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STATUS INCONSISTENCY, CROSS PRESSURES,  
AND AMERICAN POLITICAL BEHAVIOR\*

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## ABSTRACT

Research on the political effects of cross-pressures, and, more particularly, status inconsistency, has produced contradictory findings on the relationships between these phenomena, and political partisanship and non-voting. An analysis of data on a cross-section of the American electorate suggests that much of the contradiction can be cleared up by specification of whether a particular set of inconsistent statuses are causing stress because of interpersonal or intrapsychic pressures.

## PARTISANSHIP AND NON-VOTING.

A great deal of research in the field of political behavior has been devoted to explorations of the social correlates of political partisanship.<sup>1</sup> Numerous studies have shown that in the United States, members of minority religious and ethnic groups, and persons of low occupational, financial, or educational status, tend to support the Democratic Party, while members of "core" Protestant churches, and persons of high status generally, tend to support the Republican Party.

A second major concern in the field of political behavior has been the factors associated with non-voting. By and large, the characteristics related to such political inactivity are similar to those related to support of the Democratic Party-- particularly, low educational and occupational status.<sup>2</sup>

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1. See for example Morris Janowitz and David R. Segal, "Social Cleavage and Party Affiliation: Germany, Great Britain and the United States," American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 72, No. 6 (May, 1967), pp. 601-618.
  2. See Robert E. Lane, Political Life (Glencoe: Free Press, 1959), and Lester W. Milbrath, Political Participation (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965). It might be argued that non-voting among the sorts of people who consider themselves Democrats is functional for the viability of the two-party system in America, since in recent years, the Democrats have claimed the allegiance of a much larger proportion of the electorate than the Republicans. If indeed as large a proportion of Democrats as Republicans appeared at the polls on Election Day, elections as such would cease to be contests between competing parties, candidates and policies, and would serve as window dressing to legitimize a persisting Democratic administration. Assuming equal turnout, the Republicans could win elections only if nominal Democrats bolted across party lines with greater frequency than is likely. Cf. David R. Segal, "Partisan Realignment in the United States: The Lesson of the 1964 Election," Public Opinion Quarterly (forthcoming).

Research on the correlates of partisanship has assumed, either implicitly or explicitly, at least one of two dynamics to explain the linkage between social and political variables. On the one hand, rational self interest on the part of the voter may be used as the basis for such arguments as "Each citizen in our model votes for the party he believes will provide him with a higher utility income than any other party during the coming election period."<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, processes of social pressure are often cited as the intervening mechanism. "The higher the identification of the individual with the group, the higher the probability that he will think and behave in ways which distinguish members of his group from non-members."<sup>4</sup> In either case, there are assumed pressures, either intrapsychic or social, that dictate the choice of one political party rather than the other. We shall see below that formulations of status inconsistency may similarly be differentiated on the basis of whether they are primarily interpersonal or primarily intrapsychic.

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3. Anthony Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), p. 38.

4. Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes, The American Voter (New York: Wiley, 1960), p. 307. These two orientations are discussed in Reinhard Bendix and Seymour Martin Lipset, "Political Sociology," Current Sociology, Vol. 6 (1957), pp. 82-87. Frank Lindenfield argues, quite reasonably, that both factors may be important. See his "Economic Interest and Political Involvement," Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. XXVIII (Spring, 1964), pp. 104-111.

Most research on political behavior has focussed on zero-order relationships between social characteristics and political choice. Conclusions derived from such studies are essentially probability statements dealing with the relative likelihood of two individuals at different points on the same social dimension supporting the same political party, other things being equal. For example, the argument is often found in the literature on the correlates of social class that, ceteris paribus, people in white-collar occupations are more likely to vote Republican than are people in blue-collar occupations.

At a somewhat higher level of theoretical and methodological sophistication, some researchers have recognized that other things are rarely equal, and have dealt with first-order relationships between social and political variables by holding some third variable constant. Campbell, for example, in controlling for the effect of region, found that "[status] polarization [the relationship between social class and party choice] is lower in the South than in other regions of the nation."<sup>5</sup>

While the search for intervening variables is becoming more common in behavioral research, the study of the interactions existing among social variables is a relatively underdeveloped part of our science.<sup>6</sup> Two notable exceptions exist

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5. Campbell, et al., op. cit., p. 367.

6. I have tried to confront this problem in "Classes, Strata and Parties in West Germany and the United States," Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol. 10, No. 1 (October, 1967).

to this rule, and these define very different expectations in very similar situations.

#### CROSS PRESSURES AND STATUS INCONSISTENCY.

As a result of data obtained in their study of presidential voting in Erie County, Ohio, in 1940, Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet proposed that "whatever the source of the conflicting pressures, whether from social status or class identification, from voting traditions or the attitudes of associates, the consistent result was to delay the voter's final decision."<sup>7</sup> In a follow-up study conducted in Elmira, New York, in 1948, Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee found that "A few cross-pressured voters act like the proverbial donkey and do not vote at all,"<sup>8</sup> while others were able to resolve the issue by assigning weights to the relevant pressures. More recent research has suggested that withdrawal of affect from political symbols is one method of resolving cross-pressures.<sup>9</sup>

Studies of the cross-pressure phenomenon, however, are not unanimous in their support of the proposition that persons under

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7. Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson and Hazel Gaudet, The People's Choice (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), p. 60.
  8. Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee, Voting (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), p. 200.
  9. See Seymour Martin Lipset, Political Man (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963), p. 211.

cross pressures are less partisan than others. Although they initially assumed its validity, Pool, Abelson and Popkin found that the cross-pressure hypothesis was not supported by the 1960 presidential election.<sup>10</sup> The Republican Catholic, for example, was likely to vote for Kennedy rather than stay away from the polls.

Lenski's theory of status inconsistency provides a related model of political process. Lenski argues that when an individual is of high status on one dimension and low status on another, he tends to think of himself in terms of the higher status, while other people treat him in terms of the lower one. This is, for the individual involved, a continual source of stress.<sup>11</sup> Lenski proposes that the individual will react to these frustrations by supporting political parties that favor social change. In the United States, this would be viewed as the Democratic Party.<sup>12</sup>

The effects of status inconsistency are most strongly felt, Lenski argues, when they occur between achieved and ascribed statuses, rather than two achieved or two ascribed statuses.<sup>13</sup>

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10. Ithiel de Sola Pool, Robert P. Abelson and Samuel Popkin, Candidates, Issues and Strategies (revised edition: Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1965), p. 76.

11. Gerhard Lenski, Power and Privilege (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 87.

12. Gerhard Lenski, "Status Inconsistency and the Vote," American Sociological Review, Vol. 32, No. 2 (April, 1967).

13. Ibid.



Data presented by Segal and Knoke support this proposition.<sup>14</sup> Such status inconsistencies may be seen as one manifestation of the more general cross-pressure phenomenon and, given the inconclusive results of earlier studies, we may hypothesize that the political effects of such inconsistencies may be either support of the Democratic Party or withdrawal of affect from politics.

#### STATUS RELEVANCE AND STATUS INCONSISTENCY.

We derive from Lenski's formulation one qualification that does not appear in the general cross-pressure hypothesis. In the true status inconsistency situation, stress is derived from interpersonal relations, and can in fact be translated into a variant of Heider's system of interpersonal relations.<sup>15</sup> In terms of Heider's general conceptualization, a person, P, has an affective relationship with another person, O, and one of the bases of this relationship is agreement on the evaluation

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14. David R. Segal and David Knoke, "Social Mobility, Status Inconsistency and Partisan Realignment in the United States," Social Forces (forthcoming). Indeed many of the early criticisms of Lenski's formulation are invalid because, while they fail to show relationships between status inconsistency and political attitudes, they tend to focus on inconsistencies between two achieved statuses. See for example K. Dennis Kelly and William J. Chambliss, "Status Consistency and Political Attitudes," American Sociological Review, Vol. 31, No. 3 (June, 1966), pp. 375 ff.

15. Fritz Heider, The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations (New York: Wiley, 1958), esp. pp. 174-217.

of some object, X. There are three links in Heider's triangle: that between P and X, that between O and X, and that between P and O. If signs are placed on these links, i.e., specification of positive (+) and negative (-) relationships, then the system is said to be balanced if there is an even number of negative links. This condition is achieved, for example, if P likes O, P likes X, and O likes X (no negative links), or if P likes O, but neither P nor O like X (two negative links).

In the present case, X is a person's status, and O is in fact a series of others  $O_1, O_2, \dots O_n$ . There is not necessarily an affective bond between P and O, but there is a nexus of interaction that we may define as a positive link. Through the interaction between P and a series of Os, each constituting a triangular system, P learns that he differs with each O in his evaluation of X, his status, and thus, each triangle is unbalanced. This imbalance is a source of stress, but cannot be resolved in the modes most commonly associated with Heider's theory. P cannot terminate his relationship with O, since O is, in effect, the social system. Neither can he change his evaluation of X, his own status, since he is utilizing objective achievement criteria. He hence seeks to change the system that makes his lower ascriptive status relevant, and supports political parties that promise to change the system.

It is important to note that O must identify P's low ascriptive status for this interpersonal influence to occur. Thus, the true case of status inconsistency arises only when P's low ascriptive status is visible in some meaningful way: through

skin color, physical features, accent, etc.<sup>16</sup> Thus, for example, the American who has black skin may readily be treated in terms of his ascriptive status, and if he is of higher achieved status, this will only serve to heighten his awareness of being discriminated against.

There are cases, however, where P's lower ascribed status is not visible to O, and where, if it becomes relevant to his political choice, then it is due to intrapsychic processes. The Catholic businessman, for example, is in most cases not readily identifiable as a member of a minority religious group, and people relate to him in terms of his achieved occupational status, which Lenski predicts that he himself will define as relevant.

Insofar as the Catholic businessman is identified by society as a businessman, and thus identifies himself, he may support the Republican Party with impunity, feeling, as is probably correct, that it best represents his financial interests. If, however, his Catholicism is made relevant through political happenstance such as the issue of government aid to parochial schools being raised, or a Catholic candidate running for office, and the Democratic Party is on the pro-Catholic side of the ledger, then affective and cognitive political notions will be aroused which are inconsistent with those associated with

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16. Cf. Gordon W. Allport, The Nature of Prejudice (Garden City: Doubleday, 1958).

his occupational status.<sup>17</sup> This is clearly a cross-pressure situation, but, in the absence of interpersonal precipitating factors, does not truly fit Lenski's status inconsistency formulation. Moreover, this latter case, unlike true status inconsistency, is a transient state, since the individual's low ascribed status ceases to be relevant to his political choice when religion ceases to be a political issue.

DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT AND WITHDRAWAL OF AFFECT AS FUNCTIONAL ALTERNATIVES.

The cross-pressured Catholic voter is in a stressful situation. In 1948, he seems to have resolved the stress by not voting, while in 1960, he resolved it by voting Democratic. Pool attributes this difference to the fact that in 1948, the Democratic Party was not a very attractive alternative. Truman himself was a relatively unimpressive candidate, and the party had been tainted by the image of communism and, following the Harry Dexter White scandal, of corruption.<sup>18</sup> Thus, while the individual under cross-pressures might have been motivated by that fact to lean toward the Democratic Party, the party itself did not reinforce this tendency. In 1960, on the other hand,

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17. For a discussion of the dynamics involved in situations of this sort, see Milton J. Rosenberg and Robert P. Abelson, "An Analysis of Cognitive Balancing," in Rosenberg, et al., Attitude Organization and Change (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), pp. 112-163.

18. Pool, et al., loc. cit.

the Democrats had an attractive candidate, and one that cross-pressured Catholics would be strongly identified with, as well as a strong liberal platform. Thus the "push" generated by the cross-pressure situation was reinforced by the "pull" generated by the party.

On the basis of these considerations, it may be argued that the reason for contradictory findings in research on both cross-pressures and status inconsistency is that there are two different processes going on that cross-cut both fields of research. Where such pressures involve the persisting identification of the individual by the system in terms that he finds distasteful, he will seek to effect social change. However, where the conflicting pressures are internal to the individual and transient in nature, he may withdraw affect from the political arena completely, unless one of the alternatives that he is forced to consider is clearly a more attractive short-term choice. Thus, considering cross-pressures in general, it is our first hypothesis that under some conditions of cross-pressure, people will react by supporting the political party that offers the more progressive program, while under other conditions of cross-pressure, people will react by withdrawing from politics. The alternative hypothesis that must be considered is that in any given situation of cross-pressure some people will react by supporting the progressive political party, while others will withdraw from political activity.

The argument presented above also provides some basis for predicting which alternatives will be chosen under given

conditions. We hypothesize that where an individual is visibly of low ascribed status but is also of high achieved status, he will feel the strains of status-inconsistency and support the Democratic Party. If, however, he is not identified by those around him in terms of his lower status, but that status is made relevant by issues or candidates in a particular election, than the choice between withdrawal and partisanship will be based on the difference in attractiveness of alternatives. Where the difference is small, the cognitive inconsistency will be resolved by withdrawal. Where the difference is large, however, the inconsistency will tend to be resolved in favor of the more attractive alternative.

#### THE DATA.

Tests of these hypotheses were conducted through the secondary analysis of data collected from a sample of the American electorate in March, 1960, as part of a cross-national study of civic involvement.<sup>19</sup> We are concerned here with inconsistencies between either of two ascribed statuses (religion and race) and any of three achieved statuses (occupation, income and education). Support of a progressive political party has been defined as expressing a preference for the Democratic Party, while withdrawal of affect from politics is defined as expressing support of no political party.

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19. A description of the sample is presented in the primary report of the study, Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), esp. pp. 47, 519-525.

EXPECTATIONS.

1. Functional Alternatives. It was anticipated that under conditions of status inconsistency associated with Democratic preference, failure to choose a political party would be minimal. On the other hand, where a high degree of non-partisanship existed, it would be at the expense of the Democratic Party.

2. Effects of Race. Americans whose skin color is other than white are readily identified as being of low racial status, and inconsistencies with achieved statuses can only serve to increase their awareness that they are being discriminated against. It was expected that among non-white Americans in 1960, status inconsistency would increase support for the Democratic Party.

3. Effects of Religion. Previous research has shown that members of minority religious groups tend to support the Democratic Party, but that there is some differentiation on the basis of occupational status, with white-collar workers being somewhat less Democratic than blue-collar workers.<sup>20</sup> Hence it was expected that John F. Kennedy's announced attempt to attain the Democratic nomination for the presidency would create cross-pressures for middle-class Catholics. On the one hand, their occupational status caused them to identify with the Republican Party, while Kennedy's candidacy made their religious

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20. David R. Segal, "Classes, Strata and Parties in West Germany and the United States," op. cit.

status relevant and caused them to attach affect to the Democratic Party.

The attractiveness of the Democratic Party, however, was mitigated by the fact that in early March, 1960, few Catholics felt that a Roman Catholic had a chance to be elected president.<sup>21</sup> Given the relevance of Catholicism, the fact of status inconsistency, and the widespread belief that the United States was not yet ready to elect a Catholic to the presidency, it was expected that white-collar Catholics would in fact hesitate to state a party preference. Note that this expectation was not generalized to Catholics of high financial or educational status, because earlier research had failed to yield political differentiation among Catholics along these status dimensions when the effects of occupation were accounted for.

#### RESULTS.

Table 1 presents the effects of status inconsistency upon Democratic preference and failure to choose a political party. Each cell in the first quadrant represents a four-fold table, in which the percentage of Democrats in the consistent cells (two high status or two low statuses) have been subtracted from the percentage of Democrats in the inconsistent cells (one

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21. Two-thirds of the subscribers who replied to a poll conducted by Jubilee, a Roman Catholic publication, for example, held that if nominated, Kennedy would not win the election because of a bias against Catholics. See New York Times, March 6, 1960, p. 29, Col. 3.



high status and one low status).<sup>22</sup> A positive difference

Table 1. Effects of Status Inconsistency Upon Democratic Preference and Failure to Choose a Political Party.

	Religion	Race	Occupation	Income	Education
Religion			-6.2	20.5	12.1
Race			12.4	-6.7	12.3
Occupation	19.5	-9.7			
Income	-6.5	5.3			
Education	.3	-5.2			

22. If we imagine each cell representing a table showing status on 2 dimensions thus:

		Status 1	
		Low	High
Status 2	Low	II	I
	High	III	IV

then if the cell entries are per cent Democratic, the inconsistency effect is equal to (I + III) - (II + IV).

The relevant dichotomies for the status attributes were:

	Religion	Race	Occupation	Income	Education
Low	Catholic and Jewish	Non-white	Blue-collar	\$4,999 -	11 years or less
High	Protestant	White	White-collar	\$5,000 +	12 years or more

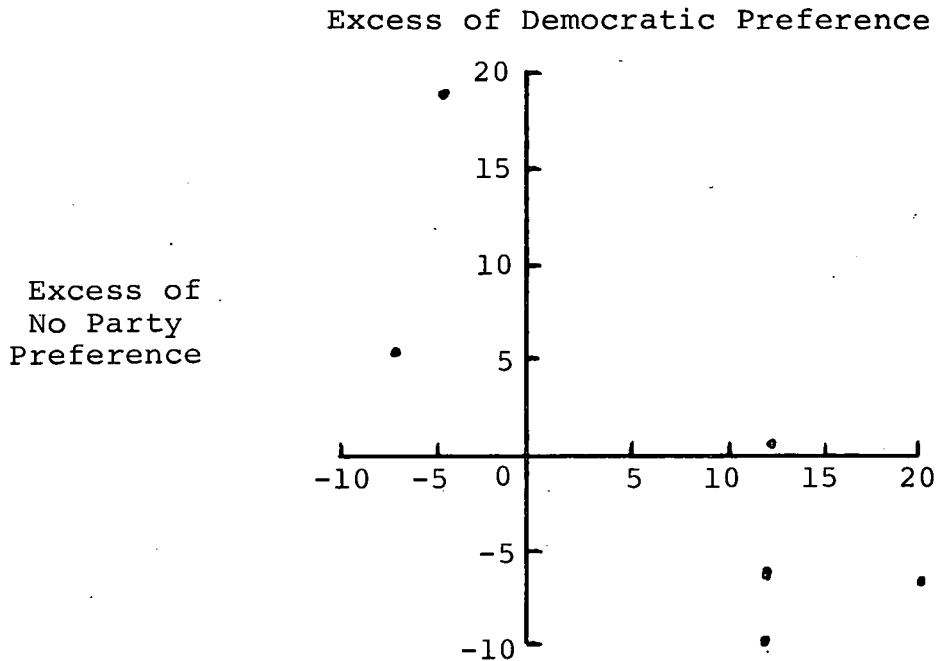
indicates a surplus of Democrats in the inconsistent cells. The third quadrant, similarly, represents the difference in per cent expressing no party preference in the consistent and inconsistent cells.

The first hypothesis is supported by the data. For those inconsistent situations where support is shown for the Democratic Party, surpluses of people preferring no political party fail to appear. However, in the two instances where there are fewer Democrats in the inconsistent than in the consistent cells, there is a surplus of respondents who failed to state a party preference.<sup>23</sup> As figure 1, which portrays these data,

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Figure 1. Excess of Democratic Preference by Excess of No Party Preference for Inconsistent Cells.

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23. If we assign matrix notation to table 1 such that  $i =$  status defining a row and  $j =$  status defining a column, then our hypothesis is that when  $a_{ij}$  is positive,  $a_{ji}$  must be negative, for all  $i$  and  $j$ , viz.  $(a_{ij})(a_{ji}) < 0$ .

shows graphically, there is an inverse relationship between incidence of Democratic preference and incidence of no party preference in status-inconsistent situations. Preferring the Democratic Party and refusing to choose a party clearly are functional alternatives, appearing in different situations of status inconsistency.

Let us now look at the instances in which the two types of reaction occurred. It had been hypothesized that the effects of inconsistency between racial and achieved variables would be increased support for the Democratic Party. Indeed, in two of the three tests of racial-achieved inconsistencies, Democratic support was more than 12 per cent higher in inconsistent than in consistent cells. In the third case, where inconsistencies between race and income are considered, respondents who were status-inconsistent were less likely to be Democrats and more likely to prefer no political party. Table 2 presents the set of data from whence this deviant case was

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Table 2. Democratic Preference and No Party Preference, by Race and Income.

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<u>Race Is</u>	<u>Income Is</u>	<u>% Democratic</u>	<u>% No Preference</u>
White	Low	36.4	39.7
White	High	36.6	42.1
Non-white	Low	39.8	52.3
Non-white	High	33.3	60.0

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derived. Clearly, the lowest proportional support for the Democratic Party and the highest rate of no party preference is found among high-income non-whites. This is strange, since our data indicate that non-whites of high educational or occupational status do support the Democratic Party, and have relatively low rates of no preference. Indeed, we may infer from these data that those high-income non-whites who voice no preference are of low educational and occupational status. Considering the types of high income occupations that are of low status and do not involve high levels of education, it might be suggested that the phenomenon we have tapped here is the involvement of significant minorities in disadvantaged ethnic communities who seek their livelihood through illicit means, e.g., gambling and vice, and who therefore, despite their high incomes, are poorly integrated into the body politic. Whether or not this truly explains this deviant case, the data on inconsistencies involving racial status in the main support our expectations.

The data on religion similarly confirm our expectation. Inconsistencies between religion and income or education yielded only the Democratic affiliation generally associated with minority religious status. Catholics with middle-class occupations, however, were cross-pressured by the candidacy of a Catholic in the Democratic Party which deterred them from their customary middle-class identification with the Republican Party. However, for the most part they believed that Kennedy could not win the election, and rather than support a loser or

oppose a Catholic, they withdrew affect from the political arena and claimed non-partisanship. As table 3 shows, the per cent of middle-class Catholics who claimed identification with the Democratic Party in the 1950's, excluding those who

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Table 3. Per cent of Middle-Class Catholics Identifying with Democratic Party, 1952-1964.

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<u>Fall, 1952*</u>	<u>Fall, 1956*</u>	<u>March, 1960**</u>	<u>Fall, 1960*</u>	<u>Fall, 1964*</u>
43%	49%	38%	70%	53%

\*SRC Presidential Election Survey

\*\*Almond-Verba Survey

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called themselves independent but leaned toward the Democratic Party was less than 50. By March, 1960, the per cent of Democrats and of Republicans fell, and the per cent claiming no preference increased. After March, 1960, during which month John F. Kennedy polled a record 45,000 votes in the New Hampshire Democratic primary, the per cent supporting the Democrats soared, reaching 70 per cent in the Fall. In 1964, when their religious status was no longer politically relevant, middle-class Catholics switched back toward the Republican Party, although a small majority still called themselves Democrats.

#### CONCLUSION

Lenski's conceptualization of status inconsistency has been shown to subsume two different aspects of cognitive

imbalance, only one of which meets the specifications of Lenski's formulation. Where an individual defines his own status as high and others define his status as low, he suffers from status inconsistency, and tends to support the Democratic Party. This situation assumes that his lower status is, in some sense, visible. On the other hand, an individual may feel cross-pressured because two statuses which become salient to him in the absence of interpersonal pressures involve conflicting expectations. In this situation, the individual may withdraw from the political arena until such time as one of the troublesome statuses becomes politically irrelevant. However, if one of the alternative sets of expectations has greater short-term pay-off value, then that alternative will be chosen.