Differentiation and Integration: Two Dimensions of Political Thinking

W. Russell Neuman
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Conceptual differentiation refers to the number of discrete elements of political information individuals utilize in their evaluation of political issues. In contrast with the more commonly used textbook political knowledge indices, this measure corresponds more closely to knowledge-in-use. Conceptual integration is defined as the spontaneous and explicit organization of ideas and information in terms of abstract or ideological constructs and represents an expansion of Philip Converse's research on levels of ideological thinking in mass publics. These two related dimensions of political information processing emerge from a detailed content analysis of depth interview transcripts. The analysis reveals substantial variation in the way citizens relate the condition of their own lives to those of their fellow citizens and to political authorities. As expected, education plays a central role in explaining these patterns, but there are some surprising interactive linkages between education and patterns of political thought. One especially intriguing finding is that conservatives have significantly lower scores than liberals on indices of differentiation and integration. The ramifications of these findings for survey research methodology and theories of mass political behavior are discussed.

It has been noted that belief systems have never surrendered easily to empirical study and quantification (Converse 1964). In fact, empirical work in this field may have crossed a watershed when two sets of researchers working independently derived rather similar measures of political sophistication—the irony being that the two measures were scored in opposite directions.  

Given that one researcher's sophistication is another's simplistic thinking,

1 This research was made possible through support from the National Science Foundation (GS31812). I am indebted to Arthur L. Stinchcombe, Charles Y. Glock, Merrill Shanks, Robert Stempf, Deborah Jor, Stephen Hart, and Charles Reen for assistance and advice in the completion of this research, and to Donald Kinder, Stanley Presser, and anonymous reviewers for helpful comments. An abridged version of this paper was read at the American Sociological Association annual meeting, Boston, 1979.

2 The compilation is between the EDESCAL measure of Marcus, Tzov, and Sullivan (1977), which attributes higher sophistication to those who are a greater number of dimensions of judgment, and the numerous other constraint measures based on Converse's work, which associate sophistication with the use of a single, abstract, liberal-conservatism dimension for conceptualizing political issues.

© 1981 by The University of Chicago. 0002-9403/81/8006-00101.50

1236 AJS Volume 86 Number 6
ing, we may benefit from an attempt to rethink the dominant approach to measurement which relies so heavily on inferences from correlation matrices of political opinion items. The present study puts forward an alternative approach to the measurement of patterns of political thinking based on a rigorous content analysis of the natural language of political discourse. The study involves 137 hour-long, loosely structured depth interviews concerning national politics. Each interview was tape-recorded and transcribed. Trained coders combed through the transcripts recording each spontaneous reference to a political object or issue and the linkages the respondent made between them. There was striking variation in both the number of political reference made and patterns of linkage. Many interviewees repeatedly responded to political questions in strictly personal terms. The primary finding of the study was the identification of two complementary dimensions of political thinking: conceptual differentiation—the ability to identify and discriminate among the various political issues, actors, and events which just lie each other for attention in the news media; and conceptual integration—the explicit organization of political ideas and issues in terms of abstract or ideological constructs. Before turning to a more detailed description of the research design and findings, however, it may be helpful to review briefly the correlational research tradition in the study of political opinion structure which predates this research.\(^\text{3}\)

**MEASURES OF POLITICAL ATTITUDE STRUCTURE**

The seminal article in this field is clearly Converse's "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics" (1964). Expanding on central findings of *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960) and Herbert McClosky's work (McClosky, Hoffman, and O'Hara 1960) on different styles of political thinking in political elites and masses, Converse contrasted the level of organization of political opinions in a sample of Congressional candidates and a national cross-sectional sample. The research was organized around the concept of constraint, defined as "the success we would have in predicting, given initial knowledge that an individual holds a specific attitude, that he holds certain further ideas and attitudes." He went on to explain, "If a person is opposed to the expansion of Social Security he is probably a conservative and is probably opposed as well to any nationalization of private industries, federal aid to education, sharply progressive income taxation and so forth" (1964, p. 207). Converse's measure of constraint is familiar with the recent flurry of attention in the scholarly literature to the methodology of measuring attitude structure and the possibility of a shift over the past decade in the level of attitude constraint in the mass public may wish to move ahead to the next section.
was the average interitem correlation coefficient for a set of survey items concerning prominent political issues. The constraint in belief systems for the elite group was found to be twice that of the mass sample (Goodman and Kruskal \( \tau \) coefficients of .55 and .25, respectively). Converse was cautious not to interpret the data as evidence that his elite respondents were more "logical" in their thinking. But clearly the higher level of constraint was seen as an indication of cognitive sophistication. "In our estimation, the use of such basic dimensions of judgment as the liberal-conservative continuum betokens a contextual grasp of politics that permits a wide range of more specific idea-elements to be organized into more tightly constrained wholes. We feel, furthermore, that there are many crucial consequences of such organization. With it, for example, new political events have more meaning, retention of political information from the past is far more adequate, and political behavior increasingly approximates that of our sophisticated 'rational models, which assume relatively fell information." (1964, p. 227).

Converse went on to discuss a broad array of related issues and alternative approaches to measurement, but the correlational measures of constraint have attracted the most attention and have recently become the basis for an intense debate in the journals over two themes: (1) Are the beliefs of the mass public really significantly less constrained than the elite's? (Lustig 1968; Brown 1970; Bennett 1975; Farah and Miller 1974) and (2) Has the pattern of low constraint and sophistication among mass publics changed since the quiescent Eisenhower era? (Pomper 1972; Nie and Anderson 1974; Bennett 1975; Nie, Verba, and Petrock 1976; Miller et al. 1976; Popkin et al. 1976; and RePust 1976).

The use of interitem correlations as an indicator of sophisticated cognitive structure did not pass without serious and sustained criticism. Recently, Popkin et al. (1976), Bishop and Oldendick (1978), Sullivan, Fierro, and Marcus (1978), and Petrock (1973), among others, have noted that the correlations used in this literature are extremely sensitive to changes in question format. Since item formats change dramatically from survey to survey, comparison across studies and over time is extremely problematic. In addition, RePust has made the point that surveys in which more of the items have common referents exhibit higher interitem correlations. He notes, for example, that one recent election study had three items referring to Vietnam, which may have artificially increased the apparent constraint in the foreign policy area (1976, p. 829).

These are important technical problems for which, we hope, technical solutions will be found. But there exists a much more difficult and fundamental issue: Is opinion constraint really a valid indicator of ideology or...
cognitive sophistication? If efforts to reduce and control for measurement error in constraint indices are successful, will we be in possession of a theoretically meaningful instrument or simply a highly refined measure of some other phenomenon?

Our discussion thus far has touched on two distinct constructs for which constraint has been used as an indicator—ideology and cognitive sophistication. Both carry considerable intellectual baggage. Ideology is one of a number of frequently used concepts with frustratingly diverse and multiple meanings. Xinar (1961), Putnam (1973), Mullins (1972), Bergmann (1951), and Johnson (1968), among others, have put together definitional lists. Drawing on their detailed specifications and discussing it is possible to identify four primary components of the construct: ideological thinking is (1) politically oriented—most public events and issues are perceived and interpreted in political terms; (2) structured around abstract concepts—cognitive links are made between specific issues and abstract theoretical principles; (3) closed—opinions are rigid and resistant to new (especially contrary) information; and (4) emotionally charged.

Political sophistication has also been defined and operationalized in diverse ways by different scholars, but most definitions emphasize the first two components identified above: a political orientation and the structuring of political thought through the use of abstract concepts.5 Our attention here will focus on this overlap between the sophistication and ideology constructs.

It seems to make strategic sense at the current stage of inquiry to main- tain a clear distinction between the definitional components of ideology and sophistication and to pursue unique measures of each. One individual may study history and politics and after a thoughtful review of issues and events come to an “ideological” position. In contrast, another may simply be repeating slogans and abstractions absorbed uncritically from friends and associates. The componential approach allows us to explore empirically why an “ideologue” may be more or less sophisticated and why a sophisticated observer of politics may be more or less “ideological.”

This brief review of the components of the ideology and sophistication concepts may help illustrate why constraint measures tend to make rather awkward indicators of either. Constraint measures require the assumption that increased correlational constraint between a number of specific issue items indicates that the opinions have been induced from more abstract principles. There are, however, numerous potential sources of constraint other than abstract thinking. For example, in his original article Converse

5 The breadth of definitions and measures of political sophistication is today striking (cf. political involvement, Breton, Lazarsfeld, and McPher [1954]; political informa-
tion, Lane and Scan [1964]; political cognition, Himmelfarb [1966]; political comp-
petence, Almond and Verba [1965]; political rationality, Shafir [1963]).
elaborates the distinction between logical, psychological, and social sources of constraint. He notes that while Americans may have absorbed the notion that “communists are atheists, very few may understand the historical and philosophical roots of such an observation and may well be repeating an often-heard phrase or simply associating ‘communists’ with everything wicked and evil” (1964, p. 212).

TWO DIMENSIONS OF POLITICAL THINKING

If the correlation-constraint approach to measuring political attitude structure dominates the literature, it is less a result of the method’s proven validity than of its methodological convenience—every opinion poll and survey of more than one item offers another opportunity for analysis. A fruitful inquiry into the nature of belief systems, however, requires a more sensitive approach to measurement, one that allows the respondent the opportunity to structure his or her own beliefs rather than simply respond to a sampling of preselected, fixed alternatives.

Robert Lane’s (1962) study of political ideology based on extended depth interviews and the detailed study of respondents’ natural language offers one model for research. But such research is prohibitively expensive, and 10-20 hours of interviewing per respondent is simply impractical for larger samples. Converse’s (1964) content analyses of respondents’ comments on why they might vote for or against the major political parties and their presidential candidates offer another, more viable model for large-scale research. But his method focuses only on the current candidates and campaign and may fail to tap very deeply into a potential wealth of political thinking and experience on which citizens could comment if given the opportunity.

This study seeks a middle ground, a viable, general-use, and theoretically grounded measure of cognitive structure in mass publics which draws on the strengths of the work of both Converse and Lane and maintains the distinctions between the various components of the ideology and sophistication constructs. Two dimensions of analysis emerged from a careful reading of their parallel inquiries and the related literature concerning the structure of mass political cognitions—conceptual differentiation and integration.

For our purposes, conceptual differentiation is operationally defined as the number of discrete, concept elements of political information the individual utilizes in the course of an hour-long depth interview. It is an indication of a political orientation—the interpretation of issues and events in political terms. It is also akin to political knowledge, but actual knowledge would be better measured by a focused exam. Conceptual differentiation might better be described as knowledge-in-use. We focus on patterns...
of cognitive discrimination, the ability and inclination of the individual to identify and separate the various issues, political figures, units of government, interest groups, events, and social trends. Only spontaneous, volunteered references to a specific issue or political entity are coded in this measure.

Intuitively, one would expect that an undifferentiated view of politics would be self-perpetuating because without a certain minimum awareness of basic political processes and institutions, political news from television and newspapers would be a meaningless and confusing jumble of strange words, unfamiliar faces, and vaguely familiar reporters standing in front of buildings in Washington.

The second dimension of analysis, conceptual integration, is complementary to the first and extends the other common component of sophistication and ideology—the use of abstract concepts in the structuring of belief elements. It is complementary in the sense that an individual must differentiate elements of the political domain to some minimum degree in order to have elements to integrate. Conceptual integration is operationally defined as the spontaneous and persistent use of abstract concepts to structure beliefs and opinions in the course of the depth interviews on American politics.

The complementarity of the concepts of differentiation and integration may be useful in trying to understand the process by which some citizens come to have a full and sophisticated understanding of the political process and others do not. Growth in political sophistication seems to involve a spiraling back and forth between an increasingly differentiated understanding of the political process and more frequent use of abstract anchoring concepts to put the discrete pieces of information in some kind of manageable and accessible order. This new structuring of the political domain in turn allows the individual to assimilate, retain, and interpret further political information. As an analogy, it might be helpful to imagine what a game of chess looks like to the uninitiated—the chess board a confusing array of strangely shaped pieces which jump and zigzag around until someone miraculously wins. Gradually, however, through observation and the asking of an occasional question the observer becomes able to differentiate the pieces and their characteristic movements and ultimately to understand how the individual movements fit together into unified strategies and styles of play. The notion of a spiraling process between differentiation and integration in an individual’s acquisition of knowledge in a particular sphere has numerous antecedents in the fields of education, psychology, and political sociology (Piaget 1952; Bruner, Goodnow, and Austin 1956; Zajonc 1968; Schroeder, Driver, and Streufert 1967; Bereiter, Lazarfeld, and McPhee 1954; Gardner and Schoen 1962; Whitehead 1929).
There are some strong suggestions that the variables of conceptual differentiation and integration in the political sphere may have some natural discontinuities, some cutting points of special significance for political behavior. One possibility, with roots in Marx's conception of the lumpen-proletariat (1852) and survey research's version of know-nothingism (Hyman and Shilsley 1947), is the idea of a self-perpetuating and unmoved bottom stratum of individuals who successfully defend themselves from any increasing interest in or information about politics. Another cutting point that suggests itself at the higher end of the integration dimension is a working understanding of the liberal-conservative continuum, which seems to be a requirement for the successful processing of the daily outpouring of political information from the news media. To address these issues, we turn to an analysis of the depth interviews.

THE BAY AREA SURVEY DEPTH INTERVIEWS

A series of transcribed hour-long depth interviews on attitudes toward the political system conducted by the Berkeley Survey Research Center in 1972 offers a special opportunity to refine a new measure of political conceptualization. The original purpose of these interviews was to validate several new scales of political alienation-allegiance and possible dissatisfaction with the quality of life. Data on a battery of over 100 closed-ended items had been collected in a previous interview and a self-administered questionnaire. The depth-interview technique of measurement validation was explained to respondents, and then the interviewers proceeded to review a number of broad questions on politics, allowing the respondent to set the pace and tone of the interview.

Several characteristics of the Bay Area Survey's depth interview make it an especially attractive medium for exploring political conceptualization. Initial questions were diffuse and general, allowing the respondent to define the salient issues. But there were also extensive follow-up probes to clarify, for example, whether individuals dissatisfied with their economic situation blamed themselves, their boss, or the political or economic system in some way for their fate.

After respondents were given ample opportunity to mention issues and events, a number of the more prominent issues of the day were raised by interviewers, including economics, crime, race relations, the environment, and the quality of education. A particularly interesting section of the interview probes the respondent's thoughts on some rather abstract principles of politics, including political freedom, equality, democracy, and the legitimacy of political institutions in America. Interviewers were instructed to probe and challenge each comment in an attempt to bring out whatever reasoning lay behind the various opinions, thus presenting
an excellent chance to explore patterns of logic and the individual’s ability to organize facts and ideas. The interviews averaged about an hour in length and were typed in full from tape recordings, resulting in single-spaced transcriptions which averaged about 20 pages in length. Four advanced graduate students in the fields of political science, sociology, and law were recruited to code the transcripts for patterns of political conceptualization.

The first task was to count and code each spontaneous reference to a political object or issue. The unit of analysis was a passage, that is, the original question and response and the one or two follow-up probes concerning the same topic. Some were brief and involved yes, no, or I don’t know responses. Other passages dealing with high salience issues ran several pages in length.

The coders were looking for references to common identifiable political issues such as unemployment or high taxes, and the mention of political figures, groups, general constituencies, events, and, of course, units of government. When such references were made the first coding decision was whether the statement was, in fact, volunteered or whether the respondent was simply repeating a term or issue raised by the interviewer.

Once a volunteered reference was located, the second step in the coding process was to establish that the reference was made in a political context. This was often the most difficult part of the process. Take, for example, a respondent raising the issue of crime. If the reference was to “increasing crime in the streets, the government ought to do something about it,” or if it concerned lenient judges or an unworkable penal system, it was obviously political in nature. If instead the comment involved an incidence of crime in which the respondent or a relative was personally involved, it was not clear whether the individual actually saw the issues as a social or political problem requiring the coordinated response of the community. The key analytic concept here is “supraindividuality.” Thus if an event or object was seen by the respondent as being caused by or requiring the response of more than one individual, it was judged to be a political reference. This was not a hard and fast coding rule. The coder had to make each decision in the context of the particular interview. References to such clearly political entities as Congress or the Constitution and the use of such terms as “socialism” or “free speech” were automatically coded as political references.

The final step in the coding process was to insure that references to specific objects and issues were counted only once. Our interest is in the number of distinct political objects and issues mentioned by the respondent and not in the frequency with which various issues were raised. Coders

---

6 An outline of the interview schedule can be found in the Appendix.
transcribed the issues and terms on special coding sheets to ensure that each was counted only once even though it might be referred to at several points in the interview.7

CONCEPTUAL DIFFERENTIATION

The key notion underlying measurement of conceptual differentiation is specificity. How many specific political issues, actors, and events will a respondent bring up in the course of an hour-long interview? Among the 117 respondents there was an impressive range of from 1 to 94 political references made in the course of the interview. The average was 25.7, the standard deviation, 16.5.

One might justifiably ask how an hour-long interview on politics can be conducted without a respondent’s mentioning more than one political object. The answer is straightforward enough. The respondents talk about themselves. Their mode of thinking, it turns out, is overwhelmingly self-centered and concrete. Are they satisfied about tax way things have been going in this country? Their response concerns their job, family, friends, and neighbors. Each politically oriented probe elicits a response which reflects only the individual’s own life. A probe about the respondent’s economic situation elicits comments on the price of bread at the market last week or a decision to put off buying a new TV. Questions concerning racial problems may elicit a detailed description of the “black lady who was elected head of our PTA.” There is no reference to social or political causes or consequences.

Such patterns of thought which translate all political and social questions into personal ones, however, are not the modal response. The political discourse of most people reflects some mixture of social and personal concern. The analysis proceeds, then, to explore this mix. What kinds of political objects are most salient to the mass citizenry? Are there some distinctive clusters and patterns of political discourse?

Political issues.—The coin of the realm in the political speech of the mass citizenry is clearly the ‘political issue’—a topical policy question or cluster of policy questions usually identified in the media and interpersonal discussion by a key term or phrase such as “inflation,” “taxes,” “civil liberties,” “crime in the streets,” or “the energy crisis.” It was not necessary that respondents actually take a position on each issue or that they mention a particular key term. A respondent need only raise the issue in some way. Typically the flow of the Interview would go as follows:

Q: Could you tell me some of the things about America you’re well satisfied with?

1 More detailed information about the coding process and scoring of the indices of conceptual differentiation and integration is available from the author.
A: Well, I'm glad to see we're out of Fiore's, and it looks like latest announcements are that we might try to solve our trade deficit problems, I think also racial relations problems, I think maybe we're making progress there.

In this case the original question is very broad, basically asking the respondent to list issues which are salient to him.

In another pattern, the question raises a general issue area such as the environment, and the respondent translates that key term into more specific issues that are meaningful to him.

Q: How about the environment? Are you satisfied with the quality of the environment around here?

A: I think we're moving in the right direction toward the environment to try to restrict automobile traffic into San Francisco, for example.

It's interesting that many of the new office buildings are being built without any new parking facilities whatsoever. It's a step to encourage people to take mass transit and BART [Bay Area Rapid Transit].

If this respondent had answered simply that he thought the environment was getting better or worse, he would not have been credited with raising an issue because in such a case he would only be responding directly to the question. The essence here is not having an opinion, but being aware of currently discussed policy questions. In one case an elderly gentleman mentioned prohibition, which is not at the moment, in most circles, a hotly debated topic. This case, accordingly, was coded as a reference to a historical event. On the average, respondents volunteered references to about 15 issues in the course of the depth interview.

A distinction was made between specific and general issues. In order to qualify as a specific issue the reference had to concern a particular bill or proposal recently considered by the voters or a legislative body. Examples of specific issues would include a school bond referendum, a proposed new freeway, or a bill in Congress. As one might expect, most references were to more general issues, at the rate of about four to one.

In the course of discussing issues and events, various political actors might be mentioned. The reference might be to the president or Congress, an organized interest group, an issue, or a private citizen. The fairytale straightforward way of organizing such references is as follows.

Units of government.—We are concerned here with distinctions among the judicial, legislative, and executive branches of government, between the two houses of Congress, among federal, state, and local authorities, or among any of the various federal agencies and bureaus. For some individuals, the term “government” may refer to an undifferentiated bureaucratic monolith. There may exist no notion of differentiated responsibility or of checks and balances. The bulk of the citizenry, however, do differentiate units and levels of government. Accordingly, the number of
references to the State Department, the IRS, FBI, the Supreme Court, the mayor, the local zoning commission, and the like, was used as an index of the extent of such differentiation. On the average, about four such references or distinctions were made.

Organized political groups.—The modal reference here would be to a political party or an interest group of some sort, such as the AMA, the Home Owners Association, the John Birch Society, or the NAACP. Almost all interviews involved some volunteered reference comparing the Democratic and Republican parties. Since references to the major parties were so often linked together, they were counted as one reference (i.e., one distinction). References to all other parties and interest groups were each counted as an additional reference. At times, individuals might forget the proper name of a group, yet it confused with other groups, or ask the interviewer if she could recall the name. Thus, the American Independent Party might be referred to as “that other party . . . you know, Wallace and those people.” As long as the reference was clear, it was included in the differentiation index. The average respondent mentioned between one and two organized political groups in the course of the interview.

General constituencies.—One of the favorite topics of political pundits and students of public opinion is the notion of zone publics or potential issue publics, a group of citizens who by reason of their racial, geographic, ideological, religious, or social characteristics are likely to be affected by and concerned about a particular issue or piece of legislation. When our respondents singled out some collectivity as actually or potentially having been influenced by or influencing a political decision, it was coded under this category. The reference might have been very broad—to poor or rich people, for example—or more specific—to people on fixed incomes, blacks, Mexican Americans. There were in this mass sample about twice as many references to broad constituencies as to actual organized nongovernmental groups.

Political figures.—Is Archie Bunker a political figure? His name was mentioned several times as typifying an approach to politics. Despite the fact that he is a fictional character, it was decided to include such references here because of their prominence in popular culture—in some weeks Archie Bunker may be responsible for getting more individuals to think about political questions than the president and leaders of Congress combined. Most references to prominent political figures, however, are much more straightforward and easily recognized. Most references were to the president or former presidents. With the exception of the governor of California, all individual political figures who were mentioned by more than 10% of the sample had occupied the presidency. A little more than four references to various political figures were made in the average interview.
A final and somewhat smaller category was devoted to political events such as Watergate or a recent presidential trip, and ongoing governmental programs such as Medicare or the Work Incentive Program for welfare recipients. Also included were references to broader historical trends, such as increasing bureaucratization or a weakening of the role of religion in American life. There were about five such references in the average interview.

Figure 1 summarizes these patterns of political discourse. A series of factor and canonical correlation analyses were conducted on the indices of these different elements of political discourse, and the results provided strong evidence of unidimensionality and communality. No significant sub-patterns, such as a prominent covariance between, for example, interest groups and specific issues, were in evidence. For the remainder of this discussion conceptual differentiation will refer to a simple additive index of the total number of respondent references to all categories.

The intercoder reliability of the index is not easily assessed because of the complexity of the coding task. A rough index was computed by assigning pairs of coders to single interviews with a resultant intercoder correlation for the index of $r = .84.$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific &amp; Questions</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>4%</th>
<th>8%</th>
<th>12%</th>
<th>16%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>24%</th>
<th>28%</th>
<th>32%</th>
<th>36%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>44%</th>
<th>48%</th>
<th>52%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of References</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Order</td>
<td>Specif</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>-2.1</td>
<td>-1.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Action</td>
<td>-2.4</td>
<td>-1.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Units of Government</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized Groups</td>
<td>-1.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Commissions</td>
<td>-2.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>-4.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Events</td>
<td>-2.4</td>
<td>-1.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Events</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/ Miscellaneous Events</td>
<td>-2.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIG. 1.—Units of political discourse—mean frequency of occurrence in the depth interviews.

8 Because of the difficult nature of coding ambiguous references to semipolitical issues and events, there was concern about intercoder reliability and the validity of the coding process itself. The usual indices of intercoder reliability are not valid under these circumstances because they are, for the most part, based on the agreement of intercoder agreements to the total number of coding decisions. There is a difficulty, in this case, of determining both the numerator and denominator. The average interview may include reference to 300 or more objects, individuals, and events, most of them nonpolitical in nature.—Uncle Herman, the living lair in the bushes, the new Pontiac, getting a promotion at work, and so on. Raising one's calculations on the fact that coders correctly identified 140 accordingly did not code these nonpolitical utterances would lead to artificially high indices of agreement. On the other hand,
CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATION

The measurement of conceptual integration included a rather different type of content analysis of the interview transcripts. In addition to scrutinizing passages and enumerating each reference to an abstract concept, coders rated the interview as a whole, functioning in this case as expert judges. They were asked to characterize the predominant pattern by which respondents organized, linked, contrasted, or put in context the various political issues, actors, and events mentioned in the course of the depth interview. The typology used closely parallels Converse's five levels of conceptualization (Campbell et al. 1954, pp. 310-35; Converse 1964, pp. 214-19). Given the prominence of Converse's distinctions, it seemed appropriate to test their generalizability beyond the election context to a broader evaluation of styles of political thought. His typology proved to be a remarkably valid, robust, and viable approach to the measurement of conceptual integration. Only 2% of the interviews were judged unclassifiable, and an additional 8% were noted to involve ambiguities but were judged codable. Because the classification of an hour-long interview entailed the evaluation of a much more complex stimulus, the intercoder reliability fell somewhat below the figures reported by Converse for his initial study. Coders assigned respondents to identical or adjacent categories 82% of the time, while in the earlier case they were classified in identical categories 82% of the time. Converse's definitions of each of the five levels were revised slightly as indicated in table 1 to make them somewhat more general and appropriate to the evaluation of a full-length and broad-ranging depth interview. The liberal-conservative continuum was frequently and characteristic used as a conceptual yardstick by respondents in the highest category, but its use was not a prerequisite for inclusion in that level (as it was in Converse's original system).

The following examples illustrate the spontaneous and unobligated use of political abstractions in the day-to-day political discourse of citizens whose active political participation for the most part was limited to voting requiring that such political utterance be given precisely the same code may lead to an underestimate of true reliability because, for the most part, the subcategory distinctions were not used in the analysis. For example, a respondent may mention a problem concerning property taxes. One code may delineate it as a specific local issue. Another may code it as one of the frequent references to high taxes, a general issue. What is important for the bulk of the analysis is only that the total number of coded political utterances (the conceptual differentiation score) be accurate. Accordingly, the most reasonable estimate of coder agreement was taken to be the average pairwise difference in standard deviation units, in (\(S, X - X, x_1\)). The x, S, and X represent the conceptual differentiation scores for each pair of coders. A represents the total number of pairwise coder comparisons, and a is the standard deviation in x for the full sample. Using this formula for the 11 intercoder comparisons, it was found that, 12/13 • 7.257 • .04, indicating that coding discrepancies accounted for a relatively small proportion of the variance.

1248
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Conceptual Integration</th>
<th>Revised References</th>
<th>Making at least one stark reference (%)</th>
<th>Average number of references</th>
<th>Total source references</th>
<th>Peripherality of abstract references</th>
<th>Peripherality of group interest references</th>
<th>Peripherality of issue context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Ideologue (23)</td>
<td>Unambiguous use of abstract concepts to structure and link political actors, issues, and events</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Near Ideologue (0)</td>
<td>Peripherical or unclear use of abstract concepts</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Group Interest (42)</td>
<td>Structuring of political issues and objects based on group interest</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Nature of titles (24)</td>
<td>Primarily free-floating reference to political issues, occasionally structured with reference to incumbent's political performance</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>No issue context (22.5)</td>
<td>Readable category</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and an occasional campaign contribution. These remarks, of course, were typically neither particularly profound nor original, but they do reflect the ability of the individual to put issues in a more abstract context.

Q. If you were trying to imagine an ideal system of government, how close do you think our present system of government comes to that ideal?
A. Well, I don’t know of anything that is more satisfactory. I have some pretty reactionary ideas. I would go back to the idea that if anyone’s going to vote on taxing property owners they should be property owners who would be paying the taxes. That idea went out a couple of hundred years ago, but it’s still a pretty good idea.

Q. Are there any other areas of life that we haven’t talked about that you think are very important?
A. Yes. The medical. I think these should be more research done on it. Finding the why-arts of the human body, is important to the future.

Q. Do you think that is the responsibility of government?
A. Yes, I think the government should have that responsibility—that is a big responsibility of the government. They should report more money into it.

Q. If they had to raise taxes to do these things—would you want it done?
A. Yeah. I would be in favor of it. That sounds like socialism, but that is the way it has to be. The type of socialism that is bad that I am talking about is the complete authoritative power of the president of the United States . . . not programs that have to be implemented for the welfare of the people.

In both examples the respondents’ vocabulary is tied to the liberal-conservative continuum. In other characteristic examples of conceptual integration the emphasis was more historical, as in one case where the respondent contrasted America’s role in Vietnam with that of England during the American revolution. In another case the respondent answered many of her remarks with references to abstract principles of freedom of speech and freedom of the press, including an extended explanation of why the right of reporters to protect their sources is essential to a healthy democracy.

The second level is impression, reflecting peripheral, vague, occasional, or especially restricted use of abstract concepts. This second category appears to be populated by two types of individuals—those who have a sophisticated grasp of most political abstractions and concepts but are not inclined to use them often and those whose use of abstract concepts reflects limited understanding or some level of confusion. Several respondents, for example, restricted the use of the liberal-conservative dimension to spend-saving issues; another equated those terms exclusively with the politics of the young versus the old. Political thought characterized of level II is not necessarily unsophisticated, just contracted and less
explicit than that of level I. For example, individuals might refer to
democracy or the principle of freedom of speech in passing without making
it clear whether they had a full understanding of the historical and
philosophical roots of these concepts, or they might use the terms simply
as representative symbolic phrases signifying American ideals of government.

As indicated in Table 1, the hour-long interviews generated substan-
tially higher estimates of the use of abstract concepts and conceptual
integration in the mass population than Converse found. This estimate
for level I is about five times the size of Converse’s original parameter,
levels I and II combined about 21 times the size. Part of this difference
may be due to the more active political climate of the 1970s and the
more extensive opportunity in the depth interviews for individuals to
demonstrate their approach to political issues and current events. None-
theless, those making significant use of abstract political concepts rep-
resent less than a third of the citizenry. It is likely that the rough and
breadth of these interviews approach the point of diminishing returns
and that interviews two or three times this length would be unlikely
to generate percentages for levels I and II combined that would exceed
a third of the sample.

If a substantial number of citizens do not make consistent use of such
constructs as the left-right continuum or similar abstractions to organize
their assessment of American politics, what do they use? There are,
apparently, two answers—two more concretely focused anchoring points
for organizing political discourse. In one case, corresponding to level III,
citizens organize their response to politics on the basis of affiliation with
a prominent social grouping. Passages within the depth interviews char-
acteristic of this level include a pattern of defining liberalism and con-
ervatism in group interest terms:

Q: In politics we often hear the terms “liberal” and “conservative”; what
do these terms mean to you?
A: Well, it means that the Democrats are liberal and the Republicans are
conservative. That’s the way I see it, and I think that’s just true.
Q: And what is there that makes the Democrats liberal and the Repub-
licans conservative? What are their characteristics?
A: Well, the Democrats are for the people and the conservatives are for
big business and the big financial interests in the country. And, they
are governed by those big financial interests. And you see, they be-
lieve that they should control the finances and the big business in the
country. And then they should hand out the jobs to the people. That’s
been the way, but the Democrats don’t feel that way about it.
That’s why we have unions.

Equally often group interests are more precisely focused in narrower
and straightforward self-interest terms. A retired army sergeant, for example,
answered the questions on his satisfaction with American government, the
goodness of life in America, race relations, the need for political leadership,
and patriotism with specific reference to the interests of retired military
personnel—a total of 18 references within the hour-long interview. This
good-interest mode of cognitive organization characterized roughly a third
of the sample.

Another alternative to a reliance on abstract concepts to organize poli-
tical discourse is characteristic of level IV. Some citizens organize their
response to government by a seemingly straightforward mechanism of
electoral reward and punishment based on the incumbent's ability to
generate peace, prosperity, and a sense of administrative competence.
Among these respondents, references to issues are seldom linked to ab-
stract concepts or to each other. They are occasionally linked to social
groups but most often exist as free-floating political observations. To the
extent that issues are structured, they are seen as being either successfully
or unsuccessfully resolved by recent government action. Skeptical of ab-
stract arguments of political philosophy on how the problems should be
approached and who might differentially benefit, these respondents reflect
the stereotype of "the man from Missouri," demanding to be shown the
concrete results. One respondent, for example, came right to the point:

Q: Do you think there is anything you can do about the things you are
dissatisfied with?
A: No, I don't. Just keep voting and trying to find the right candidates
and just trying to do what I should do and live a decent moral life
and do what I can in the community.
Q: In some way, can you have an effect?
A: A slight effect, yes. But it takes a while. If you vote somebody in, you
are not sure what he can do. No man can promise anything, but I can
certainly work to defeat him if I find somebody who promises some-
thing I prefer more. Or if he disappoints me, I can work very hard
to defeat him next time. I always help in politics.

This group, according to estimates generated from in depth interviews,
represents a little less than a third of the adult population.

The fifth and final level identifies those consistently apolitical respon-
dents who may make an occasional reference to a political issue or two
but show little evidence of any of the patterns of cognitive organization
identified above.

Table 1 illustrates another aspect of this approach to the study of
cognitive integration. The levels of conceptualization can be seen as
independent dimensions rather than as mutually exclusive, hierarchical
categories. Much of the attractiveness of Converse's original discussion of
this typology is its parsimony and clearly ordered organization of "types"
of belief systems in mass publics. Indeed, in its more generalized form,
it has proved to be a remarkably robust analytic tool. But because references to political abstractions, groups, and issues were measured independently, we are in a position to test the unidimensionality and cumulative nature of these phenomena and to explore the possibility of natural discontinuities or cutting points in the distributions. The four rightmost columns of Table 1 list the number of central and peripheral references to abstract concepts, references to group interest, and foot-chairst issue references in each of the five levels of conceptualization.

A visual inspection seems to indicate two rather distinct cutting points setting off levels I and V from the middle mass. The small group classified in level I appears to rely heavily on abstract concepts to structure their comments (abstractions appear at a frequency three to four times that of the rest of the sample). Yet they make on the average 3.7 more references to group interest than those in the group interest category and twice the number of issue references than the rest of the sample. The small apolitical counterpart at the other end of the continuum reflects an equally unique behavioral pattern, in this case a strong lack of interest in matters political or abstract.

A visual inspection also reveals that the categories are cumulative but, as it turns out, not enough to qualify as a Guttman scale. Generally the prevalence of positive references to abstract concepts (a more difficult criterion in the Guttman sense) among the lower scale types generates too many scaling errors to satisfy the traditional Guttman criteria.9

Because of the prominence of abstract references at all but the lowest level of conceptual integration, we reviewed the use of abstractions and their occasional linkage to the overarching liberal-conservative continuum. The first step was as attempt to identify clusters of abstract concepts by enumerating natural terms and phrases respondents use to denote them—a complete lexicon for the 137 depth interviews. The task turned out to be not unmanageable, in fact only 257 distinct political terms, phrases, or cliches were coined. All of these references were spontaneous, volunteered by respondents rather than by interviewers, so they should reflect the salience of these organizing concepts to the public rather than to the inquiring scientists. Six groupings of prominent concepts, as summarized in Table 2, were identified following Herbert McClorey's typology of political orientations (1975). The most intriguing finding was the dominance of the status quo versus change dimension. Since this part of the analysis is especially sensitive to the substantive focus of the depth.

9Guttman scale statistics were computed using unity at the cutting point and again using the sample mean for each variable as the cutting point. In both cases the coefficient of reproducibility (CR) = 95, pitmum marginal reproducibility = .66, coefficient of scalability = :66, and the average item-total correlation coefficient = .73. In the latter case, CR = 79, minimum marginal reproducibility = .84, coefficient of scalability = .88, and the average item-total correlation coefficient = .80.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disease Size</th>
<th>Average Number of References per Interview</th>
<th>Concept Group</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Typical Terms and Phrases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Status quo vs. change</td>
<td>A basic dimension of the liberal-conservative continuum focusing on patterns of political change</td>
<td>Revolution; military; reactionary; extremism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Political structure and process</td>
<td>Abstractions focusing on the process, issues of the balance of power, and governmental organization</td>
<td>Two-party system; power centers; policy-making; power structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Governmental responsiveness to public action</td>
<td>Also prominently associated with liberalism; conservatism; concrete dealing with the tension between authority and individual freedom</td>
<td>Majority rule; dictatorship; freedom of speech; constitutional; law and order; affirmative action; conservative; liberal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Law and order vs. individual rights</td>
<td>Concepts dealing with general principles of government intervention in economic life</td>
<td>Free enterprise; laissez-faire; social welfare; equal opportunity; inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Government intervention vs. economic individualism</td>
<td>Concepts dealing with patterns of economic, political, and social inequality and with normative strategies</td>
<td>Social Darwinism; affirmative action; quota system; civil rights; justice; isolationism; prejudice; patriotism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Equality/inequality</td>
<td>Concepts dealing with patterns of economic, political, and social inequality and with normative strategies</td>
<td>Social Darwinism; affirmative action; quota system; civil rights; justice; isolationism; prejudice; patriotism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Equality/inequality</td>
<td>Concepts dealing with patterns of economic, political, and social inequality and with normative strategies</td>
<td>Social Darwinism; affirmative action; quota system; civil rights; justice; isolationism; prejudice; patriotism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Equality/inequality</td>
<td>Concepts dealing with patterns of economic, political, and social inequality and with normative strategies</td>
<td>Social Darwinism; affirmative action; quota system; civil rights; justice; isolationism; prejudice; patriotism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Equality/inequality</td>
<td>Concepts dealing with patterns of economic, political, and social inequality and with normative strategies</td>
<td>Social Darwinism; affirmative action; quota system; civil rights; justice; isolationism; prejudice; patriotism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
interview and since the groupings themselves are ad hoc, these results are suggestive rather than definitive. But they do hark back to de Tocqueville's characterization of the American perspective as practical, centrist, and suspicious of utopian ideologies of radical reform (1840, pp. 1–3).

Table 2 illustrates that although the American public does not routinely use the left-right spectrum to identify a richly articulated and overarching philosophy of governance, they do find occasional use for related terms to identify (and most often to condemn) noncentrist political perspectives. Americans, despite a mode of language which reflects a cynicism about the motives and abilities of politicians, bureaucrats, and government, are in general rather pleased with the functioning of their political system as a whole. Even critical events such as Watergate seem not to have shaken this faith (Sniderman et al. 1975). For many respondents, especially in the middle mass (levels II, III, and IV), a collapsed form of the liberal-conservative continuum proves useful. Ignoring left versus right, they simply identify political actors and issues as more or less distant from the status quo. A more philosophical conception of modern liberalism which emphasizes government intervention, redistributive strategies, and abstract conceptions of equality is notably less prominent.

THE COVARIATION OF DIFFERENTIATION AND INTEGRATION

Differentiation and integration, as we have noted, are complementary processes. It is hard to imagine an attentive, politically oriented individual who in following the political news of the day has not developed some appreciation of the various abstract structuring concepts which are the stock in trade of journalists, columnists, and editorial writers. We expect that an increasingly differentiated view of the political arena will generate an increasing need for some means of conceptual organization, perhaps some variant of the liberal-conservative continuum. It turns, the image of a citizen with a fully articulated and sophisticated understanding of political abstractions who is unable to differentiate the executive from the judiciary, for example, is rather implausible. It is an issue, of course, easily tested with the data at hand.

The indices of differentiation and integration were indeed correlated, $r = .67$. The scatterplot for the two indices resembles a textbook example of bivariate homoscedasticity: only a few scattered respondents reflected a deviant pattern of high integration and low differentiation or the reverse. In regression terminology, our respondents on the average would make two references to issues, actors, or events for each abstraction mentioned.18

The issue of heteroscedasticity and nonlinearity, incidentally, is of spe-

18 Index of differentiation = 13.8 + 19 × index of integration, standard error of estimate = 12.5.

1255
cial theoretical relevance in this case. There is a certain intuitive appeal to the idea of a critical mass in both the differentiation and integration variables, some kind of threshold or take-off point of differentiation in the most basic elements of the political system which must be reached before the natural spiking process of increasing differentiation and integration comes into play. Such threshold effects suggested themselves in the continuous distributions for the five levels of integration in Table 1, for example. Similarly, if another critical threshold existed in the middle or higher levels of conceptual integration, we might expect that increasing differentiation would not be associated necessarily with additional integration. Thus a basic repertoire of abstract concepts, so to speak, would suffice, and the covariation between differentiation and integration would be less distinct in upper levels, that is, heteroscedasticity. But visual inspection and a series of statistical tests revealed no evidence of either nonlinearity or heteroscedasticity. If a critical threshold exists, it is not evident in the interplay of differentiation and integration, or it takes a form more subtle than these measures can discern.

DEMOGRAPHIC PATTERNS

As students of public opinion, the impulse is deeply ingrained in most of us to sift out the demographic basis of opinion distributions and trends. Most political poll data, for example, routinely break down opinions by race, sex, educational level, income, and region of the country. Chapters on the role of each of these variables have become de rigueur in empirical studies of public opinion and voting. Given all that attention, our collective intuitive estimates ought to be fairly accurate. Extrapolating from the numerous studies which correlate demographic variables with political participation and interest (Campbell et al. 1960; Key 1966; Milbrath 1965; Flanigan 1972; Verba and Nie 1972; Asher 1976), we would expect lower levels of differentiation and integration among blacks, women, poor people, both young adults and senior citizens, those with lower class origins, and those in blue-collar occupational settings, who presumably spend much of their time manipulating objects rather than ideas. In matters political, especially as they concern the use of political abstractions, one would expect the individual's level of education to be of special importance. Because the manipulation of abstract concepts is central to the educational process at all levels, we might expect that education would be especially highly correlated with conceptual integration.

Table 3 reports the results of the series of multiple regressions which attempt to unravel the causal origins of differentiation and integration in mass political thought. The bottom line (both literally and figuratively in this case) reports the multiple r² or percentage of variance explained.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Differentiation</th>
<th></th>
<th>Integration</th>
<th></th>
<th>Current Variance</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zero-Order</td>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>Zero-Order</td>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>Zero-Order</td>
<td>Regression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social status:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation status</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (black)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex (female)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (young adult)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (after citizen)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s SES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple r</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple p</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Non-significant.
by all demographic variables combined, revealing, as regressions of this sort go, rather low coefficients. These cognitive phenomena, it appears, are not easily predicted from a battery of demographic variables. The primary factors appear to be education, income, and race. In order to explore the possibility of a unique linkage between several demographic variables and one of these two indices, the unique variance of each index was extracted by running an integration-differentiation regression, taking residuals and rerunning the demographic regressions on residualized dependent variables. The results are included in table 3. As expected, education is most strongly linked with conceptual integration. In fact, it may not be related at all to the unique variation in the differentiation index.

Overall, we can conclude from these analyses that the patterns of political thought under scrutiny here are relatively weakly linked to the usual demographic variables but that, among these variables, level of education seems to be most significant. As we shall see shortly, however, the influence of education on styles of political thought is more complex than we had first anticipated.

EVIDENCE OF A SPIRALING PROCESS—PATTERNS OF POLITICAL THINKING IN THE LIFE CYCLE

An interactive spiraling process of this type is a very difficult causal pattern to untangle by means of a single survey study. We would benefit, of course, from repeated measurements over time. But even then, because we have no theoretical basis on which to estimate lagged effects, we might move only a small distance toward a clarification of the causal process involved. The best available alternative strategy seems to be an analysis of growth in differentiation and integration in the various age cohorts. We expected, given the spiral hypothesis, a steady increase in both indices with age. But the initial analysis of zero-order correlations between age and the indices of differentiation and integration indicated no significant relationship. Because of the possibility of a suppressor effect resulting from the usual negative correlation between age and education and because of the possibility of retrogression associated with senility and the status of senior citizens, nonlinear and interactive effects were explored through a series of analyses of covariance. Still, the results were nonsignificant and unimpressive. At this point the spiral theory which had stimulated the analysis in the first place was reexamined for a further clue on how the mechanism might work. Was it possible that education served as a catalyst and that the effects of age would be different for the lesser and more educated strata of our sample? Figure 2 illustrates the rather striking results of the ensuing analysis.

The upper portion of figure 2 graphs the relationship of age with
conceptual differentiation for three groups, corresponding to those whose highest level of education is grade school, high school, or college and above. The solid line designating the pattern for grade school respondents actually declines with age, starting a little above the overall sample mean for the differentiation index and dropping well below it. This seems to suggest that the spiraling pattern can work in two directions. Those who enter the work world early but with little formal education seem as capable

Fig. 2.—Interaction effects: education and age on differentiation and integration

11 In order to minimize sampling fluctuations inherent in this small sample, the data in this figure and in figure 4 have been smoothed by the traditional moving average technique, which averages the means in each reported point with the adjacent means.
as any to be attentive to and differentiate the various objects of political life. But without the help of integrative abstract concepts, the political realm becomes threatening and confusing to these individuals. As a result they retreat into a less differentiated and more simplistic conception of politics. In contrast, just the reverse spiralizing process is evident for the college educated, with the high school educated falling in between with no linear trend. A similar pattern is evident in the bottom portion of figure 2. In this case 5-yearly integration does not decrease over time for the grade school subsample, but we see a dramatic and fairly steady growth among the college educated. Also, we can see from the fact that these trend lines do not intersect that the relationship between education and integration is a much stronger one.

We cannot be sure that the interaction effects dramatically illustrated here are actually the result of accumulated exposure to political life through increasing age, because given the nature of these data we are unable to separate out age and historical cohort effects. It is often suggested, of course, that young men and women coming to political consciousness during the Depression, the Second World War, or the Vietnam era would be likely to have fundamentally unique perceptions of the political process. Of course, long-term panel data on these variables would be necessary to resolve this issue.

COGNITIVE STRUCTURE AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

The discussion thus far has not emphasized a necessary link between styles of political thinking and political behavior. There are several reasons for this. First of all, despite the vigor of ongoing policy debates, on a day-to-day basis there are not many opportunities for political behavior per se among the mass citizenry. Of course, newspapers and television continually offer up political news which many of us absorb more or less passively. But, except for the political campaign season every several years, an occasional brouhaha at the local school board, or a political petition, not much opportunity for the average individual to act on the basis of his or her political perceptions presents itself. During campaign-

izing, political activities are highly routinized and usually professionally organized. There are ample opportunities for symbolic activities such as the wearing of buttons and displaying of bumper stickers, but the bulk of the public plays the role of observer rather than participant. Second, as we have noted, the different styles of structuring political thought identified by Converse's terms "group interest" and "nature of the times" serve as functional alternatives to abstract thinking. Less politically sophisticated individuals whose party identification and political preferences are organized on a proxy mechanism, following the lead of unions
or other organizations or more politically active friends, may have a functionally consistent set of opinions and may vote as often as their own best interest as more sophisticated citizens who laboriously study the issues and candidates in making up their minds. We will return to this difficult issue of the ramifications of cognitive styles in public opinion for the functioning of the political system in a concluding section. But first, in an attempt to probe a little deeper into the character of the causal status of the differentiation and integration variables, let us take a further look at the depth interview data.

A caveat is in order here. The issue of causal direction in the linking of political belief patterns and behavior is complex. Again, we cannot assume that, for example, an increasingly differentiated conception of the political realm causes strong party identifications. Perhaps there is an interactive or spiraling process involved here, too. Much of the ensuing discussion will simply identify patterns of covariance without an attempt to certify direction of causality.

As a basic strategy of analysis we will explore the individual effects of differentiation and integration, although in most cases we might expect them to have a similar impact. The working assumption is simply that increasing differentiation (reflecting a movement from an apolitical to a political orientation) will be tied most closely to political participation, while increasing conceptual integration will be more closely tied to patterns of ideology and opinion.

Two indices of ideological orientation were available. One was a simple question which asked respondents to identify themselves on a five-point scale from very liberal to very conservative. The other was a 33-item scale of attitudes toward specific issues in the liberal-conservative domain (McClosky 1975). A nonlinear pattern was expected with the most liberal and most conservative exhibiting the highest levels of both differentiation and integration. One might expect a more distinct pattern for integration because of the salience of abstract principles to ideological thinking. But nothing in the research literature on mass ideology would lead one to expect more differentiated thinking among individuals on the left than on the right, or any greater dependence on abstractions per se. Thus a symmetric U-shaped curve was anticipated in both cases.

But as Figure 3 illustrates, there are some distinct differences that were not anticipated. It seems that, as defined by our measures of differentiation and integration, liberals are distinctly more sophisticated than conservatives in mass publics. The ideological self-identification measure is not particularly helpful because so few people identify themselves as very liberal or very conservative. In this graph we see evidence of nonlinearity for the ideological elite who identify themselves as leaning far to the left.
or right on the political spectrum. But among the middle mass, the great majority of respondents who simply identify themselves as liberal, moderate, or conservative, there is a distinct linear trend of decreasing differentiation and integration moving from liberal to conservative. The ideology attitude index, based on an actual compilation of opinions and beliefs (and a better-balanced distribution of respondents), demonstrates the linear trend more dramatically.

What would explain such a pattern? Liberals mention on the average seven more political objects than conservatives and are about one and a
half times as likely to refer to a political abstraction. Is it a spurious artifact of some sort? Probably not. Analysis of the distribution of education across these ideological categories indicates no significant confounding effects. We would not extrapolate from these findings to argue that the political leaders, scholars, and columnists of the right are any less sophisticated or disinclined to use abstract concepts. But it seems that in the way ideological packages filter down to the mass publics, the anchoring concepts of conservatism are perhaps fewer in number, less abstract and less conducive to a differentiated perception of governmental process. This makes sense on an intuitive level. One thinks of the rugged individualist of modern conservative thought who exhibits little sympathy for government intervention in our day-to-day lives, the growing federal bureaucracy, and the proliferation of abstract catch phrases based on "wars on poverty," "affirmative action," and the subtleties of détente. We might think again of the stereotypical man from Missouri who demands to be shown the concrete results and has little use for the abstractions of modern politics. His is a conservative posture, perhaps populist in flavor, which reflects a cynicism toward the undifferentiated symbol of Washington/federal bureaucracy/high taxes/etc. Perhaps such reflections overinterpret the data. There may well be a simpler explanation. But at the very least, these striking differences between liberals and conservatives in the mass population deserve further scrutiny.

Given the more highly differentiated conception of politics among liberals, we might expect Democrats to exhibit higher scores than Republicans on differentiation, but that turns out not to be the case. The pattern in the final graph in figure 3 is less distinct but indicates that Democrats have a higher level of differentiation and perhaps a lower level of integration than Republicans. So it seems that whatever the mechanism which differentiates the cognitive styles of liberals and conservatives, it does not translate into an equivalent pattern for party identification. We turn next to patterns of electoral participation. The hypotheses here are fairly straightforward. One would expect, naturally enough, that increased skills in differentiation and integration are directly associated with political participation. The dependent measure is the index of electoral participation based on the frequency of involvement in campaign activities, including displaying buttons or bumper stickers, attendance at political rallies, volunteer work, political contributions, and persuading friends or neighbors to vote for a particular candidate, in addition to voting. The average for the overall sample was about three such activities over the past several years, and, as figure 4 illustrates, there is a fairly dramatic linear correlation between both cognitive indices and electoral participation.

The hypothesis of a threshold effect of some sort had been suggested. Perhaps some critical mass of information or a critical level of integrative
structure would be associated with a steep rise in political participation. But the data indicate a strong linear relationship between both indices and electoral activity and no apparent threshold phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

The results cited above indicate that variation in conceptual differentiation and integration is measurable (albeit by a somewhat laborious content analytic procedure) and that these two dimensions of cognitive organization have unique origins and effects on political opinions and behavior. At this point, however, it would seem appropriate to move beyond the statistics to put the results in a broader context. Our first point concerns the nature of survey research data. The second and third points concern
more general questions about the role of public opinion in the democratic process.

First, one important conclusion likely to be drawn from such labors with transcribed depth interviews is an overwhelming sense of the pro-
crusian nature of survey research. It is a point which is perhaps not
readily conveyed by the few brief quotations and the summary statistics
cited above. But it is an impression, no doubt, which has struck other
analysts who have had the opportunity to work with the remarks of their
respondents in unedited natural language. By following the dynamics of
the interview process in a transcript one sees repeatedly how the initial
response of the interviewee to a particular question, such as one about
attitudes toward racial inequality or the energy crisis, might easily be
misinterpreted. The responses to follow-up probes are the ways in which
the respondents organize their answers reveal much more than any simple
agree-disagree continuum could possibly capture.

Depth interview work of this sort is expensive and time consuming, but
one of its strongest contributions might be to clarify the interpretation of
more routinely gathered poll data. One of the most surprising findings of
this study was the correlation between liberal political attitudes and high
levels of conceptual differentiation and integrations. Further work is now
underway to determine whether liberals and conservatives use abstract
concepts in distinctly different ways and whether such a distinction, if it
exists, might help explain patterns of political behavior.

A second conclusion concerns the relationship of the individual to his
or her political environment. Recent books by Bennett (1975) and Page
(1978) have emphasized this point. If after a careful examination of
hour-long interviews we still find two-thirds of the mass electorate making
only marginal use of political abstractions to structure their evaluations
of the political system, it is not necessarily the result of their own cognitive
shortcomings. If issues are vaguely defined and the linkage between candi-
dates and issues is unclear, it may well be a result of a pattern of candidate
behavior and media coverage, which itself is vague and shallow. The
columnist has so many column inches, the television reporter so many
seconds to capitalize the major issues of the day. Given the current struc-
ture of the news media, one could hardly expect them to get much beyond
the main points of an issue. Correspondingly, few candidates have found
success by handling out long manuscripts spelling out their policy positions
on each issue of the day. Further research on cognitive patterns will
benefit from parallel analyses of mass political thought and trends in media
coverage.

Clinical psychologists working in the area of cognitive structure have
argued that a sudden increase in the perceived complexity of a problem
can lead to a pattern of withdrawal (Schoeder, Driver, and Streufert 1967).

2765
American Journal of Sociology

So a potentially sudden shift in media coverage or candidate behavior could have a disruptive effect on the democratic process, especially if the citizenry as a whole came to the sudden recognition of how little the politicians and experts understand about our collective problems. There are some signs that we may be approaching a crisis of this sort now. But a gradual expansion of coverage of political events, perhaps a spiraling increase between differentiation and integration, would seem to be a step in the right direction.

Third and finally, there is an issue which underlies this entire analysis. To what extent are the less sophisticated and attentive citizens in the electorate more easily propagandized and manipulated? This concern has arisen repeatedly in social science research, including the propaganda research of the 1940s, the concern with mass society in the 1950s, as well as more recent research on media and politics. The results reported above, however, give no indication that those with lower scores on conceptual differentiation or integration are any more easily manipulated by political symbols or arguments. The intermediate levels of cognitive organization reflecting an orientation toward group interest or a straightforward mechanism of electoral reward and punishment represent, after all, rather reasonable political postures. In fact, the man-from-Missouri stereotype reflects a cognitive state more likely to be influenced by concrete results than by rhetoric. This suggests some intriguing possibilities. It may be that the more sophisticated and abstractly oriented citizens are actually more rather than less susceptible to the manipulative strategies of political elites.

APPENDIX

A Brief Outline of the Bay Area Survey Depth Interview Schedule

Global evaluations of American society.—Six questions here concerned what the respondent was satisfied and dissatisfied with in American society and government and who should take the credit or blame.

Quality of life.—Nine questions here concerned satisfaction with living and work conditions, the economic situation, crime, race relations, and the environment. Respondents were asked to contrast their personal situation with that of their community and the country as a whole.

Political values and perceptions of government.—In this section 10 questions concerned evaluations of the American system of government, political freedom, equality of opportunity, the responsiveness of government to the citizenry, participation in the political system, and the trustworthiness of public officials.

1266