TRENDS IN POLITICAL TOLERANCE

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Abstract Some researchers find a substantial increase in polit-
ical tolerance since the 1950s, while others find the increase to be
"illusory"—the public is more tolerant now of leftists, but has
simply found other targets on which to vent its intolerance.
Reanalysis and the addition of more extensive trend data from
1940 to 1985 suggest that the shift *does* seem primarily to reflect
increased tolerance of leftists, but that the public has *not* found
other groups to be intolerant of. Measured tolerance has fluc-
tuated greatly over the period, reflecting mainly changes in per-
ceptions of threat from putatively subversive groups, especially
domestic Communists. Also, the public's grasp of, and self-
interested concern about, civil liberties seems so minimal that
one might argue not that the public is substantially tolerant or
intolerant, but that it has no really tangibly measurable "atti-
tude" on the subject one way or the other.

Several recent studies have dealt with the American public's tolerance
for dissent and nonconformity. Part of the discussion has revolved
around the issue of changes in the level of tolerance—specifically,
whether there has been an increase in this quality since the 1950s.

The benchmark for these studies has been Samuel A. Stouffer's
classic study of civil liberties, published in 1955. Stouffer's survey
posed an array of questions about Communists, Socialists, and atheists
and sought to assess the public's willingness to allow such people to
speak and to hold various kinds of jobs. Twenty years later, compara-
tive data became available. In 1973, Stouffer's 1954 survey was substan-
tially replicated, and, beginning in 1972, several of his central questions
have been included on the General Social Survey of the National Opin-

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ion Research Center. Analyses of these data have generally concluded that there has been a very substantial, broadly based increase in tolerance since 1954 in the American public (Cutler and Kaufman, 1975; Davis, 1975; Erskine and Siegel, 1975; Nunn, Crockett, and Williams, 1978; McClosky and Brill, 1983:434–438).

Challenging this central finding have been John Sullivan, James Piereson, and George Marcus. First in an essay in a popular magazine, then in an article in a scholarly journal, then in a book, they argue that these supposed increases in political tolerance were "illusory" (1979a, 1979b, 1982). Instead, they assert, "claims that the public is now more tolerant than in the 1950s are either untrue or greatly exaggerated" (1982:250; see also pp. 67n, 70, 77, 82). They concede that "attitudes toward Communists, socialists, and atheists are now more favorable," but suggest that "citizens are now able to point to other political groups toward which they feel more hostility" (1982:77, 69).

To test this notion, they devised a "content-controlled" measure of tolerance and applied it on a national survey in 1978. Respondents were handed a card listing ten groups, including not only those Stouffer asked about, like Communists and atheists, but also an anarchic terrorist group (the Symbionese Liberation Army), an extreme black nationalist group (the Black Panthers), and three right wing groups: the Ku Klux Klan, the John Birch Society, and "fascists."[1] After the respondents had selected their "least-liked group" from this array, they were asked several questions about tolerating that group, and it was found that tolerance so measured was lower than that obtained by the direct Stouffer questions.

This paper seeks to reassess this debate over trends in tolerance. It recalculates the 1954 Stouffer measures to partially simulate the Sullivan least-liked group question, reevaluates the full response cadences obtained by the least-liked group question, compares the two, and concludes that, when so measured, increases in tolerance from the 1950s are still remarkably significant even when the Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus assertions are taken into account.

Then, however, an effort is made to get a richer perspective on

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1. This list changes the rules of the game somewhat. Although the Communist party is often accused of being violence-prone and terroristic at base, it adopts much of the usual trappings of a legitimate political party and is accepted by many as such. The Symbionese Liberation Army (the least-liked group for 8% of the respondents) never had any such pretensions—violence and terror were its regular course of business—and by almost any democratic theory it is criminal and outside the bounds of legitimate political discourse. To a considerable degree, the same can be said for the Ku Klux Klan (24%) and for the Black Panthers (6%) in some of their incarnations. (For related criticisms, see McClosky and Brill, 1983:435–436n; and Caspi and Seligson, 1983:396–397.)

trends in political tolerance by bringing in additional poll data covering the period from the early 1940s to the mid-1980s. It is concluded, in agreement with Sullivan and his colleagues, that measured shifts reflect declines in specific intolerance toward Communists. However, in disagreement with them, it is argued that the public has *not* redirected its intolerance to other groups, since none poses the threat Communists were perceived to pose in the 1950s. Should such a group arise, it is to be expected that high levels of intolerance would once again be found.

The paper discusses the considerable fluctuations in measured tolerance that have occurred over the last half century, and it concludes with some comments about the degree to which the public can be said to be whimsical in its approach to the issue of civil liberties. Although the public seems able to react to news events in a predictable manner, it may be most useful to conclude that no meaningfully measurable attitude on tolerance exists.

The Stouffer Shift

Although the Sullivan survey sought, in part, to be comparable to the Stouffer survey, only two of the Sullivan questions about the respondents' least-liked group actually are meaningfully comparable to the Stouffer items. One of these, a question asking whether members of the least-liked group "should be allowed to make a speech in this city," is quite directly comparable. The other asks whether members of the least-liked group "should be allowed to teach in public schools." When asking about Communists, Stouffer asked whether they should be *fired* from teaching in a *college*. The differences are troublesome but, fortunately, various comparisons possible with the Stouffer data suggest they are probably not too significant (see also Abramson, 1983:257n).

The data for Stouffer's questions are given in Table 1. A shift is evident. Between 1954 and 1972 or 1973, there was an increase of between 24 and 33 percentage points in tolerance as measured by these two questions and a decrease of between 23 and 34 percentage points in intolerance. Of interest, and of later relevance, is the fact that while substantial shifts are documented on the questions during the 18 years between 1954 and 1972, there has been no clear further liberalization in the 13 years since then on the speech question. There is a possible 10 percentage point liberalization on the teaching question between 1972 and 1985—but only if one ignores the 1973 and 1974 figures. During the 1972–1985 period NORC also asked about tolerance of atheists, rac-

Table 1. Trends in the Stouffer Questions, 1954–1985

	Communist Should Be Allowed to Speak			Communist Teacher Should Be Fired		
	Yes	No	DK,NA	Yes	No	DK,NA
1954	27%	68	5	89%	6	5
1972	52%	45	4	61%	32	7
1973	60%	38	2	55%	39	6
1973N	53%	42	6	63%	30	7
1974	58%	39	3	52%	42	6
1976	55%	43	2	54%	41	5
1977	55%	42	2	57%	39	4
1978S	60%	36	4			
1980	55%	42	3	53%	41	6
1982	56%	41	3	50%	43	6
1984	59%	38	3	49%	46	5
1985	57%	40	3	51%	44	4

SOURCES: 1954—Stouffer, 1955. 1973N—Nunn, Crockett, and Williams, 1978; personal communication with J. Allen Williams, 1983. 1978S—Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus, 1982. All other years—General Social Survey data files, NORC.

QUESTIONS: Now I should (would) like to ask you some questions about a man who admits he is a Communist. Suppose this admitted Communist wanted (wants) to make a speech in your community. Should he be allowed to speak, or not? Suppose he is teaching in a college. Should he be fired, or not?

ists, antidemocratic militarists, and homosexuals. For the most part results on these questions also varied little over the period.[2]

The Least-Liked Group Shift

A problem in trying to compare the least-liked group questions asked by Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus in 1978 with the 1954 Stouffer ques-

2. NORC asked whether members of each of the five groups should be allowed to speak, to teach college, and to have a book in the public library. For atheists there was no change on the speech and book questions, and a 4 or 5 percentage point liberalization on the teaching question. For people who believe that "blacks are genetically inferior," there was no change on the teaching or book questions, and an *il*liberalization of a few percentage points on the speaking question. For people who advocate eliminating elections and "letting the military run the country," there was no change on the speech and book questions, and a possible 2 or 3 percentage point liberalization on the teaching questions. For homosexuals there was no change on the book question, a 5 percentage point liberalization on the speech question, and a 10 percentage point liberalization on the teaching question. The data for the speech and teaching questions for admitted Communists are given in Table 1; on the book question there was no change.

tions in Table 1 is that the comparison assumes everyone in 1954 would have selected admitted Communists as their least-liked group had they been presented with a list of groups like the one used by Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus in 1978. In arguing there has been "little if any" change in tolerance since the 1950s, Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus compare the results of their least-liked group question with those obtained by Stouffer when he asked about admitted Communists. But while it may well be the case that Communists were the least-liked group for most people in 1954 (as they were in 1978—see Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus, 1982:86), there were doubtless many among the 1954 population who, if given a choice, would have said they liked some other group even less—fascists or the Ku Klux Klan, for example—and some of these would probably have been willing to suppress the speech of those groups even while advocating free speech for Communists. Thus in comparison to the Sullivan approach, the Stouffer measure *overstates* the tolerance levels of 1954.[3]

Unfortunately Stouffer did not ask about tolerating right wing groups, but he did ask about several groups besides admitted Communists: atheists, Socialists, and alleged Communists. A closer approximation to the Sullivan question can therefore be generated by retabulating the Stouffer data to derive the number who would be intolerant of *any* of these four groups. When that is done, the measured tolerance of 1954 shifts downward. While 27% of the 1954 population would allow Communists to speak, only 19% would allow all four groups to speak; and while 68% would cut off the speech of Communists, fully 81% would do so for at least one of the four groups. As for the teaching question, the already low 6% tolerance level declines to 4%, while the portion in favor of firing rises from 89% to 95%. These changes, reported in the first two columns of Table 2, are caused overwhelmingly by people who would tolerate Communists but not atheists.

It should be observed that these figures *still* overestimate the amount of tolerance abroad in the land in 1954. Some of those tolerant of all four groups might be willing to cut off the liberties of the kinds of right wing and terrorist groups asked about in the 1978 Sullivan survey.

Another underappreciated difference between the Stouffer and the Sullivan civil liberties questions concerns the response options. Rather than simply asking the respondents whether they would allow free speech or not, Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus gave their respondents a card with five response categories, one which was comparatively encouraging about an "uncertain" option; then they were asked "tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, *are uncertain,* disagree, or strongly

3. Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus evidence an awareness of this problem (1982:32, 39).

Table 2. Willingness to Allow Groups to Speak or Teach, 1954 and 1978

	Stouffer, 1954		Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus, 1978	
	Communists	Communists, Atheists, Alleged Communists, and Socialists	Least-Liked Group (% of All Respondents)	Least-Liked Group (% of Respondents Questioned)
Speak				
Allow	27%	19%	50%	55%
No opinion/uncertain	5	1	7	7
Not allow	68	81	34	37
Teach				
Allow	6%	4%	19%	20%
No opinion/uncertain	5	1	10	11
Not allow	89	95	62	68

disagree'' (emphasis added). By contrast, a respondent on Stouffer's survey would have to volunteer a no opinion response. Thus, on the Sullivan formulation, measured uncertainty will be higher and therefore *both* measured tolerance *and* intolerance will be lower.

A third incomparability arises from the fact that fully 10% of the respondents in the Sullivan survey were unable or unwilling to select a least-liked group, and these people were accordingly not asked the tolerance questions. Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus included these people in the base when they calculated their percentages for the tolerance questions with the result that both tolerance and intolerance, as measured, would be further reduced.

As it happens, Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus report only the percentage measured tolerant on the two crucial questions from their 1978 survey—a figure which, as indicated, will be twice deflated. When one looks at the entire array of results, as in Table 2, an interesting picture emerges.

On the speech question, Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus argue that measured tolerance rose from 27% to 50% (compare columns 1 and 3 in Table 2), an increase smaller than those found on the Stouffer questions—though not, as Abramson (1980) has observed, very much smaller. However, one could, with equal validity, compare the not allow/intolerance figures from those same questions and observe that intolerance declined from 68% to 34%, a drop as large as any found on the Stouffer comparisons. Moreover, a comparison of the four-group combination (which, as noted, *still* overstates the amount of tolerance in the 1954 public) with the Sullivan formulation shows a 31 percentage point rise (from 19% to 50%) in tolerance and a 47 percentage point decrease (from 81% to 34%) in intolerance. A fairer and more straightforward approach would be to eliminate those who were never asked the civil liberties questions in 1978 because they said they had no least-liked group. When this is done (in the last column of Table 2), changes in attitude at least as significant as those found with the straight Stouffer comparisons of Table 1 still prevail. Finally, if one were to reapportion the 17% of the respondents with no opinion or with no least-liked group in some reasonable manner, a substantial shift in tolerance would still be found.

The same sort of analysis is applied to the teaching question in the bottom half of Table 2, and here Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus are on somewhat stronger ground. They report the top figure in the first and third columns, and conclude tolerance has increased only 13 percentage points, from 6% to 19%. However, it would be equally valid to report the results for the other part of the question and conclude intolerance has dropped 27 percentage points—in line with the 32 or 33 percentage point change found with the Stouffer question (1954 vs.

1978 in Table 1). Removing or reapportioning the respondents with no opinion or with no least-liked group would yield a tolerance shift smaller than the one found by the Stouffer measures, but this procedure would still clearly suggest a solid increase in political tolerance since the 1950s.

Trends in Tolerance

Thus there was a marked increase in political tolerance between 1954 and the 1970s even taking the Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus critique into account. To evaluate this shift more fully, it would be useful to place it in broader historical context. Tables 3, 4, and 5 supply some of this context.

Table 3. Trends in Support for Radio Speeches by Communists

A. Do you think Communist Party candidates should be allowed any time on the radio?

	Yes	No	No Opinion
Sep 1940	32%	55	13

B. In peacetime, do you think members of the Communist Party in this country should be allowed to speak on the radio?

	Yes	Yes Qualified	No	Undecided
Nov 1943	48%		40	12
Nov 1945	48%		39	13
Mar 1946[a]	45%		44	11
Apr 1948	36%		57	7
Nov 1953[a]	19%	9	68	4
Jan 1954[a]	14%	8	73	5
Jan 1956[a]	16%	6	76	3
Dec 1956[a]	20%	4	72	4
Apr 1957[a]	17%	5	75	3
Nov 1963[a]	18%	10	67	5

SOURCES: Roper Center; NORC codebooks; *Opinion News,* 15 September 1948, p. 11; Hyman and Sheatsley, 1953:8; Gallup, 1972:245.
[a] Question did not include the words "In peacetime."

Table 3B displays the results of one important series resulting from a question about allowing Communists to speak on the radio that was asked irregularly between 1943 and 1963. It turns out that during World War II considerable numbers of people said they would allow Communists to speak freely during peacetime; this level of tolerance for Communist speeches on the radio, in fact, was almost as high as tolerance for Communist speeches in the community in the 1970s (compare Table 1) when some allowance is made for different levels of no opinion response.[4] Of course, during the war the Soviets and domestic Communists were often seen as noble and heroic allies against Nazi Germany. Following the war there was a noticeable, but not precipitous, decline in tolerance which eventually bottomed out in the mid-1950s. These low levels of tolerance generally held through late 1963 when the question was last asked. This declining trend in tolerance between the 1940s and the 1950s is paralleled on other poll questions in which respondents were asked whether Socialists should be allowed to publish (Table 4A). More generally, there was also some decline in the percentage who would allow newspapers to criticize "our form of government" (Table 4B)—and possibly a decline in the percentage willing to allow people to "say anything" in a public speech (Table 4C).

While tolerance may have been relatively high during World War II, there is fragmentary evidence to suggest it was substantially lower just before the war in 1940. This can be concluded from the 1940 data in Table 3A, and also from the 1940 data in Table 5A, in which respondents were asked about allowing "speeches against democracy." In that year the Nazi–Soviet pact was in effect and the United States was in a kind of McCarthy era, except that the perceived threat to democracy came from two sources: the extreme left and the extreme right. The tolerance levels in 1940 for allowing antidemocratic speech making (Table 5A) and for letting Communists speak on the radio (Table 3A) are roughly similar to those measured by Stouffer in 1954 for Communist speech making (Table 1).

When the question in Table 5A was replicated in the 1970s, it generated results similar to those generated by the Stouffer question at that time (Table 1). Beyond that, the question comparison in Table 5 gives dramatic evidence about the importance of paying careful attention to question wording when dealing with civil liberties issues. Both in 1940 and in the replication in the 1970s, people were found to be far less willing to "forbid" speeches against democracy than they were to "not allow" them, an issue to be considered more fully below.

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4. It should be stressed that all the data from the World War II period in Tables 3 and 4 are from questions in which the respondents were asked about allowing free speech *during peacetime*.

Table 4. Trends in Civil Liberties, 1943–1957

A. In peacetime, do you think the Socialist Party should be allowed to publish newspapers in this country?

	Yes	Yes Qualified	No	No Opinion
Nov 1943	57%		25	18
Nov 1945	58%		28	15
May 1953	45%	5	34	16
Jan 1954	41%	6	39	14
Jan 1956[a]	41%	6	40	13
Jan 1957[a]	47%	5	38	10
Apr 1957[a]	43%	5	39	13

B. In peacetime, do you think newspapers should be allowed to criticize our form of government?

	Yes	Yes Qualified	No	No Opinion
Nov 1943	66%		30	4
Nov 1945	64%		31	5
Apr 1948	70%		27	3
May 1953	54%	7	35	4

C. In peacetime, do you think people in this country should be allowed to say anything they want to in a public speech?

	Yes	Yes Qualified	No Qualified	No	No Opinion
Nov 1943	63%		32[b]	5	3
Nov 1945	64%			32	4
May 1953	53%	21		24	2
Nov 1954	56%	23		20	1

SOURCES: NORC codebooks; Erskine, 1970:486–487; Cantril and Strunk, 1951:245; Hyman and Sheatsley, 1953:15–16; Hyman, 1963:237.

NOTE: The "Yes qualified" answers include comments like "if fair," "if not Communist," "if not favoring violence," "if not treasonable," "if not libelous."

[a] Question did not include the words "In peacetime."

[b] Multiple answers accepted.

Table 5. The Forbid/Not Allow Questions

A. Do you think the United States should allow speeches against
   democracy?

	1940	Fall 1974	Feb 1976	Spring 1976
Yes, allow	21%	53%	50%	46%
No, not allow	62	42	42	42
Don't know	17	5	8	12

B. Do you think the United States should forbid speeches against
   democracy?

	1940	Fall 1974	Feb 1976	Spring 1976
No, don't forbid	39%	67%	75%	69%
Yes, forbid	46	26	19	19
Don't know	15	6	6	12

Sources: Rugg, 1941; Schuman and Presser, 1981:277; personal communication with Howard Schuman, 1983.

When the data from Tables 1, 3, 4, and 5 are combined into a single story, a pattern emerges that suggests a fair amount of fluctuation in attitudes toward free speech over a 45-year span. The pattern, in summary, is as follows:

1. In 1940, when internationally relevant subversive threats from right as well as left wing extremists were perceived, tolerance levels were probably quite low—almost as low as those registered during the McCarthy period (Tables 3A, 5A).

2. During World War II, the number of those who said they would tolerate Communist speech making during peacetime rose as the international entity to which the domestic party was linked became allied with the United States in a total war against a common enemy (Tables 3 and 4).[5]

5. Presumably, taking a leaf from the Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus argument, tolerance of Nazi or pro-Japanese speech at the time would have been found to be spectacularly less magnanimous had anybody bothered to ask about it. However, it seems likely that tolerance in general—that is, of the freedom to speak "against democracy" or to "say anything" (during peacetime)—*rose* between 1940 and the war years (compare the 1940 data in Table 5A with the 1943 data in Tables 4B and 4C).

3. After the war international Communism became a perceived threat as Cold War hostilities emerged and as various dramatic and highly publicized cases of Communist subversion, or alleged subversion, came to light: among them, the cases of Igor Gouzenko, Elizabeth Bentley, Klaus Fuchs, Alger Hiss, and Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. During this period, tolerance for Communist speech making eroded. Declining with it was tolerance for Socialist publication, and perhaps for the right to "say anything" and for newspapers to "criticize our form of government" (Tables 3 and 4).

4. These trends hit bottom in the 1950s with the Korean War and with the trial and execution of the Rosenbergs (1950–53); at this time the issue was extensively exploited by various politicians, of whom Joseph McCarthy is the best remembered (Tables 1, 3, and 4).

5. Tolerance of free speech for Communists remained at this low level at least until the end of 1963 (Table 3).

6. By 1972, tolerance for the civil liberties of Communists, Socialists, and atheists had risen sharply to levels comparable to those that prevailed during World War II (Table 1).

7. For the next 13 years tolerance for these groups and for other divergent groups has remained quite steady at this high level (Table 1 and note 2).

Explaining the Trends

This exercise in trend tracing suggests that there has been a considerable amount of fluctuation in political tolerance over the last half-century or so. Most of the measures involve free speech for Communists, but there are some data for other groups and for tolerance issues of a more general sort as well. Furthermore the measured upward shift in tolerance discussed so much in the literature occurred sometime during a relatively brief 8½-year period between late 1963 and spring 1972. These observations also suggest that it may be better to see the Stouffer shift of 1954–1972 not as a trend toward greater tolerance, but as a return to levels of tolerance that prevailed during World War II. What can explain this pattern? To approach this question, it would be useful to see if there are relevant trend lines that parallel the Stouffer pattern. In particular these trend lines should show (1) a substantial shift in opinion between the 1950s and the 1970s, and (2) little or only modest additional change during the 1970s and early 1980s.

Changes in educational or age levels. Although tolerance may be correlated with age and education, the Stouffer shift is not purely the result of changes in levels of education or in cohort shifts; if the shift occurred within 8½ years (rather than over 18 as is usually supposed)

there was insufficient time for significant cohort changes to take place or for increased educational opportunities to have such substantial impact. This reasoning is in line with the analyses of Davis (1975), Cutler and Kaufman (1975), Nunn, Crockett, and Williams (1978), and Abramson (1983: chap. 14), which find the Stouffer shift (even assuming the change to have taken place over 18 years) to be significantly in excess of what could be explained by cohort or educational shifts, a conclusion also supported by Sullivan and his colleagues (1982: chap. 5). Also relevant are two observations: (1) tolerance levels have not increased much in the 13 years between 1972 and 1985, when any presumed cohort or educational change would have continued; and (2) tolerance levels *declined* between the early 1940s and the early 1950s even while education was expanding (on this point, see also Glazer and Lipset, 1955:151; and Stewart, 1967).

Changes in psychological factors. Several studies have linked political tolerance to various psychological factors such as optimism, self-esteem, rigidity, and dogmatism (see Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus, 1982: chap. 6; Zalkind, Gaugler, and Schwartz, 1975; Sniderman, 1975). These relationships seem valid, but insofar as data are available they do not seem to account for the Stouffer shift, since patterns on these psychological dimensions mostly either have not changed since the 1950s or have changed modestly in the wrong direction. Thus Nunn, Crockett, and Williams found no significant change from 1954 in the degree to which Americans were optimistic about their personal future or were more worried about "things" (1978:27–28.) In a more extensive analysis of these issues, Lipset and Schneider conclude that there have been no important shifts since the 1950s and early 1960s in the degree to which Americans feel happy, personally satisfied, or personally optimistic; if anything, there was a mild *decline* in their good feelings on these issues (1983:111–155). Moreover, there was a modest decline in the degree of personal trust among the American public while the sense of alienation has increased somewhat (Lipset and Schneider, 1983:109–111; see also Smith, 1980:219; Wright, 1976: chap. 7).[6]

6. Stouffer included a few personality items on his survey, and four were replicated on the Nunn survey in 1973. It was found that the percentage agreeing that "Any leader should be strict with people under him in order to gain their respect" declined only 3 points, while the percentage agreeing that "People can be divided into two classes—the weak and the strong" declined 8 points. For what it's worth, larger changes were found in two questions about child rearing: agreement with the statement "A child should never be allowed to talk back to parents, or else he will lose respect for them" declined 14 points, and those agreeing that "If a child is unusual in some way, his parents should get him to be more like other children" declined 38 points (Stouffer codebook; personal communication with J. Allen Williams, 1983).

Changes in political efficacy and trust. As for measures of more specifically political attitudes, Lipset and Schneider document several trends in the direction opposite to the tolerance trend: the sense of political efficacy lessened somewhat between the 1950s and the 1970s, and there were marked declines in the degree to which Americans trusted the government, valued the performance of the government and the behavior of public officials, and expressed confidence in the leaders not only of Congress and the executive branch, but also in those of medicine, education, organized religion, the courts, business, labor, the press, the military, and the Supreme Court (1983:19–61).

Changes in attitudes on relevent political issues. Trends on two specific political issues might be expected to have some resonance with political tolerance. Neither does. One is civil rights. Since the 1950s and early 1960s there has clearly been a substantial liberalization of attitudes toward racial integration, particularly toward the principles of equal treatment. However, unlike attitudes on political tolerance, this liberalization trend generally *continued* through the 1970s rather than reaching a plateau (Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo, 1985; see also Taylor, Sheatsley, and Greeley, 1978; Smith, 1980:162–174; Smith and Sheatsley, 1984; and a Harris Survey release, 18 February 1985). The other concerns criminal justice. In this area there has been a considerable *deliberalization:* in the 1970s, people became far more likely to advocate the death penalty and to feel the courts are insufficiently harsh on criminals. Not irrelevantly, they were also found to be increasingly fearful of walking near their homes alone at night (Smith, 1980:18–19, 41–42, 52–53).

Changes in international attitudes. Other potentially relevant questions deal with the Cold War and with attitudes toward the Soviet Union. There was a big change in this between the 1950s and the 1970s; for example, Americans tended to rate Russia around 85%–91% unfavorable in the 1950s, while far fewer people were so negative in the 1970s. However, unlike the tolerance questions, questions like this were remarkably volatile in the 1970s: the portion unfavorably inclined varied actively between 30% and 73% during the 1972–1982 decade, while the portion finding Communism to be the "worst kind" of government rose substantially during the decade, from 44% to 61% (Smith, 1983:280–281; Russett and Deluca, 1981:389–391).

Changes in concern about domestic Communism. Although data are not as abundant as one might like, the questions which do seem to show the proper patterns are those dealing with concern over domestic Communism. In Stouffer's 1954 survey 81% felt American Communists to be of very great, great, or some danger to the country; in a replication in 1974 this dropped to 65%, a figure which held firm at least through 1976 (Smith, 1983:289). In 1954, 35% claimed they had re-

cently talked with friends or relatives about "Communists in the United States"; in 1973 that figure was 16% (Nunn, Crockett, and Williams, 1978:30).[7] In replicating three Stouffer items in 1973, Nunn, Crockett, and Williams found 20% calling Communists in government a "great danger" where Stouffer had found 33% expressing this degree of alarm; for Communists in defense plants the decline was from 39% to 21%; for Communists in college teaching, however, the decline was smaller—from 32% to 26%—even though the data in Table 1 show the public to have become far less willing to fire Communist teachers (Stouffer codebook; personal communication with J. Allen Williams, 1983).

What happened sometime during the late 1960s and early 1970s, then, was a notable decline in concern over domestic Communism, and this seems to be related to an increased willingness to tolerate Communist expression, even as the increased concern over subversion by domestic Communists presumably led to a decreased tolerance in the decade after World War II. This observation accords well with common sense—it was during the late 1960s and early 1970s that various anti-Communist measures adopted in the McCarthy era were calmly dismantled by the courts and Congress to remarkably little protest. As concern diminished, tolerance for Communist speech rose, apparently to a sort of plateau at about the level achieved during World War II when domestic Communism also seemed relatively benign. It has remained at that level ever since.

The data in Table 6 help to illustrate these trends. They reflect the amount of press attention given domestic Communism over the last 45 years. Substantial attention in the immediate prewar years dwindled during the war to almost nothing. A crescendo after 1945 peaked between 1950 (the year of Korea and the McCarran Act) and 1954, McCarthy's (and Stouffer's) year of maximum attention. The table also documents the oft-forgotten fact that substantial press attention to the issue (reflecting in part various anti-Communist crusading movements of the time) lasted until well into the 1960s. Finally, attention plummeted in the late 1960s to levels not seen since 1943; so when researchers again turned their attention to civil liberties attitudes in 1972, domestic Communism had become one of the great nonissues of American politics.[8]

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7. Actually, the difference is probably even greater. Stouffer asked if these conversations had occurred "in the last week or so"; Nunn, Crockett, and Williams asked about "the last few weeks or so." Both numbers seem unrealistically high.

8. It does not seem possible to determine exactly when in the period between the early 1960s and 1972 the shift took place, but some evidence suggests it may have been mostly concentrated in the early 1970s. A survey in 1965 found 89% feeling that members of the Communist party do more harm than good to "American life"; in 1969 this still held at

Table 6. Items in the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature

	Communism– US	Communist Party–US		Communism– US	Communist Party–US
1940	26	16	1963	7	5
1941	38	11	1964	14	9
1942	12	2	1965	20	9
1943	2	6	1966	10	8
1944	10	6	1967	10	4
1945	9	8	1968	6	4
1946	16	14	1969	3	4
1947	58	17	1970	5	2
1948	62	21	1971	1	3
1949	73	18	1972	0	1
1950	146	12	1973	0	5
1951	58	29	1974	0	1
1952	80	7	1975	0	2
1953	144	15	1976	0	0
1954	170	33	1977	0	2
1955	86	21	1978	0	2
1956	23	32	1979	0	0
1957	29	34	1980	0	5
1958	19	6	1981	0	4
1959	27	11	1982	0	3
1960	25	3	1983	0	5
1961	37	15	1984	0	3
1962	30	9	1985	1	0

To a degree these observations applying comparisons in trend data are in agreement with the conclusion of Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus, who mostly rely on the analysis of a single survey: "tolerance . . . of communists has increased primarily because they are not perceived as less dangerous and threatening than they were in the 1950s" (1979b:789). One of the factors they find "most strongly and consis-

85%, but by 1973 it had dropped to 72% (Erskine and Siegel, 1975:26). Some fragmentary additional evidence can be arrayed. On national surveys conducted in 1970, some rather strongly intolerant opinion was voiced: 52% would ban "newspapers which preach revolution" (Erskine and Siegel, 1975:25), while 53% would not allow "books attacking our system of government" and 62% would not allow "speeches against God" (Wilson, 1975:71). Variations in question wording make comparison exceedingly difficult, but these numbers do seem quite high compared to the 1972 figures in Table 1 and thus suggest a considerable shift in the 1970–72 period. See also Jennings and Niemi, 1981:414.

tently related to tolerance'' is ''perceptions of threat'': ''the greater the
perceived threat from a group, the more likely a person is to be intoler-
ant of the group'' (1982:251).[9] However, the method Sullivan, Piere-
son, and Marcus use to arrive at this conclusion is less than convinc-
ing. They measure perceived threat not with direct questions on the
issue, but by a scale derived from a factor analysis of responses to
adjective pairs that respondents were asked to use to describe their
least-liked group. One of the six pairs on this scale, safe/dangerous,
may reflect threat, as perhaps does nonviolent/violent. But the others
were honest/dishonest, trustworthy/untrustworthy, predictable/unpre-
dictable, and good/bad.[10] Why this scale is said to be a specific measure
of ''perceived threat'' rather than, say, ''perceived badness,'' is far
from clear. Though threat may be part of the mix, the variable seems
essentially to measure degree of dislike, and to find that it correlates
tenaciously with intolerance (those who most dislike a disliked group
are also most likely to be intolerant of it) is not very surprising.

However, although the Sullivan study uses a dubious method for
measuring threat, the trend parallels explored here do suggest that its
conclusion about the importance of perceived threat is very likely to be
sound. On the other hand, this analysis parts company with Sullivan,
Piereson, and Marcus when they argue that ''citizens are now able to
point to other political groups toward which they feel more hostility,
and which they regard as more threatening'' (1982:69), or when they
assert that intolerance has ''merely been turned toward new targets''
(1979b:792). It seems, rather, that intolerance has *not* been retargeted.
Essentially, the argument seems to assume that Americans have a
certain bundle of intolerance to distribute; if the targets of that intoler-
ance cease to be threatening enough to deserve their intolerance, peo-
ple will shop around for other targets on which to vent their intoler-
ance. The analysis here, by contrast, suggests that that intolerance can
fade with the threat unless some other similarly threatening group
emerges to fill the vacuum.[11] No groups currently fill this bill—not
even those asked about on the Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus study's
list. And thus intolerance has declined since the 1950s—though the
potential for its reemergence is always there.

9. Stouffer observed the same thing, though he found it ''far from a 1-to-1 relationship''
(1955: chap. 8).
10. See Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus, 1982:187–194. All six pairs weighed in at about
the same level on the factor except for the ''predictable/unpredictable'' item, which had
a lower loading.
11. This suggests that Stouffer may have been a bit too concerned when he concluded
that intolerance may be too ''deeply rooted'' to be ''responsive to a merely *negative*
information program which minimizes the Communist risk, even if the facts should
justify such an interpretation of the risk'' (1955:193, emphasis in the original).

Conclusions and Speculations

Although hatred and perceptions of threat may never be entirely sepa-
rable, it seems useful to differentiate two kinds of intolerance. On the
one hand, one can be intolerant out of hatred or simply because one
doesn't want to hear certain things—that some races are inferior, for
example, or that America is rotten or that God is dead or that Hitler
was a saint. On the other hand, one can be intolerant because one
believes an undesirable group to be a potential practical risk; the most
dangerous would be a subversive group allied with a foreign power
whose goal is to undermine the government.

The only significant groups in recent decades which fit the second
category have been the American Nazi party, the American Commun-
ist party (and, for some, domestic Japanese during World War II), and
any groups seen to be close allies of these. The Nazis ceased to be a
realistic threat in 1945 when their foreign ally was defeated, and the
evidence suggests that the fear of domestic Communism waned sub-
stantially after the 1950s, leading, sensibly enough, to an increase in
tolerance. No foreign-related groups of that sort have emerged toward
which one can redirect one's fear-induced intolerance.[12]

This dynamic seems to be the dominating one in tolerance levels as
usually measured in the polls. As the fear of Communism has waxed
and waned, not only has tolerance of domestic Communists changed,
but tolerance of other political groups like Socialists (seen to be associ-
ated by the public) has apparently been swept along. It may even be
that agreement with certain somewhat general democratic principles
follows as part of the package, though evidence on this is extremely
fragmentary.[13] But it does seem that attitudes on tolerance move in
packs or clusters. As fear of a putatively subversive group changes,
attitudes about tolerating that group change in consonance, and toler-

12. To a degree, the relative intolerance of the early 1950s might be seen as a sort of
induced war situation. During war, civil liberties concerning the enemy are often sub-
stantially curtailed, and in the Korean War years many felt the United Stated was in, or
nearly in, World War III. Fear of war with the Soviet Union and (therefore) of its
domestic subversive ally continued into the 1960s, until the mellowing of the Cold War
(see Mueller, 1973: chap. 3, 1977, 1979).
13. As noted earlier, general acceptance of free speech and free press seems to have risen
between 1940 and the war years (note 5), then perhaps to have declined in the 1950s
(Table 4). Then the Nunn replication of the Stouffer study in 1973 found an increase from
32% to 70% in those agreeing that it is important "to protect the rights of innocent people
even if some Communists are not found out" (Stouffer codebooks; personal communica-
tion with J. Allen Williams, 1983). There also appears to have been a simultaneous
liberalization of opinion on another issue: "Any person who hides behind the laws when
he is questioned about his activities doesn't deserve much consideration" apparently
found notably less agreement in 1978 than in 1958, though other such "principles of
democracy" do not show much change (Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus, 1982:203).

ance levels for associated, but nonsubversive, groups are carried along with it. An analogy can be found in the study by Lipset and Schneider of the "confidence gap." They document a decline in the last two decades in confidence in institutions and in the people running them, and trace this loss of confidence to events like Vietnam, Watergate, racial difficulties, and, later, to the lackluster performance of the economy. Yet the decline in confidence is universal: it is directed not only at the presumably blameworthy leaders and institutions in politics, the military, and business, but also at such (comparative) innocents as educators, religious figures, the press, and medicine (1983: chap. 2). The phenomenon is a sort of public-opinion fellow traveling: ritualistic, considerably indiscriminate, and quite unfair.[14]

As Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus have carefully and thoughtfully noted, it should not be assumed attitudes measured on polls necessarily predict or even reflect behavior (1982:49–50, 251; see also Lawrence, 1976; Zellman, 1975; Gibson and Bingham, 1982). For example, people who say that atheists should be forbidden to speak may not be moved to do anything about it should such speeches be announced. But if this point is going to be made, it does not seem reasonable to conclude with Sullivan and his colleagues that "most Americans are intolerant of some groups" (1982:252). If Americans (1) say they sup-

14. That there may have been at least some increase in tolerance since the 1950s not linked to changed fear of domestic Communism is suggested by statistics about atheists: tolerance for them has gone up nearly 30 percentage points, as much as for Communists. Some of this may be due to the fact that religion has waned somewhat as a force since the 1950s (Nunn, Crockett, and Williams, 1978:127–139), so there may be a specific mellowing of anti-atheistic feeling separate from, but parallel to, the decline in urgent anti-Communism.

However, there is a problem in assessing this issue because Stouffer asked about "people whose ideas are considered bad or dangerous by other people. For instance, somebody who is against all churches and religion" (for an interesting dissection of this question, see Schuman and Presser, 1981:289–292). He wasn't asking so much about an atheist as about a religion-threatener, and for many people that may sound a lot like a Communist. Indeed, when he asked, "What things do Communists believe in?" the most common single response (24%) was that they were "against religion" (1955:166). Moreover, Stouffer asked the atheist questions well before he asked about Communists, and so a distinction between the two would not have been suggested to the respondents. That "religion-threateners" are substantially less desirable than "atheists" is suggested by some evidence from the Sullivan study: only 15% selected atheists as their first or second least-liked group, while fully 48% chose Communists (1982:86), yet people were almost as willing in later questions to restrict the freedom of religion-threateners as they were that of Communists.

This problem is certainly confounding, but it may not be devastating. Gallup has asked several times about voting for an atheist for president, and those favorable rose from 18% in 1958 to 40% in 1978 and 42% in 1983 (*Gallup Report*, September 1983, p. 13). Thus substantially increased tolerance for "atheists" as well as "religion-threateners" does seem to be documented. However, if there is an upward trend for atheists separate from those that cluster around the Communist issue, it is odd that there has been little or no further movement in the trend since 1972 (see note 2). Real independence should be made of sterner stuff.

port free speech, (2) say they would deny this freedom to certain groups, but (3) do nothing to prevent these groups from speaking (beyond negative mutterings when queried about it in public opinion surveys), then it seems fairest to say that their behavior is best predicted by their verbal support of the principle of free speech, and thus that they are overwhelmingly tolerant (on this point, see also Glazer and Lipset, 1955:143).

It might be useful to push this consideration one step further. In some respects it seems that the data not only fail to reflect behavior, they also fail to reflect *attitude* very well. Or, to put it directly, on questions of tolerance and civil liberties—that is, on some of the basic issues on which the theory of democracy is founded—it may be most useful for some purposes to assume that no attitude worthy of the name exists (see also Converse, 1964, 1970). Rather than concluding that "most people are intolerant," it may be best to conclude that most people have no attitude on this issue that is meaningfully measureable by public opinion polls.

Consider, first of all, the data in Table 5. Measured "opinion" on a central question about free speech has repeatedly been manipulated by some 20 or 25 percentage points by merely altering the tone of the question.[15]

A second area concerns data about attitude consistency. Much research has shown that survey respondents overwhelmingly voice agreement with statements stating democratic principles but then calmly refuse to grant these rights to noncentrist groups (Prothro and Grigg, 1960; McClosky, Hoffman, and O'Hara, 1960; McClosky, 1964). Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus stress that abstract principles and specific applications may often "bring into play competing values" and thus seeming inconsistencies are not necessarily all that unreasonable (1982:36–43; see also McClosky and Brill, 1983:431–434). This is a most useful observation, but even taking this caveat into account, there is still a great deal of data that seems quite startling. For example, the Sullivan survey found 85% in agreement with the statement "I believe in free speech for all no matter what their views might be"; yet on the *very next question* only 63% said they would allow a person to make a speech against churches and religion. It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that the "principles of democracy" so queried about are, for

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15. In further experiments on this question Schuman and Presser find that when the vague "speeches against democracy" is replaced by the somewhat more specific "speeches in favor of Communism," the forbid/not allow difference remains, though lessened somewhat. However, when the question asks about things much closer to everyday humdrum reality (showing X-rated movies, advertising cigarettes on television), the forbid/not allow difference is reduced substantially (1981:276–283; see also Hippler and Schwarz, 1986).

many, just so many civics lesson platitudes, barren of tangible content. A survey in an Orwellian world could be expected to find principles like "slavery is freedom" as emptily and mechanically accepted.

Then there is the fact that even in the McCarthy-free 1970s and 1980s, surveys have repeatedly found that over 20% of the public say they are unwilling to allow any given unorthodox group the right to speak, even when that group is as politically benign as homosexuals, people who advocate government ownership of industry and the railroads, or people whose loyalty has been questioned but deny this under oath.[16] A fair interpretation of these data, of course, would be that there is an irreducible minimum of resentment and intolerance toward any given off-center group, but the data also foster the suspicion that there is in the response to such questions a certain amount of casual caprice and amiable randomness.

Finally there is Stouffer's odd finding in the depths (or heights) of the McCarthy era that his respondents seemed to be utterly unworried either about Communism or about threats to civil liberties. Asked "What kinds of things worry you most?" less than 1% mentioned either the threat of domestic Communism or concern about civil liberties. Even when specifically asked for their worries about "political or world problems," only 6% mentioned the Communist threat and only 2% mentioned concerns about civil liberties (1955:59–70). Then when Stouffer asked "Do you happen to know the names of any of the Senators or Congressmen" taking "a leading part" in "investigations of Communism," 30% could come up with no names, and only 13% volunteered the name of more than one.[17] In a Gallup poll of March 1952 (AIPO 488), respondents were asked what they worried about. So few mentioned domestic Communism that no coding category includes that worry. When they were asked what they wanted presidential candidates to talk about that year, less than 2% mentioned domestic Communism. When asked what they hoped the next president would do "to help you or people like yourself," less than 2% mentioned Communism. When asked for "some of the things" the president should do "for the good of the country," 4% included Communism in their list. However, when they were actually given a prepared list of "things the next president may try to do" and asked to choose two or three that "would be best for you," 36% managed to select "clean out Communism in the country."

16. For example, in 1954 about 20% of the population would have an accused Communist fired from a defense job, fired from teaching college or high school, forbidden to speak, and would remove his book from the public library; when Nunn, Crockett, and Williams replicated these questions in 1973, almost exactly the same results were obtained.
17. Despite the existence of well-established data like these, commentators are *still* fond of using the word "hysteria" when referring to the McCarthy era.

Although there are other areas in which the polls show opinion to be quite volatile, it certainly seems from these considerations that the issue of civil liberties is one that enjoys little salience—it almost seems that the only time many people consider the subject is when they are being queried about it in public opinion surveys. And perhaps this is quite understandable. Intellectuals who study tolerance and civil liberties have a strong interest in free inquiry, as do members of the democratic political elite, who may conclude that free speech helps preserve their right to speak their minds when out of power. But unlike these minorities, most people never say anything that anyone else—even the most paranoid of dictators—would want to suppress.[18]

To be sure, the polls are measuring *something* when they ask about civil liberties, and the results do seem to hang together pretty well. As demonstrated above, trends in tolerance for Communist speech do follow patterns that make sense in general: people picked up the cues (domestic Communists are threatening, domestic Communists are not so threatening) and were able to deduce the current correct response to feed back to the interviewers.[19] And some other comfortable regularities have been noted in the literature—the tendency for the well-educated to be more tolerant, for example, and for the more-threatened to be less tolerant. But the polls also suggest that it may be far too grand and generous to believe there is anything like a real, tangible "attitude about" or "commitment to" or "hostility toward" civil liberties one way or the other. Even a word like "apathy," as suggested by Prothro and Grigg (1960) and McClosky (1964:374–376), may be too strong when referring to public opinion in this area, since it implies people have attitudes even if they fail to act on them. Indeed, the notion that an effective, mob-like "tyranny of the majority" could actually coalesce on civil liberties issues may well need reexamination. More to be feared is a tyranny of a few who obtain bland acquiescence from the uninterested, and essentially unaffected, many.

18. Of the 13% who told Stouffer in 1954 that they felt less free to speak their minds than they used to, almost half said "this does not bother me." Bizarrely, in the Nunn, Crockett, and Williams replication of 1973, 20% (*more* than in 1954) said they felt less free to speak their minds than they used to.
19. Other countries show shifts on such matters that are truly massive. Hitler seems to have had a fair amount of popular support while in power, but when his brutal, totalitarian regime was abruptly replaced by a democracy, the same people now found they could get along quite well in this new form of government. Spain and Portugal form more recent examples, while Czechoslovakia (1948) and Chile may furnish examples of shifts in the opposite direction. It is the message of the classic film documentary *The Sorrow and the Pity* that most of the French population adjusted comfortably to German occupation during World War II. When popular opposition to a suppressive government does boil up (as in contemporary Poland) the opposition seems far more likely to be motivated by economics, religion, ethnicity, or nationalism than by concerns over civil liberties. For comparative studies of civil liberties attitudes, see Caspi and Seligson, 1983; Muller, Personen, and Jukam, 1980; Shamir and Sullivan, 1983.

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