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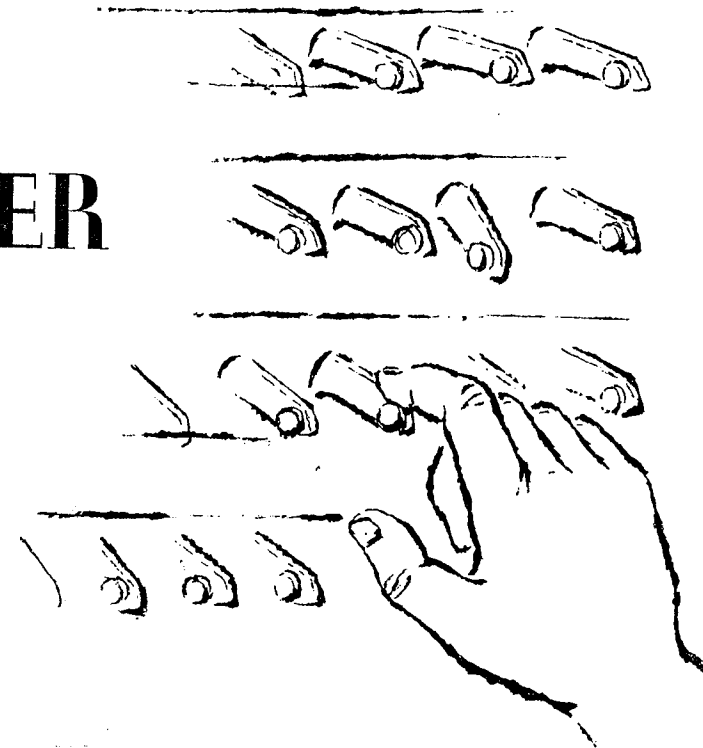
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THE AMERICAN

VOTER

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Preface

This book issues from a program of research on the American electorate that extends back to 1948. In that year the Survey Research Center conducted a national study of the presidential election, and four additional election studies followed in the next ten years. Moreover, other studies conducted by the Center in this period, although not directly concerned with voting, have added to our understanding of the national electorate.

Although we have drawn primarily on election surveys carried out in 1952 and 1956, this book is actually an outgrowth of all the political studies in which the Center has been engaged. Since numerous members of the Survey Research Center staff, many of them no longer associated with the Center, participated in those studies we would like to acknowledge their contributions here. These members include George M. Belknap, Homer C. Cooper, Burton R. Fisher, Gerald Gurin, Robert L. Kahn, Robert O. McWilliams, and Stephen B. Withey.

The program has also had the assistance of Charles F. Cannell, who has been in charge of the Center's excellent field staff throughout this period, of Leslie Kish, who has directed the sampling operations of the Center since 1951, and of Charlotte Winter, director of the Center's coding section. Rensis Likert, director of the Institute for Social Research, of which the Center is a part, has maintained a continuing interest in the program. Needless to say, the program has also depended on the services of the hundreds of interviewers, coders, IBM operators, and statistical clerks who are inevitably involved in research operations of this magnitude. Their names are seldom seen in published reports, but their work provides the basis from which all further analysis follows.

The Survey Research Center is fortunate in having a close and supportive relationship with many of the departments and schools of The University of Michigan. We are particularly indebted to an Advisory Committee of interested faculty members who worked with the

Theoretical Orientation

◇ 2

From initial efforts to understand voting behavior two major currents of thought have emerged, one primarily sociological, the other more psychological in emphasis. Much work on political behavior does not, of course, hew clearly to either of these approaches. But the most intensive research efforts have tended to contribute primarily to one stream or the other. If we seek bases for a theory of political behavior at the level of the mass electorate, we find in these alternatives the most coherent beginnings.

It has been unsatisfactory, however, to leave these two approaches as independent and competing bodies of theory. They are addressed to the same reality, and conflict between them is hardly a matter of contradictory findings. Rather, they are attacking the problem at different levels, and consequently in different languages. Each approach has had its characteristic strengths and shortcomings. To the degree that these strengths are complementary, the advantages of each should be preserved in a broader framework of theory.

The construction of such a framework would solve several problems that have harassed empirical work in the social sciences. When a field of investigation is opened, small exploratory studies turn up isolated relationships between assorted variables in the area of inquiry. These relationships have a good deal of intrinsic interest and cast a welcome light upon some corner of the phenomenon being observed. Yet as such studies multiply, the flow of unrelated findings becomes more confusing than enlightening. The conceptual tools of analysis are so varied that they defy any simple ordering by the interested reader. Increasingly, the sense of the coherent accumulation of knowledge, which the empirical approach originally seemed to hold in store, is lost.

As improved methods permit a drastic expansion of hypothesis test-

ing, pressure increases toward construction of a framework into which findings from a variety of sources may be placed. In the earliest phase of empirical effort, a concept may come into use as much because of its amenability to measurement as its relevance to the problem at hand. Theoretical contributions are small and piecemeal. But as empirical access broadens, the question becomes less what *can* be measured than what is *most strategic* to measure. A new criterion of the value of a concept may be applied: how well does it fit into a broader theoretical orientation?

The first responses to these pressures may create as many problems as they solve. A superficial approach to the consolidation of theory typically involves the restriction of explanation to one concept or a narrow set of concepts. Such "simple and sovereign" theories create "order" by simple elimination. It is true that the scientific method recommends parsimony, but this principle is most ambiguous and is subject to misuse. It is properly applied in the arbitration of conflicting interpretations, where direct test is not possible and where the opposing views require differing amounts of inference to link one datum to another. It is not intended to justify oversimplified explanations of patently complex phenomena.

If we are interested in voting behavior, it is likely that we wish to account for variation in at least two classes of events. We want to predict whether a given individual is going to vote, and which candidate he will choose. Although these are pleasantly simple dependent variables, it is clear that they represent extremely complex behavior; no single-factor theory is likely to tell us much about them. A multitude of determinants converges to produce the final behavior. A framework ample for a full-scale systematic theory must therefore be a broad one. The outlines of its structure should follow from the functions we expect systematic theory to play in the development of our knowledge.

The Functions of Theory

Understanding versus prediction. We are concerned with prediction *per se* only as it serves to test our understanding of the sequence of events leading to the dependent behavior. It is important to recognize the demand that the goal of understanding places upon the investigator. Prediction alone simply leads one to amass factors that have been found to relate to the dependent event. For instance, insurance companies want to predict the probability of automobile accidents

under varying circumstances. If someone were to discover that the length of a driver's fingers is related to the probability of accident, such a factor would be thrown into the predictive equation whether there was any *understanding* of how finger length changed accident propensity. The fact that its inclusion permitted more accurate calculation of rates would be sufficient reason for its use.

We may be able to predict accurately in the face of relatively little understanding; or again, we may understand a great deal but have only a limited capacity for prediction. In the first instance after a time our predictions may suddenly go astray, and we will be thrown back to where we started. Suppose that short fingers led to accidents because the diameter of the steering wheel was too large for ready control. Suppose further that aesthetic considerations led the manufacturers to reduce this diameter. If we had understood the original relationship, steering wheel specifications would have been coupled with finger length in our predictive theory, so that when such specification changes occurred the theory would suffer no change in predictive capacity. But if no effort has been expended to understand the circumstances intervening between short fingers and accidents, we would be likely, upon finding that finger length no longer improved our computations, to throw it out and search for replacements. Failure to arrive at an understanding of the significance of relationships makes us overlook conceptually relevant conditions that govern them.

On the other hand, we may understand thoroughly a full system of "relevant conditions" and yet be greatly limited in our predictions if this system is subject to constant intrusion of "exogenous factors." For example, the sudden illness of a presidential candidate in October could wreak havoc on the most elegant of predictive models. Of course the theorist must strive to understand the chain of events that will be touched off within the system whenever such an exogenous factor intrudes upon it. But he is not expected to include in his system the biochemical conditions that may govern the health of the candidates.

Understanding is forced to range more widely than is prediction. At the level of prediction, once we have found a variable that forecasts our chosen event, we rest content. To find another, which in turn predicts the event, or which intervenes between it and the dependent event, is superfluous. Yet for the purpose of understanding, such additional factors are invaluable, although they do not improve our prediction of the final event materially. They do enhance our grasp of the total situation and the full range of conditions that operate within it.

The problem of causality. In the first stages of inquiry, we may be satisfied with the fact of relationship, without knowing whether one term of the relationship is cause or effect, or without knowing that both are not produced by some third factor. In the ultimate phase of inquiry in certain types of subject matter, such as the physical sciences, the mathematical models that are the core of theory do not express relationships in a way that distinguishes cause from effect. But in the intermediate stages understanding seems to demand that we be able to distinguish cause from effect in our relationships.

The notion of causality, when useful, is remarkably slippery. Intuitively, we know that a time dimension is of fundamental importance to the judgment of causes. An event that occurs *after* another event cannot have caused it. But this logical dictum provides only a first step toward clarifying the concept of causality. Aristotle devoted a fair portion of his *Physics* to a discussion of the variety of ways in which the term "cause" might be understood. John Stuart Mill, in the nineteenth century, labored to specify procedures by which "true" causes might be sifted from the welter of occurrences that surround any event, but his most convincing efforts demand a degree of control by the investigator that is rare within social science. More recent evaluations of the concept of causality have disclosed many fallacies surrounding the traditional views of "laws of nature." Nonetheless, limiting the concept to refer to uniformities of sequence observed in time past, which may be expected in the absence of exogenous factors to hold in the future, remains useful to our inquiry. Unfortunately, however, reformulations of the concept give us little instruction on strategy in the approach to complex systems of events.

Let us illustrate the problems imposed by considerations of causality in the context of voting behavior with a series of case studies which, as a set, are fairly representative. We may presume that we have a complete knowledge of past events affecting these individuals. From this store of information we draw the following material.

1. *Oil worker, Texas.* Life-long Democrat but rarely voted. In 1952 heard that Stevenson wanted to give Texas oil away to all the country. Also knew that the Democratic party had been trying to push racial mixing. Did not vote in either 1952 or 1956, but was glad each time that Eisenhower won.

2. *Woman in Ohio.* Had been a Republican, but her husband was a Catholic from Boston and a strong Democrat. She did not like Truman, and admired Eisenhower. She did not know much about politics. She wanted to vote Republican in 1952 and 1956, but her husband insisted that she vote Democratic.

3. *Carpenter in Connecticut.* Was badly hit by the depression, blamed the New Deal for his problems, thought the government in Washington had gone crazy. Argued about the matter with all his friends, who were Democrats; came to feel that they were all very ignorant politically. Suffered through the Democratic administrations up to 1952, then voted triumphantly for Eisenhower. Soon decided that the Republicans were even worse, since his son was drafted into the Army. Became vitriolic about government generally. In 1956 voted Democratic.

4. *Woman, has spent life in Virginia.* Grandfather had settled there from the North after the Civil War. He had not liked Southerners, had staunchly maintained his Republican allegiances. His granddaughter is the last of the line, and the family fortunes have declined to a point of real poverty. She is disinterested in politics, but feels it is her duty to vote. She has always voted Republican. She knew little about the issues in 1956, but liked President Eisenhower. Voted Republican.

5. *Dentist, in California.* Republican by birth but came to respect President Roosevelt during period of military service in World War II. In 1948 voted Republican, disliking campaign tactics of President Truman. In 1952 was very attracted to Stevenson, did not find Eisenhower impressive. He was familiar with most of the campaign issues and favored the Democrats in most of them, particularly the foreign issues. In 1952 he voted Democratic. The first Eisenhower administration was not as bad as he expected, but he was still drawn to Stevenson and his stand on issues. He fell ill just before the 1956 election and did not vote, but was sorry he had not been able to vote Democratic.

6. *Young woman, Illinois, eligible to vote for the first time.* A typist in a business office. Her family had been Democratic, but all of the men where she worked were Republican. She liked President Eisenhower, but she did not like the men she worked for. She did not vote, but secretly hoped the Democrats would win.

7. *Wife of a brewery worker in Kansas.* She had migrated from Alabama to Kansas. Had been a Democrat, but felt that all good people in Kansas, save her husband, were Republican. Did not know much about Stevenson or Eisenhower, but felt Eisenhower was well-liked. She voted Republican in 1956.

8. *Laborer, Massachusetts.* From a Catholic family which had never been interested in politics. During the depression joined a union and became strongly Democratic. In 1952 did not like Stevenson and thought Eisenhower was a great man. Still, he felt the Democratic party was the party of the common man, and ended up not voting. In 1956 he held the same set of attitudes. He voted Democratic.

9. *Farmer, Nebraska.* Republican background. Not much interested in politics until 1946, when questions arose concerning subsidies for some of his crops. Came to like the Republican Administration in his state very much, but did not mind the Democrats in Washington. In 1954 encountered financial troubles, and policies of the Department of Agricul-

ture did not work out favorably for him, although some other farmers he knew were helped. In 1956 he voted Republican.

These brief case histories give us some idea of the problems that face us in our attempt to account for a current behavior, such as voting in 1956. The temptation is to assign to each case a cause that appeared to affect the life history at the point where the last change in partisanship occurred. The nature of the cause is fixed by the content of events at this most recent point of change. But if we deal with the matter in such simplified form, we create severe conceptual problems.

For example, we might list the following types of causes of 1956 preference for the nine cases: (1) Domestic-issue attitudes, (2) primary-group pressures, (3) personality traits of voter, (4) family political history, (5) candidate and issue attitudes, (6) family influence, (7) social pressures, (8) the depression, (9) local politics. Several characteristics of this list impress us, however. In many cases another "cause" might be given that would be equally suitable. In Case 8, for example, we might have said that membership in secondary groups like the labor union and the Catholic Church was "responsible" for 1956 political preference. In Case 9 we might have chosen family background as a cause. Even when operating with a set of facts carefully selected for relevance, there are a number of conceptual domains within which explanation can proceed for any case.

If we look at the factors across the entire list, we are impressed too by their heterogeneity. We cannot afford to build an explanatory model that treats each case as a distinctive phenomenon, with unique mechanisms at work. A systematic theory must be able to accept a set of data pertaining to any individual case and provide an ultimate prediction of behavior. The factor of family influence bulks large, over the list as a whole. Yet all nine of our cases grew up within a family circle of some sort. If we are to use the family as an explanatory tool in several instances, we must be able to deal with it in the cases where such influence looms less crucial. Similarly, Case 8 was crucially affected by the depression. Yet Case 4 experienced the depression also. Why was the political response so different?

In the face of such a variety of determining factors, we need some method of maintaining conceptual order. One such method is to restrict explanation to a set of factors of the same logical domain. If we took into account two social factors, religion and social class, we would be able to predict 1956 preference in our nine cases at a level higher than chance. Or, we might limit ourselves to political attitudes, and arrive at a somewhat more successful prediction. But either type of restriction seems to waste important information. If we deal only

in current attitudes, we ignore the fact that there is a relationship between religion and voting that any full-fledged theory of political behavior must help us to understand. A major function that a structure for theory can perform, then, is to provide us with a way to use several levels of explanation without confusion. It should give us some satisfactory way of assigning a conceptual status to any variable that we wish to include in our explanatory system.

A Structure for Theory: The Funnel of Causality

The particular explanatory problem that we have chosen has certain important characteristics. We wish to account for a single behavior at a fixed point in time. But it is behavior that stems from a multitude of prior factors. We can visualize the chain of events with which we wish to deal as contained in a *funnel of causality*.

The notion of a funnel is intended merely as a metaphor that we find helpful up to a certain point. That is, like all physical analogies for complex and intangible processes, it becomes more misleading than clarifying if pressed too far. With these cautions in mind, then, let us imagine that the axis of the funnel represents a time dimension. Events are conceived to follow each other in a converging sequence of causal chains, moving from the mouth to the stem of the funnel. The funnel shape is a logical product of the explanatory task chosen. Most of the complex events in the funnel occur as a result of multiple prior causes. Each such event is, in its turn, responsible for multiple effects as well, but our focus of interest narrows as we approach the dependent behavior. We progressively eliminate those effects that do not continue to have relevance for the political act. Since we are forced to take all partial causes as relevant at any juncture, relevant effects are therefore many fewer in number than relevant causes. The result is a convergence effect.

Now let us take a cross section of the cone of the funnel at any point, erecting a plane at right angles to the axis. Let us imagine that we can measure all events and states as they stand at the moment they flow through this plane. We would expect two results. First, we would have a congeries of variables that would be, in a peculiar and limited sense, of the same "conceptual order," that is, owing to their simultaneity. Second, this array of variables should be able to predict the dependent behavior perfectly, provided that we know the necessary combining laws.¹

¹This proviso means that we must understand the interaction of our system of factors at all cross sections that intervene between the measurement screen and the actual behavior.

One way of maintaining conceptual clarity, therefore, is to restrict our measurements to states as they exist at one "slice of time." For example, we would not say that the 1956 preference of the woman in the previously-mentioned Case 4 was "caused" in 1860 and that of Case 3 in 1954. Instead, if we chose to make 1954 our point of measurement, we might measure the so-called "cause" of Case 3 directly, but the "cause" at a coordinate conceptual level for Case 4 would lie in a certain state as it existed in 1954—strong attachment to the Republican party, for example.

We do not wish to preserve conceptual order at the price of restriction in the scope of our theory. We want a theory that will help us assess the current political effects of remote events like the depression or the Civil War. Now the funnel is bounded at its narrow end by the event that we are trying to explain. If we are dealing with the 1956 election, then we think in terms of a funnel terminating on Election Day, 1956. If we wish instead to study the 1960 election, we think of a new funnel that narrows to a point in 1960; events and states of Election Day, 1956, now represent one cross section of time four years prior to the dependent behavior. Yet, there is no fixed boundary for the funnel earlier in time. In effect, we can range freely in time back through the funnel.

To think of a funnel in this way greatly enlarges our explanatory chore, for in the ideal case we want to take measurements that refer to states not at one cross section alone, but at a great number. Each cross section contains all the elements that will successfully predict the next, and so on, until we have arrived at the final political act. Nevertheless, in such an expanded theory, we must remain cognizant of the temporal area in the funnel to which any particular measurement refers. The "conceptual status" of each measurement of an independent variable involves, as one element, location on a time dimension.

But time alone is not sufficient as an ordering dimension. The states that must be measured at any cross section in time to permit perfect prediction would be extremely heterogeneous. Since qualitative differences in content are involved, a great number of ordering dimensions could be established. Let us take note of three important ones.

Exogenous factors versus relevant conditions. First, any single cross section will be divisible into (1) exogenous factors and (2) relevant conditions. Exogenous factors are those eliminated from consideration by fiat at the outset. They include all those conditions that are so remote in nature from the content interest of the investigator that their inclusion in a system of variables, even if possible, would be undesira-

ble. A potential voter who has a flat tire on the way to the polls may fail in his intention to vote. In this instance, failure to vote would be due to certain accidental circumstances. Sufficient motivation was present and effort was expended that would normally have led to the casting of a ballot. The immediate cause of non-voting involved a flat tire. Once we have located this circumstance, we do not wish to pursue the matter further, tracing out the chain of events in the funnel that led to the mishap with the tire. We shall have no difficulty agreeing that such concerns are alien to our interest.

We will be obliged to understand what happens within our system of relevant conditions when exogenous factors impinge upon it. If "accidental" obstacles such as flat tires and bad weather block the way to the polls, we would like to be able to specify how much motivation will be required to surmount obstacles of varying magnitude, as well as the general incidence of such obstacles in the election situation. At the same time, we are not obliged to construct a theory that will indicate when and where flat tires will occur, or make long-range predictions about the weather on Election Day.

This relegation of some factors to an exogenous status, even though they affect the system at a time close to the dependent behavior, stands in sharp contrast to treatment of other forms of non-voting. In many cases, for example, the immediate cause of failure to vote may be a low motivational state readily linked to general indifference toward political matters. Here we are interested in seeking determinants of apathy that lie deeper in the funnel. A flat tire may be as efficient in preventing a vote as apathy, but the causes of apathy remain within our content interest. The causes of the flat tire do not.

The distinction between exogenous factors and relevant conditions is quite relative; that which is an exogenous factor for a narrow conceptual system may become a relevant condition within the terms of a more inclusive system. Ordinarily, the boundary is dictated by the level at which units of analysis are chosen and by the subject matter of the discipline in which investigation is conducted. But there is always room for choice on the breadth of the system that is to be employed.

Hence we may imagine that an outer ring of conditions within the funnel is left unobserved as exogenous. This fact has an important implication. As long as every cross section in the funnel has some exogenous factors, our predictions will never be perfect. *How* excellent they will be depends upon the proportion of the total cross section that such factors occupy. We can presume that this proportion increases the deeper we recede in the funnel, away from the dependent behavior.

The distinction between exogenous and relevant factors, though left to the discretion of the investigator, can be maintained with clarity under all circumstances. A given factor, if measured and treated within the conceptual system applied to the phenomenon, is thereby defined as relevant. We may make some other distinctions as well, which, if less clear-cut, will be of value in thinking about the nature of events in the funnel.

Personal versus external conditions. For some purposes it is convenient to subdivide relevant and exogenous factors according to whether or not they enjoy a subjective reality for the individual at a given point in time. We shall call *personal conditions* those events or states within the funnel of which the individual is aware, although he need not conceptualize them as the investigator does. *External conditions* are those that warrant a place in the funnel because they are causally significant for later behavior, yet which currently lie beyond the awareness of the actor.

This distinction is most useful in a consideration of the political stimuli that can affect behavior only when perceived by the actor. Suppose, for example, that we were to trace events backward in time through the funnel conceptualized for a given election. We would soon encounter a point at which the individual is unaware of the existence of the candidate-to-be, although events that will lead to that candidate's nomination and that ultimately will exert profound influence on the individual's behavior are crystallizing rapidly. At such a point in the funnel, the conceptual status of the candidate as potential stimulus object is that of an external condition. When the individual knows who the candidate is, the conceptual status shifts to that of a personal condition.

By and large we shall consider external conditions as exogenous to our theoretical system. We want to understand the individual's response to politics by exploring the way in which he perceives the objects and events of the political world. Our approach is in the main dependent on the point of view of the actor. We assume that most events or conditions that bear directly upon behavior are perceived in some form or other by the individual prior to the determined behavior, and that much of behavior consists of reactions to these perceptions.²

Nonetheless, the distinction between exogenous factors and external

² It cannot be said that *all* behavior toward a class of objects is determined by conscious attitudes concerning those objects. The area of unconscious motivation provides many illustrative exceptions. But in general, we find it fruitful to analyze behavior as a function of the individual's own "definition of the situation."

conditions will command attention at some points. For example, we shall make use of the fact that differences in legal forms that surround the conduct of elections serve to parcel the nation into electoral subcultures. It is likely that some of these legal forms affect behavior without being reacted to as objects or even cognized. In effect, they define the limits of possible behavior; they are the external "givens" of the situation, and actors make choices within these boundaries with little sense that other "givens" are conceivable. Hence many of the legal forms, as measured and related to behavior, are external conditions; yet they are not exogenous, for we have deemed it important to include them within our current explanatory system.

Tracing the antecedents of such external conditions deeper into the funnel is the obligation of institutional analysis. Why one aspirant wins the party nomination rather than another and why one legal form was instituted in preference to another are questions beyond the scope of our inquiry. Such antecedents we therefore consider exogenous. But to recognize that conditions exist in the funnel at any point in time, which are external for the actor yet which affect current or ultimate behavior, leaves our theoretical structure open for increasingly firm liaison with institutional analysis. As these bridgeheads become established, we may deal with convergent chains of external and personal conditions, neither of which will be discarded as exogenous.

Responses toward most objects are prefaced by attitudes toward those objects, which, in a proximal sense, determine the response. Therefore, the understanding of external conditions becomes more and more important as we attempt to anticipate behavior over longer and longer intervals. When we predict at short range, few events or conditions not already personal can intervene to deflect behavior to a new course. The deeper we range into the funnel, the larger the proportion of external factors with which we must cope.

Political versus non-political conditions.³ Finally, conditions in the funnel may in a rough way be classified into those that are political and those that are not. If we may locate factors as central or peripheral within any cross section, according to our interest in them and their presumed importance as determinants of ultimate behavior, then conditions that are political form the core, or central artery, running longitudinally through the funnel. This central position of the political in the funnel follows quite naturally from the fact that the subject of inquiry is political. The non-political relevant conditions form a shell around this political core. What portion of non-political condi-

³ A supplementary discussion of the rationale underlying the distinction between political and non-political conditions may be found on page 192.

tions shall also be considered relevant depends again on the scope of the investigation.

When is a specified condition political, and when is it not? In everyday thinking we readily categorize events and objects in this fashion. Various individuals, groups, public problems, and current happenings are considered to be more or less political. And the relationship of such objects to politics can be seen to change in time. A person may decide to "go into politics"; a public controversy is "made a political issue"; a group should "get out of politics."

More formally, classification can be made on either an objective or a phenomenological basis. Once again, an objective set of criteria would be most appropriate for some institutional types of analysis. A factory shutdown in Kankakee may or may not have political reverberations. An institutional approach might provide specifications of the conditions under which such a shutdown is most likely to "become political."

But whatever the objective definition of the situation, some individuals affected may link the shutdown with political objects such as parties, issues, and candidates, whereas others will not. Thus we may depend on a phenomenological definition of the degree to which an event, state, or factor is political. If the object or event is not cognized at all (an external condition), then no such determination can be made. But as soon as a condition is made personal, then determination of its political or non-political status can rest upon the individual's particular perceptions. Wherever possible, we shall treat this distinction here as it occurs phenomenologically.

We have said that at each juncture in the flow of events, effects that are not relevant for understanding the voting act are eliminated, thus creating the shape of a funnel. This fact now has a further implication; the proportion of events that are political (objectively or subjectively) increases as we take our cross sections closer and closer to the final behavior. Relevant measurements just prior to the act will be almost completely political. At a greater distance we will have to consider a larger proportion of other social and economic factors, unless we eliminate them by definition at the outset.

Process variables: communication and "political translation." Enough of the composition of the funnel has been outlined to suggest that as events approach the narrow end of the funnel, they are more completely relevant, personal, and political. Now the boundary line between the exogenous and the relevant is drawn at the discretion of the theorist. But when we use a phenomenological approach, the way in which external events become personal, and the way in which non-political events become political, depend on processes that operate

within the funnel itself. The analyst does not intervene to make a citizen aware of an external condition. Nor does he point out the political implications of objects or events that the subject perceives as non-political. These are perceptual and cognitive changes that occur naturally as events unfold. Their timing and scope depend on individual conditions and hence must be predicted within the terms of the theory itself.

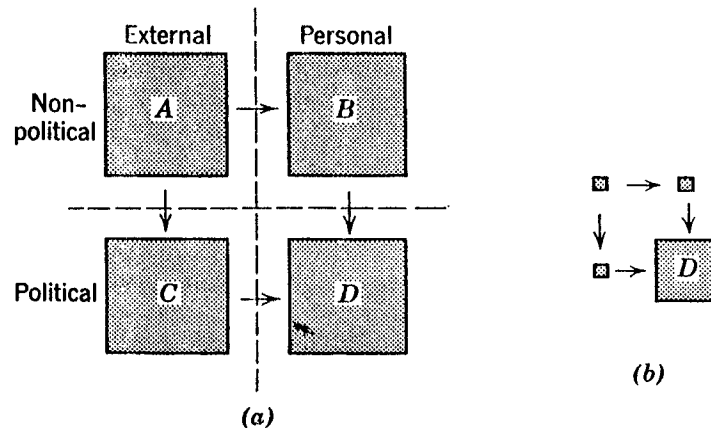


Fig. 2-1. Change in status over time of events affecting behavior. (a) The situation at a point in time remote from the behavior; (b) the situation at a point in time close to the behavior.

Figure 2-1 shows the four possible ways in which events may be categorized according to these two distinctions. An event may at some point in time be external and non-political (A); personal and non-political (B); external and political (C); or personal and political (D). The second portion of the figure provides a schematic indication of the situation just before the vote to be predicted is cast. By this point in time, personal and political elements predominate: most events and conditions that are going to affect the behavior have come into the voter's awareness and have acquired political meaning.

The mechanisms involved in these categoric changes of elements over time are critical to our understanding of events in the funnel. If the vote to be predicted is that occurring in 1956, an example of an external, non-political sequence of events (A) lying within the funnel at a point early in the 1940's would be the emergence of Dwight D. Eisenhower as a major military figure. As we move forward in time, the consequences of these events can proceed from A toward D by one of two routes. In this case, the normal route was $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow D$. Early

in the war few voters were aware of the rise of Eisenhower or would have attributed to it any political significance. By 1945, most Americans were aware of General Eisenhower. But for very few was this a fact of even potential political significance (B). During the mid-1940's, awareness led to some emotional content; for most Americans in this case the affect was positive. If we were measuring a cross section in time in 1947, it is likely that we could find a relationship between affect toward General Eisenhower shown at that time, and the individual's 1956 vote, even if traditional party preference were held constant. As Eisenhower began to receive mention as a possible presidential candidate, processes leading from B to D were set in motion. The object, Eisenhower, began to take on political coloration. This was faint, until his announcement that he would run for the Republican nomination. The affect that the individual felt for Eisenhower now was placed in contact with all the political cognitions and predispositions that had been formed independently in the core area of the funnel.

The second possible route from A to D lies through C (Fig. 2-1). In the illustration under discussion, this route was more rare. But there were undoubtedly a number of Americans who were personally unaware of the figure of Eisenhower until the point at which he broke into their consciousness as a political candidate. In this case, Eisenhower's movement into politics was an external event.⁴

The major process by which an external event becomes personal is that of communication. That part of our theory that deals with the conditions under which an object or condition moves from a non-political area of the funnel to a political area will depend upon examination of communication vehicles such as the mass media and interpersonal communication. There are other more direct processes that can effect this transformation: loss of a job in 1930 may have turned the depression from an external to a personal event without mediation of a communication system in the normal sense. But most of the beliefs that come to affect political behavior are probably developed by way of communication processes.

A non-political event becomes political by a process we shall call *political translation*. As Fig. 2-1 suggests, political translation may

⁴ Once again, we may note that determinants of movement from A to C lie in the province of institutional analysis. But, it is important to know which route has been followed. The fact that Eisenhower had been cognized for a long period of time as a non-political figure, whereas his opponent, Stevenson, was first known to most people as a Democratic candidate, must have made a critical contribution to the differences in partisan support that the two men enjoyed.

occur externally; it also may occur within the individual himself. For some people, the fact of a depression in the 1930's immediately took on political meaning, with a minimum of outside suggestion. It was perceived directly as something that the government could and should do something about. The role of the Hoover Administration was evaluated accordingly. For others, with a different set of existing perceptions regarding the potential of governmental activity, the translation was made outside, by other agents in the society. The labor unions contended that the depression was subject to governmental control; during the Hoover Administration, Democratic Party spokesmen bore down hard on the same point. Thus the fact of depression was presented to many Americans with a political meaning already attached.⁵

Strategies of Explanation

We have indicated some of the more important characteristics of the theoretical superstructure that serves as a framework to organize our thought. We could add other characteristics, and indeed as the framework begins to receive empirical content it will be important to do so. Nevertheless we have covered enough ground that we may begin to locate approaches to the study of political behavior within the structure.

It is clear that the framework proposed is an enormous one. It is perhaps better to deal with a framework challenging us to growth than with one that cramps our progress. But lest it appear that we have built too large a structure altogether, it should be pointed out that proper abstraction of concepts contributes a great economy to any explanatory venture. It is extremely difficult, in the early stages of inquiry, to arrive at concepts that are pitched at a sufficiently high level of generality. As work proceeds, the necessary abstractions begin to form out of the specificity of concrete events. The perspectives that extensive data from even three elections provide have been very helpful in this regard. This book includes a number of formulations that

⁵ The fact that anti-Republican elements in 1930 were eager to communicate a particular *type* of political translation, whereas the Republicans were equally eager to forestall such translation, does not mean that all Americans accepted the *anti-Republican* direction of the translation. If the source of the communication was negative—if the individual hated labor unions or the Democrats—the thrust of the translation might be reversed. Or the political relevance of the depression might be rejected altogether. The important point is that a key process in the funnel is that by which events or conditions move, or fail to move, into the central or political core of the funnel.

are at a far more satisfactory level of generality than could have been achieved ten years ago.

Nonetheless, the magnitude of the work to be done forces us to consider carefully the strategy of explanation that is to be followed in the development of a theory of political behavior. Our theoretical superstructure immediately poses several such questions. What cross sections in time deserve our most immediate attention? What shall we exclude as exogenous factors? How far back shall we attempt to explore in the infinite regress of antecedent factors? The two major approaches to the problem, the social and the attitudinal, represent different solutions to the problem of strategy. In several key respects these solutions are diametrically opposed. By surveying the arguments for each, we can clarify the problem of strategies a good deal.

At the beginning of inquiry, the investigator finds himself in a dilemma. On one hand, practical problems of measurement, along with difficulties in maintaining conceptual clarity before functional relationships are well understood, constitute a pressure toward closure of the system within narrow bounds. On the other hand, there is pressure to "account for variance" by an expansion of the system that will reduce "noise" from alien factors. The larger the system with which the investigator can cope, the more thorough his understanding.

The field theoretical approach. The attitudinal approach, exemplified by *The Voter Decides* (1954) represents a strategy that maximizes explanatory power while dealing with a minimum number of variables. This solution to the dilemma is accomplished by concentrating on a cross section of measurements at a point close to the dependent behavior. At such a point, the funnel is narrow. It is easier to develop a set of conceptually uniform variables that will span most of the cross section.

This mode of explanation has its intellectual roots in the movement known as "field theory," fostered in the behavioral sciences by Kurt Lewin. In essence the field-theoretical approach represents a reaction against a genetic treatment of causality. This doctrine is based upon the replacement, in the nineteenth century, of Newton's "mechanical" laws by the "field laws" of Maxwell. Mechanical laws presume action at a distance; they connect two widely separated events. In field theory, however, the field at the present moment is seen as a product of the field in the immediate neighborhood at a time just past. Of course, our metaphor of the funnel of causality fails to represent adequately all of the philosophical implications of field theory and adds other conditions peculiar to our explanatory task. But the general

field-theoretical argument may be considered an appeal for initial measurement at cross sections of the funnel that lie very close to the dependent event, with "historical" explanation proceeding backward in short steps.

The use of political attitudes to predict voting behavior hinges upon this proximal mode of explanation. It assumes that whatever effect distant events (being unemployed in 1933) may have on current political behavior (deciding to vote Democratic), this effect must be present and measurable in some form (suspicion of Republican domestic policy) just prior to the dependent event. If it is present in no form, then the effect cannot be considered to be a determinant of the event. Such an approach reduces the number of variables to be taken into account. For example, it might be possible to construct a genetic picture of an individual's relationship to his chosen political party. We might take into account the party affiliation of his parents, if any; events that had changed his allegiance from one party to another; the degree to which he had been committed to any particular party during his adult life; and hence arrive at a fair prediction of his current party choice and his strength of allegiance to it. This accounting presumes a knowledge of a multitude of past events, including many that were not themselves political but which had political effects. The field-theoretical alternative is to measure the individual's party identification at the current time, on the assumption that this is a perfect distillation of all events in the individual's life history that have borne upon the way in which he relates himself to a political party.

The characteristics postulated for the funnel serve to explain why this approach has such high explanatory power relative to accounts that are based on events lying at a point more remote from the dependent behavior. First, the exogenous factors that can intervene are reduced to a minimum. Second, the use of attitudes restricts measurement to relevant conditions that are already personal, so that we do not have to take into account the conditions of communication that govern the transition from external events to personal events. Finally, and perhaps most important, events are observed after they have received their political translations, so that the conditions of uncertainty that surround prediction of the voter's interpretation of events are excluded from the system.

This field-theoretical approach is well suited to the type of measurement employed in our survey studies of the American population. The interview represents a set of observations at a point in time close to the dependent behavior. Of course, an interview may tap other

areas of the funnel as well. When we observe personality traits or certain socio-economic characteristics, we deal with factors that have colored political perceptions for an unknown period of time stretching into the past. Or various forms of recall may be requested, a technique that permits more or less reliable measurement referring to a past time. But the most direct and accurate measurement has to do with current states.

Maximizing explanatory power in the early stages of inquiry has certain intrinsic advantages. This statement is particularly true when the dependent variable communicates little specific information. A Republican vote may represent all manner of endorsements or aggravations. Until we can command an array of attitudes that relates highly to the vote, we can sort out these intentions only by inference. Furthermore, once such an array is at hand, it provides us with a set of empirical priorities to guide research deeper in the funnel. If the components isolated analytically "in the immediate neighborhood at a time just past" have differing capacities to predict the vote, we will do well to trace first the roots of those elements that are the strongest determinants.

On the other hand, the attitudinal approach entails some liabilities as well. Measurement close to the behavior runs the risk of including values that are determined by the event we are trying to predict—that is, the vote decision. To the degree that this occurs, some elements of a system of supposed independent variables may in fact be effects rather than causes. Careful use of the technique can keep these difficulties at a minimum; but there is little way, within the normal study design, to measure precisely the confusion that may occur concerning the causal flow in the field.

A (second) shortcoming of the attitudinal approach to explanation lies in its failure to span a greater distance in the funnel. If we were interested in prediction without understanding, we could hardly improve upon such a system of attitudinal variables. It is difficult to find events deeper in the funnel that account for variance independent of the system of political attitudes. Of course, this is an excellent proof of the adequacy of the screen that has been thrown across the funnel close to the behavior.

But since we are interested in the way events unfold in the longer term, we want a set of empirical relationships that carry us deeper into the funnel and move outward from events and attitudes that are expressly political. We want to explore the political core of the funnel, particularly within the chain of personal events, at a considerable distance from the current vote. But we also want to know how

external events can become or fail to become personal, and where and how they are given political translation.

Alternate strategies. The social approach to explanation attempts prediction from points more remote in the funnel. This remoteness is to some degree temporal, although there has been no clear attempt to spell out how many of the social variables are to be conceptualized as causes in time past. Most variables of this order have characterized the individual for some considerable period of time, and their effects on political responses are certain to be distributed in time. Such variables are also removed in a cross-sectional sense from the political core of the funnel. They have no political significance save that which may be brought to them by the discovery of relationships between them and political behaviors.

It follows from the fact of remoteness that these concepts tend to account for much less variance than do attitudinal materials drawn closer to the behavior. We do not yet know how well a set of political attitudes measured in 1956 will predict a 1960 vote. It is likely that such a temporal span alone would substantially reduce the predictive capacity. Events left unmeasured in 1956 as external or non-political would be expected to move into the stream of the personal and the political in the four intervening years. Nonetheless, any measurement of political attitudes at a point in time remote from a dependent vote may well predict more effectively than an equivalent set of social variables, owing to the additional logical distance of the latter from the core of the funnel. Relationships that span these dimensions of "distance" in the funnel are particularly exciting, however, because they give us a glimpse into a "longer" chain of events. We are even willing to sacrifice some predictive capacity in order to span a greater distance in the funnel.

The social approach encounters other difficulties beyond the problem of lowered prediction. We have already remarked upon its inadequacy in handling important short-term fluctuations in the national vote division. Without a broader conceptual base, it suffers severe limitations in the long term as well. These problems arise from the frequent failure to explore in a systematic fashion what goes on in the funnel between two superficially disconnected terms of a relationship. A correlation between the fact of being a Negro and the casting of a Democratic ballot gives us interesting information, yet information pitched at a low level of abstraction. Generalizations of this sort tend to fall by the wayside with the passage of sufficient time, if not reformulated in more general terms. In the case of Negroes, for example, there is evidence to indicate that not more than a decade or two ago

the relationship was reversed, with Negroes tending to favor the Republican Party. And it seems entirely plausible that the relationship might become reversed again in the fairly near future, without upsetting any very deep-seated "laws" of social behavior.⁶

Such laws we presume to exist, and with proper phrasing they should not only outlast reversals of voting pattern but should predict them. Yet "proper phrasing" seems to require thorough understanding of the (perceptual) and (motivational) conditions that lie between such facts as race and party choice. As we speculate about these intervening terms, we are again subject to the vagaries of prediction without understanding. We have no tools with which to anticipate the circumstances under which the Negro vote will grow more or less distinctive or what other population groups might be expected to respond in the same manner. To attain a truly firm understanding, we must systematically unravel the motives that sustain the voting pattern, as well as the many other social, psychological, and political mechanisms which mediate the relationship.

⁶ Nor is the Negro a unique instance. In ensuing chapters we shall encounter other cases in which earlier sociological propositions, as formulated, have become period pieces in the span of a few years.