

# personality in politics

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# For Roz

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# préface

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*He placed higher value on knowing what men did than on having the power to cause them to do it. It seemed to Morgan that the largest questions to be explored, the greatest gambles to be taken, were within oneself, not in the arenas of society. Yet, professionally, he was fascinated by the politician and his subtle art, his not inconsiderable risks of self and material, the visions and urgings that drove him.\**

**TOM WICKER**

When I was a child in rural Arkansas, everyone I knew was a Democrat. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was our great President, leading us to victory in war as he had led us out of the Depression. When Harry Truman took over the job, he was assumed to be a good man too. With everyone agreed on the political essentials, there were few if any serious political arguments among my people and no cause to wonder whether a person's political views had anything to do with his personality.

Then we moved into town and began subscribing to the Arkansas Gazette, a statewide newspaper. For several years my newspaper reading had been limited mainly to the comic strips; but at the age of nine, I suddenly discovered the Letters to the Editor. In that column people were arguing fiercely: in large part about flying saucers, which first attracted my attention, but also about President Truman and Senator Fulbright. I had never known before that politics could be so interesting or that people could get so angry about issues so remote from their daily lives.

I have long since given up on flying saucers, but politics still fascinates me. Although I have gradually developed certain concerns about political issues and some interest in the structure of the political system, I am still most interested in the people of politics: both the people who fill important political roles and the people who get angry or happy or bored or cynical about what the politicians do in those roles.

\* Tom Wicker, *Facing the lions*. New York: Viking Press, 1973.

The expression of personality characteristics in political behavior is often entertaining, but it is also important. During the Vietnam War and later during the Watergate-related scandals, "the system" was frequently blamed for our national troubles. The political system is tremendously significant in giving people opportunities to express certain kinds of behavior and in restraining them from other kinds. But people eager to take advantage of the system, people driven by their private needs to use the system in unanticipated ways, were necessary before the American entrapment in Vietnam and the Nixon Administration's involvement in Watergate could happen. Understanding the system is only a part of understanding politics; understanding the role of personality and the interactions of personality and system is also vital.

I do not argue in this book whether personality is more, less, or just as important as the system in determining political behavior. Both are essential, so both must be studied. Instead, I devote most of the book to a discussion of what has actually been discovered about the role of personality in politics.

A great deal of evidence on that role has been discovered. "Personality and politics" is now one of the most popular research areas in political science, and it is drawing increasing attention from psychologists and sociologists. My selective introduction to this research may be somewhat different in emphasis from what a political scientist would have written, but I have avoided any attempts to draw disciplinary boundaries. Political scientists trained in psychology, psychologists who study the political-science literature, other social scientists with various odd professional backgrounds, all have made important contributions to the field.

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In part because of its diverse origins, the field includes a wide range of theoretical orientations as well as of content areas. At this relatively early stage in the development of the field, I see little point in trying to impose a single theoretical structure on all the available data. The approach I find most helpful is a broad functional analysis, stressing what political involvement does for the people involved, in terms of satisfying both conscious and unconscious needs. I therefore use a functional approach to organize the material in several chapters, and I occasionally refer to it in others. However, I do not try to fit every piece of research discussed into a neat functional framework. One great advantage of the functional approach is that it is not neat. It acknowledges that the motives influencing human behavior overlap

substantially, that the same behaviors may serve different motives in different people, and that similar motives can generate widely different patterns of behavior. We cannot yet rank the overall importance of various motives and personality characteristics in determining political behavior; but we can say with some assurance that the number of important motives is more than one or two, and that the paths of personality development that lead to political involvement are many and complex.

Personality and politics are two of the most ambiguous words in the social sciences. I interpret personality as including any individual psychological variations that influence behavior. Some psychological reactions are found in equal intensity in virtually all individuals, given the right stimulus; these I say little about. Personality enters the picture when a psychological characteristic common to all people is found to vary in intensity or expression among different individuals (for example, sexual desires), or when a characteristic is found in some people and not in others (for example, achievement motivation).

For brevity's sake, politics in this book refers mainly to elective politics in the United States or to attempts to influence elected American officials. I am aware that political behavior occurs in other nations and that important political processes exist that do not focus on elected officials. But rather than trying to say a little about everything political, I prefer to deal in somewhat more detail with a restricted range of topics. Recent and contemporary political behavior is stressed, here as in the "personality-and-politics" field itself. Other emphases reflect my greater familiarity with certain research areas. For this reason, minority and women's political movements receive less specific attention than some readers might wish. However, substantial portions of the book are at least indirectly relevant to these topics, and certain types of political participation by women are directly considered. v

My debts in writing this book are many. Irving L. Janis of Yale University first asked me to write it and kept reminding me over the next several years that I had said "yes." Judith Greissman has been an unusually encouraging and industrious editor. Irene Pavitt's careful line-by-line editing of the manuscript sharpened my language and my thinking. John B. McConahay of Duke University and Irving L. Janis also read the manuscript in detail and made many constructive suggestions. The book is much improved as a result; they should not be held responsible for its remaining deficiencies. William Potter, Edmond

## PREFACE

Costantini, and James McEvoy, all of the University of California at Davis, as well as other political scientists, psychologists, sociologists, and psychiatrists gave me helpful advice and inspiration. Joan Randall, Vivienne Chaumont, and Jo Potter were generous with their time in typing early drafts of the manuscript; Joan Randall went far beyond the call of duty in typing the final draft and in offering thoughtful comments along the way. My wife, Roslyn, and my daughters, Heather and Laurel, allowed me to work on the book during many evenings and weekends that should have been spent with them. My greatest debt is to Roz, whose love, understanding, and political acumen have over the years greatly improved the relationship between personality and politics in my own life.

ALAN C. ELMS

# 1

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## plain people

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### the political personality of the average American citizen

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Politics starts with the people. Not just “people,” but the people, as in “We, the people of the United States”: the ordinary men and women whose votes give political leaders whatever power they enjoy and whose postelectoral assent or dissent has historically determined how far that power extends. The focus of political discussion is often on the leaders; but politics in the United States cannot be fully understood without carefully considering the behavior of its “common” citizens as well.

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People have personalities. The role of personality in politics is often discussed largely in terms of politicians’ personalities; but the personal qualities of the “common” citizens also help to shape the political course of the nation. Much of the research on ordinary people’s political behavior has, curiously, ignored personality. Our consideration of that research will therefore be selective, mainly noting the points at which definite personality influences have been established. This chapter begins at the logical beginning, with the political development of children, and then examines adult political motives. Because many ordinary people are no longer interested in ordinary politics, the chapter concludes with a discussion of political alienation. The extraordinary politics of extremism and activism will be dealt with in Chapter 2.

## political socialization

Young children rarely play the game of "Voter." They do not read comic books about the lives of famous Senators. They do not collect gubernatorial bubble-gum cards. When a Presidential speech is broadcast on television, they usually turn away or complain that they are missing "The Wonderful World of Disney" or "Superfriends."

Children are not born political animals. They must learn that government exists. They must learn its scope, its functions, its processes. They must learn to identify those who are a part of government, as well as the government figures' appropriate behaviors. In addition to acquiring this knowledge, children develop emotional reactions to it, and acquire political behaviors appropriate to their own interests and capabilities. All this political development (or political socialization, as social scientists call it) takes place as children simultaneously form their basic personalities and acquire a mass of nonpolitical knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.

2 Indirect political learning begins long before children know anything about politics as such. In their first year they may learn that parents, and by extension other adults on whom they must depend, can generally be trusted or should be viewed with distrust. As parents begin to impose behavioral limits, children may acquire feelings of comfort or discomfort in connection with such external regulation, which, in turn, may develop into tentative attitudes toward what adults call "law and order." As they learn to walk, talk, and engage in social activities, children may also acquire different degrees of confidence in their ability to interact with the world beyond the family (Erikson, 1951). Clear relationships between these early patterns of personality development and adult political behavior are hard to demonstrate. Further, any such relationships can be changed substantially by a great variety of later experiences. Nevertheless, political behavior plainly involves more than the learning of specific political acts. It emerges from the context of the child's total experience of life.

### **PRESIDENTIAL BENEVOLENCE**

The first result of direct political learning will likely be a vague patriotic image of America as the child's country and of the President as that country's leader. Young children understand little about the President's real political functions. Instead, according to the classic



**President Gerald Ford at a bicentennial celebration.**

studies of political socialization, they see him as a kind of superfriend. The President is much wiser and more powerful than the child's own father, and works much harder (Hess and Torney, 1967). He can "stop bad things before they start," and he "makes people be safe" (Greenstein, 1965). A majority of the children questioned in these and other studies conducted in the late 1950s and early 1960s agreed with such grandiose statements as "The President knows more than anyone" and "The President is about the best person in the world."

Why have children's views of the President been so benevolent? Probably, in the first place, because their parents and teachers described him benevolently. Few reliable data exist on the political information young children actually receive. But there has been sufficient adult veneration of the Presidency, and sufficient tradition of protecting children from the "harsh realities," to assure that most of the information most children get about most Presidents is positive. This is particularly likely during children's early formal education, when teachers are expected to avoid expressing personal political views, to support the general political system, and to idolize Washington, Lincoln, and any other past Presidents they mention.

Furthermore, young children have yet to develop complex reasoning abilities (Flavell, 1970). They therefore tend to translate whatever they learn about politics into simple, personalized terms. (For instance, they often refer to government in general as "he," apparently seeing it

as one child described it: "It's more or less a great leader and it makes our decisions and things of that sort" [Adelson, 1971].) Even adult criticism of the President is unlikely to survive in children's simple conceptual structures unless such criticism constitutes a large part of their fund of knowledge on the Presidency. Information may be most easily processed if it resembles concepts with which children are already familiar, such as parental qualities or television heroics.

Fathers were particularly important in early hypotheses about children's benevolent views of the President. The President might be seen as a better man than the child's father, but not as a different sort of man; he was the father "writ large." Some writers have gone further in this psychoanalytic vein, suggesting that children come to like the President for the same reason that they come to identify with their father: both are powerful and sometimes frightening people, and children's anxiety is reduced by regarding them as mighty friends rather than as enemies (Easton and Dennis, 1969).

Watergate might lead us to consider children's uncritical assessments of the President--any President--with some anxiety of our own. The early researchers chose instead to see such childhood attitudes as contributing to political stability in the United States. If children began their political life by viewing the President so enthusiastically, then they might be less likely to feel cynical and alienated toward the government later in life. Or so the argument went until a few years ago.

4 It now appears that children have no inherent need to view the President benevolently (although their tendency to do so may be fairly hard to overcome), and that the Republic is in no immediate danger of collapse even when they become troubled by Presidential misbehavior. Perhaps if John Kennedy had lived to serve another term and had been succeeded by one of his brothers or by another Eisenhower, we would never have learned that children are capable of anti-Presidential thoughts. But within the span of one childhood, we experienced the assassinations of two Kennedys and of Martin Luther King, the fighting and the losing of the war in Southeast Asia, and the forced retirement or resignation of two unpopular Presidents. Through it all, the nation's children watched and listened.

The first defections from the benevolent image of the Presidency were found among children whose backgrounds differed substantially from those of the white, middle-class youngsters initially studied. Black children, particularly after the "long hot summer" of 1967 and particularly as they got older, were found to view the President less

than idealistically (Abramson, 1972; Liebschutz and Niemi, 1974). Recently Mexican-American children also have tended to be more critical of the President than urban, white schoolchildren, except in the earliest grades (Garcia, 1973; Lamare, 1974). Children in the poverty culture of the East Kentucky hills, where the federal government and its representatives have never been particularly popular, appear downright antagonistic toward the President (Jaros, Hirsch, and Fleron, 1968). Forty-one percent of the East Kentucky fifth-through eighth-graders tested in March 1967 said the President worked less hard than most men, as compared with a similar response by only 3 percent of a large sample of Chicago schoolchildren in 1958 (Hess and Easton, 1960). Further, 27 percent of the Kentuckians said the President was less honest than most men (23 percent said he was more honest), whereas only 1 percent of the Chicago sample said the President was less honest.

These comparisons are complicated not only by cultural differences but by actual changes in the person of the President and in his behavior. As the Vietnam War reached its height in 1967, Lyndon Johnson was widely accused of a "lack of credibility" or worse. Even if parents and teachers had continued to avoid criticizing Johnson in the interests of the country, both the war itself and the antiwar, anti-Johnson protests were revealed to children daily on television. Representative data on the attitudes of American children toward Johnson are not available; but in 1971, attitudes toward Richard Nixon and the war were measured among a broad sample of East Coast children, the majority of whom were middle- and upper-class whites (Tolley, 1973). Forty percent disagreed with the statement "President Nixon is doing the right thing in Vietnam" (31 percent agreed). Forty-five percent disagreed with "The President always tells the truth about the war" (29 percent agreed). A rash of post-Watergate surveys has shown further erosions in children's beliefs about the President's morality and goodness, or at least a change in emphasis from Presidential goodness to Presidential power (Greenstein, 1974; Lupfer and Kenny, 1974; Arterton, 1974).

The development of these critical responses toward the President raises questions about whether earlier, largely benevolent views indeed came from children's attempts to reduce anxiety by emphasizing a powerful figure's positive features. As Christopher Arterton (1974) observes, "a president exercising his capability of doing great harm should produce ever increasing anxiety." According to the anxiety-

reduction hypothesis, therefore, Nixon should have become more popular among children after Watergate rather than less. Perhaps he might have, had the anxiety-reduction process been working alone. But other influences were no doubt operating at the same time, including a huge increase in televised criticisms of the President and parents' and teachers' greater willingness to voice criticisms directly to children. Perhaps children themselves took advantage of the situation to project disliked characteristics of their imperfect fathers onto the convenient target of the President. (It should also be noted that many children continued to idealize the President even at the height of the Watergate revelations. Out of several Watergate-period studies of predominantly white populations, only one [Arterton, 1974] found generally anti-Presidential attitudes among children, and that was in the anti-Nixon bastion of Boston.)

Furthermore, American children, including those belonging to racial minorities, tended to maintain a generally positive evaluation of the government as a whole even when their evaluation of the President declined (Sears, 1975). Indeed, the events leading up to and following Richard Nixon's resignation may have helped children to differentiate more clearly between the person of the President and the government in general. Nixon's early rejection of efforts to investigate his Watergate involvement apparently led many children to assume, at least temporarily, that the President is above the law (Green-

**The Nixons greet two future voters.**



stein, in press). Gerald Ford's pardon of Nixon may have strengthened such a belief among some children; but Nixon's fall from power to disgrace should have provided a clearer lesson about Presidential limits.

What should we teach our children about the President? In the early 1960s, it seemed that if you wanted a stable democracy, you should teach them that the President is kind and good and strong. But many of the children who were taught those lessons must eventually have participated in the anti-Presidential demonstrations of the middle and late 1960s. Their behavior suggests a rephrasing of the question: Is it better for children to be taught distrust of the President at an early age and perhaps to learn a little trust later, or for them to be trusting at first only to be disillusioned later? Some degree of eventual disillusionment is almost inevitable, unless the child either is very dense or begins with an East-Kentucky-style rock-ribbed cynicism about the entire national government. Even in the research conducted during the Eisenhower and Kennedy years, children had substantially moderated their idealistic political views by the time they reached junior high school; and cynicism is a way of life for many older adolescents. Studies in areas other than politics (for example, Janis, 1959) suggest that exaggerated trust followed by disillusionment is a reliable recipe for irrational rage. However, early cynicism followed by later strengthening of that cynicism through observations of Watergate-style politics could produce an equally undesirable apathy. A middle way in teaching, with some indication of our leaders' human fallibility but without hammering away at it, seems the optimal choice.

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## **LATER CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE**

Children's attitudes toward the President do not entirely determine their later political behavior. As they grow older, they also begin to understand the role of Congress, the Supreme Court, and various state and local governing bodies. At times children may develop more faith in these institutions than in the Presidency. They begin to conceive of themselves as political actors in some fashion, and develop ideas as to how effective or ineffective their influence may be (Knutson, 1974a). They are also likely to acquire a party identification—usually before they have any clear ideas as to what the party stands for, and more often than not because it is the party of one or both parents. (Lately, increasing numbers of children have begun calling themselves Inde-

pendents, apparently with no better idea of that term's meaning than of Democrat or Republican.) This party identification may then begin to bias their further political socialization: influencing children's interpretation of political news; making them initially more sympathetic toward one candidate and therefore more likely to give that candidate's views a close hearing; perhaps leading them ultimately to associate more often with people who share the same party label (Niemi, 1974).

Party identification can also play an important role in children's continuing personality development. They may have first asked their parents, "What are we?" when they found that their friends seemed to have a political identity while they did not. "I'm a Democrat" or "I'm a Republican" can be a comfortingly quick response when someone else later asks them what they are. "I'm an Independent" can make them feel ahead of the game.

For a time, children may gain an added sense of strength from the realization that they share the political views of their fathers (or, increasingly, of their mothers; Beck and Jennings, 1975). But as they enter adolescence, party label may become as useful a means to differentiate themselves from their parents as it earlier was to identify themselves with the parents. Ordinarily, this adolescent flirting with new political identities is unlikely to result in a permanent shift any further from the parents' traditional party label than to the status of Independent. But under the impact of a major social trauma, such as the Depression, or perhaps the Vietnam War or Watergate, a tentative political identity may harden into permanence, influencing not only the youth's own later political behavior but also that of his or her children (Beck, 1974). Millions of such conversions in a decade are the stuff of democratic revolution.

The study of adolescent political development has lagged well behind research on the political socialization of elementary-school children. For a time it seemed that with their party label already announced and with their basic fund of political knowledge amassed by the end of the eighth grade if not sooner, adolescents were hardly worth studying. One massive survey of high-school students, parents, and teachers (Langton and Jennings, 1968) even concluded that high-school civics courses have no significant effect on the political attitudes, knowledge, or interest of white students. (Black students did show significant increases in political knowledge and other criteria, perhaps because they were less exposed than whites to politics prior

to high school. Unfortunately, the civics courses also increased black students' tendency toward passive loyalty rather than toward active political participation.)

However, more recent research (Adelson, 1971; Jennings and Niemi, 1974) has revealed sharp changes in many young people's political thinking from the beginning of adolescence to its midpoint or later. For one thing, political thought tends to become much more abstract during those few years. When Adelson asked twelve- and thirteen-year-olds to tell him the purpose of laws, typical answers were "So that people don't get hurt" or "So people don't steal and kill." Fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds responded instead: "To ensure safety and enforce government" or "They are basically guidelines for people. I mean, like this is wrong and this is right and to help them understand." The typical twelve-year-old still personalizes the government in the form of judges and criminals; the typical fifteen-year-old is able to talk about government as a means for society to function.

Younger adolescents also tend to be highly authoritarian (even "bloodthirsty," according to Adelson), seeing criminals as deserving of cruel treatment and seeing the government as inherently good—the latter view continuing the childhood concept of governmental benevolence. But if development continues normally, within a few years adolescents begin to think seriously about general principles of fair treatment, about the criminal's motives other than sheer evilness, about the long-term as well as the short-term effects of government policies. With these new ideas, based on the increasing ability to think in terms of complex abstractions (and perhaps also on the personal exploration of several potential identities), adolescents' authoritarianism diminishes or disappears.

Finally, younger adolescents tend to take one political question at a time, dealing with it as best they can. Older adolescents—at least those who have become interested enough in politics to think about it a good deal—may develop an entire ideology within which to fit each political issue. A thoroughly developed ideological structure is rare in adolescents of any age; but in those who have it, it is one more indication that political growth need not stop in the eighth grade.

From a personality standpoint, adolescent political development is perhaps most interesting for its diversity. We sometimes get a hint of individuality in the political comments even of small children (Coles, 1975); but they are usually secondhand remarks, dependent upon someone else's personality. Middle adolescents are fully capable of

doing their own thinking and developing their own beliefs, based as much on their unique personalities as on the political “reality” around them. Ideologies right and left, simple and complex; elaborate utopias and angry revolutionary impulses; junior-prom-queen electioneering and door-to-door precinct work: all and more can be found in adolescents, intermingled with personal motives, defensive maneuvers, tentative identities in astonishing profusion. Few case studies have been conducted of adolescent political development, but its complexity and variability demand such research. Survey studies reveal much about what adolescents know and feel about politics, but they let too much slip through the cracks in terms of how adolescents got that way. And the importance of understanding adolescent political development is hard to deny: the sixteen-year-old is, after all, no more than two years away from becoming a legally qualified voter.

### political needs

10 In 1950 my father took me to my first political rally. Helen Gahagan Douglas was a candidate for one of California’s U.S. Senate seats, and the rally was on her behalf; but its main theme was “Nix on Nixon.” I knew hardly anything about either candidate; in fact, I don’t remember ever having heard Richard Nixon’s name before. But I did know whose side we were on, and I enjoyed singing anti-Nixon parodies of popular songs in between eating free hot dogs and drinking free soda pop. I especially liked the hot dogs. Maybe the only way San Diego Democrats could guarantee a good crowd in those days was to promise food and drink; but I was too naive to think of that. It just seemed to me that any political party willing to hand out free hot dogs for a few songs and a round of applause deserved my support. The newspaper letters-to-the-editor columns had earlier aroused my interest in electoral battles; the rally confirmed it. I was hooked on politics then and there.

How do other children get hooked on politics? Researchers have so far not told us. They have been so busy discovering when children learn about various components of politics, and what they learn, and how they feel about it, that they have directed little attention to why children become interested in politics at all. The prevailing assumption is that if parents and teachers say politics is important, children will see it as important. That may be so, to a moderate degree. Parents

and other adults do focus children's attention on certain aspects of the world, and parental approval or disapproval often serves as an important motivator for children's interest. But surely other motives also strengthen political interest or involvement (including a desire for hot dogs.)

A good deal more theorizing and research has focused on adults' reasons for political involvement. Involvement is used very loosely here, since much of the work in this area has been concerned simply with reasons for holding political attitudes rather than with motives for overt political activity. Few adults are politically active, but most hold some sort of political attitudes, which, if nothing else, may influence their vote.

Attitudes are predispositions to feel or act positively or negatively toward certain sets of objects. Political attitudes differ from other kinds of attitudes only in the nature of their objects: political figures, political goals and processes. Therefore, general theories about why people develop and hold attitudes have been readily applied to political attitudes, and vice versa. Psychologists have seldom concluded that attitudes are acquired at random or are inherited genetically; instead, a widely held assumption is that attitudes are functional. That is, they are acquired because they satisfy an individual's needs; they are retained because they continue to serve those or other needs effectively; they are changed when the original attitudes are no longer as useful for need satisfaction as new attitudes.

Attitude functions have been categorized in several ways. One of the first, and still one of the most useful, categorizations was developed by Smith, Bruner, and White (1956). In 1947 they interviewed ten men for nearly thirty hours each to determine what role their attitudes toward Russia played in their personalities. Out of masses of data, the researchers identified three main functions of these attitudes: social adjustment, object appraisal, and externalization. These categories not only describe the major uses to which individuals are likely to put their political attitudes; they also parallel the three major theoretical emphases in attempts to explain the motives for adult political behavior.

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### **SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT**

Social adjustment reflects the role of attitudes in "maintaining relationships with other people." This is a particularly important function for

the individual whose need for social support or social contact is strong. In Smith, Bruner, and White's study, for instance, a subject named Grafton Upjohn struggled hard to come up with definite opinions about Russia, even though he knew little about the country and cared less, apparently in order to maintain friendships with the prestigious researchers whose approval he desired. Upjohn was somewhat unusual in the strength of his social needs, having dropped sharply in social class since childhood; but some need for affection or approval from others is widespread. The possibility that children adopt early political attitudes at least in part to win affection from or to placate their parents has already been mentioned. Children's development of a patriotic identification with their country, or minority members' identification with their ethnic group, may not only promote friendship with others sharing similar views but also may raise the individual's own self-esteem.

In recent years, to emphasize that this functional category involves more than just going along with the views of other people, M. Brewster Smith (1973) has relabeled it "mediation of self-other relationships." People may feel a need to differentiate themselves from others as well as to align themselves with others. I pointed out in the previous section that adolescents often espouse different political views from their parents to strengthen their sense of possessing a distinct identity. Among Smith, Bruner, and White's subjects, a man named Hilary Sullivan voiced strongly pro-Russian views, in part to shock people to whom he could therefore feel superior. This more broadly labeled category might also be taken to include what Daniel Katz (1960) has labeled the "value-expressive function" of attitudes, "the function of giving positive expression to [one's] central values and to the type of person he conceives himself to be." Katz sees such value expression as a basic human need.

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In the narrow sense of satisfying the need to get along with others, the social-adjustment function encompasses the most popular social-scientific explanations of political attitude development during the past several decades: Children acquire their political attitudes mainly from their parents, who got them from their parents, not only because that is the easiest thing to do but because there are strong social reinforcements within the family for going along. And adults show political attitudes similar to those of their geographic, ethnic, religious, and social-class fellows because they might otherwise be ostracized.

Recently, however, such demographic predictors of political views

as social class and geographic region have been growing less accurate (Pomper, 1975). When voters in at least some parts of the country are interviewed in detail about the reasons why they hold specific political views, social-adjustment concerns like Grafton Upjohn's seem hard to find. For instance, when Karl Lamb (1974) interviewed twenty-three Orange County, California, suburbanites in great detail about their lives and their politics, only one indicated that he felt any social pressure to modify his political views (away from the John Birch Society line to something milder), and he refused to do so. The rest indicated that they were "not aware of subtle or unsubtle pressures toward political conformity on the job, in the neighborhood, or within their circle of friends," although in several instances they mentioned friends with whom they had "agreed to disagree" or to keep silent about political issues. If Orange County, reputed to be one of the most staunchly conservative and conformist voting areas in the country, is so tolerant of at least moderate political diversity, "getting along with others" may by now be well down in the ranks of motives for adopting political attitudes nationwide.

### **OBJECT APPRAISAL**

Object appraisal, the next category in Smith, Bruner, and White's list of attitude functions, better describes Orange Countians' political motives. Object appraisal is a person's use of attitudes in "trying to size up the world around him and to place it in relation to his major interests, ongoing concerns, and cherished aspirations." People seem to need to give structure to their environment, and attitudes can help them do this by providing convenient categories in which to pigeonhole new information, as well as convenient responses toward whatever falls into a particular pigeonhole. Purely random responses toward new stimuli would be both inefficient and often unrewarding. But if you have developed a positive attitude toward a class of rewarding objects in the past, and therefore respond positively to a new object falling into that class, you can save time otherwise spent in choosing a response, and you should also increase your rewards.

The Orange County residents interviewed by Lamb generally reserve their strongest political feelings for issues that hit close to home, both figuratively and literally. They are concerned about air pollution, property taxes, public access to beaches; and their positions on these issues are not much constrained by traditional political affilia-

tions. A Republican neurologist who works in a state psychiatric hospital is bitterly angry at Ronald Reagan because Reagan cut the state mental-health budget. A Republican engineer favors welfare payments for unemployed engineers, despite his general conservatism. The most liberal people in the group strongly oppose the building of a public housing project in their neighborhood because they feel it would lower the value of their houses. All these people could be accused of hypocrisy, but in truth they are less concerned with consistency than with what they perceive as their immediate material interests.

So far, object appraisal resembles the motivational model of classic economic theory, in which individuals are assumed always to act rationally to minimize their costs and to maximize their benefits in economic transactions. But Smith, Bruner, and White have more in mind than appraising the economic benefits of one's attitudes. They cite as an example of object appraisal the views of Ernest Daniel, an unskilled worker, who likes Russia because there "an unskilled workingman would be given the chance to develop to the top of his capacity, and would in any event be protected from financial insecurity." But they also cite the views of a very religious subject, Albert Rock, who condemns Russia for its rejection of "moral values and of faith in an ultimate [religious] reward." People seek to defend not only economic interests but also "intellectual and artistic interests," "ethical ideals," and the well-being of other people with whom they empathize. These are all conscious goals whose attainment may be furthered by developing good feelings about objects that appear positively related to the goals and bad feelings toward objects negatively related to the goals. Several Orange County suburbanites in Lamb's study held negative attitudes toward "hippy-looking" youth, whom they felt were challenging their cherished "work ethic"; they became equally hostile toward the men of the Nixon Administration, whom they saw as undermining the same ethical system while pretending to venerate it.

The belief in "voter rationality" was undermined in the earliest days of quantitative political science research. Voters were found to be pitifully misinformed about the leading issues of the day, and to vote largely on the basis of political party affiliation or demographic category. But recently, "voter rationality" has attained new respectability, as studies such as Lamb's have shown voters to devote considerable thought to the issues that interest them personally, and as mass surveys show greater voter attentiveness to candidates' individual qualities and to important political issues, with correspondingly

less inclination toward party-line voting (Verba and Nie, 1972; Pomper, 1975; Nie and Verba, 1975). The political drowsiness of the Eisenhower years, from which the largest amount of evidence for voter conformity and lack of interest in issues was drawn, is now beginning to be recognized as unrepresentative of American voters' characteristic political behavior. The electrified alertness to which many of them were awakened by crisis after crisis during the past decades may also be unrepresentative. But in response to the crises still to come in the next decades, an acute state of object appraisal may become both characteristic and essential.

### **EXTERNALIZATION**

Some researchers regard neither social adjustment nor object appraisal as genuinely involving personality. They therefore include in discussions of "personality and politics" only the final category in Smith, Bruner, and White's list of functions: externalization. In so doing, they ignore both the scope of contemporary personality theories and the evidence for wide variations in reliance on other attitude functions, politically and otherwise. As Smith, Bruner, and White have shown in their case studies, some people stress object appraisal in their political views, while others stress social adjustment; and the stress can often be traced to a particular pattern of personality development or of current personality needs. Modern ego psychology, the successor to classic Freudian psychoanalytic theory, emphasizes individuals' realistic coping with the objective world and their mutually influential interaction with other individuals, as do most other current personality theories. Nonetheless, externalization apparently continues to be the most intriguing function of political attitudes for many students of the field.

15

Externalization refers to coping with one's inner psychological problems by treating outside objects and events as if they were the inner difficulties. The examples typically given for this function are of neurotic or psychotic behaviors: shooting at a President, for instance, because you have long bottled up your rage against your father. But externalization much more often involves rather mild tendencies, as when Smith, Bruner, and White's subject Albert Rock, silently annoyed with his hypochondriacal wife, strongly criticizes "the Russian attempt to weaken the home and family," thereby nicely reinforcing the suppression or repression of his own impulse to weaken his family

by leaving it. Robert Lane (1962), in a detailed case study of fifteen working-class men, presents an even more interesting example: Rapuano, son of a poor Italian immigrant, intelligent, resourceful, relatively free of prejudice, generally open-minded. His personality is complex, and on the whole he seems psychologically healthy. But the cultural conflict he experienced during his childhood, between the traditions of his immigrant family and the behavior patterns acceptable at school, has left him somewhat confused about his own identity and often more angry than the occasion warrants. His anger tends to be directed against certain groups (Communists, gangsters) who violate the ordinary behavioral codes of the society in which he now lives. Rapuano would probably not feel motivated to see a psychotherapist, and the family doctor would not see any problems serious enough to refer him to one. But Rapuano's internal difficulties with identity and with controlling his aggressive impulses have led him to an externalization-based political position, in which he advocates the necessity for the government to control the nation tightly and to suppress deviant political behaviors.

16 All of these examples involve desires that the person has not been able to fulfill because of anxiety. Smith, Bruner, and White also identified another kind of externalization, involving desires that have not been fulfilled because of outer circumstances. In these cases, rather than externalizing the desire and then giving it "a properly energetic belaboring" as in the above examples, the individual may display considerable enthusiasm toward the desire as it is expressed in the behavior of others. Research subject John Chatwell, for instance, was distressed that his job in a patent law office did not allow him to produce usable goods for society. His strong praise for Russian industrial productivity appeared to be a way of expressing, rather than of controlling, his desires through externalization,

The influence of externalization on specific political views is hard to demonstrate, except in intensive case studies like those of Lane or of Smith, Bruner, and White. These studies suggest that externalization is widespread in its relatively mild forms, particularly in shaping attitudes toward foreign policy and other political issues that have little immediate impact on a person's life (see also Christiansen, 1965). Its contribution to personally significant domestic political attitudes, however, is likely to be subordinate to social adjustment and particularly to object appraisal, at least in clinically "normal" individuals. More powerful externalization effects will be explored later in this

chapter with regard to alienation and in Chapter 2 in connection with political extremism.

### **RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL NEEDS**

Smith, Bruner, and White's categorization of attitude functions is convenient and can easily be applied to attitudes toward a variety of political objects. But it is by no means the only way to analyze politically related needs. Robert Lane (1969), for instance, felt that the three categories lump too much together, are "too undifferentiated." He therefore proposed his own list of ten categories of human needs particularly applicable to political thinking. The ten include several categories resembling Smith, Bruner, and White's, such as "social needs: affiliation, approval, being liked." But they also include more specific categories, such as consistency needs, needs for the expression of aggression, and needs for autonomy, which are not clearly included in the previous categorization. In addition to his earlier case studies of workingmen, Lane has done his own thorough examination of the political ideas of twenty-four college students and has found considerable evidence for the political relevance of these ten needs. I wonder, though, whether Lane himself may be lumping too many needs together in his ten categories, and whether it might not be useful to discriminate twenty, or forty, or a hundred needs. I wonder where to stop.

It would be useful at this point to know which needs are most influential in determining the degree and direction of a person's involvement with politics. We might then decide to study closely the first three, or ten, or however many we have the time and energy for, and not worry about the less important ones. Smith, Bruner, and White point out that such rankings of importance are likely to vary widely for different groups and individuals. But even if we had averages merely for a random sample of American voters, it would be a useful start.

No one has yet provided such a ranking. However, Stanley Renshon (1974) has statistically compared two possible motives for political involvement in a group of college students: civic obligation and the need for personal control. Civic obligation is the individual's feeling (presumably inculcated by parents and schools) that in order to be a good citizen, he or she should show some degree of political interest and activity. This sort of concern would probably fall into

Smith, Bruner, and White's social-adjustment category. The need for personal control, as defined by Renshon, is "a basic need to gain control over [one's] physical and psychological life-space," which, applied to politics, means a need to have some influence on the political systems that bear on one's own life. Such a need would probably fall mainly within the scope of object appraisal in Smith, Bruner, and White's system, although its satisfaction might serve social-adjustment and externalization functions as well. (A single kind of political act or attitude will often satisfy more than one need and serve more than one personality function.)

Renshon studied these two motives, as well as feelings of political alienation, political interest, and other variables, in three hundred undergraduates at the University of Pennsylvania during 1970-71. At the time of the study, anti-Vietnam-War political activity continued at a high level. Renshon found that feelings of civic obligation contributed rather little to the students' decision either to campaign for antiwar Congressional candidates or to join the April 24, 1971, March on Washington. The desire for personal control made the strongest contribution of all the variables Renshon studied.

18 Renshon has by no means proved that a need for personal control is the single most powerful motive underlying political behavior, nor did he set out to do so. His correlations do suggest that people who feel that they have little influence on their environment, and that government policies bear heavily on their lives, are more likely to participate in certain political activities than people who don't feel so. But he did not investigate whether these people who feel that politics is important but that they have little personal control of it also share other needs, such as for identity or for peer approval, which might be even stronger than the personal-control need. Further, Renshon studied a group of subjects in whom that particular combination of feelings of little personal control, perceptions of strong government influence, and high political participation, might be unusually common: college students at the height of the Vietnam War, when the military draft was still in effect and represented for many the major intrusion of government into their lives. Under other circumstances, the need for personal control might be rather less important in influencing the level of political activity, compared with such concerns as civic responsibility. The reverse of the Renshon results can also occur, as in numerous studies showing that people who feel they already have high personal control (political efficacy is the more usual term)

are more likely to be politically active than those low in perceived personal control. The high-political-efficacy people in these studies were probably so active not because they desired still more personal control but because they had found they could reliably expect a solid payoff for their efforts (see Campbell, Gurin, and Miller, 1954; Prewitt, 1968; Verba and Nie, 1972).

Future research should tell us not only what the relative political importance of various psychological needs is for the general population, but how the need rankings vary among different segments of the populace and at different time periods, both in the individual's life and in the life of the nation. The needs that most often motivated Americans to act politically in the 1930s were not necessarily the important political needs in the 1960s—although they may be regaining strength in the late 1970s. Under certain circumstances, free hot dogs may motivate more votes than a sense of civic responsibility.

### the uninterested and the alienated

The most popular choice in the 1972 Presidential election was not Richard Nixon. It was Nobody.

There are always plenty of votes for Nobody. The high-water mark of voter involvement in the last half-century, reached in the Kennedy-Nixon Presidential election, included less than two-thirds of eligible voters. In 1972 almost one-half of the electorate stayed home on Election Day. Elections for lesser offices, held at other times, typically show even poorer turnouts. Some failures to vote are unavoidable or unintentional: illness, economic necessity, bad weather, changes of residence, all may place obstacles in the potential voter's path. But a substantial proportion of the "votes" for Nobody are cast deliberately. Either the nonvoters have grown up with little interest in politics and little sense of its relevance to their own lives, or they have decided that, although political issues are important, casting a vote for a candidate is useless, because the candidates are equally bad or because the governmental system is itself bad or unresponsive. The first kind of "No"-voter might be called "uninterested"; the second kind is usually identified as "alienated."

19

*The uninterested* apparently strike most social scientists as uninteresting. Some demographic data have been collected on them: they are more likely than people who vote regularly to be young, black,

female, Southern, poorly educated, just plain poor, or more than one of the above (Flanigan, 1972). They tend to know little about politics --presumably more a result than a cause of their lack of interest, although Paul Sniderman (1975) suggests that shortcomings in political learning can make politics seem too complicated to be worth following. Fortunately, the percentage of uninterested citizens has decreased steadily over the past two decades, at least in that major bastion of uninterest, the South. Educational levels have increased; the federal government has made itself visibly important during the racial and political upheavals of the period; and, at the same time, television may have made the political drama a very personal matter to many more people. Perhaps other factors in the decline of the uninterested, including changes in personality patterns, will become visible through further research.

#### POLITICAL ALIENATION

*The alienated* have been studied much more intensely. They supply their own drama: they have been interested enough in politics to feel angered or disappointed by it and to reject it. They may vote, but if they do, their vote is likely to be a vote of dissent rather than of agreement. They may be even more active politically than the average voter, but their aim is to change the whole system or a substantial part of it, not to further the *status quo*.

20 Alienation has been one of the staples of research on political behavior for many years. As in most studies of political behavior, the bulk of the research has been directed toward such demographic variables as social class and educational level, both because such information is relatively easy to obtain through large-scale survey techniques and because those variables often seem to explain a good deal about the behaviors involved. Typical demographic findings are similar to those for the uninterested (Schwartz, 1973), perhaps because the questionnaires most often used to measure alienation do not discriminate clearly between the uninterested and the genuinely alienated. When you ask people whether they agree with such statements as "These days a person doesn't know whom he can count on" or "There's little use writing to public officials because often they aren't really interested in the problems of the average man" (Srole, 1956), they are likely to say "yes" whether they have simply never cared about politics at all or whether they are actively opposed to the system.

An even greater problem with these demographic studies of alienation has recently become evident. When most people were satisfied with the political system in this country, it was possible to look at the few who were not and to identify rather quickly their most obvious differences from the majority: usually, differences associated with low socioeconomic status. But in the post-Kennedy era, dissatisfaction began to spread. More and more people grew unhappy with the government's role in the Vietnam War, regardless of how they thought the war should be handled. More and more became dissatisfied with the government's policies on the economy, on energy and environment, on minority rights--again, regardless of which side they were on. By 1970, according to David C. Schwartz's extensive studies (1973), the old reliable negative relationship between alienation and socioeconomic status (the lower the status, the higher the alienation) had virtually disappeared. So many people had become alienated to a substantial degree, regardless of social class, age, education, race, sex, or whatever, that research on demographic variables had lost much of its usefulness, either in predicting what groups of people would most likely become alienated or in explaining how they got that way. Other researchers have continued to find relationships between demographic variables and certain measures of alienation, most notably in terms of race: alienation has recently increased much more sharply among blacks than among whites. But almost every recent study of alienation shows substantial increases across all major demographic categories in the past decade (for example, Boyd, 1974; Miller, 1974a; Citrin, McClosky, Shanks, and Sniderman, 1975).

21

Even though alienation has become widespread, however, it is not all-pervasive. Some people are more alienated than others; some show alienation mainly toward national or local or party politics, but not toward other aspects of the political scene; some remain insistently unalienated. Demographic variables alone appear unable to explain satisfactorily these variations in the quantity and quality of alienation. Personality variables have been less studied in relation to political alienation than they should be, but some suggestive findings are available. They can be conveniently organized in terms of Smith, Bruner, and White's (1956) categories of political-attitude functions.

## SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT

This function has received the least attention as a foundation for alienated attitudes. Jack Citrin (1974) has suggested that since a good

deal of the alienation recently detected through public-opinion surveys has not been translated into political activism, it may in many cases be merely a mouthing of "fashionable clichés." Such alienated clichés appear particularly fashionable among the Berkeley, California, residents whom Citrin mainly studies. Among people between the ages of eighteen and thirty, Berkeleyites were more than twice as likely as a national sample to report feeling strong alienation (Citrin, McClosky, Shanks, and Sniderman, 1975). Berkeley's countercultural reputation no doubt attracts the already alienated; but the general atmosphere of alienation among the young there probably induces others who are not particularly alienated to say they are.

Alienation can also be a useful position to take for purposes of identity formation. It is more popular among the young than among the old throughout the country, no doubt in part because the young often perceive the old as part of the established political system and therefore find rejection of that political system an effective way of differentiating themselves from the older generation. Also, although blacks in general are more alienated than whites, alienation is highest among blacks who identify with the black movement (Miller, 1974b). In part this increased alienation surely comes from their greater awareness of political and economic inequities; but again, it is likely to be strengthened by the usefulness of alienated attitudes in giving them an identity distinct from the dominant culture.

## OBJECT APPRAISAL

22

Black perception of government maltreatment is one example of how an effort to evaluate one's world as accurately as possible, and to organize one's observations into a meaningful model of reality, can lead to alienation. The political system does not operate to treat everyone equally, and political leaders are not all uniformly trustworthy. People whose personalities allow them or compel them to look closely and clearheadedly at politics in this country are therefore likely to become at least somewhat alienated. The evidence that alienation has increased along with the increasing clarity and personal relevance of political issues (for example, Miller, 1974a) can therefore be counted as evidence for the role of object appraisal. So can the evidence that among at least some demographic categories (such as, again, blacks) the more educated people are, the more they are likely to distrust government figures (Finifter, 1970).

Object appraisal does not operate on alienation only in one direction, however. A person who understands the current political scene very well may find good reason to feel alienated; but a person who cannot understand the political scene at all may feel equally alienated. In an important study done before the recent spread of alienated attitudes (McClosky and Scharr, 1965), high alienation was found to be associated with low intellectual orientation, high psychological inflexibility, high anxiety, low ego strength, high hostility level, and similar characteristics. These relationships held firm even among persons of equal socioeconomic level. According to McClosky and Scharr, the direction of causation leads largely from personality to alienation rather than vice versa: inflexible, unintellectual, anxious, hostile people will probably fail to learn how to use the political system effectively for their own purposes, or to understand its operations sufficiently to feel comfortable with it. Paul Sniderman (1975) has recently provided a similar argument for the relationship between low self-esteem and alienation. People who feel strong doubts about their own worth tend to withdraw their interest from "the main channels of social communication, and in any event, are less attentive and receptive to information which passes along these channels. In addition to being more poorly exposed to information circulating through the society, persons with low self-esteem are also less likely to understand correctly the information which they do receive." As a result, "democratic politics can easily appear a disorderly and unintelligible process, serving no apparent purpose, producing only conflict or confusion." So ineffective as well as effective object appraisal can become a pathway to alienation.

23

#### EXTERNALIZATION

McClosky and Scharr's (1965) unintellectual, inflexible, anxious, and hostile individuals had more reason than poor political learning to become alienated. They also appeared likely to cope with their psychological problems by externalizing them into the political arena, particularly by seeing the political system rather than themselves as rigid, stupid, and hostile. When people respond in this way, the political system may in turn begin to act really hostile and rigid toward them, thus confirming their suspicions and strengthening their alienation. (Of course, such people need not direct their concern toward politics at all. Many people with personality patterns such as those

described by McClosky and Scharr will be so absorbed in their own psyches and difficult interpersonal relationships that they may register on surveys as politically uninterested rather than as politically alienated. Those who do become politically alienated through externalization are likely to be passive alienates rather than activists; they don't like the political scene, but they don't know what to do about it.)

Several case studies of alienation through externalization are available (Lane, 1962, 1969; Keniston, 1965). The process described by Keniston is especially intriguing. His subjects were male Harvard students who as children had seen their fathers as weak and their mothers as talented, frustrated, and seductive. They failed to identify with the father but became intensely involved on an emotional level with the mother--so intensely that in later reaction to this "devouring" relationship, they came to reject any kind of strong emotional commitment, including political commitments. Keniston's Harvard men were culturally and philosophically as well as politically alienated, on a much broader scale than most of the people counted as "alienated" in mass surveys. Their peculiar maternal relationship is also probably rather rare in the population as a whole. But they do indicate that externalization can be an important source of alienation in the sensitive and the well-informed, as well as in the poorly educated fringes of society.

#### REQUIRING THE ALIENATED TO VOTE

24

Ralph Nader and others have recently proposed that all American citizens of voting age be required to vote. They are dismayed at the low voter turnouts in this country, particularly during the 1972 Presidential election, and they feel that required voting would boost other kinds of citizen participation in politics as well as increasing the vote itself. Other countries have been able to impose at least a minimal level of participation through such a law; why not the United States?

The idea is tempting, but it does not seem to me to acknowledge fully the diverse reasons people have for not voting. As I have indicated, many of our alienated citizens are as well informed about politics as the unalienated--perhaps in some ways even better informed. But these well-informed alienates often vote already, and participate politically in other ways, even though (or because) they feel distressed at the direction in which the nation is moving. Insisting that they vote is unlikely to raise the level of political participation very much; such a requirement might even add to their alienation. Instead, the obligatory ballot box is most likely to bring out the unin-

terested and the passively alienated: the people who know the least both about candidates and about issues, and who understand little about the rules of the political "game." They tend to make their voting decisions (if any) on trivial or irrational grounds (Flanigan, 1972). Dan Nimmo (1970), an expert on political campaigning, argues that it is precisely such individuals who are most susceptible to modern mass-media campaigns, where personal style rather than political substance is emphasized, where millions of dollars are spent on developing a synthetic image of the candidate, and where television—preferably via the quickie commercial—is the principal means of campaigning. One sometimes hears the argument that if alienated citizens were really aroused, they would vote for major reforms in the political system, and maybe that is what Ralph Nader hopes will happen if they are required to vote. But the passive alienated often turn out to be mere "aginnners," voting for the candidate who can most arouse their hatred and envy against other segments of society. With so little information and interest concerning the substantive issues of the campaign, the passive alienates may be forced to rely on those emotions almost exclusively in developing their vision of politics; and they may therefore find it easier to vote for destructive candidates than for political rebuilders.

The passive alienated and the uninterested should not be completely ignored, on the assumption that they won't bother anyone if they're left alone. An intelligent and wealthy demagogue may eventually be able to marshal their support, even if they aren't required to vote. But insisting that they vote will not lessen their hostility and ignorance, and by the time other efforts to improve the quality of their participation begin to take effect, our government may have suffered major wounds from these reluctant balloters. Ralph Nader and other advocates of increased political participation should perhaps instead direct their attention toward reforming the early political socialization of our children—if not in the home, then at least in the schools and on television. Politics may not interest young children quite as much as sex, but we should be at least as concerned with what they hear in the streets about politics as about sex, and as concerned with making politics a constructive and meaningful part of their lives. If we remain passive on such matters ourselves, we may within another ten or fifteen years discover in our maturing youth the most politically alienated, and therefore the most dangerous, generation in American history.