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An Alternative Conceptualization of Political Tolerance: Illusory Increases 1950s-1970s*

JOHN L. SULLIVAN
University of Minnesota

JAMES PIERESON
University of Pennsylvania

GEORGE E. MARCUS
Williams College

This article proposes an alternative conceptualization of political tolerance, a new measurement strategy consistent with that conceptualization, and some new findings based upon this measurement strategy. Briefly put, we argue that tolerance presumes a political objection to a group or to an idea, and if such an objection does not arise, neither does the problem of tolerance. Working from this understanding, we argue that previous efforts to measure tolerance have failed because they have asked respondents about groups preselected by the investigators. Those groups selected as points of reference in measuring tolerance have generally been of a leftist persuasion. Our measurement strategy allowed respondents themselves to select a political group to which they were strongly opposed. They were then asked a series of questions testing the extent to which they were prepared to extend procedural claims to these self-selected targets. Using this approach, we found little change between the 1950s and the 1970s in levels of tolerance in the United States, a result that contradicts much recent research on the problem.

Many theorists have argued that although a democratic regime may be divided by fierce conflicts, it can remain stable if citizens remain attached to democratic or constitutional procedures and maintain a willingness to apply such procedures—the right to speak, to publish, to run for office—on an equal basis to all, even to those who challenge its way of life. In this instrumental sense, tolerance is understood as valuable because it helps to maintain a stable democratic regime. In addition, since a tolerant regime is generally thought to be a good regime, tolerance is sometimes understood as a good in itself, as an essential characteristic of the good society.

The earliest empirical studies of tolerance conducted during the 1950s (Stouffer, 1955; Prothro and Grigg, 1960; McClosky, 1964)

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found high levels of intolerance and a good deal of unwillingness to extend civil liberties to objectionable groups. Many have therefore taken heart in recent findings which purport to show that levels of tolerance in the American public have increased substantially since these earlier studies were conducted (Davis, 1976; Nunn et al., 1978). It would appear that the political ferment of the 1960s and the declining salience of the cold war and of the communist issue have contributed to a more tolerant climate for political debate and dissent. According to this research, then, much progress has been made in the United States over the past two decades in building a more tolerant political regime.

However, the apparent connection between the social and political trends of the 1960s and 1970s and the changing levels of tolerance reported in these studies may dissolve upon closer inspection. Though domestic communists declined in salience and visibility during this period relative to the 1950s, they were replaced as potential targets of tolerance by other groups challenging the political consensus. These groups, representing all shades of political opinion, were not generally received in a tolerant manner, either by members of the elite or by the public at large. The claim that a changed climate of opinion produced higher levels of tolerance is thus too facile, and it begs a number of questions about the sources of

tolerance and its meaning in a democratic regime.

These conclusions about changing levels of tolerance in American society derive from a particular tradition of research. This tradition incorporates common assumptions about the meaning of tolerance and about the way the concept should be measured. These assumptions, in turn, contributed heavily to the conclusions that were reached. As will be shown below, these assumptions about the meaning and measurement of tolerance are unwarranted and, hence, the conclusions based upon them are inaccurate or, at least, incomplete.

This article, therefore, will reconsider the problem from the beginning. Since the tradition of empirical research on tolerance is powerful and persuasive, it will be necessary to examine its assumptions in some detail to demonstrate our objections to it. After reformulating the problem on the basis of more tenable assumptions, we will proceed to our own analysis of the level of political tolerance in the United States. This analysis, in turn, will produce conclusions different from those of the studies cited above.

The Empirical Literature on Tolerance

Despite the importance of the subject, the literature on political tolerance is not particularly extensive. We can point to six important studies spanning two decades: Stouffer's (1955) study of attitudes toward communism; the Prothro-Grigg (1960) study of political tolerance; McClosky's (1964) study of levels of support for democratic norms; Lawrence's (1976) study connecting tolerance with positions on specific issues; Davis' (1975) study testing Stouffer's predictions about the effects of generation, age, and education on tolerance toward communists and atheists; and the Nunn, Crockett, and Williams (1978) more extensive update of Stouffer's work.

These studies are especially worthy of attention because they draw some important conclusions about the way in which democracy in the United States supposedly operates. As their conclusions are based upon empirical findings, close attention should be given to the way the studies are executed and to the evidence upon which these conclusions rest. In particular, they should be examined in light of the following questions: How is tolerance defined? How is it measured? And what assumptions are made concerning the role of tolerance in a democratic polity?

Among the earliest empirical studies of

tolerance in the United States was Stouffer's analysis of public attitudes toward communism, published in 1955. Based upon a large national survey conducted in 1954, the study was designed to measure public attitudes toward communism and the extent to which Americans were prepared to extend procedural rights to communists and suspected communists. Stouffer also examined attitudes toward two other groups on the left, atheists and socialists. Though the study purported to study tolerance of "nonconformity," all but four of the fifteen items used to measure tolerance listed communists or suspected communists as points of reference (Stouffer, 1955, Appendix C). The conclusions of the study, therefore, bear more closely upon tolerance of communists than upon tolerance more broadly understood.

Stouffer's findings were nevertheless important—and disturbing. Substantial majorities said that an admitted communist should not be permitted to speak publicly, or to teach in high schools or colleges, or, indeed, to work as a clerk in a store. Majorities also agreed that communists should have their citizenship revoked, that books written by communists should be taken out of public libraries, that the government should have the authority to tap personal telephone conversations to acquire evidence against communists, and that, withal, admitted communists should be thrown in jail (Stouffer, 1955, Ch. 2). These attitudes softened considerably when the same questions were posed about socialists, atheists, and suspected communists. However, large numbers of citizens responded intolerantly to these targets as well. These results have to be interpreted against the background of the McCarthy period, but they undermined the assumption that there existed a consensus in the society around procedural norms that allow extremist groups access to political institutions.

Stouffer's conclusions about tolerance in the United States, however, were more optimistic than his empirical findings at first glance seemed to warrant. He suggested that tolerant norms in the society would inevitably grow stronger as time passed:

Great social, economic, and technological forces are operating slowly and imperceptibly on the side of spreading tolerance. The rising level of education and the accompanying decline in authoritarian childrearing practices increase independence of thought and respect for others whose ideas are different. The increasing geographical movement of people has a similar consequence, as well as the vicarious experiences supplied by the magic of our even more powerful media of communications (p. 236).

Stouffer concluded, then, that the intolerance of the early 1950s would abate because of increased education and other factors.

Prothro and Grigg (1960) tried to discover whether there existed a consensus on general procedural norms of democracy and minority rights, and whether citizens were prepared to apply these abstract principles to specific situations in which unpopular groups of individuals might be involved. They did find a general consensus on the principles, but this broke down on the specific applications of the norms, particularly when the principles were applied to communists.

In a related study, McClosky (1964) compared political influentials and rank and file citizens in levels of support for abstract principles and for the application of these principles to specific situations. He found members of the elite to be much more sympathetic to statements expressing the "rules of the game"; in addition, they were more likely than the general electorate to support the application of the general principles of free speech and opinion to specific situations. He therefore concluded that "a large proportion of the electorate has failed to grasp certain of the underlying ideas and principles on which the American political system rests."¹

These studies were carried out and written during the peak of the cold war era when the denial of procedural rights to communists and related groups was the major concern of those interested in civil liberties. In the interim, the dimensions of political conflict have grown more complex, and challenges to the political consensus have come from many sources, including civil rights activists, feminists, opponents of the war in Vietnam, and various radicals and reactionaries. As the potential targets of intolerance have proliferated, it is even less appropriate now to measure tolerance solely with reference to communists and associated groups. At the same time, by broadening the range of political opinion in the society, the ferment of the 1960s may have created a more tolerant environment for dissent. For these reasons, the conclusions of these earlier studies need to be reconsidered.

In a recent article, using National Opinion Research Center data collected in the early 1970s, Lawrence (1976) has reconsidered the problem and has refined the conclusions of these earlier studies. Like Prothro and Grigg, he

is concerned with the relationship between positions on specific issues and the willingness to tolerate the actions of various groups concerned with these issues. Lawrence's findings report a higher level of tolerance in the 1970s than that suggested by earlier studies. A majority of citizens would permit all of the general acts of protest, except that involving the blocking of a government building, and there was considerable consistency between evaluations of the abstract acts and their specific applications. This consistency, however, varied from issue to issue.

The question of whether tolerance has in fact increased since Stouffer's study has been addressed in two separate studies. Davis (1975) attempted to test Stouffer's prediction that tolerance would increase as levels of education in the society increased and as the average age of the population declined. Drawing upon the same NORC sample Lawrence used, Davis found a 22 percent increase in tolerance between 1954 and 1971. He attributed 4 percent of this increase to higher levels of education, 5 percent to cohort replacement, and 13 percent to increasing levels of tolerance among all cohort and educational groups. Thus, the bulk of the change apparently reflected general trends that strengthened tolerant political norms. What these trends were he did not venture to say, though he suggested that they involved a "general movement" in the society toward more liberal positions on all sorts of non-economic issues.

Similarly, Nunn, Crockett, and Williams (1978) have attempted to measure changes in levels of tolerance by analyzing their own national survey conducted in 1973 that repeated the Stouffer items. Like Lawrence and Davis, they found a considerable increase in tolerance between 1954 and the early 1970s. Since their survey contained the same questions Stouffer used, they were able to measure quite precisely the changes in levels of tolerance of communists, atheists, and socialists. This is demonstrated in Table 1, where, using NORC data, we present the responses to six questions about communists and atheists in both 1954 and 1977. It is clear from these data that tolerance for these two groups increased significantly over this 23-year span. The increases range from 25 to 35 percentage points, depending upon the question. Nunn et al., relying upon data from their own survey and from several NORC surveys conducted in the early 1970s, observed a similar change. Thus, they found that while in 1954 only 31 percent of the public could be classified as tolerant on their overall tolerance index, fully 55 percent

¹Jackman (1972) shows that most of the differences between elite and mass disappear once education is controlled.

Table 1. Increases in Tolerance of Atheists and Communists, 1954–1977 (Percent)

	1977 NORC	1954 Stouffer	Increase
Should an atheist be allowed to speak?*	63	37	26
Should an atheist be allowed to teach?	39	12	27
Should a book written by an atheist be removed from the library?	60	35	25
Should a communist be allowed to speak?	57	27	30
Should a communist be allowed to teach?	41	6	35
Should a book written by a communist be removed from the library?	57	27	30

Source: Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan, 1954 data; National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, 1977 data.

*The data reported are the percentages giving the tolerant response. These questions have been repeated by NORC several times in the 1970s and the results are all virtually identical to those in column one above.

could be so classified by 1973. They concluded, "The most important finding from our efforts to track trends in American tolerance is that citizens who are most supportive of civil liberties have emerged as the majority in our society—and they are not a 'silent majority'" (p. 12).

The conclusions of these two studies then are, first, that levels of tolerance in the United States have increased significantly in the last 20 years and, second, that these changes flow partially from higher levels of education, partially from aging and cohort replacement, but primarily from broader political forces that have improved the climate for tolerance and civil liberties. Nunn and his associates mention such factors as the secularization of society and the Watergate episode as sources of the change, and they go so far to conclude that, "given the substantial increase in public support for democratic principles, the risk of demagogic takeover or the undermining of civil liberties, is less now than it once was" (p. 158). In other words, they have gone well beyond their empirical finding that tolerance of communists, atheists, and socialists has increased and have proceeded to conclude that tolerant beliefs in general are now more widely held, and that support for democratic principles has increased as well. Furthermore, the conclusion that tolerance has increased since 1954 rests upon assumptions about the meaning and measurement of tolerance that Stouffer first introduced. The conclusion therefore hinges in part on the validity of these assumptions. To challenge this conclusion, we must reconsider the assumptions upon which it is based. As we do this, a more tenable basis for the study of tolerance will be developed.

A Reconsideration of Political Tolerance

Tolerance implies a willingness to "put up with" those things that one rejects. Politically, it implies a willingness to permit the expression of those ideas or interests that one opposes. A tolerant regime, then, like a tolerant individual, is one that allows a wide berth to those ideas that challenge its way of life (see Crick, 1973, Ch. 3).

We should observe at the outset, then, that tolerance presumes opposition or disagreement. If there is no reason to oppose, then there is no occasion for one to be tolerant or intolerant. The question does not arise, since it is pointless to ask people to tolerate a doctrine or practice of which they approve or toward which they are indifferent. The problem of tolerance only arises once there are grounds for real disagreement; what one proceeds to do at this point determines whether one is tolerant.

In this sense, tolerance is conceptually "content-free" in that the content of the ideas that one opposes are irrelevant to the principle itself. One is tolerant to the extent one is prepared to extend freedoms to those whose ideas one rejects, whatever these might be. The analytical problem, from our standpoint, arises from the fact that people oppose or reject different groups or ideas. Smith may be particularly concerned about communists, while Jones is concerned about the Ku Klux Klan, and so on. To measure tolerance, we must first discern an objection, and this cannot be assumed by simply asking respondents about generally unpopular groups. They must identify such groups for themselves, since the targets of intolerance may vary widely among individuals. If respon-

dents are simply asked about groups that are generally assumed to be unpopular and tolerance is measured with reference to attitudes about these groups, we are bound to confuse tolerance with the contents of respondents' beliefs about the groups the investigator selects.

In the studies previously reviewed, the measures of tolerance were not content-free, since the questions asked invariably referred to specific groups, generally of a leftist persuasion. The items used in Stouffer's study, and in subsequent attempts to monitor changing levels of tolerance, referred to communists, atheists, and socialists. Hence, in these studies, tolerance and intolerance for these particular groups have been confused with tolerance and intolerance more generally understood. The difficulty with this technique is that while one might be tolerant of communists or other radical groups, one might at the same time be quite intolerant of other groups on the right, such as racists, fascists, or nativists. At the same time, those who support repression against groups on the extreme left could be very tolerant of the groups just mentioned. Thus, the validity of items used to measure tolerance is fundamentally called into question.²

A Content-Controlled Measure of Tolerance

What is needed is a measurement procedure which allows respondents themselves to specify the groups they most strongly oppose. In an attempt to obtain such a measure, we developed and tested the following measurement approach. First, we provided each interview respondent with a list of potentially unpopular groups that ranged from communists and social-

ists on the left, to fascists, John Birch Society members, and Ku Klux Klan members on the right. We also included a number of groups, such as atheists, pro-abortionists, and anti-abortionists, which we expected in some ways to represent positions that are orthogonal to the left-right dimensions. (See Appendix A for the exact question wording and the specific groups listed.) Respondents were then asked to identify the group they liked the *least*, and we made it very clear that they could select a group *not* on our list. Respondents were then presented with a series of statements in an agree-disagree format which elicited their views about a range of activities in which members of that group might participate. The following statements were among those included in the series:

- (1) Members of the _____ should be banned from being president of the United States.
- (2) Members of the _____ should be allowed to teach in the public schools.
- (3) The _____ should be outlawed.
- (4) Members of the _____ should be allowed to make a speech in this city.
- (5) The _____ should have their phones tapped by our government.
- (6) The _____ should be allowed to hold public rallies in our city.

The statements were read as they appear above with the blanks filled with the group selected by each respondent. Respondents were also asked to pick their *second* least-liked group, and questions 1–6 were repeated. (Additional groups could be volunteered by the respondent; in fact, we encouraged this. See Appendix A.)

Our intention was to avoid contaminating the tolerance-intolerance dimension with the respondents' political beliefs. If we had merely asked all respondents whether communists should be allowed to hold public office, their responses would depend not only on their levels of tolerance, but also on their feelings toward communists. Previous studies have looked at tolerance in either of two ways: (1) by asking respondents whether they would tolerate certain groups, such as communists, socialists or atheists (Stouffer, 1955; Davis, 1975); or (2) by asking respondents whether they agree with general procedural norms in abstract terms. (Prothro and Grigg, 1960, and McClosky, 1964, used both of these procedures.) The advantage of our procedure is that it creates a situation in which the evaluation of each respondent toward the group in question is held constant. This measurement generates "content-con-

²In order to examine the validity of our critique by using the Stouffer items, we have performed a maximum likelihood factor analysis of the 1954 and 1974 Stouffer items, applying the SIFASP computer program which allows a simultaneous fitting of a model to separate populations (Jöreskog, 1969, 1970, and 1973). For a brief presentation of these results, see Sullivan et al. (1979). In brief, we find that almost all of the change in tolerance in the Stouffer items can be explained as a result of the decreasing salience of the three groups studied: communists, socialists, and atheists. Almost none of it can be accounted for by changes in attitudes toward the three acts noted in Table 1 (allowing atheists or communists to speak, to teach, or to have their books in a public library). A somewhat more detailed analysis of these data can be obtained from the authors. Our case, however, rests primarily upon the original data presented in this article.

trolled" responses and also prevents respondents from expressing agreement with general norms which they then fail to apply to specific groups. Clearly, our measures are not "content-free" since there *is* a context and a specific group toward which each respondent must react. We thus call it a "content-controlled" measure, to emphasize that we have attempted to "control for" the content by allowing respondents to select functionally equivalent groups. We view the group selected by each respondent as having a similar meaning across respondents' psychic organizations, even though different groups are selected.

A second sample was presented with the Stouffer approach to measuring tolerance, which specified either communists or atheists as points of reference. These items are identical to those used by Stouffer in his 1955 study (and by NORC in the 1970s) to measure tolerance of nonconformity, and they consisted of the following questions:

- (1) There are always some people whose ideas are considered bad or dangerous by other people. For instance, somebody who is against all churches and religion. If such a person wanted to make a speech in your city against churches and religion, should he be allowed to speak, or not?
- (2) Should such a person be allowed to teach in a college or university, or not?
- (3) If some people in your community suggested that a book he wrote against churches and religion should be taken out of your public library, would you favor removing this book, or not?
- (4) Now, I should like to ask you some questions about a man who admits he is a communist. Suppose this admitted communist wanted to make a speech in your community. Should he be allowed to speak, or not?
- (5) Suppose he is teaching in a college. Should he be fired, or not?
- (6) Suppose he wrote a book which is in your public library. Somebody in your community suggests that the book should be removed from the library. Would you favor removing it, or not?

By our standards, these questions do not guarantee equivalence of group meaning, since they measure tolerance with reference to groups selected by the investigators. We would expect these items primarily to measure attitudes toward communists and atheists rather than tolerance. Since we have presented these

different sets of questions to separate random samples, we can readily measure the influence of different measurement strategies.

Levels of Tolerance: Differences by Measurement Strategy

We conducted two independent surveys in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota during the spring and summer of 1976. One independent random sample of respondents was asked our new set of tolerance questions while the other was asked the old Stouffer set. Two independent random samples of size 300 were selected from the Twin Cities' city directories, which include a listing of all adults in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Interviews were completed with 200 persons using the old questions and with 198 persons using the new questions, a response rate of about 66 percent.³

In addition, we will present data from a national opinion survey conducted for us by NORC in the spring of 1978. We included our content-controlled questions as well as four of the Stouffer questions. Thus we can compare the results both from an equivalent samples design and from a single sample which was asked both sets of questions.

Table 2 presents the percentage of tolerant responses for questions using both the least-liked and the second least-liked groups in one of the Twin Cities samples. The comparable

³Interviewers were trained by the senior author during a one-day workshop and subsequent individual training sessions. Each interviewer conducted several practice interviews and was evaluated by the senior author and the subjects being interviewed. A lengthy training manual was prepared and much time was spent to ensure that interviewers would handle similar situations and problems in the same, objective manner. Weekly meetings were held after the interviewing began to go over problems and to standardize responses to these problems. The interviewers were hired through the University Employment Service at the University of Minnesota. Approximately 15 interviewers were used, most of them students. All interviewees were called or visited personally by a research assistant subsequent to the interview to ensure that the reported interview had taken place and that the interviewer had been competent. We have been unable to discover any data problems related to interviewers.

The two samples do not differ from each other or from the population on any demographic characteristics (see Sullivan, Piereson and Marcus, 1978). Both samples are representative of the larger population, and differences in tolerance may thus be attributed to different measurement strategies rather than differences between samples per se.

Table 2. Levels of Tolerance for Content-Controlled and for Stouffer Items

A. Content-Controlled Items	1976 Twin Cities Split Samples		1978 NORC
	Percent Tolerant, Least-Liked Group	Percent Tolerant, Second Least- Liked Group	Percent Tolerant, Least-Liked Group
Members of the _____ should be banned from being president of the U.S.	28	32	16
Members of the _____ should be allowed to teach in public schools.	26	30	19
The _____ should be outlawed.	33	43	29
Members of the _____ should be allowed to make a speech in this city.	70	67	50
The _____ should have their phones tapped by our government.	70	70	59
The _____ should be allowed to hold public rallies in our city.	57	51	34

B. Stouffer Items	Percent Tolerant	Percent Tolerant
Should an atheist be allowed to speak?*	78	65
Should an atheist be allowed to teach?	63	40**
Should a book written by an atheist be removed from the library?	80	62
Should a communist be allowed to speak?	71	63
Should a communist be allowed to teach?	62	40**
Should a book written by a communist be removed from the library?	79	64

Source: Twin Cities Survey and National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago.

*See the text for the exact question wording. For part A, N = 198 and for part B, N = 200, in the 1976 split samples.

**Question not asked in the 1978 survey. Figures are from the 1977 NORC General Social Survey. N = 1509, in the 1978 NORC Survey.

percentages for the Stouffer items, given to the other Twin Cities sample, are also in Table 2, as well as the results from the 1978 NORC survey. According to the Twin Cities sample which responded to the Stouffer items, strong majorities are tolerant on every item, ranging from 62 percent tolerant on the "communist-teach" question to 80 percent tolerant on the "atheist-book" question. According to the other Twin Cities sample, which responded to the content-controlled questions, the portrait looks more bleak. The percentage tolerant ranges from 26 on the teaching question, to 70 on the speech and wiretapping questions. In fact, one finds only one-third of the citizenry willing to say that their least-liked group ought not to be outlawed. Further, only about one-fourth of the respondents were willing to allow members of their least-liked group to teach in schools, and to say they ought *not* to be banned from being president. Only about half were willing to

allow this group to hold public rallies in their cities.⁴

It is our interpretation that the content-controlled items reveal more intolerance than the Stouffer items because they allow respondents to select from a much wider range of groups. People who may be willing to allow communists and atheists their full range of civil liberties, perhaps because they sympathize with such groups or fail to find them particularly threatening, may be unwilling to allow the Ku Klux Klan the same rights, perhaps because they do not sympathize with the Klan and find it dangerous.

None of the Stouffer items in column one

⁴Since our questions are five-point agree-disagree items, the percentage tolerant reflects those who agree or agree strongly (or disagree, depending upon the *direction* of the statement).

produces a majority in favor of depriving either of these groups of fundamental civil liberties. It should be noted, however, that these sets of questions are not *strictly* comparable. The contents of the questions are not identical, and in addition, the content-controlled items were presented in an *agree-disagree* format while the Stouffer items were presented in a *yes-no* format. Nevertheless, over half of the Twin Cities respondents given the content-controlled items believe that their least-liked group should be outlawed, hardly consistent with the recent conclusion that the mass public is increasingly tolerant.

Our content-controlled question on allowing the least-liked group to teach is worded similarly to the Stouffer item on allowing atheists or communists to teach, and while only 26 percent of the content-controlled sample thought members of a least-liked group should be allowed to teach, fully 63 and 62 percent of the sample responding to the Stouffer items gave the tolerant response. Certainly this suggests that although tolerance of communists and atheists has increased, the overall extent of tolerance may not have changed much at all. Our analysis suggests that the explanation for Davis' and Nunn's findings could well be one Davis rejects: that the cold war and fervor of the 1950s produced a convenient outlet for intolerance against communists and their "fellow traveler" atheists. Since the number of targets (on both the right and left) for political intolerance multiplied during the 1960s and 1970s, and since the cold war fervor of the political elites waned considerably during this time, we might well expect more tolerant responses toward communists and atheists while, at the same time, other groups were becoming the major targets of this intolerant impulse. We suggest that the aggregate level of tolerance may not have increased very much, even though tolerance toward these particular groups has undeniably increased.

Table 2 also presents the results from the national survey. In general, the results are consistent with our question-wording experiment. In the national sample, using the content-controlled questions, we find that 19 percent are tolerant on the teaching question, while with the Stouffer teaching questions, we find 40 percent are tolerant (for atheists and for communists). Similarly, 50 percent are tolerant if we rely on the controlled question about freedom of speech, while 65 and 63 percent are tolerant if we use the Stouffer items. So it appears that whether one uses one sample, including both sets of questions, or uses equivalent samples, asking each sample one set

of questions, the conclusion is inescapable: higher levels of tolerance are indicated with the Stouffer items. And although some of the content-controlled items indicate a majority of tolerant citizens, most do not.

Some of the differences between the two sets of items are the result of somewhat different wordings of the questions. Further, the degree of tolerance depends in part on the nature of the act to be tolerated. Some acts are "easier" to tolerate: for example, allowing someone to speak as against allowing someone to teach. Nevertheless, the wording of two of the items across the sets, the speaking and teaching items, are similar enough to attribute the observed differences in tolerance to differences in measurement strategies.

The responses on the second least-liked group are slightly more tolerant than on the least-liked group. Certainly this is true of the first three items in Table 2, those that show the smallest proportion of tolerant responses. The first two indicate an increase in tolerance of 4 percent, the third an increase of 10 percent. This suggests that for each respondent, as we move from the least-liked group toward groups that are assessed more neutrally, we find the indicated tolerance to be higher. Therefore the Stouffer items produce more apparent tolerance because the communists and atheists are not "least-liked" for many respondents in the current population, so that these respondents appear to be more tolerant.

We can examine this point in more detail by analyzing the data in Table 3. In the content-controlled survey, after we asked respondents our six tolerance questions about their least-liked group, each respondent then judged that group (on a seven-point scale) on the seven pairs of adjectives listed in Table 3. We also repeated this procedure for each respondent's second least-liked group. In the Twin Cities sample that contained the Stouffer items, we asked each respondent to judge communists and atheists on the same seven pairs of adjectives.

Looking first at the mean scores for the content-controlled items, we see that the three most extreme adjective pairs are *good-bad*, *democratic-undemocratic*, and *dangerous-safe*. The other items all have mean evaluations among the middle three categories. The respondents' least-liked groups are perceived as uniformly bad, undemocratic, and dangerous. As one would expect, the means are less negative, closer to the middle categories, for the second least-liked group. A different picture emerges, however, for the Stouffer items. For the sample given these items, almost all seven adjective

pairs for *both* communists and atheists have means in the middle categories of 3, 4, and 5. For example, although the least-liked group has a mean of 6.14 on the *good-bad* dimension, that figure is 5.41 for communists and only 4.61 for atheists; while for the least-liked group the mean on *democratic-undemocratic* is 6.38, for communists it is 6.07 and for atheists it is 4.81. For the least-liked group it is 1.89 on *dangerous-safe*, for communists it is 2.62 and for atheists it is 3.37. In fact, when one compares the means for the least-liked group to the means for communists and atheists, in all 14 instances the means move from the less to the more desirable evaluation. Thus, atheists are perceived as less important, less dishonest, less bad, less unpredictable, less dangerous, less strong, and less undemocratic than the respondents' least-liked group. The same is true of communists.

We feel quite certain, then, that the mass public is still generally intolerant today. Tolerance of atheists and communists has increased primarily because they are now perceived as less threatening and dangerous than they were in the 1950s. Other groups are now more salient, and one must study a multiplicity of groups to study tolerance. The reader might note that in every case, the mean score for the second least-liked group is less "negative" than that of the least-liked group. Although the differences are generally small, they are consistent. We expect that if one were to progress down the line toward third, fourth, fifth, etc. least-liked groups, tolerance would slowly increase.

In the national sample, the mean score for the least-liked group was 1.97 on *dangerous-*

safe and 6.09 on *good-bad*. Thus, we have again found groups toward which almost all respondents feel negative, and which almost all feel are dangerous. That, of course, is the intent of our measurement procedure. If some respondents feel more positive than others toward the group we ask them about, it is not clear that we are measuring tolerance in a meaningful way. We feel confident that our procedure controls for such exogenous influences.

The Content-Controlled Measure: A Brief Look at Validity

The exact question wording of our content-controlled measure is given in Appendix A. The frequency distributions for groups selected as least-liked and second least-liked are found in Table 4. (All data presented from this point on are from the NORC 1978 national survey.) Only 38 percent of all respondents selected the socialists, communists or atheists as their least-liked groups, which suggests that in the earlier NORC studies used by Davis (1975) and the study by Nunn et al. (1978), approximately 60 percent of respondents were probably questioned about other than their least-preferred group. In fact, fully 30 percent of our respondents selected one of the three radical-right groups included in our analysis, and an additional 14 percent chose the Black Panthers and the Symbionese Liberation Army, radical-left groups not in existence in the 1950s. The major point, of course, is that the choices were spread out across the ten groups; if we were to ask respondents about only a subset of them, it would be more difficult for some respondents

Table 3. Semantic Differential Items for Both the Content-Controlled and the Stouffer Measures: Twin Cities Samples

	Content-Controlled Measures		Stouffer Measures	
	Mean Score* for Least-Liked Group	Mean Score for Second-Least-Liked Group	Mean Score for Communists	Mean Score for Atheists
Important-Unimportant	4.55	4.29	4.33	4.48
Honest-Dishonest	5.27	5.20	4.77	3.74
Good-Bad	6.14	6.09	5.41	4.61
Predictable-Unpredictable	4.96	4.66	4.71	4.65
Dangerous-Safe	1.89	2.20	2.62	3.37
Strong-Weak	3.62	3.48	3.63	3.92
Democratic-Undemocratic	6.38	6.24	6.07	4.81

Source: Twin Cities Survey, 1976.

*These means are based on semantic differential scales ranging from 1-7. The higher the mean, the closer the average perception was to the second of the adjective pairs. For example, the mean of 6.14 for *good-bad* reflects the fact that almost every respondent perceived their least-favorite group as *bad*, while the mean of 1.89 on *dangerous-safe* means almost all of them perceived this group as *dangerous* (rather than *safe*).

Table 4. Targets of Intolerance (Percent)

	Least-Liked Group	Second Least-Liked Group
Socialists	1	2
Communists	29	19
Atheists	8	7
Symbionese Liberation Army	8	10
Black Panthers	6	10
Pro-abortionists	4	5
Anti-abortionists	2	3
John Birch Society	1	3
Ku Klux Klan	24	14
Fascists	5	6
Other Group	2	1
Don't Know	10	19

N = 1509

Source: National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, 1978 Survey.

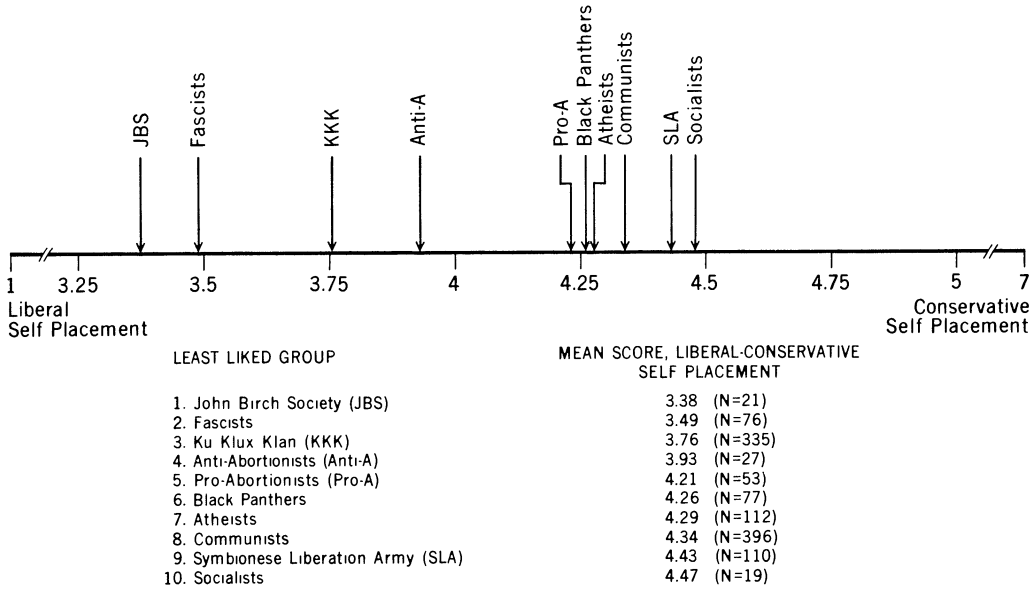
to be tolerant. For the 29 percent of our respondents who selected communists as their least-liked group, it would be quite difficult for them to exhibit tolerance if we merely asked them questions about the communists. For the remaining 60 or 70 percent, however, it might be much easier because they do not fear the communists, or feel them dangerous or threatening. This is likely to be true no matter which group we study, so long as we do the selecting and force each respondent to react to our predetermined groups.

To examine the validity of our measurement, we gave our respondents the traditional seven-point liberal-conservative self-identification scale. In Figure 1, we present the mean score on this scale for respondents who picked each of the various groups as their least-liked group. For example, the respondents who selected the John Birch Society as their least-liked group had a mean score on the self-placement scale of 3.38, toward the liberal end; those who selected the socialists had a mean score of 4.47, toward the conservative end of the scale. As is evident from the rank-ordering in the figure, the groups are ordered roughly as one would expect if one assumes that liberals generally dislike right-wing groups and conservatives dislike left-wing groups. Four groups of respondents had mean scores on the liberal side of 4 (the neutral point): those who selected the Birch Society, fascists, the Klan, and anti-abortionists as their least-liked. Six groups had means on the conservative side of 4: those who selected the socialists, the SLA, communists, atheists, the Black Panthers, and pro-abortionists. The groups of respondents selecting the groups studied by Stouffer (and subsequently

by Davis and Nunn) had means ranging between 4.29 and 4.47, clearly on the conservative side. Thus in those studies, it is probably true that respondents who identified themselves as conservatives had more difficulty giving tolerant responses about the communists, socialists, and atheists than did those who considered themselves liberals. To study tolerance correctly, one needs to include groups from the entire ideological spectrum, and apparently our procedure affords such coverage.⁵

It appears that our measure does what it should—it discriminates between liberals and conservatives, and it presents a number of groups from across the ideological spectrum. This makes it likely that most of our respon-

⁵To examine further the validity of our measurement, we repeated the analysis in Figure 1 using respondents' second least-liked group, and our results were identical. The extremes are again represented by those whose second least-liked group is the Birch Society (mean of 3.33) and those whose second least-liked group is the socialists (mean of 4.92). Again, respondents whose second least-liked group is the Birch Society, fascists, anti-abortionists, and the Klan, have mean self-placement scores on the liberal end of the continuum, while those whose second least-liked group is the Black Panthers, the SLA, communists, pro-abortionists, atheists, or socialists have mean scores on the conservative end of the continuum. We repeated this exercise using four of the Survey Research Center's issues questions—on jobs, medical care, school integration, and black welfare—and the results are basically the same. (We created a scale using these four issues, and did our analysis for both least-liked and second least-liked group. These figures are available from the authors.)



Source: National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, 1978 Survey.

Figure 1. Liberal-Conservative Self-Placement by Least-Liked Group

dents were able to find one of their disliked groups on our list.

Another way to examine the validity of our measurement procedure is to examine what we shall label "crossovers." By crossovers we refer to those respondents who select one right-wing and one left-wing group as their two least-liked groups. If our respondents do indeed select as disliked those groups furthest away from themselves on the ideological continuum, then we expect that respondents near the middle of the continuum would be more likely to be crossovers than those who more clearly label them-

selves as liberals or conservatives. These results are presented in Table 5. Among people who define themselves as the most liberal on our seven-point scale, 40 percent of them select two right-wing groups as their two least-liked, despite the fact that there are only three groups that we can clearly label as right-wing. There is a sharp decline in the percent selecting two right-wing groups as we go across the categories of conservatism. At the other extreme, only one percent and zero percent of those who score themselves as 6 or 7 on the conservatism scale select two right-wing groups.

Table 5. Liberal-Conservative Self-Placement and Target Groups Picked (Percent)

Groups Picked Are:	Liberal				Conservative		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Both Left-Wing	11	16	20	35	38	47	53
One Left and One Center*	0	6	9	14	10	12	6
One Left and One Right	40	49	53	41	42	38	29
One Right and One Center	9	9	5	6	5	2	12
Both Right-Wing	40	18	13	4	4	1	0
N =	(35)	(109)	(136)	(428)	(224)	(114)	(17)

Source: National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, 1978 Survey.

*The two abortion groups are defined as centrist groups. (No respondents selected both abortion groups as their two least-liked groups.) Note that in Figure 1, the two abortion groups are the two closest to 4, which is the midpoint on the liberal-conservative scale.

On the other hand, fully half of those who label themselves as conservatives select two left-wing groups, while only about one in ten of the liberals does so. Looking at the crossovers, we see that those respondents who place themselves toward the middle of the scale are in fact more likely to select one left- and one right-wing group. Going from left to right, 40 percent of liberals are crossovers, and this percentage rises to 53 percent for the third category, and then begins a decrease until only 29 percent of conservatives are crossovers. (More liberals are crossovers because there are five left-wing groups and only three right-wing groups on our list.) Although the pattern does not peak in category 4, it is clearly curvilinear, particularly in comparison to the straight linearity exhibited by the first and last rows in the table.

Concluding Comments

The foregoing analysis leads to two important conclusions about tolerance in the United States:

(1) Stouffer's method of measuring tolerance with reference to communists, socialists, and atheists is inadequate and, to a large extent, time-bound. It is inadequate because it does not fully capture the meaning of the concept of tolerance. It is time-bound because it presumes that these particular groups are the only important targets of intolerance in the society. This *may* have been more or less true in 1954, so that Stouffer's conclusions *may* have been appropriate for the limited purposes of his research. But it is certainly not true now. Hence, attempts to monitor changing levels of tolerance with this procedure are inappropriate and produce misleading conclusions.

(2) Substantively, the content-controlled method of studying tolerance developed above reveals that intolerance has not necessarily declined much over the past 25 years, but merely has been turned toward new targets. Our data show that while the mass public is now more tolerant of communists, atheists, and socialists than it was in 1954, other targets of intolerance have emerged in the meantime to neutralize this change. On the face of things, then, it appears that the present period differs from the earlier one in that there are now more targets of intolerance but none which is sufficiently important to generate a major threat to civil liberties.

These conclusions, while important in their own right, also raise other questions about the understanding of tolerance that has been handed down through the earlier tradition of re-

search in the area. If we are correct in asserting that tolerance has been incorrectly conceived and measured, we expect that other accepted generalizations in the area might also be of dubious validity. For example, Stouffer and others found that, among individuals, education was the most important "cause" of a tolerant outlook. The work that we have done so far on this question suggests that this relationship is largely an artifact of the groups selected as points of reference against which to measure tolerance. Paradoxically, those with lower levels of education are most threatened by and most opposed to dissident groups on the left—that is, precisely those groups selected in the earlier studies as points of reference for measuring tolerance. When individuals are given the opportunity to select the groups (from both the left and the right) to which they are opposed, the powerful relationship between education and tolerance is reduced considerably. The faith, therefore, that many have placed in education, conventionally conceived, as a solution to the problem of intolerance is apparently misplaced.

It should be emphasized that we are not resurrecting the old argument, developed by Prothro and Grigg (1960) and McClosky (1964), that because large numbers of citizens are intolerant, a meaningful democratic politics, with all that this implies, is a utopian goal. There is a sense in which these writers began their studies with a utopian version of democracy, a major condition of which was that nearly all citizens would accept the creed of tolerance in a form similar to that laid down by John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty*. When citizens did not measure up to the standard, these scholars began to recast their understanding of democracy in order to find sources of democratic stability in places other than in citizen virtue. Now that more recent studies have found that levels of tolerance are on the increase, it has been suggested (Nunn et al., p. 159) that we can begin to resurrect the classical theory. In this strange way, empirical findings concerning levels of tolerance in the society have shaped our understanding of democracy itself.

As others (Berns, 1962; Pateman, 1970) have pointed out, the "classical" view of democracy which served as the theoretical compass for these studies was itself a modern construction. As such, the theory did not take into account a number of fundamental questions about the relationship between tolerance and democratic politics that were raised by earlier liberal thinkers. The theory assumes, for example, that political tolerance is good and that any deviation in the society or among individuals from an absolute standard of toler-

ance is undesirable. In this sense, it rests upon a normative view of democracy that resembles the position taken by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes in his famous dissent in the case of *Abrams v. United States* (1919: 630):

If you have no doubt of your premises or your power and want a certain result with all your heart you naturally express your wishes in law and sweep away all opposition. To allow opposition by speech seems to indicate that you think the speech impotent, as when a man says he has squared the circle, or that you do not care wholeheartedly for the result, or that you doubt either your power or your premises. But when men have realized that time has upset many fighting faiths, they come to believe even more than they believe in the very foundations of their own conduct that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas—that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground upon which their wishes safely can be carried out. That at any rate is the theory of our Constitution.

This is not the place to raise the various criticisms of this doctrine, since most of them are well known. The merits of these abstract points aside, it seems to us that any theory of democracy that relies upon a widespread acceptance of this doctrine, or of something similar to it, is quite unrealistic and, in any case, unnecessary to the functioning of a democratic system.

It is more prudent, in our view, to take one's bearings on these questions from *The Federalist*. Contrary to Holmes, the Framers did not base the Constitution on the notion that political truth emerges from the competition of the market; nor did they believe that it was necessary that citizens accept this doctrine in order for a republican system to survive. As is well known, in *Federalist* 51 Madison (Cooke, 1961, pp. 351–52) put his faith in more practical and realistic safeguards:

In a free government, the security for civil rights must be the same as for religious rights. It consists in the one case in the multiplicity of interests, and in the other, in the multiplicity of sects; and this may be presumed to depend on the extent of the country and number of people comprehended under the same government.

For Madison, then, the safeguards consist in the processes of politics and in the requirements of coalition rather than in the acceptance among citizens of an abstract creed similar to that suggested by Holmes. To be sure, Madison recognized that this was a problematic solution and not a hard and fast safeguard.

It makes some sense, therefore, to interpret the findings of this article in terms of Madison's prescriptions. When the political system provides a multitude of convenient targets for intolerance, the result is what one might call "pluralistic intolerance." The political consequences of such a situation may be quite different from those of a situation in which dominant targets of intolerance exist, a difference not unlike the varying consequences of cross-cutting versus overlapping cleavages. The findings of this study suggest that even though levels of intolerance are now quite high in American society, the diversity of the targets of intolerance prevent, for the time being, a substantial threat to civil liberties. Nevertheless, for those truly concerned with this problem, the dangers of intolerance still exist, for given the right circumstances, these attitudes could be focused and mobilized, as they were in the 1950s. For those who will escape into abstractions, this will seem a pessimistic conclusion. For others, perhaps, who are used to thinking about the realities of politics, it may come as no surprise.

Appendix A

Instructions to interviewer: Hand the respondent our handout A, the "List of Groups in Politics." Then say:

I am giving you a list of groups in politics. As I read the list please follow along: socialists, fascists, communists, Ku Klux Klan, John Birch Society, Black Panthers, Symbionese Liberation Army, atheists, pro-abortionists, and anti-abortionists. Which of these groups do you like the least? If there is some group that you like even less than the groups listed here, please tell me the name of that group.

(Note to interviewer: If they have trouble making up their mind, encourage them to think, just generally, which group is the most unpleasant, in their opinion. If they really can't decide, mark that opinion below.)

_____ respondent can't decide; doesn't know
 _____ respondent dislikes group not listed here
 (fill in name of group below)

_____ socialists
 _____ fascists
 _____ communists
 _____ Ku Klux Klan
 _____ John Birch Society
 _____ Black Panthers
 _____ Symbionese Liberation Army
 _____ atheists
 _____ pro-abortionists
 _____ anti-abortionists (pro-lifers)

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