

ALIENATION AND NEGATIVE VOTING ON A SCHOOL LEVY**Dwight D. Dean and Alberta Y. Jordon Woods, Iowa State University**

PROBLEM. Providing education for all has been firmly established policy in America for many, many years. In 1961-62, 72.1 percent of school bond elections resulted in approval; in 1966-67 the rate was 66.6%; in 1971-72, 47.0% and in 1976-77, 55.6% (Grant & Eiden, 1981 75). This study was undertaken to determine the effect of both social structural and social psychological variables on negative voting on a school levy in a midwest industrial-type city of 42,000. It was conducted just prior to the third and finally successful attempt after two failures. It passed, in part, because the state legislature had in the meantime changed the law from requiring 55 percent approval to simple majority.

BACKGROUND

Even in Presidential elections, only about half of eligible citizens vote, the percentage having declined for several decades (Cavanagh, 1981). It is suggested that low rates of participation may reflect alienation from the political system. (Carr, 1974). Others have suggested that alienated people vote, but express their alienation by voting negatively to protest the "wrong" decisions "they" have made (Nettler, 1957; Gold, 1962; Horton & Hanson, 1961; Levin & Eden, 1962; McDill & Ridlen, 1962; Templeton, 1966; Piele & Hall, 1973). Wright (1976) did not find this to be true. Alienation has affected opposition to fluoridation (Richardson, 1963). Morris (1966) determined that alienation is a deterrent to well-child supervision (Morris, 1966). Alienation is inversely related to immunization (Gray, Kesler, & Moody, 1967). Alienation has related negatively to utilization of health services by Mexican Americans (Hoppe, Heller, 1975). Maddox (1981,295) stated "we are now in a period when the bulk of the electorate (45.4% in 1976) is alienated from politics in a very basic sense, and when nonvoters (61.5% were alienated in 1976) are no longer the system's evidence of slumbering contentment". A study of 334 women, found that alienation scores were stable over an 8-year period (Zeller, 1980).

Social background factors have also been

found related to patterns of voting (Schwartz, 1973). Voting is inversely related to social class (Reiter, 1979). Those with less education tend not to give support to school financial issues (Tebutt, 1968; Gallup, 1969). The less a voter's income, the less likely he will vote in favor of a school financial issue (Fish, 1964; Hatley, 1970; Gallup, 1969; Wilson & Banfield, 1971). Occupation, length of residence in the relevant community, having children still in the home, age, and religious affiliation are also shown related to patterns of voting (Gallup, 1969; Tebutt, 1968; Parnell, 1964; Smith, 1968; King, 1973; McKalven, 1966).

There is, of course, also a relationship between social structural variables and alienation. Alienation has been found inversely related to social status (Citrin, 1975; Rowe, 1975; House & Mason 1975). The lower the occupational status or family income the higher the level of alienation (Neal & Groat, 1974). The less educated are more alienated, (Braun, 1976; Maddi, 1979). Alienation was shown inversely related to levels of education, income, and age, (Otto & Featherman, 1975). High alienation is related to low education, and low need for accomplishment (Vredenburg & Sheridan, 1979). Martin (1976) related alienation to rural residence. Washba (1980) and Kohn (1976) found the work situation related to alienation. The lower income groups feel alienated primarily in the sense of powerlessness (Josephson & Josephson, 1962).

HYPOTHESES. Both alienation and low social status may be interpreted as low integration in society, in empirically indicated by a high degree of alienation, and specifically, higher scores on powerlessness, normlessness, and social isolation. Low integration in the community will be represented by low income, lesser education, recent residence in the community, having no children living at home, and having a "minority" religious affiliation. Catholics represent about 20 percent of the population in this community, and have parochial schools to support. Hypotheses: (1) Low integration in the society yields a negative voting response. (2) Low integration in the

community yields a high negative voting response.

PROCEDURE. The experimental design was a cross-sectional study involving 4 of the city's 60 precincts. The percentage of favorable vote was calculated for each precinct. Two sets of contiguous precincts with widely-differing favorable percentages of 38% and 59% and 50% and 62%, were selected in the hope that extraneous factors such as race, the proximity of a parochial school, a possibly more active Parent Teachers' Association, would be randomized. A table of random numbers was used to select a third of the households within each of the four designated precincts. The resulting sub-samples varied from 86 to 95 cases. Questionnaires were hand distributed and picked up by students in an undergraduate methodology course. Of 368 households selected, 60 were excluded because of such legitimate factors as too recent residency to qualify as a voter, or illness in the family. Of the remaining 308 in the sample, 252 replies were received for a response rate of 82 percent from the selected households.

A questionnaire was prepared which included Dean's scale of Alienation (Dean, 1961), selected social background variables, and questions about voting. The alienation scale was a Likert-type, scored in such a way that a high score indicates high powerlessness. This scale was selected, in part, because it is widely-used (Dean, 1980). This instrument was constructed in the social psychological tradition; "if men define things as real...", rather than the Marxian "objective" sense. Seeman (1976 has presented a comprehensive review of empirical work done from the social psychological viewpoint. For an attempt to bridge the opposing theoretical positions, see Geyer (1976) and Fischer (1966).

Four categories of voting behavior were used: voted for the school levy, voted against, did not vote on this issue, and was unable to get to the polls. The latter two response categories were inserted to provide a face-saving mechanism for probable "no" voters, since the questionnaires were, as indicated above, distributed by college students. Analysis indicated that respondents in the latter two categories did not differ significantly from the "no" voters but did differ significantly from "yes"

voters. When these two categories were combined with the "no" voters, a prediction about the outcome of the election was made: 51.3% favorable. The actual outcome was 51.2% favorable. However, for the purpose of a "pure" sample, this study will utilize only respondents from the definitely "yes" or "no" categories. This reduced the sample from an N of 269 to 224.

The sample, thus delimited, consisted of 101 males and 123 females. Mean ages were about 40 and 37, respectively. The modal occupational level was skilled craftsmen/kindred workers; the mean North-Hatt occupational prestige score was 64; 75 percent of the sample had a high school education or better. The average length of residence in the community was about 10 years. With reference to religion, 73% were Protestants, 21% were Catholics, and the rest were unaffiliated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION. Expressed as zero-order correlations, the relationship between the measured variables and negative voting was as shown in Table 1.

Only three of the empirical hypotheses were supported at the .05 level of confidence, but 9 of the 10 hypotheses except recent residency were in the predicted direction ($p = .002$).

TABLE: 1 CORRELATION OF ALIENATION VARIABLES TO NEGATIVE VOTING

($r_{.05,225} = .13$)

<i>Alienation Variables</i>	<i>Correlation</i>
Powerlessness	.22
Normlessness	.17
Social Isolation	.13
Low Education	.19
Low Income	.21
Low Occupation	.03
Recent Residency	-.18
No Children at Home	.12
Younger Age	.10
"Minority Religion"	.26

A hierarchical regression was undertaken. Recalling that the literature indicated a positive relationship between social structure and alienation, and assuming the former to be the independent variables, the social background variables were entered first in the model, and then the social psychological ones. The results are shown in Table 2.

TABLE: 2 HIERACHICAL REGRESSION OF ALIENATION WITH SOCIAL VARIABLES

(n = 224)	Hierachic Regression Coefficient	R ²
Social Variables		
Income	.208	.04
Occupation	.213	.05
Children at Home	.226	.05
Education	.260	.07
Age	.292	.09
Religious Preference	.294	.09
Length of Residence	.328	.11
Social Isolation	.348	.12
Powelessness	.367	.14
Normlessness	.368	.14

It may be noted that after the social structural variables were entered, the multiple correlation was .328 and R-squared was .108. The addition of the alienation scores increased the multiple r to .368 and R-squared to .136, respectively. The venerable sociological variables of socio economics status (SES), were of greater importance in accounting for voting behavior than the social psychological variable, alienation.

A portion of the low significance may possibly be explained by the decision to eliminate, for the sake of a "pure" sample, the 45 respondents who reported that they either did not vote on the school issue or were unable to get to the polls. As indicated above, they were not significantly different from the "no" voters, and of course the inclusion of these 45 would change the level of significance, though little if anything of practical import would be added. It would be highly desirable in future research to obtain a sample of non-voters to compare with those who do vote but who vote "against," since there have been numerous suggestions that one result of alienation is apathy about voting. Possibly rather than continuing research into personality variables (or "traits"), it would be useful to combine personality and situation variables (Argyle and Little, 1972) and/or construct an institution-related alienation scale, as Dean (1961) so long ago suggested. With so low a proportion of direction being accounted for, it is imperative that a search begin for other promising variables which might lead to more practical results.

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