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CLASS INCONSISTENCY, STATUS INCONSISTENCY AND POLITICAL
PARTISANSHIP IN AMERICA*

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ABSTRACT

In the sociological literature, inconsistencies between status dimensions are hypothesized to produce Democratic party preference, while inconsistencies between economic classes are hypothesized to produce Republican preferences. Analysis of data from a 1965 Survey of Consumer Finances (N = 2,213) confirms the former hypothesis, but not the latter. This is in accordance with other studies which suggest that in the United States today, status variables are more important determinants of political partisanship than are economic class variables. Moreover, these data suggest that as high economic class consistency is approached, the effects of status inconsistency are increased.

CLASS AND STATUS.

One of the most important theoretical distinctions in the field of social stratification is that between class and status. A class system, to Marx (1962: 862) consisted of a set of discrete categories membership in which was defined by relationship to the means of production, viz. labor, capital, and land. Thus, the three major classes in modern society were seen as the wage-laborers, capitalists, and rentiers. In feudal society, there had been greater differentiation in property relations, and hence a "manifold gradation" of social classes. The trend in industrial society, as Marx saw it, was toward the accumulation of property in the hands of one class, the denial of property to the other, and hence the reduction of stratification systems to two classes.

Weber's (1968: 952 ff.) definition of class also focussed on the holding of property, but this dichotomous attribute was further differentiated by the market within which transactions took place relating to the resources that one possessed or wished to possess. Property or lack of property were seen as the "basic categories of all class situations," but one could be in the subordinate class--the unpropertied--or in the superordinate class--the propertied--in any of the three major economic markets: credit, commodity, or labor. Thus, "class situation" could be equated with any of three "market situations."

Weber's view of stratification systems was made more complex yet by the juxtaposition of class and status. Status

groups (stände) to Weber reflected not market position or property, but rather positive or negative social estimations of honor or prestige. Indeed, both the propertied and the propertyless can belong to the same status group. Whereas class was measured in terms of discrete social categories, status can be conceived as being measured along a series of continua. Each continuum is defined by a dimension along which differentiation of levels of prestige is made, e.g., education, occupation, ethnicity, etc.

Unfortunately, in the recent literature on social stratification, the analytic distinction between class and status has become obscured. Warner (1960) for example, combines occupation, amount and source of income, education, house type and dwelling area for his index of social class. Kahl (1965) uses prestige, occupation, possessions, interaction, class consciousness, and value orientations. Such aggregate indices obscure not only the distinction between class and status, but also the important differences between the economic markets that serve as the bases of class, and the prestige dimensions related to the distribution of status. We shall assume in the analysis that follows that differentiation between class and status, as well as within the domains of class and status, is necessary to develop a true picture of the effects of the American stratification system upon partisan affiliation.

INCONSISTENCY IN THE STRATIFICATION SYSTEM.

Although it has long been argued that an individual's positions on several status dimensions tend to reach a common

level (Benoit-Smullyan, 1944), Sorokin (1947) has argued that complete coincidence does not occur. "The stratified pyramids of the unbonded groups never consolidate in such a way that all their strata coincide." More recently, Lenski (1966) has spoken of the multiple class systems that exist in a single society. In this conceptual scheme, we would for example see one class system based upon property and another upon ethnicity. A person of a low ethnic class who was also a property owner would be viewed as inconsistent, as would the unpropertied member of a high ethnic class.

Having assumed the relevance of the distinction between class and status, we shall similarly differentiate class and status inconsistency. Following Lenski (1954), we define status inconsistency in terms of an individual's prestige on one dimension being discrepant with the prestige accorded him on a second dimension. Thus, in American society, Negroes are the recipients of very little social honor, lawyers are evaluated highly, and Negro lawyers are therefore status inconsistent. Class inconsistency, on the other hand, is defined in terms of discrepancies in property relations across economic markets. The individual who is an employer, a creditor, and producer, in the labor, credit, and commodity markets respectively, is class consistent and propertied. The person who is an employee, a debtor, and a consumer is likewise consistent, but property-less. All other combinations are class inconsistent.

STATUS INCONSISTENCY AND POLITICAL PARTISANSHIP.

Lenski's (1954) original study showed that status inconsistent people were more likely to prefer the Democratic Party, and that certain types of status inconsistency were more closely related to political liberalism than others. Specifically, the effect was manifested most strongly when low ethnic status was combined with high income, education, or occupational status. Jackson (1962) generalized from this finding when he concluded that response to the stress of status inconsistency is greatest when the inconsistent evaluations occur between an achieved and an ascribed status. Lenski subsequently (1967) incorporated this postulate into his theory. The dynamic presumed to be operating is that a person will tend to evaluate himself in terms of his higher achieved status, and will expect deference from others on that basis. Other people, however, will evaluate him in terms of his lower ascribed status. The tension that this builds into interpersonal relations will be manifested by the individual's withdrawal from social contacts (Lenski, 1962). Since the inconsistent individual cannot change his ascribed status, he may seek to change the system that causes him to be evaluated on ascriptive bases (Goffman, 1957). Studies that claim to have disconfirmed the hypothesized relationship between status inconsistency and Democratic preference tend to overlook both this dynamic and its underlying assumption, and to focus on discrepancies between achieved statuses (Kenkel, 1962; Kelly and Chambliss, 1966). We shall adopt these prior findings as postulates, and

assume both that for our purposes, the relevant inconsistencies to consider are those between an achieved and an ascribed status, and that preference for the Democratic Party is indicative of a desire to "liberalize" the social structure so that ascriptive bases of evaluation will become less relevant.

CLASS INCONSISTENCY AND POLITICAL PARTISANSHIP.

A very different dynamic is presumed to operate when inconsistencies exist between economic markets. Here, the class-inconsistent individual by definition is propertied in at least one market, and property, unlike educational attainment, can be lost through liberal or radical change in the social structure. Although they seek change to reduce the stress of inconsistency, class-inconsistent individuals are unwilling to risk losing the property they already possess through liberal or radical political activity. Rather than wishing to distribute the rewards of society more widely, they wish to see all values consolidated in all hands of those who are already somewhat advantaged. They are therefore hypothesized to be especially prone to support right-wing groups (Wiley, 1967). In the American political arena, we take this to mean increased probability of support for the Republican Party.

OVERVIEW OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

We have thus far made a series of assumptions about the nature of the social and political structure of American society, which serve as the basis for two hypotheses regarding the relationship between social stratification and political

choice.

Assumption 1. It is meaningful to differentiate between dimensions of social class, based upon position in an economic market, and dimensions of social status, based upon estimation of social honor or prestige.

Assumption 2. The rankings of any given individual need not be consistent across economic markets or dimensions of social esteem.

Assumption 3. Persons who have achieved high status on one dimension, but are assigned a low status on an ascriptive dimension will define themselves in terms of their higher status, but be defined by others in terms of their lower status.

Assumption 4. Persons who are propertied in one economic market and propertyless in another will seek consistency at the higher, rather than the lower class position.

Assumption 5. Persons experiencing inconsistencies as described in assumptions 3 and 4 will experience stress, and will attempt to reduce this stress by altering the social structure that produces it.

Assumption 6. If the inconsistency is not based upon property ownership, and therefore property is not risked through the process of social change, such change will be couched in liberal or radical rhetoric, and the manifest goal will be to raise the status of the lower strata of society. The theme of social welfare will be stressed.

Assumption 7. If the inconsistency is based upon property ownership, and therefore property is risked through the process

of social change, the rhetoric of such change will be couched in conservative terms, and the manifest goal will be to increase the property holdings of those people in the system who are already property owners. Thus, the theme of individualism rather than social welfare will be stressed.

Assumption 8. In the United States, the Democratic Party stands as a symbol of political liberalism, while the Republican Party stands as the symbol of political conservatism.

Hypothesis 1. In the United States, status inconsistency will be related to support of the Democratic Party.

Hypothesis 2. In the United States, class inconsistency will be related to support for the Republican Party.

DATA.

These hypotheses were tested using data from the Survey of Consumer Finances (SCF) conducted by the Economic Behavior Program, Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, in 1965. Economic and political data were collected from a national sample of 2,213 households representing a cross-section of the American population. Position in the commodity market was measured by ownership of automobiles, appliances, businesses, and farms. Position in the credit market was measured by automobile financing, liquid assets, house values, annual income, and income relative to the past year. Position in the labor market was measured by industry, occupation, employment status, self-employment, and criteria for getting ahead. These data were combined into indices as described below. Status

dimensions were recorded in terms of univariate nominal measures of income, education, occupation, race, religion, and ethnicity.

INDICES OF ECONOMIC MARKETS.

Each pair of variables within each economic market was cross-tabulated, and a measure of association (Q) was computed for each resulting table. The Q values were entered into a matrix which was permuted by the symmetric reordering of columns and rows to cluster the highest values along the main diagonal. Through this procedure, 2 clusters of variables emerged in each market. The interrelationships of these clusters were then studied, and one index was constructed for each economic market. (Procedures for index construction are presented in Knoke, 1970.) The indices, and their component variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Composition of Economic Market Indices.

1. Credit Market:	Liquid assets; home ownership; current income; change in income from past year.
2. Commodity Market:	Number of automobiles in family unit; number of major appliances in family unit.
3. Labor Market:	Ownership of farm or business.

The interrelationships among these indices are far enough from unity to insure that the indices are measuring different phenomena, as Table 2 shows. At the same time, the direction

Table 2. Associations (Q) Among Credit, Commodity, and Labor Market Indices.

	<u>Commodity</u>	<u>Labor</u>
Credit	.61	-.12
Labor	.12	

and magnitude of these relationships fits the notions we have about the structure of the American economy. Thus, there is a strong relationship between position in the credit market and the commodity market, and weak relationships between the labor market and both labor and commodity markets (see Segal and Knoke, 1970).

THE MEASUREMENT OF INCONSISTENCY EFFECTS.

The basic model utilized in recent studies of inconsistency effects is

$$y = f_1(x_1) + f_2(x_2) + f_3(x_1, x_2)$$

where y is the measure of effect, x_1 and x_2 are two status (or class) variables, and $f_3(x_1, x_2)$ is the measure of inconsistency (see Lenski, 1964). While neither methods nor data currently in use are precise enough to specify the three functions in question, there are methods available for demonstrating that the interaction term $f_3(x_1, x_2)$ contributes something to the explanation of y that is not gained from merely looking at the additive effects of the status variables.

The method most commonly presented in the current literature, and which shall be used in the present analysis, utilizes

the effect of the interaction of the two status variables upon the predictor variable. The interaction term cannot be equated with inconsistency effects, since indeed interaction might be attributed to a wide range of phenomena, but if one assumes additive main effects, then one can use the interaction term to estimate the inconsistency effect (Blalock, 1967). The inferences so drawn are strengthened if the direction of interaction effects is specified a priori (Blalock, 1966).

If, in a four-fold table, where the axes are defined by status (or class) differences, cell entries represent the percent of people in each cell having the characteristic under study, then the difference between the sums of the entries on the two diagonals of the table serves to indicate the interaction effect. For example, in Table 3, where the model is layed out in hypothetical terms, we would expect more Democrats in quadrants I and III, (the inconsistent quadrants), than in

Table 3. Modular Table for the Analysis of Class or Status Inconsistency Effects.

		Status I	
		Low	High
Status II	Low	Quadrant II	Quadrant I
	High	Quadrant III	Quadrant IV

II and IV. If we were dealing with class attributes, however, we would expect more Republicans in I and III than in II and IV.

Beyond the comparison of sums between diagonals, a further step is required in the analysis of interaction effects. The nature of the interaction may be such that offsetting effects appear in the two inconsistent cells, thereby showing no effect in the comparison of the diagonal (Hyman, 1966). Thus, the individual cells must be investigated as well.

RESULTS.

Table 4 presents the effects produced as a result of inconsistencies between achieved and ascribed statuses. Each cell in Table 4 represents the analysis of a four-fold table, such as Table 3. A positive cell entry signifies a surplus in the percentage of Democratic identifiers in the inconsistent cells over the consistent cells. Null entries would indicate no difference in Democratic identifiers between the two diagonals, and negative entries would indicate a surplus in the percentage of Democrats in the status consistent cells.

Table 4. Effects of Inconsistencies Between Achieved and Ascribed Statuses, as Indicated by Surplus Per Cent Democratic Party Preference.

		Ascribed Status		
		<u>Race</u>	<u>Religion</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>
Achieved Status	Education	17.0	8.0	9.0
	Occupation	7.2	14.5	3.1
	Income	9.9	8.8	7.8

As Table 4 reveals, in each instance where inconsistencies occur between an achieved and an ascribed status, status inconsistent respondents tend to disproportionately prefer the Democratic Party. This is consistent with our hypothesis. Indeed, Democratic surpluses did emerge as a result of inconsistencies between achieved statuses and between ascribed statuses, but these were of much lesser magnitude. The mean inconsistency effect (in terms of Democratic surplus) between two ascribed statuses, for example, was 2.9, as opposed to 9.5 for the data presented in Table 4. Moreover, inspection of the tables dealing with ascription-ascription or achievement-achievement inconsistencies revealed no reason to argue that the low magnitudes were due to complex, and self-cancelling interaction effects.

Table 5 presents the effects of inconsistencies between economic markets, in terms of the surplus percentage of Republican identifiers in the inconsistent diagonal. Clearly, the effects of class inconsistency on Republican preference

Table 5. Effects of Inconsistencies Between Positions in Economic Markets, as Indicated by Republican Preference.

	Market	
	<u>Credit</u>	<u>Commodity</u>
Commodity	2.9	
Labor	0.7	0.0

that are hypothesized by Wiley are not manifested in these data. These findings are not surprising in view of previous results indicating that status factors are more powerful than economic class factors in determining political party preference in America. (See Segal and Knoke, 1970.)

Since class inconsistency and status inconsistency can vary independently of each other, an attempt was made to discover whether these two dimensions, taken together, would have an effect on political party choice different than what was observed when each inconsistency variable was considered alone. Each respondent's scores in the three dichotomized economic markets were summed, producing a class inconsistency measure across all 3 markets. A score of 3 would indicate consistently low positions in all 3 markets, a score of 6 would reveal consistently high positions, and scores of 4 and 5 would reflect inconsistent scores. The univariate distribution of this index is presented in Table 6. Obviously the

Table 6. Distribution of Class Positions
Across 3 Markets.

	Index Score				
	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>Total</u>
%	32	34	30	5	101%*
N	724	760	623	102	2209

*due to rounding

majority of the sample was class-inconsistent in these terms, and only 5 per cent of our respondents were consistently advantaged across economic markets.

Within each category defined by our index, respondents were classified according to their positions on the 6 status variables, and the effects of achievement-ascription status inconsistencies were analyzed within each class.

The effects of status inconsistency on partisanship as mediated by degree of consistency on the combined classes are shown in Table 7. The entries represent the results of each 2 x 2 contingency table for the status variables in a given row. A positive entry indicates a surplus of Republicans in

Table 7. Political Effects of Class Inconsistency and Status Inconsistency.

	Class Inconsistency			
	Consis-	Inconsis-	Inconsis-	Consis-
	tency Low	tency Low	tency High	tency High
Religion				
x Education	10.5	6.0	6.0	10.6
x Income	- 5.4	6.3	2.4	31.5
x Occupation	- 2.6	22.0	13.3	18.0
Race				
x Education	12.4	8.0	18.8	25.0
x Income	7.7	13.7	86.3*	20.2
x Occupation	13.7	- 4.6	9.7	22.2
Ethnic				
x Education	-20.6	17.9	22.6	24.3
x Income	-62.9*	- 7.6	8.3	- 3.0
x Occupation	9.4	3.6	3.8	21.3

*These per cents are effected by null cells in the four-fold tables that they summarize.

consistent as over inconsistent cells. No persistent pattern emerges for all status pairings although on seven out of nine status pairings, the effects were greatest in the consistently high class positions. In fact, in all but one instance, the effect of a more advantageous class position upon status inconsistency was to increase the preference for the Democratic party among status inconsistent. The effect on preference for those in low or near low class position is identification with the Democratic Party, but this effect is neither as persistent nor of as great a magnitude.

It would appear that when class position is consistently high, status inconsistency exerts its strongest effect. When class position is low, and probably therefore more salient, stress due to status inconsistency seems to be confounded by class-originated tensions leading to less clear-cut political resolutions.

We believe that, under the particular interaction model used to identify effects of status inconsistency, this increased effect of status inconsistency results from interaction with the main effect of class position. Here we assume that specification of the particular class situation of an individual has an important bearing on the interaction of two statuses. Each of the three variables by itself is assumed to have an additive effect upon the level of partisanship: an increase in status or class results in a proportionate increase in Republican identification. Now the interaction of the two statuses produces an interaction component of preference for

the left, apparently strong enough on the average (across all class levels) to overcome the main effect of class. But by specifying the level of class (holding class constant) the main effect of class operates more strongly on consistent status pairs than on inconsistent pairs.

This is illustrated in Table 8 where b presents the main effects of Status 1, c the main effects of Status 2, and e the interaction effect (this may be a summary component of several interaction tendencies; it is located in a consistent cell to give the net interaction term a left partisans resolution). In Table 8a we assume that the entries present levels of partisanship caused by low levels of class position; here the net interaction component is thus e. In moving to Table 8b, by specifying a move from a low class position to a high class position, we assume the main effect is to increase Republicanism; but specification of a high class position interacts with the additive components of the status variables. Suppose for clarity's sake that the main effect of increasing class position is an exact doubling of all levels of partisanship in all four cells. This doubling will effect the net interaction component. Hence the effect on status inconsistency of high class position compared to low class position is a greater preference for the party of the left, as measured by the net component, $2e$. We suspect that class interacts directly with status pairings, primarily on the consistent cells in higher class positions, and thus causes a stronger Democratic preference among high class status inconsistent.

Table 8

		8a			8b
		Low Class Position		High Class Position	
		Status 2		Status 2	
		Hi	Lo	Hi	Lo
S t a t u s	Hi	b+c+e	b	2b+2c+2e	2b
	Lo	c		2c	
		1		1	

Inconsistency:
 $(b+c+e+0) - (c+b) = e$

$$(2b+2c+2e+0) - (2c+2b) = 2e$$

A final analysis was made to consider the effect of class position upon persons of consistent status. In this instance, the consistent high status cell (quadrant IV) of each 2 x 2 contingency table for pairs of status variables was isolated and the percentage of Republicans in that cell under each class condition was computed. These data are presented in Table 9. The effect of increasingly greater class standing is identical regardless of the status variables used: among persons with consistently high status attributes, Republicanism increases proportionately to class position. Persons who are high on all three markets and both status variables obtain the highest proportion of Republican partisanship, often a majority of the persons in that position.

Table 9. Per Cent Republican Among Consistent High Status Respondents.

	Class Inconsistency			
	Consistent Low	Inconsistent Low	Inconsistent High	Consistent High
Religion				
x Education	33.8	38.2	46.3	57.8
x Income	18.2	36.2	41.5	51.4
x Occupation	35.3	44.6	50.7	54.0
Race				
x Education	33.3	34.3	39.1	45.7
x Income	24.0	32.1	33.7	50.0
x Occupation	35.5	36.8	40.1	44.4
Ethnic				
x Education	29.1	33.3	38.9	45.7
x Income	13.3	30.4	34.3	37.5
x Occupation	33.3	36.8	40.2	44.4

DISCUSSION

The comparison of status- and class-inconsistency by controlling for one dimension and observing the effects of variations in the other leads to a demonstrated greater contribution of status inconsistency to variations in partisanship. Regardless of class position across economic markets, status-inconsistency in the overwhelming majority of cases leads to preference of the party of the left, as Table 7 demonstrates. This is also the effect of status inconsistency when class is not controlled, thus refuting the contention that class position has the effect of providing status inconsistent with an alternative resolution to their dilemma with the party of the

right. If anything, the fact that status inconsistency within the highest class position leads to the greatest preference for the Democratic party argues for the opposite conclusion. It appears that to be status inconsistent between an ineradicable ascribed variable and an achieved variable is particularly stressful for persons having a high class position. Whereas their economic condition indicates that their self-interest is to identify with the conservative party of the right, either the tradition associated with their low status attribute or the personal interaction that results in low evaluation by others of that status attribute will work in the opposite direction to create tendencies towards left identification.

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