Comment: The Political Relevance of Trust in Government*

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"In God We Trust: Everyone Else Pays Cash." America's political leaders should not pretend to godliness; no one will be fooled. According to prestigious biennial national surveys, the government's credit rating has steadily declined as a result of a disastrous foreign investment and growing consumer resistance to its "line" of products. Neither the country's present management nor its most prominent rivals inspire public confidence. How, then, can the political system rebuild its depleted reserves of political trust, the basis of future growth and stability? Will "one good season," better advertising, new blood in the boardroom or product innovation be sufficient? Or is a drastic restructuring of the regime's organization and operating procedures the only alternative to liquidation?

A Political Theory of Political Trust

Arthur Miller's article, "Political Issues and Trust in Government: 1964–70" makes an important contribution to our understanding of the sharp increase in political cynicism among the American public. Miller evokes the language of the corporation balance-sheet and the imagery of *Executive Suite* by suggesting that the cumulative outcome of exchanges between political authorities on the one hand and citizens on the other determines the level of public trust in government. Political elites "produce" policies; in exchange, they receive trust from citizens satisfied with these policies and cynicism from those who are disappointed. Since Miller defines both policy satisfaction and political trust in attitudinal terms, the exchange transactions he records are purely psychological in nature. Operationally, dissatisfied respondents are those whose own policy preferences are discrepant with their perceptions of the positions advocated by the party controlling the presidency. Miller's findings confirm the hypothesis that the greater the perceived discrepancy the less likely one is to express a generalized sense of trust in government. This conclusion, of course, constitutes further evidence for one of social science's most familiar generalizations: We tend to trust and like those who agree with us.

While the reaffirmation of an eternal verity is comforting, the significance of Miller's analysis lies elsewhere. In my view, "Political Issues and Trust in Government: 1964–70" argues that the performance of political officeholders and institutions determines their legitimacy. To be sure, an individual's ideological orientation and policy preferences influence his evaluations of governmental behavior, but such mediating effects are quite consistent with a theoretical emphasis on political events and experiences as the main source of public support for the political system. Thus, Miller interprets the sharp decline in the aggregate level of trust in government as the result of increased discontent with putatively unsuccessful "centrist" policies.

An emphasis on political factors as determinants of attitudes toward the political system represents a departure from earlier theoretical perspectives that stressed the causal influence of social background or personality.[1] But analysis of the well-known election studies conducted by the Survey Research Center and Center for Political Studies of the University of Michigan indicates that social background variables are neither strongly nor consistently correlated with political trust, as measured by the Trust in Government scale.[2] For example, in 1964 blacks were more

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[1] Other studies that support the conclusion that political factors such as ideological orientations, evaluations of the performance of governmental institutions, and responses to personal contacts with political authorities are important causes of political disaffection are Joel Aberbach and Jack Walker, "Political Trust and Racial Ideology," *American Political Science Review*, 64, (December, 1970), 1199–1219, Edward N. Muller, "The Role of Political Distrust in a Theory of Support and Opposition to the Regime," unpublished paper delivered at the Madison, Wisconsin Conference on Public Support for the Political System, Aug. 13–17, 1973, Jack Citrin, "Political Disaffection in America: 1958–68" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, Jan., 1972); and Jack Citrin, Herbert McClosky, J. Merrill Shanks, and Paul M. Sniderman, "Personal and Political Sources of Political Alienation," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 4 (September, 1974).

[2] On this point see Citrin "Political Disaffection in America," chap. 4, and Arthur Miller, Thad Brown,

trusting than whites; people earning less than $5000 a year were more trusting than those earning more than $15,000; and manual workers were more trusting than businessmen. In 1970, and again in 1972, these relationships were reversed. Moreover, the decline in political trust documented by Miller cannot be attributed to changes in the social composition of the American public; virtually every social group became more politically cynical between 1964 and 1972. Turning to the psychological explanations, although measures of personal competence and "trust in people" do correlate positively, albeit rather weakly, with feelings of political trust,[3] we cannot conclude that the recent erosion of public confidence in the political process reflects changes in these psychological dispositions. A comparison of the responses of the 1964 and 1970 election study samples to the questions used to measure ego strength and trust in other people reveals no systematic decrease in the number of "competent" or "trusting" answers. In sum, while social background and personality factors doubtless have some influence on how one evaluates the political order, Miller's identification of the strong and independent impact of political attitudes and experiences is convincing.

This comment accepts Miller's main conclusion that policy-related discontent is a source of political cynicism and proceeds to focus on three issues: (1) The meaning of political trust as measured by the Trust in Government scale; (2) The independent impact, if any, of *attitudes* of political cynicism on political *actions* at the individual level; and (3) A re-examination of the claim that a continuation of "centrist" policies will inhibit the restoration of public confidence in the political process. In pursuing these questions, my principal interest is in the implications of Miller's analysis for the study of political change in contemporary America.

The Meaning of Declining Trust in Government

Miller interprets the persistent decline in the levels of political trust and political efficacy to indicate that "a situation of widespread, basic discontent and political alienation" is the existing condition in the U.S. today (p. 951). He refers to "hostility toward political and social leaders, the institutions of government, and the regime as a whole" and of a "negative orientation toward the political *system*" (p. 951, italics mine). According to Miller, large segments of the American public have unfulfilled needs and blame the government for the unsatisfactory quality of life they are experiencing. Moreover, the high level of political discontent has endured so long (1966–70!) that simply voting out the incumbent leaders will not restore confidence in the political system. The persistence of widespread mistrust of government suggests that "the normal means by which conflict is managed in the political system are not fully operative" (p. 000) and, therefore, that strong potential for radical change exists. In sum, utilitarian as well as expressive motives underlie feelings of attachment to the political system, and the failure of government policy to "fulfill needs" or "meet expectations" has resulted in the erosion of political legitimacy in the United States.

These conclusions rest on the assumption that the Trust in Government scale measures alienation from the political regime rather than mere disapproval of incumbent political leaders. Unfavorable evaluations of the trustworthiness, competence, and responsiveness of "the government," "people running the government," and "public officials," the attitude-objects of the standard political trust and political efficacy items, increased substantially between 1964 and 1970. Allegiance to the political system, however, does not preclude criticism of specific policies, authorities, or institutions; many people readily combine intense patriotic sentiments with cynicism about politicians. Moreover, opinions about incumbents inevitably color evaluations of political roles or institutions, and the tendency of respondents in a survey to perceive "the government in general" in terms of the incumbent president and his administration probably is strongest in an electoral context, when partisan cues are at a maximum. Thus, the political implications of Miller's analysis depends on the discriminant validity of the Trust in Government scale as an indicator of attitudes toward the political regime.[4]

The level of political disaffection observed varies with the focus (or "object") of the questions used to measure it. For example, the 1972 National Election Study indicates that 47 per cent of the general public believed that "you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right only some or none of the time" and that 44.3 per cent felt that "quite a few of the people running the government don't seem to know what they're

and Alden Raine, "Social Conflict and Political Estrangement," unpublished paper delivered at the 1973 annual meetings of the Midwest Political Science Association.

[3] For example, in 1964, the association between personal trust and political trust was .21 (tau-b); in 1968 it was .20 (tau-b). Aberbach and Walker report a relationship of .16 (gamma) for their Detroit sample.

[4] Throughout this paper I use the terms political authorities, regime, and community in the sense of David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1965). In addition, I use the term political system as a synonym of regime.

Table 1. Political Trust and Attitudes toward the American Form of Government,* 1972 (percentages down)

	Trust in Government			
	Low ($n=419$)	Middle ($n=373$)	High ($n=224$)	Total ($n=1016$)
Pride in Government				
I am proud of many things about our form of gov't.	74.3	91.8	97.9	86.0
I can't find much about our form of gov't to be proud of.	25.8	8.2	2.1	14.0
Change our Form of Government?**				
Keep our form of gov't as is	43.2	63.3	80.8	58.8
Some Change needed	31.7	27.6	14.3	26.4
Big Change needed	25.1	9.1	4.9	14.7

* Access to these materials was provided by Merrill Shanks.

** The exact wording of this question is: "Some people believe that change in our whole form of government is needed to solve the problems facing our country, while others feel no real change is necessary. Do you think . . . ?"

doing." But only 13.5 per cent said "I can't find much in our form of government to be proud of." And 54.9 per cent believed that the existing political system should remain "pretty much as it is" whereas only 14 per cent advocated "a big change in our whole form of government."[5] Thus a diffuse sense of pride in and support for the ongoing "form of government" can coexist with widespread public cynicism about "the government in Washington" and the people "running" it.

The questions about pride in existing institutional arrangements and the desirability of changing them appear to be on their face more valid indicators of a basic attachment to the political regime than most of the items comprising the Trust in Government scale. To be sure, the manifest content of attitude items cannot be the sole criterion of their validity. A process of construct validation that focuses on the relationships among responses to a proposed attitudinal measure and theoretically relevant attitudes and actions constitutes a more definitive test.[6] Nevertheless, the cynical responses to the CPS political trust items are hardly extreme. To believe that the government wastes "a lot" of money, can be trusted to "do what is right only some of the time," and includes "quite a few" people who are "crooked" or "don't know what they're doing" need not bespeak a deep-seated hostility toward the political system at the regime or community levels. As Table 1 shows, in the 1972 election study 74 per cent of those who score "low" on the Trust in Government scale express pride in "our form of government."[7] And 43 per cent of the political cynics would like existing institutional arrangements to remain unchanged compared to 25 per cent who advocate a "big change in our form of government." This strongly suggests that many political cynics focus their dissatisfaction on incumbent authorities rather than systemic values and processes.

Increasing discontent with current government policy undoubtedly has contributed to the growth of political cynicism, but the decline in "trusting" responses to the Trust in Government items may also reflect a higher level of political sophistication and realism among the general public. In addition, the current *zeitgeist*, which legitimizes, even encourages, the expression of anti-political rhetoric, makes it fashionable to denigrate politicians and to criticize established institutions. As a result, the burgeoning ranks of the politically cynical may include many who are verbalizing a casual and ritualistic negativism rather than an enduring sense of estrangement that influences their beliefs and actions. And if the meaning of identical responses to the Trust in Government items change as political and cultural contexts vary, it may be inappropriate to use the same items or cutting-points to measure political dis-

[5] These figures are computed from the marginal distributions provided in the ICPR 1972 Election Study Codebook. "No answer" responses are omitted from the total base. The last two questions are restricted variables made available by J. Merrill Shanks.

[6] See the extended discussion of this point in Citrin et al., "Personal and Political Sources of Political Alienation."

[7] Unless explicitly noted, all the tables reported and all figures in the text derive from my own analysis of the 1964, 1968, 1970, and 1972 election study data made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research. My scoring of the Trust in Government scale employs the same item dichotomies as Miller does, although our handling of missing data varies slightly and I construct scale scores by simply summing responses rather than using a formal Guttman scoring procedure.

affection at different points in time, regardless of whether these continue to form a Guttman scale.[8]

Table 1 implies that many "political cynics" do not repudiate the political *regime;* the data reported in Table 2 point directly to a connection between lack of political trust and negative evaluations of the *incumbent* national administration. For example, in 1968 "trusting" scores on the Trust in Government scale were associated with approval of "how President Johnson is handling his job," and in 1972 political trust covaried with approval of President Nixon's performance. With a Democrat in the White House in 1964, strong Republicans formed the most cynical group on the party identification continuum, and strong Democrats were the most likely to express trust in government; during the Nixon presidency the positions of Republican and Democratic partisans were reversed. It is difficult to reconcile this pattern of attitude change among those most committed to the major political parties with the claim that the Trust in Government scale measures alienation from the political system. But if cynical responses record opposition to the "ins" as well as or instead of rejection of the political regime, the shifting relationship between party identification and political trust is to be expected. After all, in the American context partisans of the "out" party usually believe that there are alternatives to the incumbent president whose advent to power would assuage their present sense of disenchantment.

The *overall* relationship between party identification and trust in govenment (tau$-b=-.16$ in 1964, $-.09$ in 1968, and .12 in 1972, with party identification scored in the Republican direction) is relatively weak, and how someone votes for president (Goldwater in 1964, Wallace in 1968, and McGovern in 1972) is a better predictor of political cynicism than his party identification. In an era of strong ideological focus and declining party loyalty, apparently, the personal qualities and policy orientations of the presidential candidates, rather than their party labels, cue cynical (or trusting) responses.

Table 3 provides additional evidence that trust in government and support for the incumbent national administration are correlated, whereas political cynicism reflects a sense of identification with critics of the status quo. Positive evaluations of the incumbent president and vice-president—Johnson and Humphrey in 1968, Nixon and Agnew in 1970 and 1972—were more widespread among the politically trusting than the politically cynical. By contrast, the cynics were more likely to view positively politicians who themselves attacked the underlying assumptions of ongoing public policies, whether from the right or left, George Wallace in 1968 and George McGovern in 1972. These data confirm Miller's analysis of the curvilinear relationship between policy preferences and trust in government: respondents with either "leftist" or "rightist" candidate preferences are disproportionately likely to feel politically cynical.

Quite predictably, "leftist" and "rightist" cynics diverged sharply in their evaluations of presidential candidates and of groups such as civil rights leaders, black militants, student protesters, rock-festival goers, or the police. *But the responses of "leftists" and "rightists" who trusted the government differed in much the same way.* Thus, whether or not the feeling thermometer ratings of the politically cynical and trusting will diverge depends on the relative balance of ideological predispositions within these groups. (It also requires that the group or candidate being rated somehow engages these ideological predispositions.) For example, between 1970 and 1972 the predominance of conservatives among the politically trusting grew, whereas the political cynics, as a group, became more liberal. As a result, neither a negative relationship between political trust and a favorable image of George Wallace nor a positive association between trust in government and "warm" feelings about civil rights leaders appeared in the 1972 sample.

The close connection between disapproval of the incumbent president and cynical scores on the Trust in Government scale does not establish definitively that the "object" of this attitude measure is the current administration rather than the overall political system. After all, someone who is deeply estranged from the underlying values of the political system and rejects its constitutional order is unlikely to view the incumbent authorities favorably. At a minimum, however, the Trust in Government scale fails to discriminate between the politically alienated and those who mistrust particular leaders or politicians as a class without repudiating regime values or institutions. And to the extent that today a cynical score consitutes a surrogate measure of partisanship or anti-Nixon sentiment, a new face in the Oval office might well lead to higher levels of trust in government.

One difficulty with my own argument, of course, is that trust in government has continued to decline despite fluctuations in the level of presidential popularity. In 1972, 57 per cent of those expressing approval of "how President Nixon is handling his job" had cynical scores on the Trust in Government scale. One possible explanation for the coexistence of widespread support

[8] This conclusion has disturbing implications for analysts of time-series data. Again, the appropriate safeguards lie in conceiving of the construct validation process as a continuous one.

Table 2. Political Trust and Support for Incumbents, 1964–72
(percentages down)

A) Approval of Incumbent President's Performance
1968 Sample:

	Quality of Johnson's Performance					
	Very Good [$n=137$]	Good [$n=372$]	Fair [$n=489$]	Poor [$n=172$]	Very Poor [$n=107$]	Total [$n=1314$]
Trust in Government						
Low	24.1	20.7	32.7	47.7	56.1	32.6
Middle	40.9	47.3	46.8	38.4	35.5	44.1
High	35.0	32.0	20.4	14.0	8.4	23.2

1972 Sample:

	Evaluations of Nixon's Performance*		
	Approve [$n=746$]	Disapprove [$n=291$]	Total [$n=1037$]
Trust in Government			
Low	34.7	67.0	42.8
Middle	39.5	24.1	36.2
High	25.7	8.9	21.0

* Richard Brody provided me access to this material.

B) Political Trust and Party Identification, 1964–72

	Strong Democrat	Weak Democrat	Independent Democrat	Independent	Independent Republican	Weak Republican	Strong Republican	Total
Trust in Government								
1964: Low	16.5	19.8	17.3	29.1	31.2	26.6	37.8	22.7
Middle	33.1	39.4	37.0	39.8	38.7	40.1	37.2	37.2
High	50.4	40.8	45.7	31.1	30.0	33.3	25.0	40.0
	[$n=393$]	[$n=358$]	[$n=127$]	[$n=103$]	[$n=80$]	[$n=142$]	[$n=156$]	[$n=1409$]
1968: Low	24.8	33.2	31.2	49.2	32.2	30.9	33.8	32.6
Middle	42.9	42.6	43.7	36.4	50.4	46.6	53.4	44.1
High	32.3	24.2	25.0	14.4	17.4	22.5	12.8	23.2
	[$n=266$]	[$n=331$]	[$n=128$]	[$n=132$]	[$n=115$]	[$n=191$]	[$n=133$]	[$n=1296$]
1970: Low	44.4	43.4	44.1	46.8	38.9	37.9	34.3	42.3
Middle	35.9	37.2	32.3	34.1	47.3	40.0	39.9	37.4
High	19.7	19.4	23.6	19.0	13.7	22.1	25.9	20.4
	[$n=304$]	[$n=366$]	[$n=161$]	[$n=205$]	[$n=131$]	[$n=235$]	[$n=143$]	[$n=1545$]
1972: Low	53.7	44.0	51.5	45.2	33.5	35.1	32.4	42.8
Middle	31.2	36.8	32.8	35.1	41.2	36.7	40.2	36.2
High	15.1	19.2	15.8	19.7	25.3	28.2	27.5	21.0
	[$n=324$]	[$n=582$]	[$n=241$]	[$n=279$]	[$n=245$]	[$n=319$]	[$n=244$]	[$n=2234$]

C) Political Trust and Presidential Vote: 1964–1972

	Trust in Government			
	Low	Middle	High	Total
1964 Vote:	[$n=240$]	[$n=428$]	[$n=434$]	[$n=1102$]
Johnson	42.1	64.7	84.3	67.5
Goldwater	57.9	35.3	15.7	32.5
1968 Vote:	[$n=292$]	[$n=444$]	[$n=226$]	[$n=962$]
Nixon	46.6	49.8	43.8	48.0
Humphrey	32.2	41.2	54.4	40.6
Wallace	21.2	9.0	1.8	11.4
1972 Vote:	[$n=646$]	[$n=600$]	[$n=347$]	[$n=1583$]
Nixon	51.9	69.7	76.7	63.9
McGovern	47.2	29.5	23.3	35.4

Table 3. Political Trust and Affect Toward Candidates and Selected Groups: 1968–1972*

Trust in Government		Nixon	Agnew	McGovern	Johnson	Humphrey	Wallace	Policemen	The Military	Civil Rights Leaders
1968:	Low	63	49		50	54	39	71	65	
	Middle	67	51		59	62	30	71	65	
	High	68	51		68	70	25	73	67	
		[n=1278]	[n=1191]		[n=1283]	[n=1281]	[n=1270]	[n=888]	[n=925]	
1970:	Low	55	43	45		47	35	77	71	42
	Middle	61	47	46		52	28	80	73	48
	High	65	50	46		53	30	80	74	50
		[n=1531]	[n=1485]	[n=983]		[n=1506]	[n=1465]	[n=1541]	[n=1510]	[n=1492]
1972:	Low	56	48	53		63	50	73	67	42
	Middle	70	58	45		53	51	76	71	40
	High	76	63	44		54	53	79	72	42
		[n=2136]	[n=2063]	[n=2112]		[n=2174]	[n=2097]	[n=2115]	[n=2074]	[n=2040]

* Figures given are mean ratings on feeling thermometer; 0 = very cold feeling, 97 = very warm feeling. Blank spaces in the table mean that this "object" was not rated in the year in question.

for the President and a pervasive mistrust of "government in general" is that for many respondents approval of Nixon's performance represented a short-term rationalization of an anti-McGovern vote. One possible explanation for the coexistence of widespread support for the President and a pervasive mistrust of "government in general" is that for many respondents approval of Nixon's performance represented a short-term rationalization of an anti-McGovern vote. The finding that pro-Nixon Democrats were more likely than their Republican counterparts to be politically cynical supports this interpretation. An alternative, but not mutually exclusive, explanation is that many cynical responses are ritualistic rather than genuine. The tendency to demean politics is a well-established cultural tradition in America. Even Lincoln described politicians as "a set of men who have interests aside from the interests of the people and who, to say the most of them, are, taken as a class, at least one long step removed from honesty."[9] In the vocabulary of contemporary American politics, government and politics are "dirty" words that convey contemptuous and derisive feelings. Yet precisely because the political culture sanctions expressions of political cynicism, their consequences may be purely symbolic. According to this point of view, to agree verbally that many people "running the government" are corrupt, incompetent, or untrustworthy is like shouting "Kill the umpire!" at a baseball game. Bloodthirsty rhetoric threatens neither the life expectancy of umpires nor the future of the national pastime. Thus, a diffuse opposition to the "government in general" does not preclude support for its authority in specific instances. For example, the 1972 election study reveals that while 56.1 per cent of the public agreed that "the government in Washington is getting too powerful for the good of the country and the individual person," an overwhelming majority also favored "total government action against inflation" and felt that "government should force private industry to stop its polluting."

To summarize, low scorers on the Trust in Government scale appear to form a heterogeneous group. They include "ritualistic cynics" and partisans of the "outs" as well as respondents who see no viable alternative to the incumbent authorities and reject the ongoing constitutional order. If, as seems likely, ritualistic cynics, partisan cynics, and alienated cynics differ in their backgrounds, attitudes, and modes of political participation, the policy implications of declining political trust will vary according to the relative contribution of each "type" of political cynic to this aggregate shift. "Political Issues and Trust in Government: 1964–70" provides no basis for disaggregating the politically cynical respondents or for identifying the correlates of the relevant "types" of cynic. Thus, the meaning of recent increases in the level of political cynicism remains ambiguous, and to decisively conclude that there exists widespread support for radical political change or pervasive alienation from the political *system* is premature, if not misleading.

Political Cynicism and Political Action

An investigation of the behavioral consequences of political cynicism serves two purposes. First, inferences about the impact of declining aggregate levels of trust in government require knowledge of whether and how the politically cynical and trusting differ in their actions. And methodologically, the validity of the Trust in Government scale as an indicator of alienation from the political regime depends ultimately on the emergence of theoretically predicted differences in the be-

[9] Quoted in Richard N. Current, *The Lincoln Nobody Knows* (New York, McGraw Hill, 1958), p. 187.

havior of "high" and "low" scorers. Miller does not examine the empirical relationships between cynical attitudes and political actions, but his remarks point to a conclusion that political cynics, unlike those who trust government, favor large-scale political change. Both the precise objectives of the politically disaffected, however, and the tactics they are likely to adopt remain ambiguous. Are political cynics merely seeking new policies, or do they favor a complete reconstitution of the ongoing political order? Will political cynics seek change in the streets rather than at the ballot box? Does mistrust of government lead people to disobey the law, participate in civil violence, or join revolutionary organizations? And are the politically cynical more likely than those who trust the government to withdraw from involvement in electoral politics?

The standard hypothesis, of course, is that political disaffection (cynicism, alienation) is associated with a rejection of conventional or "conformist" modes of political participation such as voting, lobbying, writing letters to congressmen, and campaigning for political candidates. Thus, the politically cynical should be more likely than those who trust the government *either* to withdraw from political activity altogether *or* to engage in noncustomary, sometimes illegal, activities such as participating in sit-ins or riots, or organizing for revolution. Whether a political cynic adopts an active or an apathetic mode of behavior depends on the interactions among factors such as the level of social support for "alienated" behavior, the availability of an "alienated" response option in the concrete situation, and the individual's social status and personality.[10]

Previous research provides substantial support for these ideas. For example, Muller's Waterloo, Iowa study indicates that a low degree of trust in political authorities is strongly related to a "readiness to engage in acts of unconventional dissent against the state."[11] Schwartz reports that among both university students and urban blacks political alienation leads to the repudiation of "conformist" modes of political participation.[12] Sears and Maconahay show that participation in the 1965 Watts riot was associated with both a generalized sense of political disaffection and mistrust of specific local agencies and officials such as Mayor Yorty and the police.[13] Paige's study of the 1967 riots in Newark indicates that mistrust of local government, when combined with a strong sense of political efficacy, fostered participation in riot activity.[14] Finally, our Berkeley-based study of political alienation in the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area found a strong relationship between feelings of disaffection from the national political regime and self-reported involvement in unconventional political protests.[15]

While these studies confirm the general proposition that unfavorable evaluations of the political system are associated with support for or participation in "oppositionist" political behavior, they leave several important issues unresolved. For example, there is conflicting evidence about whether political cynicism has a *direct* effect on riot participation.[16] More importantly, there is no consensus about the exact nature of the attitudes that underlie unconventional or illegal protest behavior. Some studies refer to feelings of pride in or belonging to "the country," others to trust in the national government or public officials "in general," and still others to evaluations of specific leaders or local government. But since these attitudes are not always strongly intercorrelated and their behavioral consequences may vary, the political implications of aggregate change on any one attitudinal dimension are unclear and may often be quite limited. Thus, the finding that a sense of estrangement from the political *community*, in Easton's terms, leads people to adopt an "oppositionist" stance and to withdraw from electoral politics does not imply that increased cynicism about the incumbent national administration will reduce turnout at presidential elections.

In this regard one recalls that many of the Watts rioters combined mistrust of local government with strong approval of the federal government, President Johnson, and the Democratic party. Quite plausibly, attitudes and actions are more likely to be linked when they are responses to

[10] See David Schwartz, *Political Alienation and Political Behavior* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co. 1973), ch. 8, for a good summary of the problems in "modeling" the attitude-behavior linkage. The concept of a "behavioral orientation" is similar to Rokeach's concept of "attitude toward the situation." See Milton Rokeach, *Beliefs, Attitudes and Values* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1970).

[11] Edward N. Muller, "A Partial Test of a Theory of Potential for Political Violence", *American Political Science Review*, 66 (September, 1972), 928–959.

[12] Schwartz, chaps. 9, 10.

[13] David O. Sears and John Maconahay, *The Politics of Violence* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

[14] Jeffery. Paige, "Political Orientation and Riot Participation", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 36, (1971), 810–820.

[15] Jack Citrin, Herbert McClosky, J. Merrill Shanks, and Paul M. Sniderman, "Sources and Consequences of Political Alienation: A Preliminary Report on Indicator Development," unpublished paper delivered at the Madison, Wisconsin, Conference on Public Support for the Political System, August 13–17, 1973.

[16] See, for example, the conflict between Paige's study of Newark rioters and the report on the Watts riot in H. Edward Ransford, "Isolation, Powerlessness and Violence: A Study of Attitudes and Participation in the Watts Riot", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 73 (1968), 581–591.

the same stimulus object.[17] "Oppositionist" activity usually expresses a sense of grievance about some concrete situation and it takes as the targets of its verbal and physical attacks those perceived as responsible for that unsatisfactory situation. Those blamed need not include every, or even any, political institution and authority; in fact, we would expect protestors to express trust rather than cynicism toward government officials and agencies that share their objectives.

The closeness of the relationships among feelings of dissatisfaction about some specific issue, the belief that some circumscribed set of political actors or institutions are to blame, and the decision to act on that issue or against those authorities raises two difficulties for the argument that a diffuse sense of mistrust in government is causally related to "oppositionist" behavior. There is, first of all, the familiar possibility that people rationalize actions based on a narrowly defined grievance or on nonpolitical grounds by characterizing the entire political system as unresponsive and untrustworthy. In other words, behaviors may cause attitudes rather than the reverse. Given the connection between policy dissatisfaction and political cynicism, however, a more fundamental issue arises: Even if mistrust of government precedes acts of dissent against the authorities, does it have an independent effect on behavior. The customary hypothesis that feelings of political mistrust or alienation intervene between a sense of discontent and "oppositionist" actions requires not only that cynical and trusting repondents differ in their behavior, particularly at high levels of policy dissatisfaction, but also that with respondents' orientation toward the political system controlled, the relationship between feelings of dissatisfaction and the relevant behavioral dependent variable is significantly diminished. Few researchers have addressed this issue directly;[18] thus it remains unclear whether or not our capacity to predict the willingness of those who are dissatisfied with current policy to engage in "oppositionist" activity is enhanced by knowing that they mistrust government.

The election studies Miller and I have analyzed provide few opportunities for an analysis of the behavioral consequences of feelings of political cynicism. The 1968, 1970, and 1972 studies did, however, ask respondents whether they approved of a person's showing his disagreement with government policy by: (1) taking part in a legal protest march, (2) refusing to obey an "unjust" law, or (3) attempting, as a last resort, to disrupt the normal activities of government by joining a sit-in or mass demonstration.[19] Admittedly, these forms of protest, while unpopular and in some instances illegal, pose less severe challenges to the political regime than unorganized civil violence or organized attacks on political targets by revolutionary groups; moreover, the survey questions cited above refer to a generalized readiness to approve of certain forms of noncustomary dissent rather than to the respondent's willingness to engage in such behavior himself. Nevertheless, Muller's Waterloo, Iowa study indicates that approval of disruptive sit-ins and of noncompliance with "unjust" laws fall midway on a continuum of support for anti-regime activity that is defined by opposition to all forms of political dissent at one end and approval of armed revolution at the other.[20] Muller also reports that his measures of approval of political violence and the intention to engage in political violence were strongly interrelated (Somers's $d = .53$)[21]. Thus, it appears appropriate and unexceptional to consider the CPS questions about approval of protest marches, civil disobedience, and participation in disruptive sit-ins as indicators of a behavioral orientation that is both "nonconformist" and activist. Accordingly, if the Trust in Government scale measures feelings of alienation from the political regime, political cynics should be more likely than those who trust the government to endorse acts of political dissent.

The data, however, provide only partial support for this hypothesis. As Table 4 shows, the aggregate level of trust in government declined between 1968 and 1972. The extent of unequivocal opposition to protest marches civil disobedience, and disruptive sit-ins also diminished. But at the microlevel, there is neither a strong nor even a consistent association between political cynicism and approval of these forms of political protest. In 1970 and 1972, "low" scorers on the Trust in Government scale were slightly more likely than respondents with a high level of political trust to express at least qualified approval of protesting against government policy through disruptive demonstrations. In 1968, however, political cynicism and approval of sit-ins or mass demonstra-

[17] See the argument made by Martin Fishbein, "Attitude and the Prediction of Behavior," in *Readings in Attitude Theory and Measurement*, ed. Martin Fishbein (New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1967).

[18] The exception is Muller, who finds that relative deprivation has a weak influence on the potential for political violence and that this influence is entirely dependent on whether such feelings of deprivation are associated with political mistrust. Muller's measure of relative deprivation, however, does not include the element of politicization that is subsumed by the concept of policy dissatisfaction.

[19] The exact working of these questions can be found in the ICPR codebook of the CPS 1970 National Election Study, pp. 83–84.

[20] Muller, "A Partial Test of a Theory . . .", p. 934.

[21] *Ibid.* p. 936.

Table 4. Political Trust and Approval of Political Protest, 1968–1972 (percentages down)

	1968 Trust in Government				*1970* Trust in Government				*1972* Trust in Government			
	Low ($n=388$)	Middle ($n=523$)	High ($n=268$)	Total ($n=1179$)	Low ($n=348$)	Middle ($n=332$)	High ($n=171$)	Total ($n=851$)	Low ($n=951$)	Middle ($n=801$)	High ($n=466$)	Total ($n=2218$)
Legal Protest Marches:												
Approve	15.1	20.1	24.2	19.5	14.0	14.0	14.6	14.2	21.6	18.4	16.8	18.7
Depends	27.1	25.7	28.9	26.9	40.9	43.5	37.4	41.1	39.5	40.1	41.6	40.8
Disapprove	57.8	54.2	46.9	53.5	45.1	42.6	48.0	44.7	38.9	41.5	41.6	40.5
		($p<.05$)				n.s.				n.s.		
Refusal to Obey Unjust Laws:												
Approve	13.1	17.1	12.6	14.7	12.9	10.4	11.0	11.6	20.9	13.5	11.7	16.6
Depends	27.8	23.1	18.8	23.9	40.7	35.9	37.2	38.2	42.2	39.0	36.9	39.3
Disapprove	59.0	59.8	68.6	61.4	46.4	53.7	51.7	50.3	36.9	47.6	51.4	44.0
		($p<.05$)				n.s.				($p<.05$)		
Disruptive Sit-ins, Demonstrations:												
Approve	6.2	8.2	10.1	8.0	9.8	6.6	6.9	7.9	10.0	7.2	5.2	7.9
Depends	15.5	20.1	17.2	17.9	36.5	31.0	24.9	31.8	35.5	32.4	29.8	33.6
Disapprove	78.4	71.7	72.8	74.1	53.7	62.3	68.2	60.3	54.5	60.4	65.0	58.5
		n.s.				($p<.05$)				($p<.05$)		

tions were unrelated. Moreover, in 1968 the politically trusting were *more* likely than political cynics to approve of noncompliance with an "unjust" law or participation in legal protest marches.

The weak and unsystematic relationships between scores on the Trust in Government scale and support for an activist behavioral orientation belie the contention that a diffuse mistrust of political authorities intervenes between political cynicism and approval of disruptive sit-ins or mass demonstrations. The relationships that do appear may be a spurious reflection of the association between mistrust of government and policy dissatisfaction. In both 1970 and 1972, policy dissatisfaction, operationalized as Miller proposes by measuring the distance between an individual's policy preferences and those he identifies with the ruling Republican party, was positively correlated with approval of all three forms of political protest cited above.[22] Controlling for policy dissatisfaction causes the relationships between political cynicism and support for disruptive sit-ins to vanish, whereas the relationships between policy dissatisfaction and support for activist modes of protest remain statistically significant even when we control for the putative intervening variable, trust in government. Thus, it appears that feelings of cynicism about "the government in general" have no independent effect on someone's willingness to approve of or engage in noncustomary and illegal protests. Of course, failure to confirm a strong connection between mistrust of government and support for "oppositionist" activity may reflect inadequacies in our measures of these attitudes and behaviors rather than faulty theorizing.

The 1970 and 1972 election studies indicate that the intensity of a person's discontent with current policy has a direct effect on his orientation toward acts of political dissent. In the 1968 study, however, no such association was found between policy dissatisfaction and approval of legal protest marches, civil disobedience, or sit-ins. Part of the explanation for this discrepancy between the 1968 data and the results of the later studies is that the *direction* of a person's policy preferences as well as the *degree* of his dissatisfaction influence his willingness to support an activist behavioral orientation. In all three data sets analyzed, leftist positions on policy questions are correlated with approval of legal protest marches, noncompliance with unjust laws, or disruptive sit-ins. Given the historical and contemporary associations of these types of protest activity with left wing or liberal causes, this is hardly surprising. But while the relationships between issue orientations and approval of noncustomary protest tactics remained stable, the proportions of "leftists" and "rightists" among those dissatisfied with government policy, and among the political cynics, shifted between 1968 and 1972. And as the discontented and cynical groups came to include relatively more blacks and liberals, they were more likely than respondents expressing satisfaction with current policy and trust in government to endorse unconventional forms of political protest. Thus, whether declining levels of political trust imply a growing potential for political protest and violence depends at least in part on the nature of the relationships among political cynicism, policy dissatisfaction, and ideological orientations.

Granting that political cynicism plays a minor role in producing activists or rebels, does this attitude toward government generate apathy? Are political cynics more likely than people who trust government to withdraw from participation in "conventional" electoral politics? Table 5 conclusively refutes this proposition. Although feelings of political powerlessness and perceptions of governmental institutions as unresponsive to the public's demands are consistently and strongly associated with low levels of political interest and participation,[23] mistrust of government and political apathy do not go together. Even without controlling for education, differences between "low" and "high" scorers on the Trust in Government scale tend to be small whatever the type or measure of political awareness and involvement we examine. In 1964, political cynics, many of whom were well-educated Goldwater supporters, tended to be more active than trusting respondents, whereas during the 1968, 1970, and 1972 elections the levels of interest and participation among cynical and trusting respondents were virtually identical.

Perhaps the most appropriate context for testing the hypothesis that mistrust of government leads to withdrawal from conventional political activity is the 1970 election, a low-stimulus contest without an "anti-mainstream" presidential candidate to mobolize political cynics. In that year, however, cynical and trusting respondents did not differ in their level of prior voting, voting in the 1970 election itself, media exposure during

[22] The measure of policy dissatisfaction for both 1970 and 1972 refers to the mean distance between a respondent's issue position and the position he attributes to the Republican party on the following eight issues: Vietnam, health insurance, inflation, urban violence, crime control, campus protests, and pollution. See Miller, this issue of the *Review*. The figures concerning the relationships between policy dissatisfaction and approval of political dissent are not included, but in every case these are significant at at least the .01 level.

[23] See Citrin, "Political Disaffection in America," chap. 6, for a detailed report on the connections between diverse orientations toward the political system and political participation.

Table 5. Political Trust and Political Involvement, 1964–1972 (percentages down)

	Trust in Government			
1964:	Low ($n=324$)	Middle ($n=531$)	High ($n=569$)	Total ($n=1424$)
Voted	74.8	81.2	77.1	77.7
Did not vote	25.2	18.8	22.9	22.3
Paid a great deal of attention to campaign	43.5	40.1	35.5	38.2
Paid some attention	33.0	37.5	39.4	36.6
Paid little attention	23.5	22.4	25.1	25.1
Pay a great deal of attention to governmental affairs	37.5	32.2	25.3	30.3
Some attention	34.8	40.1	47.4	41.6
Little attention	16.3	16.6	17.5	16.9
Have written to a public official	21.3	18.4	13.3	16.9
Have never written	78.7	81.6	86.7	83.1
Campaign activity index:*				
Performed all five activities	2.2	1.3	0.7	1.2
Performed four activities	2.5	1.9	0.5	1.5
Performed three activities	4.0	2.3	3.1	3.0
Performed two activities	9.0	8.3	10.7	9.3
Performed one activity	26.5	30.1	23.6	26.4
No campaign activities	55.9	56.1	61.4	58.6

	Trust in Government			
1968:	Low ($n=427$)	Middle ($n=574$)	High ($n=303$)	Total ($n=1304$)
Voted	70.6	78.6	76.3	78.5
Did not vote	29.4	21.4	23.7	21.5
Paid a great deal of attention to campaign	39.3	40.3	38.8	38.9
Paid some attention	37.2	42.4	45.1	40.4
Paid little attention	23.4	17.4	16.1	20.8
Follow public affairs most of the time	37.1	31.9	28.7	33.0
Some of the time	23.8	34.0	34.0	30.7
Now and then	18.6	18.8	19.5	18.7
Hardly at all	20.5	15.3	17.8	17.6
Have written to a public official	21.5	18.0	19.4	19.8
Have never written	78.5	82.0	80.6	80.2
Campaign activity index:*				
Performed all five activities	0.0	1.6	1.0	0.9
Performed four activities	2.3	1.7	1.0	1.8
Performed three activities	3.5	5.4	2.6	4.1
Performed two activities	7.0	9.6	5.9	7.9
Performed one activity	25.1	27.5	26.2	26.6
No campaign activities	62.1	54.2	63.3	58.7

Table 5 continued on next page

Table 5.—*Continued*

	Trust in Government			
1970:	Low ($n=647$)	Middle ($n=566$)	High ($n=309$)	Total ($n=1522$)
Voted	56.2	60.1	57.6	57.6
Did not vote	43.7	39.9	42.4	42.4
Paid a great deal of attention to campaign	31.1	36.0	33.0	33.1
Paid some attention	41.8	43.0	47.2	43.2
Paid little attention	27.1	21.0	19.8	23.7
Campaign activity index:*				
Performed all five activities	0.9	1.5	1.3	1.2
Performed four activities	1.7	3.4	2.5	2.5
Performed three activities	2.3	4.5	3.1	3.2
Performed two activities	4.8	5.5	6.9	5.4
Performed one activity	22.3	22.8	18.9	21.6
No campaign activities	68.0	62.3	67.3	66.0

	Trust in Government			
1972:	Low ($n=931$)	Middle ($n=786$)	High ($n=454$)	Total ($n=2171$)
Voted	69.7	76.0	75.1	72.8
Did not vote	30.3	24.0	24.9	27.2
Paid a great deal of attention to campaign	31.9	34.4	32.8	31.5
Paid some attention	41.1	42.4	44.8	41.1
Paid little attention	27.0	23.2	22.4	27.4
Follow public affairs most of the time	35.7	40.1	33.5	36.6
Some of the time	34.0	36.9	40.1	36.2
Now and then	17.4	14.2	15.9	15.9
Hardly at all	12.9	8.8	10.6	11.4
Have written to a public official	23.4	30.1	30.2	27.1
Have never written	76.6	69.9	69.8	72.9
Campaign activity index:*				
Performed all five activities	0.4	0.9	0.7	0.6
Performed four activities	1.7	0.6	2.2	1.4
Performed three activities	3.1	3.8	3.3	3.4
Performed two activities	7.9	10.9	10.1	9.4
Performed one activity	26.0	24.7	24.7	25.0
No campaign activities	60.8	59.1	59.0	60.2

* This index was created by simply summing the number of these campaign activities performed. The activities were: trying to influence someone's vote, attending a political meeting or rally, belonging to a political club or organization, working for a candidate, and displaying a button or bumper-sticker.

the campaign, concern about the election's outcome, general political interest, political knowledge, or campaign activities such as contributing money, wearing a campaign button, attending political meetings, belonging to a political club or organization, and attempting to influence other people's voting decisions. In other words, the politically cynical were as likely as those expressing trust in government to be eligible for good citizenship awards. *Thus, the evidence that mistrust of government, as operationalized by Miller, produces neither political apathy nor political activism reinforces the argument that many cynical responses merely record opposition to incumbent officeholders or largely ritualistic expressions of fashionable clichés.*

Political Trust and Public Policy: Must "Centrism" Fail?

I do not dispute Miller's finding that disagreement with government policy on important contemporary issues engenders political cynicism.

The data indicate relatively robust and stable correlations between his proposed measure of policy dissatisfaction and the Trust in Government scale—Pearson's $r = .30$ in both 1970 and 1972. Nevertheless, while only 6 per cent of the 1970 respondents with a high level of policy dissatisfaction (mean issue distance scores of 4 or above) expressed a strong sense of trust in government, fully 24.3 per cent of those who agreed completely with the policy preferences of the ruling Republican party expressed political cynicism. Quite plausibly, disagreement with the policies of incumbent authorities is a sufficient but not a necessary condition for judging them untrustworthy and incompetent.

Miller goes beyond this general conclusion to make the more specific assertions that mistrust of government results from dissatisfaction with *both* Republican and Democratic policies and that the "centrist" character of these policies arouses discontent. These claims about the focus and content of policy dissatisfaction are problematic and deserve more detailed consideration.

The argument that political cynicism is related to dissatisfaction with both parties rests on the comparison of mean Trust in Government scores among groups of 1970 respondents cross-classified according to their locations on measures of dissatisfaction with the parties' policies (Miller, Table 8). Miller himself acknowledges that the relationship between cynicism and dissatisfaction with the Democrats, controlling for perceived distance from the incumbent Republicans, is weak and uneven. And the finding that mean levels of trust in government decline monotonically along the diagonal entries in his Table 8 appears to be due largely to the successive increases in perceived distance from the Republican party.

The 1972 election study data indicate unambiguously that dissatisfaction with the perceived policies of the "out" party and its leader are not related to feelings of political cynicism. The correlations between political cynicism and dissatisfaction with the policy stances of the Democrats and George McGovern were an insignificant .04 and −.03 respectively. In addition, Table 6 below, a replication of Miller's Table 8 using the 1972 election study data, confirms that at any given level of dissatisfaction with the policies of the Republicans (or Nixon), increased perceived distance from the policies of the Democrats (or McGovern) was *not* associated with higher levels of political mistrust. (Readers are warned that according to my scoring procedures, unlike Miller's, 0 is the most cynical and 5 is the most trusting score on the Trust in Government scale.) Between 1970 and 1972, the tendency of political trust to signify support for the incumbent national administration grew concomitantly with the increased visibility and salience of ideological cleavages between the parties. One can no longer conclude, therefore, 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" (Miller, p. 968).

Table 6. Dissatisfaction with Party Policy and Political Cynicism: A Replication of Miller's Table 8 with the 1972 Election Study Data

(Entries are mean scores on trust scale. Trust in Government scores range from 0 = most cynical to 5 = most trusting.)

Distance from Republican Party	Distance from Democratic Party 0	1	2	3	4	
0	2.5	2.6	2.4	2.6	2.2	(n = 329)
1	2.4	2.1	2.4	2.2	2.0	(n = 513)
2	1.3	1.5	1.9	2.1	2.2	(n = 244)
3	1.1	1.4	0.9	0.5	1.4	(n = 110)
4	1.1	0.8	0.8	0.5	2.2	(n = 82)
	(n = 300)	(n = 511)	(n = 268)	(n = 92)	(n = 30)	

Distance from Nixon	Distance from McGovern 0	1	2	3	4	
0	2.5	2.6	2.3	2.3	2.2	(n = 455)
1	2.2	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.0	(n = 514)
2	1.4	1.7	1.9	1.7	1.9	(n = 275)
3	1.2	1.11	1.4	1.0	2.5	(n = 141)
4	0.9	1.07	0.5	1.6	1.7	(n = 99)
	(n = 213)	(n = 443)	(n = 313)	(n = 179)	(n = 75)	

Miller bases the proposition that "centrist" policies are the source of public discontent and cynicism toward government on the finding that people who placed themselves at the extremes (scale values 1 and 7) on a number of policy questions were less likely to express trust in government than those who located themselves at the center (scale value 4). Given the institutional and cultural pressures toward compromise, bargaining, and coalition-building in American politics, this conclusion should surprise no one. Indeed, the slight relationship between political cynicism and dissatisfaction with both parties in the 1970 sample reflects the tendency of those at the ideological extremes to reject moderate parties whose primary goal is electoral victory. It is noteworthy, therefore, that Miller's data reveal several deviations from the reported tendency of both the "leftist" and "rightist" camps to contain relatively more political cynics than the group at the center of the political spectrum. For example, Table 5 in his paper indicates that respondents at scale position 4 on the national health insurance issue were more likely to be politically cynical than those at the extreme right of this issue continuum. Similarly, on the question of what should be the rights of accused criminals, the most trusting group of respondents were those with a self-assigned scale value of 2, near the liberal end of the continuum. Only on the urban riot and Vietnam policy questions were there consistently monotonic decreases in the level of political trust as one moved from the center of the policy continuum toward its extremes.

Even if one makes the somewhat unrealistic assumption that people regularly monitor the extent of their disagreement with government policies and then re-evaluate how much they trust political authorities, the impact of a move from the center on the aggregate level of political cynicism depends on the size and cohesion of the "centrist" bloc. Miller, however, underestimates the number of "centrists" in the public by applying this term only to those who assign themselves a scale value of 4 on the seven-point issue continua. That more than half of the 1970 respondents whose Vietnam policy scale values were 3 and 5 respectively agreed that U.S. policy should be "to keep our soldiers in Vietnam but try to end the fighting" suggests that the "centrist" bloc includes a larger number than he allows for. But when the "center" is redefined to include scale values 3, 4, and 5 it becomes the modal, although not the majority, position of the 1970 sample on the issues of urban unrest, Vietnam, rights for the accused, and government aid for minority groups. And when the 1972 study gave respondents the explicit choice of saying they had not thought about an issue, the proportion of respondents with "leftist" (scale values 1 and 2) or "rightist" (scale values 6 and 7) preferences declined even further.

Determining the precise meanings of "leftist," "centrist," or "rightist" policy preferences presents another methodological problem. Miller tends to rely too much on the numerical symbols that denote opinions on a given issue and to overlook the ambiguity of their concrete referents. In some cases it is difficult to imagine what these specific policy positions might be. For example, what is a "centrist" policy on inflation? Does someone who assigns himself a scale position of 5 on this issue reject a policy of wage and price controls? Does someone who calls for "total" government action against inflation advocate a planned economy, a tight money policy, or both? What does it mean to give oneself a scale value of 6 on the issue of urban unrest? Does this indicate support for the use of only two-thirds of the available force to quell riots?

On some issues, of course, elites have defined policy alternatives in ways that make it easy for the public to identify meaningful left, right, and center positions. In Donald Stokes's terms these are "position" issues; that is, on such questions there are rival bodies of opinion about the goals of public policy and how to achieve them.[24] American policy toward the war in Vietnam became a "position" issue on which the policy of "fight and negotiate" emerged as a distinctively "centrist" option. But on most of the other policies Miller discusses, the public does not encounter a well-articulated set of choices that can be ranked along the left-right continuum. And if one cannot tell where along the seven-point continuum respondents would locate a particular policy, the effect of its adoption on the aggregate level of political trust is indeterminate. The self-anchoring scale is an easily administered and hence convenient methodological device, but it is hardly the most appropriate technique for identifying concrete policy preferences. Similarly, when the referents of perceived policy stands are vague or vacuous, we should be cautious about using issue distance measures as valid indicators of policy dissatisfaction. Clearly, the diffuse character of the perceptions that define a respondent's distance from a party or candidate enhances the possibility that "high" policy dissatisfaction scores result from a tendency to attribute discrepant opinions to people one already dislikes.

Thus, the relationships between political cynicism and "extremist" policy orientations do not imply that abandoning "centrist" policies would rebuild trust in government. Miller argues that

[24] For the distinction between "position" and "valence" issues, see Donald E. Stokes, "Some Dynamic Elements of Contests for the Presidency," *American Political Science Review*, 60 (March, 1966), pp. 19–38.

when government moves to the left it often increases the number of "cynics of the right," and vice versa. By the logic of his own argument, such shifts in policy would also produce "cynics of the center." As both George McGovern and Barry Goldwater have discovered, Anthony Downs remains relevant reading material.

Miller is convinced that only policies of social change—"leftist" or liberal policies, that is—can solve existing social problems, improve the quality of life, and thereby stem the tide of public cynicism and dissatisfaction. He advocates "creative and constructive" action that will benefit the majority of people and diminish feelings of frustration. It is difficult to oppose such a recommendation. Of course, government will have to counter the inevitable resistance to creative radical change by "educating the public so that it will better understand the need for social change and the benefits which would evolve from such change" (Miller, p. 972). In other words, the restoration of public trust in government requires a "centrist" president to sell "leftist" policies to a sizeable group of "rightists." According to Miller, failure to achieve these changes in policies and leadership will cause even more people to repudiate the underlying goals of the ongoing political system and raise the probability of extra-legal protests leading to major institutional transformations.

It seems to me that this apocalyptic prognosis rests on a dubious interpretation of the meanings of political cynicism and policy dissatisfaction, as operationally defined. In addition, Miller's pessimism about the consequences of the government's continuing to pursue "centrist" policies, or, more properly, of its seeming to do so, assumes that the most salient political questions are "position" issues on which there is a sharp polarization of public opinion. Today, however, "valence" issues such as inflation, economic prosperity, the energy crisis, and honesty in government are uppermost in the public mind. On these issues, everyone agrees about the goals of public policy; everyone, including political cynics, is against inflation and corruption and for prosperity, full employment, and cheap gasoline. Because public opinion on "valence" issues does not constrain the government's choice of specific policies for achieving consensual goals, *results*, such as an improving economy, will do more to rebuild trust in government than the adoption of some particular program or ideological orientation.

The current decline in trust in government and the public's seeming loss of confidence in a wide range of social institutions and elites are expressions of a pervasive sense of malaise. Many Americans feel unhappy about the state of the nation and, quite naturally, blame incumbent authorities for this situation. But many political cynics are probably expressing the conviction that "the times are bad" rather than repudiating the political regime on ideological grounds. To use another baseball analogy, political systems, like baseball teams, have slumps and winning streaks. Having recently endured a succession of losing seasons, Americans boo the home team when it takes the field. But fans are often fickle; victories quickly elicit cheers. And to most fans what matters is whether the home team wins or loses, not how it plays the game. According to this analysis, a modest "winning streak" and, perhaps, some new names in the lineup may be sufficient to raise the level of trust in government.

Unfortunately, winning baseball games comes more easily than progress in solving the complex and intractable problems that face American society. Overcoming public resistance to social change becomes a pressing issue only after government discovers the "creative and constructive" programs that, if implemented, will benefit the majority of the people. In the meantime, politicians should follow Miller's advice to promise less and deliver more. For as long as "bad times" persist and current linguistic habits do not change, political authorities, *whatever their ideological predilections*, will remain the object of considerable public scorn and mistrust.

Conclusion

Since the previous sections have necessarily accentuated my disagreements with Miller's analysis, I would like to re-emphasize the significance of his demonstration that political events, attitudes, and expectations have been a primary source of declining trust in government. Future research should develop superior indicators of subjective orientations toward the political system and specify more precisely the cognitive processes that link policy dissatisfaction to political cynicism. In this regard, we need to distinguish, operationally, between the following attitudes: dissatisfaction with current government policy positions, dissatisfaction with the *outcomes* of ongoing events and policies, mistrust of incumbent officeholders, and rejection of the entire political system.

We also need greater knowledge of the consequences of cynical attitudes at both the micro and macro levels. In particular, we require an empirical assessment of the familiar contention that low levels of political trust inhibit the capacity of political elites to make necessary decisions and commit public resources to collective ends. Stated so abstractly this proposition appears plausible, but its confirmation in a concrete case surely depends on such factors as the number of

nonritualistic cynics, the degree of consensus among them, their location in the social, economic, and political stratification systems, and on the degree to which the government's policy requires the voluntary cooperation of the mass public in unpopular tasks. For instance, high levels of political cynicism did not prevent President Nixon from renewing the bombing of Hanoi in December, 1972, or from obtaining broad powers to deal with the energy crisis in late 1973.

To conceive of public trust in government as a "resource" for authorities to exploit fosters the belief that high levels of cynicism are dysfunctional and undesirable. Cynics may also provide a service, however, by insisting that policy departures be founded on public support, and, as a result, restricting the flexibility of elites. Recent events remind us that allowing authorities the freedom to act provides no guarantee that they will act wisely. It is worth recalling John Stuart Mill's belief that a democratic political culture is characterized by a vigilant skepticism (or realistic cynicism) rather than an unquestioning faith in the motives and abilities of political authority.