

THE GOLDWATER CANDIDACY, RIGHT WING CONSERVATISM,  
AND THE 'OLD-FASHIONED' AMERICAN

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# The Goldwater Candidacy, Right-Wing Conservatism, and the 'Old-Fashioned' American

By ALLAN KORNBERG, TOM FLANAGAN, GEORGE L. WATSON

American academicians, especially social scientists, have tended to be disproportionately and strongly opposed to conservatism in politics, religion, and social life.<sup>1</sup> Not unnaturally, then, they have been distressed by the marked increase in right-wing conservative sentiment and activity in post-war America, a conservatism climaxed by McCarthyism in the fifties, Goldwaterism in the sixties, and interspersed with the rapid growth of radical right-wing groups such as the John Birch society. Social science's concern with these events has been manifested in scholarly research in the area, and the past two decades have witnessed intensive study of phenomena such as the social bases of McCarthyism,<sup>2</sup> the structure and tactics of the John Birch society,<sup>3</sup> and the nature of the belief systems of anti-communist 'crusaders.'<sup>4</sup> A review of the literature indicates that such diverse examples of extreme right-wing behavior as intense antipathy toward the east and the eastern establishment, radical anti-communism, ethnic and racial intolerance, and belief in a 'conspiracy' theory of government, frequently have been explained by two related concepts, status anxiety and alienation.

Apparently, two population elements are particularly susceptible to status anxieties. First, there are the upwardly mobile ethnic-religious groups such as Irish- and German-Catholics who tend to feel insecure about their 'americanism' and recently acquired status and affluence. These groups were among the late Senator McCarthy's greatest admirers. Second, there are the traditionally dominant groups, the 'old-fashioned' Americans, 'Republican, Protestant, God-fearing, deeply religious, moral, middle-class, living in a stable, non-urban community,'<sup>5</sup> who feel lost and

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Wagner Thielens, *The Academic Mind* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1958).

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Samuel A. Stouffer, *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1955); Martin Trow, 'Small Businessmen, Political Tolerance, and Support for McCarthy,' *The American Journal of Sociology*, 64 (1958), pp 270-281; and Talcott Parsons, 'Social Strains in America (1955),' in Daniel Bell, ed., *The Radical Right* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Book, 1964), pp 210-229.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Alan F. Westin, 'The John Birch Society: "Radical Right" and "Extreme Left" in the Political Context of Post World War II (1962),' in Daniel Bell, ed., *ibid.*, pp 240-268; and Stanley Mosk and Howard H. Jewel, 'The Birch Phenomenon Analyzed,' *New York Times Magazine* (17 June, 1962).

<sup>4</sup>Raymond Wolfinger, *et. al.*, 'America's Radical Right: Politics and Ideology,' in David Apter, ed., *Ideology and Discontent* (New York: Free Press, 1964), pp 262-293.

<sup>5</sup>Seymour M. Lipset, 'Beyond the Backlash,' *Encounter*, 23 (Nov. 1964), p 14. In one of the most succinct statements of the status-anxiety thesis, Lipset has written: The groups which are receptive to status-oriented appeals are not only those which have risen in the economic structure and who may be frustrated in their desire to be accepted socially by those who already hold status, but also those groups already possessing status who feel that rapid social change threatens their claim to high social position, or enables previously lower status groups to claim equal status with their own. When there are status anxieties, there is little or nothing a government can do. It is not surprising, therefore, that the political movements which have successfully appealed to

superfluous because of the rapid social changes generated by a complex urban-industrial technology. Such individuals are disproportionately attracted by right-wing extremist organizations. Presumably, they also tended to be the most rabid supporters of Senator Goldwater's candidacy in 1964.

Both groups, but particularly, the old-fashioned Americans, tend to be marginal in that they largely are alienated from the social-political system. Alienation has been described as a process 'experienced in varying forms and degrees of intensity when certain forces block the individual's quest for so-called authentic, or true existence, when he feels himself unable to shake off a sense of cleavage, or an abyss, within himself, and between himself and other men. At bottom, the alienated man is unable to assume what he believes to be his rightful role in society.'<sup>6</sup> Because the alienated individual seemingly is unable or unwilling to adjust to the bureaucratized mechanized and impersonal environment of mid-twentieth century America, he either withdraws from a politics that is regarded as 'having departed from the path of rectitude'<sup>7</sup> or alternatively, becomes almost manic in his efforts to rediscover and/or return to 'the Golden Age of "Americanism" and the political and moral authenticity that characterized it'.<sup>8</sup>

Although the status anxiety-alienation theory is intriguing, obviously, it requires more systematic empirical research to be tenable. As Irving Howe has pointed out, 'Ralph Cordiner is not a Midwestern automobile salesman, George Humphrey is not a malaise-smitten petty bourgeois, and H. L. Hunt is not a bewildered storekeeper.'<sup>9</sup> Thus, in an interesting article, Irving Crespi has employed a pyramided national sample of Gallup data to test the status anxiety thesis by delineating the social bases of Goldwater's support for the republican nomination.<sup>10</sup> Like Crespi, we assume that enthusiasm for Goldwater as candidate is one manifestation of right-wing conservatism. However, not only do we test the notion that supposedly status-anxious groups like

status resentment have been irrational in character and have sought scapegoats which conveniently serve to symbolize the status threat. See, 'The Sources of the Radical Right (1955),' in Daniel Bell, ed., *op. cit.*, p 309.

In a satirical article, Nelson Polsby has compiled a list of all the specific groups named as potential sources of extremism by the authors of *The Radical Right*. Included are all significant parts of American society except social science professors from Ivy League schools. See, Nelson Polsby, 'Toward an Explanation of McCarthyism,' *Political Studies*, 8 (1960), p 255.

A variation of the status-anxiety thesis is the 'status crystallization' hypothesis, which posits that an individual whose status has not crystallized (i.e., a status inconsistent) tends to be unusually receptive to extremist appeals. A good review of the 'crystallization' literature is contained in Gary B. Rush, 'Status Consistency and Right-Wing Extremism,' *American Sociological Review*, 32 (Feb. 1967), pp 86-92.

<sup>6</sup>Gilbert Abercarian and Sherman M. Stanage, 'Alienation and the Radical Right,' *Journal of Politics*, 27 (Nov. 1965), p 784.

<sup>7</sup>Abercarian and Stanage, *ibid.*, p 789.

<sup>8</sup>Abercarian and Stanage, *ibid.*, p 790. According to Parsons, this longing for the past, particularly, the frontier, stems from an illusion that the frontier was a place where a man, if only he wanted, could still control his destiny:

'The essential point about the frontier is that it was the situation—in legend at least—of the predominance of self-help. Here a man—who was allegedly really a man—was most obviously "on his own." If "bad" men were about, he had to defend himself—and of course, the good women—with his bare fists and his six-shooter. He made his living "honestly"—by wrestling with nature in the form of recalcitrant soils, drought, storm, and "ornery" beasts—so that no one could say when he won that it was because he was dependent on anyone.' See Talcott Parsons, 'Social Strains in America' (1962), in Daniel Bell, ed., *The Radical Right*, p 234.

<sup>9</sup>See Irving Howe, *Steady Work* (New York, 1966), p 228.

<sup>10</sup>Irving Crespi, 'The Structural Basis for Right-Wing Conservatism: The Goldwater Case,' *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 29 (Winter, 1965-66), pp 523-543.

the old-fashioned Americans were disproportionately enthusiastic about Goldwater, but also that this enthusiasm is associated with xenophobic attitudes toward the northeast and feelings of alienation from the political system.

### Data Source and Measures

The data employed in this analysis are derived from pre- and post-election interviews with a national sample of the American electorate. The study was carried out in 1964 by the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan.<sup>11</sup> Among the questions asked was one which probed for the public's attitudes to Senator Goldwater's nomination by the republican national convention: 'Were you particularly happy that Goldwater got the nomination?' The responses have been arrayed along a dimension ranging from those who said they were happy, through those respondents who were neutral (i.e., they were neither happy nor unhappy), to those who were unhappy with the nomination of Senator Goldwater. It is felt that the public's attitudes toward the nomination of Goldwater are better indicators of right-wing conservatism than actual votes for him,<sup>12</sup> since countless empirical studies have established that voting direction largely is determined by individual identification with a political party. Illustrative of the importance of party identification as a determinant of voting preference is the finding that a substantial proportion of the individuals who stated they voted for Goldwater were either indifferent or hostile to him as a candidate.<sup>13</sup>

The independent variables we use here are those characteristics, which, according to the status-anxiety thesis, distinguish the old-fashioned American and include: living outside the northeast; protestantism; religious fundamentalism (i.e., a literal belief in the Bible); non-urban residency; self-employment; hostility toward northeasterners; and feelings of alienation.

Xenophobia toward northeasterners is measured by a self-score ranging from zero (cool) to 99 (warm) in response to the question, 'How do you feel toward Northeasterners?'

Political alienation is measured by the respondents' position on a five point 'political efficacy' scale.<sup>14</sup> The assumption underlying the use of this scale is that political alienation is inversely related to political efficacy; the more alienated the individual, the less likely is he to feel politically efficacious.

Finally, since a preliminary tabulation of the data revealed literally no support among non-whites for Senator Goldwater's candidacy, they have been excluded from this analysis.

<sup>11</sup>The data were made available to us by the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research. Although we are grateful to them for their generosity, they naturally are not responsible for the use we have made of them. Any errors in fact or in interpretation are our own.

<sup>12</sup>Crespi also used attitudes toward Goldwater's candidacy as his dependent variable. In his analysis, any person, regardless of party preference, who selected Goldwater as his choice for the Republican nomination was considered to be a Goldwater adherent. See Crespi, *ibid.*, p 525.

<sup>13</sup>See Angus Campbell, 'Interpreting the Presidential Victory,' in Milton C. Cummings, ed., *The National Election of 1964* (Washington, 1966), p 274.

<sup>14</sup>The four agree/disagree statements from which the cumulative Guttman scale was derived are: (1) People like me don't have any say about what the government does. (2) Voting is the only way that people like me can have a say about how the government runs things. (3) Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on. (4) I don't think public officials care much what people like me think.

**Findings**

The status-anxiety thesis postulates that right-wing conservative attitudes are held disproportionately by individuals with certain social characteristics. We felt that an appropriate test of the theory would be to isolate individuals who possessed these characteristics and ascertain whether the level of their satisfaction with Senator Goldwater as candidate was significantly greater than it was for other members of the sample. Also, we hoped to ascertain whether xenophobic attitudes toward the north-east and low political efficacy were associated with a preference for Goldwater.

Since party identification is not randomly distributed in the national population, we first divided the sample into Republicans and Democrats, and for each group, cross-tabulated attitudes toward the Goldwater candidacy by region. We found, as did Crespi, that attitudes varied significantly by party, but, regardless of party affiliation, southerners tended to be the most happy and northeasterners the least happy with Goldwater<sup>15</sup> (See Table 1).

**TABLE 1**  
The Distribution of Attitudes Toward Goldwater By Region With  
Party Identification Controlled

Attitudes	Republicans				Democrats					
	North-east	Mid-west	South	West	North-east	Mid-west	South	West		
Happy	6%	16%	29%	24%	2%	2%	10%	4%		
Neutral	52	53	59	46	60	66	72	58		
Unhappy	42	31	12	30	38	32	18	38		
(N=)	(120)	(167)	(90)	(70)	(164)	(240)	(258)	(141)		
	X <sup>2</sup> = 35.0				p = < .001 df = 6		X <sup>2</sup> = 45.2		p = < .001 df = 6	

Next, we 'added' a religious and an urban-rural variable by isolating Southern Democrats and non-eastern Republicans who were Protestants, and cross-tabulating their attitudes toward Goldwater with rural non-rural residence. We found that differences among rural and non-rural protestant democrats were not statistically significant. There *were* significant differences among republicans. However, the direction of those differences was opposite to that predicted by the status theory, since it was the republican respondents who lived in relatively urban areas who were happiest with Senator Goldwater (See Table 2).

**TABLE 2**  
Distribution of Attitudes Toward Goldwater Candidacy By Rural Non-Rural  
Residence With Party Identification and Religious Preference Controlled

Attitudes	Non-Eastern Protestant Republicans		Southern Protestant Democrats	
	Rural	Not Rural	Rural	Not Rural
Happy	13%	25%	9%	10%
Neutral	62	46	79	71
Unhappy	25	29	12	19
(N=)	(119)	(154)	(150)	(73)
	X <sup>2</sup> = 8.7 ~ .02 > p > .01; df = 2		X <sup>2</sup> = 2.12 ~ .5 > p > .25; df = 2	

The diminishing number of cases did not permit 'adding' the cumulated impact on attitudes toward the Goldwater candidacy of three other characteristics of the old-fashioned American: religious fundamentalism; frequent church attendance; and self-employment. However, we were able to estimate the effect on the populations

<sup>15</sup>See Crespi, *op. cit.*, pp 528 and 532.

we already had isolated of each of these variables, in turn, through the use of a non-parametric correlation which is appropriate for samples of this size. The table below indicates that only one of these correlations is significant in a statistical sense—that between attitudinal differences and religious fundamentalism for rural white southern protestant democrats. This is rather surprising, in view of the importance the literature on right-wing extremism ascribes to both fundamentalism and self-employment.<sup>16</sup> Although, among republicans, the correlation for self-employment did attain a magnitude of .20, it was not significant, and if religious fundamentalism had any effect on members of the party, it was opposite to that predicted by the literature (See Table 3).

TABLE 3

Relationships Among Attitudes Toward Goldwater, Religious Fundamentalism, Frequent Church Attendance, and Self-Employment With Party, Region, and Rural Non-Rural Residence Controlled

For	For
Non-Eastern Rural Protestant Republicans Attitudes x Religious Fundamentalism Gamma <sup>a</sup> = -.04 (not significant)	Southern Rural Protestant Democrats Attitudes x Religious Fundamentalism Gamma = .36 (significant at .05 level)
Attitudes x Church Attendance Gamma = .00 (not significant)	Attitudes x Church Attendance Gamma = .02 (not significant)
Attitudes x Self-Employment Gamma = .20 (not significant)	Attitudes x Self-Employment Gamma = .11 (not significant)

<sup>a</sup>This is a non-parametric statistic proposed by William H. Kruskal, and Leo A. Goodman, 'Measure of Association for Cross-Classification,' *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 44(1954), pp 732-64.

To recapitulate, we found that the attitudes of a national sample of white Americans to the candidacy of Senator Goldwater varied significantly only with their party identification and by region. Thus, republicans were more in favor of Goldwater than were democrats. Within these two groups, southern democrats and republicans outside the northeast were happier with Goldwater than were democrats and republicans in other regions. Insofar as other characteristics such as rural residency, religion, church attendance, self-employment and religious fundamentalism are concerned, only the latter had a statistically significant effect upon attitudinal differences, and its impact was limited to a sub-population of rural protestant southern democrats. Rural/non-rural residence did influence the attitudes of republicans, but in a direction opposite to that predicted by the status-anxiety theory of right-wing conservatism.

Our ability to test the effect of hostility toward the northeast and political alienation (as measured by a lack of efficacy) was somewhat hampered by the fact that these two variables are interval measures while attitudes toward Goldwater is an ordinal variable. However, with the use of the 'dummy variable' technique,<sup>17</sup> we

<sup>16</sup>On fundamentalism, see, for instance, David Danzig, 'The Radical Right and the Fundamentalist Minority,' *Commentary* (April, 1962), pp 291-298; and Victor C. Ferkiss, 'Political and Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism, Right and Left,' *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 34 (Nov. 1962), pp 1-12. On self-employment, see such articles as Martin Trow, *op. cit.*, and John H. Bunzel, 'The General Ideology of American Small Businessmen,' *Political Science Quarterly*, 10 (1955), pp 87-102.

<sup>17</sup>Daniel B. Suits, 'Use of the Dummy Variable in Regression Equations,' *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 45 (1955), pp 87-102.

were able to transform the dependent measure into a dichotomous variable suitable for regression analysis.

The results of this analysis do not support the theoretical notion that a preference for Senator Goldwater, as an indicator of right-wing conservatism, is associated with hostility toward northeasterners. First, xenophobia toward the northeast was minimal for the sample as a whole. Less than 5 per cent of the interviewees scored themselves as 'cold' toward people from the northeast. When, for each successively smaller sub-population of republicans and democrats, correlations were computed between hostility and a preference for Goldwater, we were unable to obtain any significant results. In no instance did a correlation attain the magnitude of .10.

The situation with respect to alienation is somewhat more complex. Among the Republican sub-populations, there are consistent positive partial regression correlations ranging in magnitude from .1 to .3 between positions on the efficacy scale and being *either for or against Goldwater!* That is, a feeling that one is politically efficacious is associated with positive feelings either for or against Goldwater while those who do not feel efficacious (i.e., they feel alienated) do not care one way or the other about Goldwater as candidate. At least in part, these data are consonant with the conclusions of Converse, Clausen, and Miller, that conservative republicans, far from being marginal citizens, are usually very active in public life.<sup>18</sup>

Among the democratic sub-groups, there were consistent positive correlations ranging in magnitude from .18 to .23 between perceptions of efficacy and being *against* the senator's candidacy. The correlations between happiness with Goldwater and being alienated (lacking efficacy) were negligible. Thus, alienated democrats were not particularly drawn to Goldwater, while those who were against him tended to feel politically efficacious.

These data offer little support for the theses that pro-Goldwater people, *at the mass level*, either hated the northeast or felt politically powerless. At least the first hypothesis may have been valid with respect to the convention delegates who actually made Goldwater the Republican nominee. However, empirical observation of their behavior at that convention would certainly cast doubt on the validity of the alienation-as-withdrawal thesis.

### Summary and Conclusions

Survey data derived from a national sample of the American public of 1964 were used to test a status anxiety *cum* alienation theory of right-wing conservatism. Responses to a question on attitudes toward Senator Goldwater's nomination were employed as the dependent measure; our assumption being that right-wing conservatives should have been extremely pleased with the selection of a 'real' conservative candidate. We used an additive model to test the theoretical notion that support for the Goldwater candidacy should have been particularly strong among a social group we have termed 'old-fashioned Americans.' A dummy variable form of regression

<sup>18</sup>The authors' claim that the belief that there were thousands of American conservatives who voluntarily abstained from participating in the political system because the republican party never nominated a conservative candidate, was simply a myth. See, Philip E. Converse, Aage Clausen, and Warren E. Miller, 'Electoral Myth and Reality: The 1964 Election,' *American Political Science Review*, 59 (1965), pp 321-336.

**TABLE 4**  
Summary of Findings

Category	Republican Percentage for Goldwater	Does Analysis Support Status Theory?	Category	Democratic Percentage for Goldwater	Does Analysis Support Status Theory
White Republicans	17%	---	White Democrats	5%	---
White Non-Eastern Republicans	21	yes	White Southern Democrats	10	yes
White Protestant Non-Eastern Republicans	19	no	White Protestant Southern Demo crats	10	no
White Rural Protestant Non-Eastern Republicans	13	no	White Rural Protest- ant Southern Democrats	9	no
White Rural Protestant Non Eastern Republicans + Religious Fundamentalism	8	no	White Rural Protestant Southern Democrats + Religious Funda- mentalism	11	yes
White Rural Protestant Non-Eastern Republicans + Frequent Church Attendance	14	no	White Rural Protestant Southern Democrats + Frequent Church Attendance	10	no
White Rural Protestant Non-Eastern Republicans + Self-Employment	16	no	White Rural Protestant Southern Democrats *Self-Employment	6	no
Xenophobia Toward Northeast Political Alienation	---	no	Xenophobia Toward Northeast Political Alienation	---	no



analysis was employed to test the relationships between right-wing conservatism, xenophobia toward the Northeast and political alienation (inferred from low efficacy). Our findings are summarized in Table 4.

The data presented in this paper strongly suggest that the 'old-fashioned' segments of the American population did not manifest disproportionate enthusiasm for the Goldwater candidacy. In particular, if we take into account the fact that a substantial number of Americans with these social characteristics tend to be republicans, and would undoubtedly have been influenced by a kind of 'my party's candidate, right or wrong, my party's candidate' sentiment, the evidence in favor of the status-anxiety theory tends to be weak. This is not to say, of course, that many Americans who were drawn to Senator Goldwater were not bewildered, angry, and resentful of the direction that American society appeared to be taking. As a theory of psychological motivation for individual behavior it may, in fact, be quite valid. But on the macro-probabilistic level at which our analysis is set, the theory does not offer an adequate explanation of group behavior.

The problem, as Philip Converse has pointed out in his important essay, 'The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics,'<sup>19</sup> is to distinguish the symbols of political discourse from the social characteristics of those who espouse them. Undeniably, the public remarks of Senator Goldwater were filled with references to the simple virtues of the old-fashioned vanishing American. Yet this does not mean that those who were moved by this type of appeal were themselves old-fashioned, vanishing Americans. On the contrary, they very well may have been modern up-to-date cosmopolites, stirred by the vision of a world that for them, at least, had long vanished.

<sup>19</sup>Philip Converse, 'The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics,' in David Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent*, (Glencoe: Free Press, 1964), pp 206-261.

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