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Memorandum

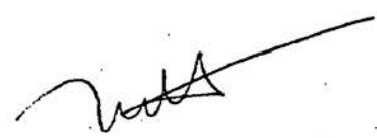
THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date October 24, 1979
to Bertram H. Gold
from Milton Himmelfarb
subject John L. Sullivan, James Piereson, George E. Marcus,
"An Alternative Conceptualization of Political Tolerance:
Illusory Increases 1950s-1970s," American Political
Science Review, September 1979

A copy of the abstract and concluding comments is attached.

The most striking findings and conclusions are these:

1. Previous research has mostly measured the right's intolerance of the left. This may have been appropriate at one time, but no longer is. Now there seems to be a substantial intolerance by an enlarged left of the right.
2. The reported decline of intolerance over the past generation, therefore, may be an illusion.
3. We can no longer be quite so certain as we would like to be that a rise in education results in a rise in tolerance.
4. Our "pluralistic intolerance" is a less serious threat to democracy than a concentrated intolerance would be.



MH:rg

cc: Hy Bookbinder, Milton Ellerin, Selma Hirsh, Abe Karlikow,
Will Katz, Neal Kozodoy, Irving Levine, Sam Rabinove,
Yehuda Rosenman, Seymour Samet, Ira Silverman, Marc Tanenbaum,
Bill Trosten, Mort Yarmon

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

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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)

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

*We wish to express our thanks to the University of Minnesota Graduate School and to the National Science Foundation, grant SOC 77-17623, for supporting this study. Considerable appreciation is extended to the following for their most helpful comments on an earlier version of this article: David Booth, David Colby, William Flanigan, Daniel Minns, Leroy Rieselbach, W. Phillips Shively, James Stimson, Robert Weissberg, and James Davis. We could not take all of their advice because often it was contradictory, but the final product would have been considerably weakened were it not for their help.

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)

August 2, 1979

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Milton Himmelfarb

Arend Liphart, "Religious vs. Linguistic vs. Class Voting:
The 'Crucial Experiment' of Comparing Belgium, Canada,
South Africa, and Switzerland," American Political Science
Review, June 1979

The material in italics is the author's own abstract
of his article. Note the striking conclusion: religion first,
language (in American terms, ethnicity?) second, and class a
distant third.

MH:rg

cc: Hy Bookbinder
Irving Levine
Ira Silverman
✓ Marc Tanenbaum
Mort Yarmon

Religious vs. Linguistic vs. Class Voting: The "Crucial Experiment" of Comparing Belgium, Canada, South Africa, and Switzerland*

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For the purpose of determining the relative influence of the three potentially most important social and demographic factors on party choice—social class, religion, and language—a comparison of Belgium, Canada, South Africa, and Switzerland provides a "crucial experiment," because these three variables are simultaneously present in all four countries. Building on the major earlier research achievements in comparative electoral behavior, this four-country multivariate analysis compares the indices of voting and the party choice "trees" on the basis of national sample surveys conducted in the 1970s. From this crucial contest among the three determinants of party choice, religion emerges as the victor, language as a strong runner-up, and class as a distant third. The surprising strength of the religious factor can be explained in terms of the "freezing" of past conflict dimensions in the party system and the presence of alternative, regional-federal, structures for the expression of linguistic interests.

The major overall conclusion which emerges from comparative studies of the social and demographic bases of voting behavior is that there are two especially important determinants of party choice: social class and religion. Compared to these two strong factors, the influence of other social and demographic

variables tends to be much weaker. However, a third potentially powerful variable—language—has received scant attention so far. The main reason for this undeserved neglect appears to be that linguistic cleavages are relatively rare in Western democracies.

There are several Western countries with small linguistic minorities, but only three that can really be said to be linguistically divided: Belgium, Canada, and Switzerland. Hence these three countries are obvious candidates for comparison with regard to the impact of linguistic divisions on voting (see Hill, 1974, p. 100). An interesting fourth case that can be added is the Republic of South Africa. This country—or, more precisely, its white electorate—fits all three of the theoretical criteria used by Richard Rose (1974b, pp. 5–6) to demarcate the universe of countries suitable for inclusion in his comparative handbook on *Electoral Behavior*: the persistence of competitive free elections since 1945, a high rank on the conventional socioeconomic indicators of industrialization, and Christian cultural origins.

Another reason why these four countries are especially interesting is that they present an outstanding opportunity for a multivariate analysis of the relative weights of the linguistic, religious, and class variables, since all four countries are divided along all of these dimensions. In addition to their linguistic cleavages and the socioeconomic or class differences present in all industrialized societies, there is a Protestant-Catholic division in Canada, South Africa, and Switzerland, and a religious-secular split in homogeneously Catholic Belgium. The latter cleavage is at least as important as the

*I wish to thank the scholars and the organizations who made the data collected by them or tabulations based on these data available to me for the purpose of this study. The Belgian data were part of the 1970 and 1973 European Communities Studies of which Ronald Inglehart and Jacques-René Rabier were the principal investigators. The data of the 1974 Canadian national election survey were originally collected by Harold Clarke, Jane Jenson, Lawrence LeDuc, and Jon Pammett. The South African data were collected in 1974 by Market Research Africa (Pty) Ltd. under the guidance of Lawrence Schlemmer. The Swiss national election study of 1972 was organized by the Department of Political Science of the University of Geneva and the Sozialforschungsstelle of the University of Zurich under the direction of Henry H. Kerr, Jr., Dusan Sidjanski, and Gerhard Schmidchen. The Belgian and Canadian data were obtained from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. Neither the original collectors of the data nor the Consortium bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here. I should also like to express my appreciation to Galen A. Irwin and Jan Verhoef for their advice and assistance, to the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and the Social Sciences in Wassenaar, where I was a Fellow in 1974–75 and where I did part of the research for this article, and to the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Pure Research (Z.W.O.) for its financial support.