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**Political Aspects of Social Indicators:
Implications for Research**

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Foreword

The interest of Russell Sage Foundation in relating social science research to public policy analysis and application is particularly exemplified in its program on "social indicators." As a logical outgrowth of earlier work in this field (*Indicators of Social Change*, edited by Eleanor Bernert Sheldon and Wilbert E. Moore; *The Human Meaning of Social Change*, edited by Angus Campbell and Philip E. Converse; *Indicators of Trends in American Education*, *Indicators of Change in the American Family*, *Indicators of Trends in the Status of American Women*, Abbott L. Ferriss; *Toward Social Reporting: Next Steps*, Otis Dudley Duncan), Peter J. Henriot proposes in this study that social indicators are "basically a matter of values, of interest, of policies—hence, of politics." Thus, complementing the current focus on the structural and social-psychological aspects of measuring social change, we find here a statement and research approach relating social measurement to antecedent and consequent political considerations.

Dr. Henriot reminds us that all measures of the quality of life have implications for public policy and thereby may well have political impact. He suggests that the frontiers of research be expanded so as to develop new "political indicators," to examine systematically the needs for and use of indicators, and to investigate the institutional arrangements for their production.

We hope that Dr. Henriot's statement and research agenda will stimulate both criticism and further work on the political aspects of social indicator research.

Eleanor Bernert Sheldon

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Introduction

A significant element in the recent focus on the relationship between social science and public policy has been the interest in social indicators and social reporting. Since the mid-1960's, considerable thought and activity has occurred in the field of social measurement, taking place under numerous auspices and in various environments. Today the concern for more adequate gathering, analysis, reporting, and use of social statistics is pervasive throughout the federal government and increasingly present at the state and local government levels. Outside government circles, many academic centers and research institutions are directing their resources into this field. Much more activity can be expected in the near future, since the National Science Foundation has recently been budgeting several million dollars worth of grants a year for both analytical and applied research in social indicators. It has been suggested that something of a "social movement" exists with all this lively interest and activity (Duncan, 1969).

Given this extensive dimension to the "social indicator movement," we might expect that there would be a considerable amount

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the Joint Center for Urban Studies of MIT-Harvard where the author spent 1970–1971 as a Visiting Associate.

of research exploring the specifically *political* aspects of this work. By "political" aspects I refer to questions of political values, policy impact, power consequences, administrative influences, institutionalization, and so forth. But it does not appear that research into these aspects has gone on in any serious fashion. A bibliographic search reveals only a handful of articles which approach the topic of social indicators with a sensitivity to political considerations. It may be understandable that the topic is focused on by sociologists, economists, psychologists, and systems analysts; but it is difficult to understand why it has by and large been ignored by political scientists, political sociologists, and students of public administration.

Our purpose in this study, therefore, is to suggest some research implications arising out of a consideration of the political aspects of the social indicators movement. My own perspective is that of a political scientist, but my recommendations are directed to any social scientist interested in political phenomena and in the issue of the relationship between social science and public policy.

The approach of this report is a mixture of discussion and research agenda. While assuming some previous acquaintance with the literature, we nevertheless provide background and explanation to highlight specific political aspects of the topic. In the first half of the study, we consider a framework for political research into the social indicators movement; in the second half, we outline an agenda of suggestions for particular areas of research by social scientists.

A Framework for Research

Definitions and Contexts

Perhaps the greatest frustration experienced by anyone involved in a discussion about social indicators is the vagueness of definition of the topic. Just what *are* social indicators? By offering a definition here, I readily admit an incompleteness of formulation and certainly intend no foreclosure of the argument. Yet for the sake of clarity, we need to begin with at least a general statement of what we consider significant for political research. In general, then, *social indicators are quantitative data that serve as measures of socially important conditions of society.* These indicators may measure both "objective" conditions of society and persons (e.g., health, education, crime, mobility, etc.) and "subjective" perceptions of life experiences (e.g., satisfactions, aspirations, alienation, etc.).

In offering such a definition, I take no stand on the complex (and controversial) issues surrounding the characteristics of (1) normative interest, (2) input/output difference, (3) relation to model, (4) trend (longitudinal basis), (5) level of aggregation. These specifically *technical* issues are important, but do not immediately affect the *political* aspects being addressed here.

In a critical analysis of recent developments in social indicators works, Sheldon and Freeman (1970) have differentiated three *impossible* uses of indicators and three *potential* uses. Their categorizing is helpful as an introduction to our discussion here because it sums up many of the debated issues of recent years. Among the impossible uses they see the efforts toward: (1) the setting of goals and priorities; (2) the evaluation of programs; and (3) the development of a balance sheet. At present, there is technical deficiency and underdeveloped conceptual sophistication to attempt these efforts. On the other hand, Sheldon and Freeman see more promise in the interrelated efforts to upgrade the quantity and quality of data on the structural outlines and social processes of society through: (1) improved descriptive reporting; (2) the analysis of social change; and (3) the prediction of future social events and social life. Efforts along these lines are proceeding with sufficient technique and attention to limitations.

Three recent developments in the social sciences provide a context for our considerations and point to research needs. The first development relates to the debate in the social science community over the impact of social science on public policy. Dating from at least twenty years ago with the publication of Lerner and Lasswell's *The Policy Sciences*, there has been considerable concern with the application of social science method and insight to governmental decision making. The union of knowledge and power, the role of the expert, the "value-free" character of inquiry: these and many more are critical issues for the social scientist (see MacRae, 1970). As a sophisticated social science methodology (for it is *at least* that), the social indicators approach has a potential impact upon public policy which merits research attention.

A second and related development is what David Easton has called "the new revolution in political science." In his 1969 Presidential Address to the American Political Science Association, Easton referred to the "post-behavioral" period which social scientists are entering. Characteristic of this period is a more intense concern for *applied research* and a more acute look at the *value premises* of the researchers. In the discipline of political science, for example, post-behavioralism "supports and extends behavioral methods and techniques by seeking to make their substantive implications more cogent for the problems of our times" (p. 1061). As I suggest later in this report, social scientists can and should make just such a contribution in research dealing with the social indicators movement.

Finally, a third development that provides a context is the growth in the field of public administration of interest in technical tools such as systems analysis, planning-programming-budgeting systems (PPBS), and management information systems. The social indicators project, in theory and in practice, deals with these tools. Students of public administration thus have much to explore in this area and in the related field of policy analysis.

Some Political Hypotheses

My treatment of social indicators rests on the conclusion drawn from an earlier study of a series of political questions about the premises, generation, and utilization of social indicators. The thesis of that study is that systems of social indicators "are not simply a matter of technical skill in gathering and correlating data, but are basically a matter of values, of interest, of policies—hence, of politics" (Henriot, 1970, p. 255). It follows that the political implications of various efforts presently being made or contemplated are numerous and significant, and call for serious research attention.

There is a set of interrelated hypotheses that serve to explain the particular approach taken in this report and that provide a framework for the research agenda proposed. These hypotheses express different aspects of the one general theme emphasized here and are worth setting forth at the outset of our study.

1. *The concern for "quality of life" is a highly political concern; hence measurement of the quality of life (a practical objective of social indicators work) has inevitable political implications.* In the opening chapters of his *Politics*, Aristotle notes that men come together in the polis for mere survival but remain there in pursuit of the good life. Politics, the proper activity of citizens of the polis, relates directly to the promotion of the good life. Thus it is that the measurement of that good life, that is, the quality of life, cannot be a politically neutral task. This hypothesis has at least one immediate consequence. In discussing social indicators, the distinction is sometimes made between work which is principally aimed at "understanding" and work which is directed toward "policy making," between data for social research and information for decisions. While the distinction may have theoretical validity, it breaks down in the practical order. All social indicators, because they measure the quality of life, will have implications for public policy about that quality of life, that is, will have political impact. Even purely descriptive and/or analytical data have policy

impact in the long run because they are the input for models which guide programs of social action.

Another and less theoretical way to explain this hypothesis is to point to some of the concrete ingredients in the "quality of life" concern today in the United States. That measurement in this area is not likely to be "apolitical" is immediately evident from the following examples of controversy which come to mind:

environmentalism ("Earth Day," pollution taxes)
consumerism (Ralph Nader, truth-in-advertising)
technology assessment (S.S.T., atomic reactors)
population control (Z.P.G.)
leisurism (guaranteed annual income, "TV wasteland")

It is clear that "quality of life" is alive with political values, power, and consequences.

A current social indicators project in the federal government exemplifies this political point very well. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is preparing a "social statistics publication," planned for release in early 1973. It is explicitly designed to aid in decision making by providing information for policy makers and others concerned with an overview of social conditions (see Tunstall, 1970). The data to be presented are, in the plan of OMB, to be "problem oriented" but *not* "policy oriented." But such a distinction has been and remains difficult to maintain. The principles for the selection and organization of information in the OMB publication are statements of "social concerns," broad consensual statements of social wants and social needs that are inevitably fraught with *policy implications*. Early drafts used phrases which had some minimal value content; the most recent drafts consciously try to exclude all value connotation. For example: (1) "adequate housing for all" has become "housing and quality of living conditions"; (2) "adequate legal safeguards for the accused" and "prompt adjudication of cases" has become "deposition of those brought within the criminal-justice system"; and (3) "adequacy of income" has become "absolute level of income." The word "poverty" has given way to "low income level." It is evident that presentation of data on such topics—measurements of the quality of life in this country—can hardly be isolated from both political pressures and political consequences. The experience of OMB, as it proceeds from initial assignment of the task to final publication, would seem to bear out this hypothesis.

2. *The commitment to social indicators work springs from an*

identifiable political position. In his analysis of "post-behavioralism" cited earlier, Easton has emphasized the need to acknowledge "what has been repeatedly revealed over the years, by Marx, Weber, and Mannheim, among others, namely, that all research, whether pure or applied, of necessity rests on certain value assumptions" (p. 1057). Easton is not saying that the social scientist is biased in the sense of being ideologically closed, but that he does have normative presuppositions and practical concerns. Hence it should not be unexpected that certain common traits characterize those involved in measuring and reporting the quality of life in the United States at this time. I would suggest three traits. First, there is a *belief* that the political system can work. This does not mean a complete acceptance of the system as presently constituted and operating, but at least a faith in the political category itself. Second, there is an *emphasis* on the value of rationalization of the decision-making process through an input into the political system of improved information. Knowledge is seen as an essential—though not a determinative—element in effective political action. Third, there is an *acceptance* of the goal of "promotion of the public welfare" (to use the words of the United States Constitution) as a legitimate output of the political system. This belief, emphasis, and acceptance form the political position that characterizes social indicators advocates. In describing such a position, this second hypothesis points to several of the research suggestions to be made later in this report.

In line with this hypothesis is an observation made by Harold Orlans (1971), to the effect that the preponderance of academic social scientists are on the liberal-radical side of the political spectrum. Orlans states that this fact is "one of the most obvious and sensible reasons for the reservations of a conservative Administration about making fuller use of the social sciences" (p. 34). What this might mean for development and use of social indicators at a high level of government is, of course, relevant in terms of political implications. The political linkage between social science knowledge and public policy—especially if that knowledge is affected by a particular political bias—is worth considerable attention. We will take up this point again when we discuss the need to study the actual impact of social indicators use.

3. *The generation and utilization of social indicators takes place in a thoroughly political environment.* Like the two previous hypotheses, this statement does not deny that objective efforts to develop social indicators are being made. What is emphasized is

that the social indicators task is going to be subject to and shaped by many important political variables. Significant among these variables are:

- the authoritative character of the institution or agency involved with the task (e.g., OMB or a minor HEW office).
- the agency's vulnerability to pressures (e.g., a government office or a private foundation).
- the controversial character of the topic being measured (e.g., crime or health, political conflict or leisure time).
- the immediate effects foreseen and unforeseen by persons involved in the task (e.g., budget cuts or personnel promotions).

It is simply not possible—or desirable—to isolate the social indicators task from political influences. The statement of this hypothesis leads us to see early in our study the interactions in this task: politics influences social indicators and social indicators influence politics.

The current debate in governmental and academic circles over what agency should be charged with top-level responsibility for social indicators work illustrates well this hypothesis about the political environment. Should the President be assisted by a Council of Social Advisors which would provide periodic series of social indicators to describe the state of the nation? What do the recent experiences of the HEW Panel on Social Indicators and the National Goals Research Staff mean in this debate? What about the desirability of independent status for agencies or institutions charged with social indicators tasks? We will return to these questions when we suggest research to study the institutional bases for social indicators and social reporting.

Elements of a "Movement"

We have spoken of the current interest and activity in social indicators work as a "social movement." Without pressing too strenuously the "social movement" analogy, it may be helpful here to sort out some of the elements which can be identified as influencing developments in this field. A list of these elements, by no means exhaustive, would include: demand, technique, rationale, and leadership. All have political implications.

1. *Demand:* The demand for quantitative data that serve as measures of socially important conditions of society (to use our very broad definition of social indicators) has arisen as a result of a combination of factors. First, there is the growing realization

that economic indicators of themselves are insufficient today to provide an accurate picture of the state of our society. Criticism of GNP figures is commonplace. A major statement of the dissatisfaction with national income accounts can be found, for example, in the 50th Annual Report of the National Bureau of Economic Research (Juster, 1970), the group most responsible for the earlier development of economic indicators. Second, measurement of social change has been widely stimulated in the past few years by the need felt within the social science community for more adequate trend data. The need for such data—of both "objective" conditions and "subjective" perceptions—is felt especially during a time of change and challenge manifested in urban problems, racial unrest, youthful dissent, political turmoil, and so on. Russell Sage Foundation, for example, has promoted projects to monitor social change in the areas of education, family, status of women, and health (see Ferriss, 1969, 1970, 1971, forthcoming), and to discern perceptions of the quality of American life (see Campbell and Converse, 1970). Third, the introduction into government decision making of rationalizing efforts such as PPBS has stimulated the search for output measures of social programs. Administrators, legislators, and taxpayers alike are interested in data on the outcome of large-scale expenditures in programs such as the War on Poverty or in education and health grants. Politically, these three factors have contributed to creating a demand for social indicators.

2. *Technique:* The social indicators movement is obviously assisted in its growth by the increasingly sophisticated technology—hardware and software—available to social measurement efforts. Computers have made possible information systems of impressive size and complexity. Social models and theories currently being developed open new areas of explanation which devour vast amounts of data. Daniel Bell (1968) has noted the emergence of a new "intellectual technology" as one of the characteristics of post-industrial society; he describes it as including

> such varied techniques as linear programming, systems analysis, information theory, decision theory, games, and simulation which, when linked to the computer, allow us to accumulate and manipulate large aggregates of data of a differential kind so as to have more complete knowledge of social and economic matters (pp. 157–158).

This technology will make possible new planning tools for social policy. As the technique of social measurement evolves, there is a tendency—natural and artificially stimulated—to broaden both its application and its influence.

3. *Rationale:* Another element in the social indicators movement is a rationale that could be said to underlie its many diverse efforts. This rationale locates social indicators as part of the wider effort to apply the findings of social science to the formation of social policy, an effort to make the decision-making process more efficient and responsive to informed analysis. It is a view which can be found expressed in its most optimistic fashion, for example, in the various public reports on the relationships between the social sciences and public policy (see *Knowledge into Action*, 1969). In a more critical form, this view is examined by Daniel Patrick Moynihan as an instance of "social science reformism" (1970). Strong encouragement for applied social research, coupled to the common political position of the advocates discussed earlier, provides a motivating rationale for the social indicator movement. Such a rationale clearly has significant political implications that deserve research.

4. *Leadership:* A final element in the social indicators movement can be seen in the various patterns of influence which have developed over the past several years. One way of describing these patterns is in terms of "diffusion of innovation." Donald Schon (1969) has discussed several models of diffusion as applied to technological, ideological, and intellectual change. The classical model of diffusion is the "center-periphery" model, describing a more or less tightly structured pattern. In this model, leadership is clearly identified at the center, and techniques are standardized for diffusing information outward over established networks. The more modern "systems movement" model, on the other hand, is an open process, freely structured, without sharp definitions of influence. I believe that Schon's discussion of the "movement" model focuses well on the experience of influence in social indicators work in recent years:

> The system of the movement cannot be described as the diffusion of an established message from a center to a periphery. The movement is a loosely connected, shifting and evolving whole, in which centers come and go and messages emerge, rise, and fall. And yet the movement transforms both itself and the institutions with which it comes into contact (p. 52).

A variety of leaders, a variety of centers, a variety of techniques: these characterize a "movement" in Schon's description of how new ideas catch on.

Looking at social indicators work, we can readily see signs of

this "movement" model. Raymond Bauer, Bertram Gross, Eleanor Bernert Sheldon, and Mancur Olson have certainly been among the most influential leaders, albeit each in a very diverse way. Centers of activity with widely different approaches have been Russell Sage Foundation, the American Academy of Political and Social Science, the Panel on Social Indicators of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, the Urban Institute, Wayne State University, the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan. Techniques have varied according to the expected debates between conceptualists and pragmatists, academicians and administrators, long-term developers and short-term users. Comprehensive bibliographies of social indicators work such as those produced by the Legislative Reference Service of the Library of Congress and by Iowa State University give ample evidence of these various patterns of influence (see Knezo, 1970, 1971; Beal, 1972).

An Agenda for Research

Duncan MacRae, Jr., has recently reminded political scientists that their discipline "has a role to play in systematic appraisal of the situation in which expert advice is offered, as well as in making its own recommendations and in the conduct of valuative discourse" (1970, p. 309). In urging interest in the context as well as the content of expert advice, MacRae points to the need for research which demonstrates an appreciation of the political aspects of applied social science efforts. With this reminder as a guide, I suggest two major areas for research in the political aspects of social indicators work today:

1. The first area relates to *the need to develop "political indicators"* of change in our society so that both recommendations about response to change and evaluation of the course of change may be forthcoming from a viewpoint which explicitly takes account of political considerations.
2. The second area deals with *the need to study the relationships between social indicators and public policy* so that social science research may offer a systematic appraisal of the genesis and the impact of this particular type of expert advice, its potential and its future.

The distinction between these two major areas is not sharply defined, and research in one area will not be unrelated to research in the other area. This will become evident as our research agenda is set forth.

It is true that MacRae's remark, which forms the basis of our agenda, is directed immediately to political scientists. But the implications of his twofold emphasis obviously apply to all social scientists who would adequately examine the process of public policy formation. Hence the research agenda which we recommend offers suggestions not only for political scientists but also for political sociologists, students of public administration, and all social scientists concerned with the impact of their field upon public policy.

Development of "Political Indicators"

When Raymond Bauer edited the ground-breaking volume, *Social Indicators* (1966), he clearly stated its basic assumption: "For many of the important topics on which social critics blithely pass judgment, and on which policies are made, there are no yardsticks by which to know if things are getting better or worse" (p. 20). Two important political topics are the subject of considerable social judgment these days—though that judgment frequently lacks adequate "yardsticks." These topics are public support for governmental institutions and the qualitative character of these institutions. Generally important areas for measurement by social scientists, the topics are especially critical in a time of significant challenge to the operation of political institutions and during periods of important changes in the political systems themselves. Therefore, measures of *support* and *quality* deserve serious attention from social scientists as "political indicators." Though we will treat them separately in the suggestions that follow, support and quality measures are related and several cross-references will be made.

A. INDICATORS OF PUBLIC SUPPORT. Many indicators of citizens' orientations toward their government are available. Public opinion polls, voting statistics, measurements of alienation, and memberships in organizations, all tell us something about the support or lack thereof which is shown for governmental institutions. For our purposes, however, it is possible to summarize these various indicators under the headings of "attitudinal" and "participative."

Attitudinal: What do American citizens think of and feel toward their government and political processes?

1. In their study, *The Civic Culture*, Almond and Verba (1963) distinguished among:

"system affect": generalized attitudes toward the nation as a whole, its virtues, accomplishments and the like.

"output affect": the kinds of expectations people have of treatment at the hands of government officials.

"input affect": the feelings people have both about those agencies and processes involved in the election of public officials, and about the enactment of general public policies.

Research in each of these areas is needed today to gain measures of the level of public support and the perception of the legitimacy of the political system. The Campbell and Converse study (1970) on "monitoring the quality of American life" will provide significant trend data on the aspirations, expectations, satisfactions, and dissatisfactions of the American public. Replication studies such as those generally suggested by Duncan (1969) (and specifically undertaken by him with the Detroit Area Survey) can be of great importance in discerning patterns of alienation and sense of powerlessness or their opposites among the general public. Besides general public surveys, however, special publics should also be studied, such as military personnel, ethnic minorities, college students, and housewives. The work of Robinson, Rusk and Head (1968) suggests numerous instruments for empirical surveys of political attitudes.

2. The impact upon citizens' voting choices of systems of values has been explored in studies by Wilson and Banfield on "public-regardingness" (1964, 1972). Given the importance of certain value premises, it is essential to an adequate picture of public attitudes toward government that indicators of values be constructed. Of particular significance to social scientists would be the political value premises not only of groups differentiated by income and ethnic status (as Wilson-Banfield have done) but also those of various elite strata—government leaders, politicians, scientists, educators, writers, and outstanding figures in the communications media. Value premises give an important clue to perceptions of the meaning and operational character of concepts such as "public interest" and "common good," since these concepts include —implicitly or explicitly—sets of attitudes toward government and government action. One reason why such value premises have as-

sumed greater political significance recently in discerning support of governmental institutions is the rise of influential "public interest" groups such as consumer advocates and environmentalists.

3. The political concept of "regime" comprehends a variety of historical precedents, institutional arrangements, citizenry values, and symbolic manifestations that have to do with the state. One of the key elements in the American regime is the system of civil liberties. Hence studies of attitudes toward civil liberties are always important indicators of the viability of the American regime in times of stress. Stouffer's (1953) classic study of conformity and civil liberties during the McCarthy era revealed that a low level of tolerance of political dissent characterized citizens on the right. Studies are currently needed to determine across time the truth of an oft-repeated assertion that citizens on the left (especially youth influenced by Marcuse and others) are today the ones characterized by a low level of tolerance of political views contrary to theirs. Aiming to clarify such issues, these studies would produce key political indicators.

4. Citizen endorsement of major foreign policies of the United States government is a leading indicator of political support. Trend data on popular support of wars, such as that recently gathered on the wars in Korea and Vietnam by John Mueller (1971), can reveal the constituents of both endorsement and dissent, and can attempt to explain the relationship between intensity of feeling and actual expression. Politically such indicators tell us much about the values of citizens, about bases of coalitions, and about the responsiveness of elected officials.

5. A political indicator of support which also helps describe the qualitative character of government is the measurement of citizen satisfaction with governmental services. For example, the perception of city dwellers of municipal services such as garbage pickup or street maintenance will be of as much—sometimes more—use in providing output measurements as the record of tonnage collected or potholes filled. There can be a greater political value attached to subjective perceptions than to objective measurements.

Participative: What is the level and character of influence or control by citizens over those who make major decisions affecting them?

1. Because the democratic process involves some level of active citizen participation in shaping public policy, indicators of support for governmental institutions must necessarily move beyond measures of attitudes and values to include measures of involvement

in actions directed toward influencing policy decisions. The crucial character today of this topic of participation is well put by Verba:

> The issues of participation are, to paraphrase Harold Lasswell: *Who* participates, about *what* and *how*? There is an acute crisis of participation in the contemporary United States because all three issues are being raised at once: new people want to participate, in relation to new issues, and in new ways (1967, p. 54).

More general measurement of participation can take several forms. Besides the standard indicators revealed through voting statistics, there is a variety of levels of political involvement which can be measured through surveys. In their studies of this involvement, Almond and Verba have suggested a series of indicators which include measurements of attempting to influence local government and national legislatures, following accounts of political affairs, paying attention to campaigns, discussing politics, memberships in voluntary associations engaged in politics.

2. Voting statistics in general will continue to be key political indicators; their relevance is heightened, of course, with whatever longitudinal and aggregate character they possess and with whatever sophistication of analysis they will bear. Becoming more specific, the recent lowering of the voting age to 18 means that a major new area for the development of political indicators will be available. Measurement of participation in voting, in campaigning, and in office-seeking by young people will provide key indicators of levels of support for American governmental institutions. There has been considerable discussion of late about the political alienation, antagonism, and apathy of young people. Electoral participation measurements and surveys of attitudes toward participation (especially when linked to crucial issues and/or events) will be good political indicators to tell us whether or not this discussion is based in fact. A major source of information for social scientists would be the use of periodic measurement of cohort samples, to provide over the years some indicators of political involvement by young Americans.

3. Another specific area for political indicator research is inquiry relating to the newly expanded interest in American ethnic groups. Just what is today's rising "ethnic consciousness" translated into political terms? And what relationship, if any, does it bear to earlier analyses of "voting blocs"? Political participation indicators related to these groups will be important as indicators of integration, coalition, upward mobility, or issue salience. In line

with this interest, it is noteworthy that political scientists are associated with the new Center for the Study of American Pluralism at the National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, which will be focusing on studies of ethnic groups.

4. Political participation measurements have critical relationships to party strengths in the United States. Indicators across time of such things as formal party membership, status of members, degree of support (money and time), income, and levels of success would be valuable for understanding a variety of issues relating to evolving party structures. The increasing prominence of presidential primaries reflect changing roles for parties and offer an area for development of indicators relating to party cohesion, impact of party effort on the vote, relationship of issue salience and choice of party, role of controversial candidates, and potential for third parties. A relevant indicator of future party strength and/or direction would be longitudinal measurements of the phenomenon among voters of split-ticketing. Voters who choose to divide their allegiance across party lines may be indicating more about political choice than simply an attraction to particular candidates (see DeVries and Torrance, 1971).

5. A topic that deserves both attitudinal and participative study to serve as a relevant political indicator of support of governmental institutions is the use and impact of the "protest style" in politics. This may seem to be an area of "nontraditional" political participation but Theodore Lowi (1971) has recently suggested that protests and disorder—both nonviolent and violent—have in fact contributed significantly to political changes experienced in this country in the past few decades. He argues that new opportunities for effective political participation can be seen in the present-day political disorder which has in the past been the impetus for major reforms in agriculture, labor and business legislation, and foreign policy. Sets of indicators are certainly needed which would measure the political impact of protests and disorder. Similarly, more adequate measurement and explanation is needed to study the impact of the related phenomena of (1) participation in political violence (civil riots, police repression, assassinations, etc.), and (2) willingness to engage in other "nontraditional" forms of political protest—tax evasion, for example.

B. INDICATORS OF QUALITATIVE CHARACTER. Gathering the data of voting statistics and attitude surveys is a rather routine task for social scientists. It is a more difficult task, and one which promises less certain results, for social scientists to assess the quality of

political processes and institutions. Yet we do need indicators of measurable qualities which tell us something about the government in terms of its inputs, outputs, and structural changes. Such political indicators will assist us in understanding a little more about the state of the system to which citizens relate attitudinally and participatively.

Before discussing some suggestions for research in this area, we should clarify again that measurements of *support* are by no means completely distinct from measurements of *quality*. This should be clear from the preceding section. Indeed, there are possibilities of several interrelationships, instances of which would include: (1) the impact of government actions upon citizens' attitudes, for example, new perceptions of criminal justice because of Supreme Court decisions; (2) the reaction of government institutions to public opinion, for example, changes in policies of poverty programs because of citizen dissatisfaction. Research into these interrelationships would be a valuable source for political indicators.

1. Obvious qualitative measures of governmental institutions are *input* measurements. Elements in these measures would include: taxes, size of budget, purchases of goods and services, personnel, information flows, and facilities. Provided as trend data and integrated into a systematic framework, these measures would present an important series of political indicators. Input indicators do not, of course, offer an accurate picture of what the political system actually *does* or *produces*, that is, its outputs.

2. Because of the inadequacy of input measures, attention has been focused in recent years on the *outputs* of political systems. As we mentioned earlier, emphasis upon PPBS or cost-effectiveness studies accounts for much of this attention. Certainly output measures can be key indicators of the quality of political institutions. But it is critical to note that a considerable task of basic conceptualization needs to be done to measure accurately policy outputs of American governments. Without this conceptualization, measures will be scattered, incomplete, and largely irrelevant. (This is related to the development of concepts and models which we will mention again when we discuss the study of the needs of users of indicators.) Social scientists need to research just how quantifiable political objectives are and what the potential is for intelligible and useful measurement of these objectives. Of particular interest, for example, would be the definition and measurement (to the extent possible) of "public goods" as outputs of the system, "public

goods" such as security, welfare, and the administration of justice (see Mitchell & Mitchell, 1968). A general systematic effort currently underway to examine the relationship between goals and the means of achieving them is the work directed by Nestor Terleckyj at the National Planning Association (1970, 1971).

3. One approach to measuring policy outputs is to relate outcomes to various political structures and governmental characteristics. Thomas Dye, for example, has done this in examining state policies correlated to the degree of party competition and legislative apportionment patterns (1966). In introducing a set of essays which study policy outcomes of local governments, James Q. Wilson remarks:

> The best empirical political science has, in my view, usually (not always) been that which has tried to explain why one goal rather than another is served by government, and the consequences of serving that goal, or serving it in a particular way (1968, p. 3).

As political indicators, explanations of the sort suggested by Wilson would be constructed by relating measurements of policy outcomes to community typologies, structural changes, or machine/reform differences. Longitudinal and comparative studies would demonstrate the significance of these relationships and establish reliable sets of indicators.

4. Governmental institutions in the United States are themselves undergoing changes. Some changes are basic, such as those effected in representative bodies by "one man–one vote" rulings; others are less basic but still significant, such as the increased role of staff expertise for decision-making purposes. Social scientists in the United States have the challenge to discern the extent of these changes and explain their meaning in terms of system equilibrium and institutional maintenance. There is a difficulty, however. For years the structural-functional approach in the social sciences has too often imposed a very static analysis on the study of institutions (see Olson, 1970, and Long, 1970). Today this approach is being broadened, as new efforts are made to measure change. The rise of anti-government violence, the broadening character of public dissent, the shift in the prestige of the military, the impact of perceived "credibility gaps," new patterns of intergovernmental relationships: these are some of the impacts upon governmental institutions which are effecting changes. Measurements of these impacts by social scientists—measurements integrated with adequate explanatory theory—are necessary for true perceptions of the degree and direction of structural changes.

Linkage Between Social Indicators and Public Policy

It should be clear from our earlier discussion that social indicators work has inevitable implications for public policy. Information on education, health, crime, participation and satisfaction, welfare, and environment has political potential whether the indicators work is being done for explicit policy-oriented purposes or for more general understanding purposes. One commentator urges that social indicators be studied as "institutional products and social objects":

> This study would aim at developing understanding of how particular indicators come to be generated, who uses them and *how*, the aspects of society they reflect strongly and those they do not reflect at all, the attention and inattention they receive from various publics, and the interests they sustain or threaten (Biderman, 1966, p. 145; see also Popper, 1971).

Following this recommendation, social science research can explore the political aspects of a variety of topics relating to: the needs of users, the impact of use, and the institutional organization of activity in the field.

A. NEEDS OF USERS. A tremendous amount of data is generated at the several levels of government and in institutions outside government circles. Not all of the data is usable and/or useful. Study of the real needs of consumers of the data will enlighten social scientists not only about the nature of social information but also about the character of decision-making processes for public policy.

1. The various uses of data by governmental agencies are helpfully clarified in a set of conceptual distinctions developed by Albert Biderman (1970). Biderman notes that there are three distinct uses of data which should not be confounded mentally or organizationally. The lowest or most specific level of data is "information"—data intended for use at the operational level. The next level of data is that designed for overall administration and management purposes, and is "intelligence." The third and highest level of data is termed "enlightenment," and is designed for contributing to public understanding and formation of general policy. It is this third category only which Biderman would designate as "social indicators."

The advantage of Biderman's categories is that they immediately call to the attention of the social science researcher the fact that in an organization/utilization scheme, social indicators are con-

siderably more than operational and administrative data. This fact has at least two consequences. The first is that the normal statistical output of agencies does not generally deserve the name of "social indicators," no matter how elaborately the data may be displayed. The second consequence is that the political character of social indicators is especially relevant to a policy-making function and not simply to a purely administrative function.

2. Satisfying the needs of users of social indicators will be closely related to raising the level of conceptualization of the political system. That is, as models of political systems become more sophisticated, with logical relationships among the various component variables more explicated, social indicators will have greater cogency and utility. There is need for this conceptualization in terms of: (1) noting the input points for the most efficient and politically effective communication of data to decision makers; and (2) developing output measures that rest on logically valid imputation of cause-effect relationships.

I would not go as far, however, as Kenneth Land, a mathematical sociologist, who includes as necessary in his definition of social indicators the element of explicit relationship to a model of the social system (1971). Nevertheless, it is true that if social indicators are to be used with an impact on public policy, then models of the political system need to be described more adequately. Social science research should focus on these models. Among political scientists, the work of David Easton, Karl Deutsch, and Bertram Gross comes to mind immediately. Deutsch has said that "it might be profitable to look upon government somewhat less as a problem of power and somewhat more as a problem of steering; and . . . steering is decisively a matter of communication" (1966, p. ix). Information, of course, is central to communication, and hence the information which social indicators provide is necessary to the efficient, effective management of government.

3. Systematic analysis of the utilization of social indicators should include an explanation of why policy makers accept some kinds of information and why they reject others. Offering a framework for such an analysis, political scientist Richard Rose argues: "Policy indicators will be used when their utility to policy-makers is greater than the cost of using them"(1971). He sees that the use of information does not so much imply that a particular indicator is crucial as that it has been taken into account in an overall *calculus of policy*. The variables for this calculus include: cost of obtaining information, cost of consumption, cost in value conflict,

cost of action, cost of inaction. The outcome of the calculus is the utility of the information. Social indicators will be used by experts, administrators, and politicians; the effort to market indicators to each group should begin by identifying those sources of resistance to use which are easiest to change.

Rose's analytical framework, applied to studies of social indicators use in the United States, could reveal to the social scientists some interesting instances of the applied calculus. Certainly there is much to explore in the politics of data hinted at by Bauer when he remarks that "those parties who think that a phenomenon should not enter into consideration [in public policy decisions] first attack its use, then contend that it cannot be measured, and if it is measured, attack the measurement" (1966, pp. 35–36). Research into the political aspects of use will be forwarded by case studies of social indicators needs, for example, in the fields of crime records and of public health (see Henriot, 1971).

4. The preceding three research suggestions apply to studying the needs of governmental users of social information. There is also a place for studying the needs of nongovernmental users. I do not refer here primarily to the needs of academic or business organizations (though obviously the needs of these groups also deserve attention) but to the needs of groups that are part of the large and undefined "social revolution" in this country. For example, are the data requirements of civil rights organizations adequately met by official social statistics? Are there specific kinds of social indicators which would be especially helpful if available for use by groups which represent the poor, or consumers, or environmental causes? This area for political research prompts study of not only the dissemination of social indicators but also their design and focus. We will return to this issue when we speak of the politics relating to institutional bases for social indicators work.

B. THE IMPACT OF USE. Closely related to the study of the needs of users (primarily governmental users) of social indicators is the study of actual impact of use. This is key, of course, in exploring the linkage between indicators and public policy, and deserves research attention from social scientists on a variety of counts. We outline three suggestions here. Besides the administrative questions about practices affected by indicators and about their use in evaluation programs, there are some substantive questions relating to the issue of democratic control.

1. As new technologies of social information have developed in recent years, great claims have been made regarding their impact

—potential and/or actual—on public policy. Alan Westin has summarized some of these claims about information technology:

> Information about social reality could now be so rich and detailed, policy options could be so clearly defined, the probable outcomes of alternative measures could be so accurately predicted, and the feedback mechanisms from society would be so effective that man could at last bring his full intelligence to bear on resolving the central problems of society (1971, p. 1).

An analysis of some of the politics of decision making would help place such exaggerated claims into a real-world context. Social indicators are a significant part of the new information technology, and examination of their implementation and impact upon administrative practices is called for. Empirical case studies by social scientists of various governmental agencies and jurisdictions which have begun to utilize social indicators should reveal the impact upon organizational forms, decision-making patterns, and distribution of power. Such case studies will also demonstrate that perceived need, expressed interest, real involvement, and actual impact are several administrative stages, discrete and not necessarily related in the political order. At a deeper level, these studies would offer more empirical evidence on whether or not "improved information" does in fact lead to "rationalized decisions" —and what the relation of such decisions is to the world of politics.

2. There is a strong possibility that social indicators will have an unmerited impact on policy by being used in *evaluation* programs. The emphasis at several levels of government for PPB systems, cost/benefit analysis, and cost-effectiveness studies has contributed to the demand for measures of the consequences of programs. But consequential inferences are complex and caution must be expressed lest social indicators be too readily pressed into service in evaluating programs. A model of rather sophisticated character would be required, for instance, before it were possible to state clearly that "X" amount of dollars into health program "Y" brought about change "Z" in a set of health indicators. Intervening variables, "A," "B," and "C" may very well have cause-effect relationships which need to be taken into account. As we discussed previously, adequate models or theories are strikingly absent from fields wherein social indicators are being developed. It is politically impossible (and probably undesirable) to prevent indicators from becoming "vindicators" and "indictors" (Biderman, 1966, p. 78). But it is important that evaluation efforts do not mean an

over-reliance on an as yet underdeveloped technique. Social scientists studying the use of social indicators in evaluation programs should note the need to analyze adequately any logical imputations and to avoid carefully all premature conclusions.

3. Another and much larger area of interest to the social scientist studying the political impact of social indicators is the area of control and power. This moves the study beyond merely administrative concerns into more substantive questions relating to issues of democratic government (see Springer, 1970, and Green, 1971). What are the political implications, for example, of the data-gathering on the deeds and feelings of private citizens? Does any agency —governmental or academic—have the right to *ask* so many questions and *keep* so many answers? Furthermore, is there a built-in bias of social indicators research—at least as presently constituted and pursued—toward favoring the status quo, the "establishment," the already-ruling elites? If so, then the "managed society" described recently in works by Toffler (1970) and by Gross (1970) might become more and more of a possibility. Social science research should examine this possibility, especially as it is related to the institutional question treated next.

C. INSTITUTIONAL ORGANIZATION. Because of the policy impact foreseen if systems of social indicators are included in a formal "social report," the question of the institutional base of social indicators work has political significance. Suggestions for social science research into the political aspects of this question arise from a consideration of the various *alternatives* for organization of research and reporting. We now outline the background and outcome of some of the alternatives.

1. A major question is whether efforts toward the generation of social indicators and the preparation of a social report should be focused principally inside or outside the government. A strong argument for nongovernmental involvement was made by the Behavioral and Social Sciences Survey Committee (BASS) in their 1969 report:

> The Committee recommends that behavioral and social scientists outside the government begin to prepare the equivalent of an "Annual Social Report to the Nation," to identify and expedite work toward the solution of problems connected with the eventual preparation of such a report on an official basis. Support for this endeavor should come from private foundations as well as from federal sources (*The Behavioral and Social Sciences*, p. 106).

Four reasons were given for this BASS recommendation. (1) Pre-

mature solidification of the effort in official administrative forms should be avoided, and an openness to admit failures in efforts should be preserved. These objectives are more easily maintained if the work is initially attempted on a private basis. (2) A privately sponsored social report could be more objective in analyzing social phenomena, and less likely to be caught up in partisan justification and attacks on governmental social measures. (3) In sensitive behavioral areas such as religion and politics, the government is more traditionally restrained and private initiative could more practically explore indicators in these areas. (4) Finally, social scientists outside the government might more readily be engaged in research and training related to social indicators and reports. Each of these four reasons deserves some empirical testing.

2. It is insufficient, however, to speak of social indicators efforts by "nongovernment" groups without further distinctions. The BASS report referred primarily to the role of the traditional social science groups operating outside the government—universities, research institutions, foundations—which supply information to governmental or other established power centers. To be complete, we must also speak of the need for a wider nongovernmental institutional base. Two questions must be focused on: (1) whether the institutional base allows for *formulation* of social indicators that reflect interests other than those of traditional elites; and (2) whether the institutional base allows for *dissemination* of information to a sufficiently wide audience. The political nature of social indicators gives significance to research into these questions.

3. The experience of two recent government projects on social reporting, and the current status of a third project explicitly related to social indicators, would seem to confirm both the difficulties and ambiguities of government sponsorship and the desirability of some independent status for at least the initial efforts in this field. Research is needed for further clarification of the issues. (1) The first project, the Panel on Social Indicators of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, produced *Toward a Social Report* (1969). Minimal staff was devoted to this project; the report was not reviewed by the panel of social scientists advising the task; publication was delayed until the last day of the Johnson Administration; and the report received very little comment in the press or scholarly journals. No follow-up on the project was undertaken. (2) The Nixon Administration established a National Goals Research Staff (NGRS) within the White House, with instructions to prepare an annual public report. But the first report, *Toward*

Balanced Growth: Quantity with Quality (1970) was also the last report. No reference to "annual reports" was contained in the text, and the NGRS quietly faded from sight in the White House. (3) The present project of the Office of Management and Budget to prepare a social statistics publication is experiencing delays and difficulties which are not all technical in nature. As we noted earlier in this report the OMB task cannot realistically be isolated from both political pressures and political consequences.

4. Despite the mixed experiences of government-sponsored projects, strong support continues for a "social report" issued through the government. The intent of Senator Walter Mondale's (D-Minn.) proposed "Full Opportunity Act" is to provide for an annual social report which would be: (1) issued by a Council of Social Advisers, and (2) reviewed by Congress in public hearings. Both provisions are significant for social indicators work. The Council would be a prestigious, highly visible group, staffed with professionals concerned about the quality of their social indicators. And the congressional review—by statutory mandate—would mean considerable focus on the quality of the work, both of the data and of the analysis. Since 1967 Senator Mondale has pursued his effort to elevate social indicators work to a high level in government. In hearings during the summer of 1971, he again emphasized his intention "to demonstrate the need for a statutory mandate for the development of social indicators . . ." (U.S. Congress, 1971, p. 2). At least in the minds of congressmen who must approve Mondale's proposal, that need has not yet been demonstrated as a political necessity.

5. Politically, the issue of institutional organization for social indicators work will probably best be approached by following two routes simultaneously. Government action promoting the development of comprehensive social indicators and the presentation of a social report should be encouraged and established through top-level agencies such as OMB. At the same time, groups outside the government such as the Urban Institute (Flax, 1971) should continue work on data-gathering and analysis, free to be innovative and unrestrained by immediately political considerations. Social science research should observe whether this combination of efforts will provide adequately for such requisite—though not necessarily compatible—elements as priority, access, funding, autonomy, accountability, flexibility, short-range application, and long-term development.

Conclusion

The purpose of our report has been to suggest research implications about the *context* and the *content* of the social indicators movement by focusing specifically on political aspects. The recommendations for social scientists have not been particularly new or unique. No doubt some of the implications might be explored outside of an emphasis which is explicitly political. But a political emphasis does distinguish the mixture of items in this report's research agenda because of a concern for: (1) explicating political values, (2) noting policy impacts, and (3) recognizing power influences.

Amidst the array of suggested studies I have presented here, it is possible to discern at least a few patterns of priorities.

1. It seems clear that one priority among social scientists must be the development of adequate models of the sociopolitical system. There must be a plurality of models, for no one single model could or should be sufficient to describe the American system. Economists have far out-distanced other social scientists in the sophistication of their models, and this is one of the reasons for the policy impact of economic indicators. Social scientists who see the policy relevance of social indicators will therefore be interested in seeing a refinement of social models.

2. Of the numerous projects suggested which relate to the construction of social indicators of attitudes and participation, I would suggest priority be given to study of the politically sensitive publics of youth and minority groups. In any effort to understand the future of the American system, the perceptions and actions of the young, and of blacks and Spanish-speaking, will be especially critical. For this reason, I repeat the need to assure that nonelite views play a role in the construction of social indicators.

3. Much of what is recommended in the foregoing research agenda is based on the assertion that social information does in fact have an impact on public policy, especially because it is taken into account in the deliberations of decision makers. High in priority in any research agenda, then, should be case studies of the actual use of social indicators, to provide empirical evidence of what, if any, impact really does occur.

4. Finally, some priority should be given the very difficult task of measuring the "public goods" produced by the American political system. Indicators of outputs in terms of justice, security, and welfare are as important to an understanding of the present and future of this country as any other indicators mentioned in this report. Because of their nature, "public goods" do not readily lend themselves to measurement. Their political significance is such, however, as to challenge the serious attention of the social scientist.

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