



University of Pennsylvania  
ScholarlyCommons

---

Departmental Papers (ASC)

Annenberg School for Communication

---

January 1983

# Does It Make Any Difference How You Feel About Your Job? An Exploratory Study of the Relationship Between Job Satisfaction and Political Orientations

Michael X. Delli Carpini  
*University of Pennsylvania*, [dean@asc.upenn.edu](mailto:dean@asc.upenn.edu)

Roberta S. Sigel  
*Rutgers University*

Robin Snyder  
*Rutgers University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://repository.upenn.edu/asc\\_papers](http://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers)

---

## Recommended Citation

Delli Carpini, M. X., Sigel, R. S., & Snyder, R. (1983). Does It Make Any Difference How You Feel About Your Job? An Exploratory Study of the Relationship Between Job Satisfaction and Political Orientations. *Micropolitics*, 3 (2), 227-251. Retrieved from [http://repository.upenn.edu/asc\\_papers/18](http://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers/18)

NOTE: At the time of publication, the author Michael X. Delli Carpini was affiliated with Rutgers University. Currently January 2008, he is a faculty member of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. [http://repository.upenn.edu/asc\\_papers/18](http://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers/18)  
For more information, please contact [libraryrepository@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:libraryrepository@pobox.upenn.edu).

---

# Does It Make Any Difference How You Feel About Your Job? An Exploratory Study of the Relationship Between Job Satisfaction and Political Orientations

## **Abstract**

Does job satisfaction - as reported by the jobholder have a bearing on one's political orientations? Findings based upon five sets of political variables suggest that job satisfaction is related to politics, though not always strongly so. Dissatisfied individuals participate less, trust government less, and are more politically alienated than job-satisfied respondents. Job satisfaction cannot be characterized as a surrogate for other job- and personality-related characteristics, but has explanatory power of its own, though this power is affected when controls are introduced to the research design. While job satisfaction has important political implications, none of the relationships examined split satisfied and dissatisfied individuals into opposing majorities. In a relatively alienated, distrustful, and apathetic population, the dissatisfied are somewhat more so. The data base was NORC's General Social Survey Cumulative File 1972-1980.

## **Comments**

NOTE: At the time of publication, the author Michael X. Delli Carpini was affiliated with Rutgers University. Currently January 2008, he is a faculty member of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

# **Does It Make Any Difference How You Feel About Your Job? An Exploratory Study of the Relationship Between Job Satisfaction and Political Orientations**

Michael X. Delli Carpini  
Roberta S. Sigel  
Robin Snyder

Department of Political Science  
Rutgers—The State University of New Jersey  
New Brunswick, New Jersey

*Abstract* Does job satisfaction—as reported by the jobholder—have a bearing on one's political orientations? Findings based upon five sets of political variables suggest that job satisfaction is related to politics, though not always strongly so. Dissatisfied individuals participate less, trust government less, and are more politically alienated than job-satisfied respondents. Job satisfaction cannot be characterized as a surrogate for other job- and personality-related characteristics, but has explanatory power of its own, though this power is affected when controls are introduced to the research design. While job satisfaction has important political implications, none of the relationships examined split satisfied and dissatisfied individuals into opposing majorities. In a relatively alienated, distrustful, and apathetic population, the dissatisfied are somewhat more so. The data base was NORC's General Social Survey Cumulative File 1972–1980.

Support for this research was provided by the Research Council of Rutgers University.

*Micropolitics*, Volume 3, Number 2  
0271-6623/83/030227-00\$02.00/0  
Copyright © 1983 Crane, Russak & Company, Inc.

## **Introduction**

Does job satisfaction have a bearing on one's political orientations? The following research described below is an exploratory investigation into this question. More specifically, we seek to discover whether job satisfaction (JS) and job dissatisfaction (JD) relate differentially to a person's political outlook and behavior. The theoretical argument that underpins this proposition rests upon two central tenets: first, that JS, while related to the more structural concepts of occupation or work, is clearly a distinct construct; and second, that certain elements of modern politics in the United States make a connection between JS and political attitudes and action likely. We now turn to the first of these tenets.

Work is a central fact of man's existence: it is a necessity for survival; it can offer economic self-sufficiency, status, and the opportunity for social interaction; and it plays a crucial psychological role in the formation of self-esteem and personal identity (see, for example, Kornhauser, 1965; Kanter, 1976; Sarason, 1972). Moreover, in the United States work tends to be seen not only as a means to an end, but as a value in and of itself. To work is tantamount to being socially responsible and individually worthy. Not to work—from choice or inability—is considered a human failing bordering on immorality. So significant is work in the eyes of most Americans<sup>1</sup> that people persistently assert they would continue to work even if there no longer existed any economic necessity to do so (Morse and Weiss, 1955; Kahn, 1972; Strauss, 1974).

Because of the central role that work plays in our lives, the question of our satisfaction with the work we are performing has received a fair amount of scholarly attention. Job satisfaction has been defined and measured in a variety of ways. For the purposes of our investigation we shall adopt the most widely used and simplest definition: the fulfillment or gratification an individual receives from the job. The data suggest that although Americans work at a great variety of jobs, majorities of them regularly express satisfaction with the work they are doing.<sup>2</sup> A recent study on the quality of life in America, for example, concluded that people

in the major occupational categories differ substantially in the assessments they give to various job attributes, but they differ only marginally in their overall job satisfaction. People in the professional and technical occupations are most likely to describe themselves as satisfied and operatives are the least likely, but the differences seem very small in relation to the profound

contrasts in the objective characteristics of these occupations. [Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers, 1976, p. 304]

Such high aggregate levels of satisfaction should not, however, tempt us to overlook the fact that degrees of JS do vary to some extent by type of work performed. Since the rewards men and women receive for the type of work they do vary enormously—be the rewards in status, income, autonomy,<sup>3</sup> or safety, to name but a few—it is not surprising that those in the least rewarding occupations are often also among the least job-satisfied. This distinction is clearly job-related and not a result of aversion to work per se. For example, individuals holding less-rewarding jobs are as likely as the more rewarded to claim they would continue working even if they no longer needed to do so. What is significant, however, is that these individuals say they would seek employment *different* from that which they currently hold. In contrast, people performing interesting, highly respected, and/or well-paying work are strongly inclined to continue with their current jobs. For example,

from 93% of university professors to 16% of unskilled auto-workers<sup>4</sup> said that they would seek the same type of work again. The sharpest break comes between professional and nonprofessional jobs although there is an additional difference between white-collar and blue-collar jobs in favor of the former. [Kahn, 1972, pp. 182–183]

In other words, though work is deemed important by all, not all types of work are equally satisfying. Nonetheless, even here we find sizable intraoccupational variations. Different individuals in the same workplace, performing the same type of work, attach different values and degrees of importance to the same job-related factors.<sup>5</sup> Conditions that lead one worker to describe himself as JS lead another to declare he is dissatisfied. In short, the very fact that JS is not synonymous with any one job-related factor, or any combination thereof (Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers, 1976), even in the same line of work, suggests that it constitutes a distinct, subjective reaction to one's work, based upon the individual's perception of the job. It should, therefore, be treated as an independent construct not to be equated with occupation or any specific job feature.

### **Job Satisfaction and Mass Political Involvement**

Precisely because JS is a subjective indicator, it should relate particularly intimately to an individual's orientation to the outside world, including politics. Unfortunately, political scientists who have studied the link between work and selected political variables have tended to ignore the importance of the subjective factor of individual JS. Instead they have used occupation or occupational status *per se* as the independent variable, on the assumption that the differential rewards of different occupations offer sufficient explanation for political variance. Implicit in this formulation is the assumption that such objective factors are synonymous with subjectively experienced JS. Since the empirical data have shown this assumption to be unfounded, it is imperative that the distinction between the two be preserved and that political scientists address themselves to the relation between JS and politics. In fact, precisely because work plays such a central role in the American ethos, knowledge about JS should provide important information about the dynamics of mass political involvement. JS and politics should be related for three central reasons:

1. Inasmuch as the rewards for hard work are distributed unequally (some might say inequitably), a clear conflict exists with the American ethos, which rests on the belief that America is the land of opportunity that grants everyone the chance to succeed and become upwardly mobile. From this it should follow that those who work hard, but feel poorly rewarded or see their chances for success blocked, should conclude that the system is not living up to its promise, that something is wrong politically. Thus, their JD should be accompanied by some form of political dissatisfaction.
2. Much has been written on the issue of rising entitlements in advanced industrial societies. Bell (1975) argues that along with these rising entitlements comes an increased expectation that government can and should solve social, cultural, and economic problems that were previously considered outside the realm of politics. Schlozman and Verba (1979) note similar changes. Though Americans seemingly continue to subscribe to the doctrine of self-reliance as the best course, they increasingly also feel that government can and must help in certain areas, including work-related ones. If this is true, then satisfaction with one's work

should be connected with one's political attitudes, opinions, and behaviors. More specifically, the classic finding of Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes (1960) that over half the electorate conceptualizes politics in terms of group benefits received or by the "nature of the times" may be relevant to the issue of job satisfaction and politics. The more one is satisfied with one's work, the more likely he or she is to judge the individual or collective "nature of the times" favorably and hence evaluate government and its policies positively. Conversely, the more dissatisfied with work one is, the more negative one's political outlook becomes.

3. Government's presence in the economic process is nothing new, of course. But its presence has probably never been as clearly visible even to the least politically sophisticated as it is today. This applies to the owner of the "means of production" as much as to the unskilled blue-collar worker. Government regulations pertaining to hours, wages, working conditions, affirmative action, product safety, and so forth are all concrete and constant reminders that politics affects one's job. The owner of a plant may resent governmental insistence that he hire women; the women workers in his plant may feel equally resentful that government regulations do not provide sufficiently for female promotion on the job. Or—to choose a positive example—owners may appreciate a given government subsidy while employees are grateful for governmental safety inspections. In short, how one feels about those aspects of one's work over which government exerts some control should have a bearing on one's view of government. Since these controls or policies contribute differentially to job rewards, and hence to JS, it is plausible to conjecture that JS and politics are related.<sup>6</sup>

In summary, we are arguing that the individual ethic, as it applies to work, has three "flaws" that make a link between JS and politics possible: the awareness that hard work does not necessarily mean upward mobility; the greater general acceptance, in an advanced industrial society, of links between the political and the private; and the greater visibility of government in the day-to-day routines of the workplace. Specifically, we advance the following hypotheses:

1. People dissatisfied with their jobs (JDs) will report greater political alienation and less confidence in government officials than will those who are satisfied (JSs).
2. JDs, more than JSs, will advocate policies that deviate from the status quo by requiring either a return to previous practices or a restructuring and redistribution of values in new ways.
3. Because of their lessened trust and efficacy and their heightened alienation, JDs will be less engaged politically (as demonstrated by their lower voting turnout).
4. The relationship between JS and politics will be strengthened when controls are introduced for relevant job- and personality-related factors that are complementary to JS, and will be weakened when these factors conflict with JS.

### **Data and Methods**

The data analyzed come from the General Social Survey (GSS) 1972–1980. This survey was conducted annually (with the exception of 1979, when no survey was conducted) by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). The surveys were administered to national cross-samples of adults 18 years of age and older. The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research merged the eight individual surveys into a single file, and it is this file which forms the basis for our research. The cumulative data set contains a total of 12,120 interviews from which we excluded the unemployed, retired, housewives, and part-time workers. The sample size was thus reduced to 5,455. The GSS was, of course, not designed with our specific research questions in mind. Accordingly, not all indicators are optimal for our task. Specifically, we would have preferred a greater number and variety of political questions—such as are featured in the American National Election Studies—in order to examine the various facets of politics that might be affected by JS. The Election Studies, unlike the NORC studies, however, do not include questions that directly address the issue of JS, the primary concern of our study. Thus, in order to have access to responses directly confronting the issue of JS, we had to trade off a degree of specificity and precision concerning political attitudes and behavior.

Job satisfaction is a very difficult concept to operationalize and measure. Most studies on the subject have been carried out by means of



public opinion surveys or surveys of select populations (such as scientists) featuring highly structured questions with two or more forced choices.<sup>7</sup> The Gallup Poll is but one extreme example of this genre. It forces respondents to choose between two polar positions. The respondent is either satisfied or dissatisfied. No room is permitted, therefore, for adding qualifications to one's reply. Even subtler question formats are often inadequate in that they fail to elicit the reasons for JS or JD. The answers thus afford very little insight into the meaning respondents attach to their replies.

So poor are the measures of JS that critics of the prevailing studies have on occasion attributed the finding of widespread job satisfaction among Americans to the very weakness of the method of inquiry. For example, Herzberg and his colleagues (Herzberg, 1968; Herzberg et al., 1957) argued that expressions of JS did not necessarily convey genuine fulfillment in or satisfaction with the job. Rather, what an individual meant to convey was an absence of acute dissatisfaction. To be job-satisfied, in this view, merely implies that one is not actively dissatisfied.

The GSS features several JS-related questions, and one dealing directly with JS. The job-satisfaction question asks a respondent to describe the degree of his/her JS by choosing from four options, which range from very satisfied to very dissatisfied. While this format offers some advantages over the dichotomized one used in the Gallup Poll, it still suffers from some of the shortcomings just discussed. In the analyses to follow, these shortcomings should be kept in mind: to the extent that differences in job satisfaction are muted by poor measurement, the tests of the relationship between JS and politics are conservative ones.

In our analysis we designated those respondents as dissatisfied who answered that they were either very or a little dissatisfied. The other two categories (very and moderately satisfied) were kept intact. We collapsed the two dissatisfied categories into one because the job-dissatisfied in this data set, as in all others, constitute a small percentage of the total sample (13 percent). Had we distinguished between the two groups of JDs, much of our analysis could not have been performed because of diminishing cell size.

The remaining survey items employed fall into two main categories: those used as controls and those used as dependent variables. Several different kinds of controls were used in different parts of the analysis. To

guard against the possibility that JS was merely shorthand for a liking for some specific component of the job, nine job-related questions were periodically added as controls (see the Appendix for wording of the questions). We chose those components most frequently cited in the literature as related to JS: type of job, financial reward, job security, and job autonomy.<sup>8</sup>

Because job satisfaction is a function of a myriad of factors, and because the relationship between job satisfaction and politics can be mediated by a host of other factors, it was necessary for us to apply a variety of controls in addition to the job-related ones discussed above. Besides the standard demographic ones such as sex, race, education, and age, we controlled for an individual's general satisfaction with his life. This was done to insure that it is in fact *job* satisfaction that affects one's political outlook, and not some more pervasive sense of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. As with job-related factors, we expect the two to be related, but not synonymous.

Our central independent variables—political attitudes and behavior—can be classified into five categories: (1) estrangement from government (hereafter referred to as political alienation); (2) confidence or trust in government officials; (3) political participation; (4) ideology; and (5) policy preferences. The first two categories convey a respondent's perception of the extent to which government is concerned about people like himself or herself and is responsive to their preferences. Political participation is measured by voting turnout in presidential elections. Ideology is measured by a person's self-classification on the liberal/conservative continuum and by a second question which registers a respondent's preference for income equalization. Policy preferences are measured by tapping views on the adequacy of government outlays for a variety of programs, including defense, education, welfare, and the environment.

## Findings

The findings to be presented fall into three distinct categories. The first set of findings centers on the question of job satisfaction as a distinct concept, connected with but not identical to other job- and personality-related variables. The second and central set of findings focuses on the political ramifications of JS and JD. The final set of findings returns to

**Table 1**  
 Job Characteristics and Job Satisfaction  
 (Percentages in Various Jobs Categories Who Are  
 Job-Satisfied [JS], Moderately Job-Satisfied [MS],  
 and Job-Dissatisfied [JD])

	JS	MS	JD
<i>A. Satisfaction with Current Financial Situation</i>			
Very satisfied	65%	28%	8%
Moderately satisfied	49	41	10
Not at all satisfied	37	38	25
<i>N = 5376; chi-square = 339.6; p = .0001</i>			
<i>B. Occupation and Job Satisfaction</i>			
Unskilled	47	39	14
Skilled	43	42	15
Clerical/sales	50	36	14
Professional/managerial	62	29	9
<i>N = 5373; chi-square = 135.5; p = .0001</i>			
<i>C. Autonomy and Job Satisfaction</i>			
Self-employed	65	30	5
Works for someone else	49	37	14
<i>N = 5388; chi-square = 60.6; p = .0001</i>			
<i>D. Sense of Job Security</i>			
Likely to lose job	32	43	26
Not likely to lose job	52	38	10
<i>N = 1447; chi-square = 31.6; p = .0001</i>			

the issue of the importance of job satisfaction as an independent explanatory variable. Although we attach major significance to JS in and of itself, we also subscribe to the notion that the relationship between job satisfaction and politics can be strengthened or diluted when other, related forces interact.

#### *Factors Related to Job Satisfaction*

Table 1 highlights some of the relationships found between job-related factors and job satisfaction.<sup>9</sup> Part A clearly indicates the important and

significant relation between financial rewards and JS. Consistent with our expectations, however, there are relatively sizable numbers of job-dissatisfied individuals among the upper strata of our income variables. And, more remarkably, even among the financially dissatisfied, large proportions still find themselves satisfied with their jobs. Similar patterns are uncovered when other measures of financial reward such as perception of family income, change in financial status, or actual yearly income are used (tables not shown). While money does talk, it apparently tells only part of the story when it comes to job satisfaction.

Another variable shown to be related to job satisfaction is the nature of the job itself. It should come as no surprise that, as shown in part B of the table, satisfaction rises with occupational status. But what is again noteworthy is that JD is so slight even among unskilled laborers. This may reflect the inadequacies of the measure, though a closer inspection suggests that some other dynamic may be at work here. Astonishingly, 47 percent of the unskilled laborers profess to actually being *very* satisfied. While the low proportion of JD is in keeping with previous research, especially that of Herzberg et al., we are still at a loss to explain the relatively high proportion of the very satisfied among blue-collar workers. It will be recalled that Herzberg explained simple expressions of satisfaction as the absence of acute JD and not as indicative of genuine JS (though this distinction did not constitute the major thrust of Herzberg's theory of work motivation). Yet in Table 1 we see respondents who feel financially disadvantaged or who belong to low-status occupations not only eschewing the "dissatisfied" option, but actually characterizing themselves more often as "very" satisfied than as "moderately" satisfied.

The picture does not alter greatly when we consider the third job-related factor, autonomy, here operationalized as working for oneself or for someone else. As can be seen in part C, the self-employed are overwhelmingly very job-satisfied, with JD all but vanishing (5 percent). For those employed by another, great satisfaction drops to 49 percent—still a substantial portion. Autonomy, as measured here, apparently greatly enhances JS, but the reverse—that lack of autonomy contributes to JD—seems less certain.

A final, directly job-related factor we examine concerns the issue of job security. To what extent is JS a function of the likelihood of keeping one's job? Part D of Table 1 provides a partial answer to this question. As

**Table 2**  
 Personal Satisfaction and Job Satisfaction  
 (Percentages in Various Personal-Satisfaction  
 Categories Who Are JS, MS, or JD)

	JS	MS	JD
<i>A. General Happiness</i>			
Very happy	66%	27%	8%
Pretty happy	46	41	14
Not happy	32	41	27
<i>N</i> = 5375; chi-square = 355.8; <i>p</i> = .01			
<i>B. Satisfaction with Family Life</i>			
Very satisfied	55	34	11
Moderately satisfied	38	45	16
Dissatisfied	42	33	25
<i>N</i> = 4634; chi-square = 65.5; <i>p</i> = .0001			
<i>C. Satisfaction with Activities and Hobbies</i>			
Very satisfied	55	34	12
Moderately satisfied	44	44	13
Dissatisfied	39	44	17
<i>N</i> = 4627; chi-square = 62.1; <i>p</i> = .0001			
<i>D. Satisfaction with Place of Residence</i>			
Very satisfied	58	32	10
Moderately satisfied	41	44	16
Dissatisfied	38	43	20
<i>N</i> = 4638; chi-square = 166.1; <i>p</i> = .01			

can be seen, job insecurity contributes to a clear loss of JS, though again it is not the whole story. Similar patterns are found when JS is compared to the respondents' perception of the ease in finding an equally good job, and to their prior experience with unemployment (tables not shown).

The information provided in Table 1 demonstrates that JS is related to, but not synonymous with, the characteristics of the job itself. It is possible, however, that job satisfaction is nothing more than a reflection of a more general satisfaction with one's personal life. In order to test for this we examined the relationship between JS and several measures of personal happiness and satisfaction. These measures included general

happiness, satisfaction with one's family life, activities and hobbies, friends, place of residence, marriage, and the quality of life generally. The results show a pattern quite similar to the one described for job-related factors: while JS is related to personal satisfaction, it is clearly a distinct phenomenon that is present or absent in individuals quite independently of these other variables (see Table 2 for several typical examples).

To summarize the data presented in this section, it is clear that job satisfaction is an attribute with links to structural conditions and perceptions, but also that it captures an independent aspect of an individual's self-perceptions. The persistence of high job satisfaction (and the occurrence of JD) in the presence of counterindicative factors suggests that the concept of job satisfaction has a dynamic of its own and does, therefore, deserve to be studied in and of itself. It is to this task, as it relates to politics, that we now turn.

### ***Job Satisfaction and Politics***

Table 3 provides information concerning the relationship between job satisfaction and four measures of political alienation. As can be seen, individuals dissatisfied in their jobs also have little faith that government cares about its citizens, especially about the "average man." This relationship prevails no matter what aspect of political alienation we measure, with 65 percent or more of JD individuals choosing the alienated response. To be unhappy with one's work strongly suggests that one is also unhappy with one's government. We are unable to ascertain if the respondents held the government responsible for their job dissatisfaction, so we cannot state that JD is a *cause* of political alienation. The relationship is a suggestive one, however.

It would, of course, be encouraging to report that JS individuals, unlike JDs, have faith in their government and its responsiveness. This, however, is not the case. Even they lack such faith, although their alienation is much less pronounced than that of the job-dissatisfied individuals, averaging 55 percent alienated for the four items. Apparently, in a somewhat alienated population, job-dissatisfied individuals are significantly more so.

A similar, though less pronounced, pattern is uncovered when we examine the relationship between job satisfaction and confidence in

**Table 3**  
 Political Alienation and Job Satisfaction  
 (Percentage Alienated in Each Satisfaction Category)

	<i>Officials Don't Care</i>		<i>What You Think Doesn't Count</i>		<i>Government Is Out of Touch with Country</i>		<i>Officials Not Interested in Average Man</i>	
	<i>A</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>D</i>
Job-satisfied	48%	52%	52%	48%	58%	42%	60%	40%
Moderately job-satisfied	54	46	55	45	64	36	67	33
Job-dissatisfied	65	35	72	28	72	28	71	29
	<i>N = 688</i>		<i>N = 670</i>		<i>N = 671</i>		<i>N = 3265</i>	
	chi-square = 7.2		chi-square = 9.2		chi-square = 6.2		chi-square = 23.2	
	<i>p = .027</i>		<i>p = .009</i>		<i>p = .0001</i>		<i>p = .0001</i>	

*A* = agree; *D* = disagree.

**Table 4**  
Confidence in Government Institutions  
(Percentages of JS, MS, and JD Individuals with Confidence in Government)

	<i>Great Deal</i>	<i>Some</i>	<i>None</i>
<i>A. Confidence in Executive</i>			
Job-satisfied	21%	54%	25%
Moderately job-satisfied	15	58	27
Job-dissatisfied	10	56	34
<i>N</i> = 4563; chi-square = 59.3; <i>p</i> = .0001			
<i>B. Confidence in Congress</i>			
Job-satisfied	18	61	21
Moderately job-satisfied	13	63	24
Job-dissatisfied	10	59	31
<i>N</i> = 4565; chi-square = 51.9; <i>p</i> = .0001			
<i>C. Confidence in Supreme Court</i>			
Job-satisfied	36	48	16
Moderately job-satisfied	32	52	16
Job-dissatisfied	28	50	22
<i>N</i> = 4543; chi-square = 23.8; <i>p</i> = .0001			
<i>D. Confidence in Military</i>			
Job-satisfied	37	50	12
Moderately job-satisfied	30	54	16
Job-dissatisfied	27	54	19
<i>N</i> = 4539; chi-square = 41.7; <i>p</i> = .0001			

government institutions. As can be seen in Table 4, few individuals express a great deal of confidence in any of the institutions examined. On the other hand, the proportion of those who have abandoned all trust is not large either. In general, this is a pretty jaded, if not outright cynical, population which has some but not a great deal of confidence in the performance of its government. But, again, it is the job-dissatisfied population that is the least confident and the most cynical. Once more the relationship is monotonic and significant, with JDs averaging 8 to 9 percent less trust than the JSs.<sup>10</sup> When these findings are combined with those concerning political alienation, we are led to the conclusion that our first hypothesis is supported: JDs



are more likely to feel removed from the leaders and institutions of U.S. politics than are JSs.

Our second hypothesis suggested that the JDs would be more inclined to advocate policy changes than would JSs. Without belaboring each individual item, it is clear that job satisfaction plays a suggestive, but relatively minor role in the area of ideology and policy preferences. As one would expect, the dissatisfieds are slightly more liberal in their policy preferences, and slightly more inclined to favor greater government spending (with defense spending the one exception to this latter pattern). Differences, while significant, are often quite small. Our second hypothesis is thus at best only weakly supported. What ideological conflict exists on some of the major problems of the day apparently extends across categories of job satisfaction.

There are several intriguing exceptions to this pattern of small differences, however. JD individuals are 15 percent more likely to favor greater spending to protect the environment, 13 percent more likely to favor greater spending to aid the nation's big cities, and 9 percent more likely to favor the reduction of income differences. In addition, they are 9 percent more likely to call themselves liberal, 13 percent less likely to call themselves conservative, and 12 percent more likely to consider themselves politically independent (tables not shown). While we cannot say definitely that job satisfaction distinguishes the population on issues of ideology and policy, we are not ready to discount this either. It is clear, however, that job satisfaction does not break the population into ideologically distinct majorities.

The final political variable to be examined is political participation. If we take nonvoting as one measure of noninvolvement with, or alienation from, the political system, then JD individuals qualify as a group that not only talks alienated, but acts it as well. Table 5 shows that in all the presidential elections for which such data exist (1968, 1972, and 1976) JDs voted less often than JSs. By 1976 nonvoting among the dissatisfied rose to 47 percent, a full 22 percent higher than for the job-satisfied group. Our third hypothesis is, therefore, also supported.

When we combine this last observation with what we have already discussed, we gain a rather clear picture of the JD respondent as one whose faith in government is relatively low and whose willingness to get involved is not great. Although we are not prepared to classify him or her as genuinely alienated, signs of estrangement certainly exist. Equally

**Table 5**  
**Voting and Job Satisfaction**  
 (Percentages of JS, MS, and JD Individuals  
 Who Voted in Selected Elections)

	<i>Voted in 1968</i>		<i>Voted in 1972</i>		<i>Voted in 1976</i>	
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
Job-satisfied	77%	23%	77%	23%	75%	25%
Moderately job-satisfied	69	31	67	33	66	34
Job-dissatisfied	62	38	64	36	53	47
	<i>N = 1373</i>		<i>N = 3223</i>		<i>N = 2133</i>	
	chi-square = 31.6		chi-square = 76.3		chi-square = 70.7	
	<i>p = .0001</i>		<i>p = .0001</i>		<i>p = .0001</i>	

significant is that this pattern holds for every aspect of politics into which we were able to inquire. Although the job-satisfied are not starry-eyed idealists, it must be reiterated that they are significantly less politically alienated or distrustful, show a slight tendency to be politically more conservative, and are distinctly more likely to vote than their job-dissatisfied counterparts. The consistent and monotonic nature of this pattern leads us to conclude that our central hypothesis is confirmed: job satisfaction is systematically related to politics.

#### ***Controlling for Demographic, Attitudinal, and Job-Related Factors***

It is possible, of course, that the relationships we have demonstrated are largely spurious, or at least attributable to more causally distant variables. To test for this possibility we reran all of the political relationships, controlling for standard demographic variables (age, race, sex, and education), for the job-related variables (income, income satisfaction, income deterioration, perceived financial status, autonomy, occupation, and job security), and for the personal satisfaction variables (general happiness, marital happiness, and satisfaction with one's friends, family, residence, and activities). It was our expectation that, in each case, job satisfaction would continue to show the relationships exhibited in the prior section, but that they would be weakened when the control variable worked in opposition to the main relationship, and strengthened when it worked in conjunction.

The specific results of these analyses are too cumbersome to replicate here, but they were true to our expectations. That is, within similar strata (same education, same income, and so on) differences between the job-satisfied and the job-dissatisfied remained. Also, when the factors are arrayed so as to supplement each other (high-income JS individuals compared to low-income JD individuals, for example), the strength of the relationship with the political variables is increased in the expected direction. Even with a sample as large as ours, however, the number of individuals falling into each cell quickly shrinks. As a result, many of these controlled relationships are not statistically significant at normally accepted levels. In all cases, however, where the numbers remained adequate, the relationships remained significant. Even in the nonsignificant cases, the tables showed a clear and consistent relationship between job satisfaction and politics in the predicted direction. In short,

our fourth and final hypothesis was confirmed, though not always at an acceptable level of statistical significance.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The burden of our paper's argument has been to demonstrate that job satisfaction and political satisfaction are related. This we were able to do. Our findings provide firm evidence that JS is a variable that has a bearing on political attitudes and behavior. How an individual feels about the totality of his job experience is clearly related to the way he or she feels about the government. Our data show that JS is not synonymous with specific components of one's job or personal life, though these are, of course, related. Instead, JS is an important concept that helps us explain some of the individual variations in the political responses of people who hold identical jobs.

To summarize our specific findings briefly, we consistently found JD to be accompanied by higher levels of political alienation, less confidence that officials in Washington understand or care about citizens' concerns, and less political optimism generally. JDs are somewhat more inclined than JSs to consider themselves liberal and to advocate greater income equalization. On most policy preferences the two groups are not widely separated, although JDs are somewhat more inclined to favor governmental spending for Great Society or entitlement programs. These last results confirm once again what has been observed by others, notably by Schlozman and Verba (1979): that the ideological gulf between different subgroups in the United States is relatively narrow.

By contrast, we found pronounced differences in the voting behavior of the two groups, with JDs having participated much less in the three presidential elections. All told, we must conclude that job dissatisfaction and political dissatisfaction are related. We are tempted to say that JD contributes to political dissatisfaction, but our data do not permit us to test conclusively for causality. Instead we must content ourselves with asserting that dissatisfaction with one's job is quite likely to be accompanied by dissatisfaction with one's government.

As we stated at the outset, this paper is intended to be an exploratory study: an initial attempt to survey the terrain so as to assess the potential payoff of more intensive analysis. It is our conclusion that further analysis is warranted, though there are limits to what this particular body

of data can yield. Now that we have disassembled the components of work, satisfaction, and mass politics so as to examine a few of the more direct relationships, it is necessary to turn to the more complex linkages that undoubtedly exist. In this research we have examined job satisfaction separately as both a dependent variable and an independent variable. The next stage is to combine these models and analyze JS as an intervening variable in the larger dynamics that connect work and politics. We are currently engaged in research of this nature.

It is, of course, significant that with an admittedly imperfect measure of job satisfaction we were able to demonstrate a strong enough relationship with politics to encourage further analysis of the data. There are, however, certain limitations in the GSS that have presented themselves. We strongly suspect that a more sensitive measure of JS would uncover stronger and more complex relationships with work and politics. A measure that would permit jobholders to reflect more meaningfully on their work and the gratifications and frustrations related to it might permit the investigator to distinguish with more assurance the aspects of work that relate to politics. The ability to make such a distinction becomes crucial for political scientists concerned about citizens' perception of and involvement in government. Before we can make definitive assertions about the impact of work on politics, we need to discover the meaning individuals attach to JS and exactly how they relate this to politics. Herein lies the importance of the topic of job satisfaction for the student of politics. The data available permitted us to raise the question, but we were able only to hint at an answer. Our data are far too general to supply anything but leads. To answer the question fully requires not only more in-depth analysis of these data, but the development of a body of data that offers more sophisticated measures of job characteristics, job satisfaction, and political involvement. Such data and research are all the more crucial as we seem to enter an era when the issue of employment has moved to the center of the political stage.

#### **Appendix: Questions Used from NORC GSS File**

##### *Job Satisfaction Question*

1. On the whole, how satisfied are you with the work you do—would you say you are very satisfied, moderately satisfied, a little dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?

*Financial Rewards*

1. We are interested in how people are getting along financially these days. So far as you and your family are concerned, would you say that you are pretty well satisfied with your present financial situation, more or less satisfied, or not satisfied at all?
2. During the last few years, has your financial situation been getting better, getting worse, or has it stayed the same?
3. Compared with American families in general, would you say your family income is far below average, below average, average, above average, or far above average?
4. Did you earn any income from (*occupation*) in (*year prior to survey*)? (If yes) In which of these groups did your earnings from (*occupation*) for last year fall? That is, before taxes and other deductions. Just tell me the letter. (Interviewer shows R card).

*Occupation*

1. What kind of work do you normally do? That is, what is your job called?

*Autonomy*

1. Are you self-employed or do you work for someone else?

*Job Security*

1. Thinking about the next 12 months, how likely do you think it is that you will lose your job or be laid off—very likely, fairly likely, not too likely, or not at all likely?
2. About how easy would it be for you to find a job with another employer with approximately the same income and fringe benefits you now have? Would you say very easy, somewhat easy, or not easy at all?
3. At any time during the last ten years, have you been unemployed and looking for work for as long as a month?

*Political Alienation*

1. Now I want to read you some things some people have told us they felt from time to time. Do you tend to feel or not . . .  
The people running the country don't really care what happens to you.
2. (Refer to statement above)  
. . . What you think doesn't count too much anymore.

3. (Refer to statement above)  
... The people in Washington, D.C. are out of touch with the rest of the country.
4. Now I'm going to read several more statements. Some people agree with a statement, others disagree. As I read each one, tell me whether you more or less agree with it, or more or less disagree.  
... Most public officials (people in public office) are not really interested in the problems of the average man.

*Trust in Government*

1. I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?  
... Executive branch of the federal government
2. (Refer to statement above)  
... Congress
3. (Refer to statement above)  
... U.S. Supreme Court
4. (Refer to statement above)  
... Military

*Ideology and Policy Preferences*

1. Some people think the government in Washington ought to reduce the income differences between the rich and the poor, perhaps by raising the taxes of wealthy families or by giving income assistance to the poor. Others think that the government should not concern itself with reducing this income difference between the rich and the poor. (Interviewer hands R card.) Here is a card with a scale from 1 to 7. Think of a score of 1 as meaning that the government ought to reduce the income differences between the rich and poor, and a score of 7 as meaning that the government should not concern itself with reducing income differences. What score between 1 and 7 comes closest to the way you feel?
2. We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether

you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount. Are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on . . .

Space exploration program?

3. (Refer to statement above)  
. . . Improving and protecting the environment?
4. (Refer to the statement above)  
. . . Improving and protecting the nation's health?
5. (Refer to statement above)  
. . . Solving the problems of the big cities?
6. (Refer to statement above)  
. . . Improving the nation's education system?
7. (Refer to statement above)  
. . . The military, armaments, and defense?
8. (Refer to statement above)  
. . . Welfare?
9. (Refer to statement above)  
. . . Foreign aid?
10. Do you expect the United States to fight in another war within the next ten years?
11. We hear a lot of talk these days about Liberals and Conservatives. I'm going to show you a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely Liberal—point 1—to extremely Conservative—point 7. Where would you place yourself on this scale?

*Voting Behavior*

1. Now in 1968, you remember that Humphrey ran for president on the Democratic ticket against Nixon for the Republicans, and Wallace as Independent. Do you remember for sure whether or not you voted in that election?
2. In 1972, you remember that McGovern ran for president on the Democratic ticket against Nixon for the Republicans. Do you remember for sure whether or not you voted in that election?
3. In 1976, you remember that Carter ran for president on the Democratic ticket against Ford for the Republicans. Do you remember for sure whether or not you voted in that election?



*Personal Happiness and Satisfaction*

1. Taken all together, how would you say things are going these days—would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?
2. For each area of life I am going to name, tell me the number that shows how much satisfaction you get from that area. (Interviewer hands respondent card which contains 7 response categories ranging from "a very great deal" to "none.")  
... Your family life
3. (Refer to statement above)  
... Your non-working activities—hobbies and so on
4. In general, do you find life exciting, pretty routine, or dull?
5. (Refer to statement above)  
... Your friendships
6. (Refer to statement above)  
... The city or place you live in
7. Taking things all together, how would you describe your marriage? Would you say that your marriage is very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?

**Notes**

1. Recently the question has been raised whether this work ethic—frequently referred to as the Protestant ethic—still exerts such a strong hold over Americans, especially over the younger generation. The extant research suggests that dedication to work has remained high, but there has been an increased rejection of certain organizational features of work, especially among better-educated blue-collar workers (Sheppard and Herrick, 1972; O'Toole, 1974).
2. Since 1949 the Gallup Poll has been asking, "On the whole would you say you are satisfied with the work you are doing?" Since the early 1960s the percentage saying they were satisfied has remained between 80 and 90 percent.
3. Much attention has recently been paid to worker participation and its impact on both job satisfaction and politics. The results of these analyses have been far from consistent.
4. The study was conducted in the 1960s when automobile workers were among the most highly paid unskilled workers in the nation.
5. Sociologists of occupation have persistently tried to isolate those job-related factors that contribute to JS but so far have not been able to reach much consensus, although some agreement on some factors does exist. The Institute

for Social Research in Ann Arbor, for example, noted that workers' evaluations of a job could be classified under five headings: (1) comfort; (2) financial reward; (3) challenge; (4) co-worker relations; (5) resources for performing the job (Quinn, Staines, and McCullough, 1971). Others have added or subsumed under the above categories the quality of supervision; the nature of the organizational setting and structure; job security; and autonomy.

6. For all three of the above points we are not arguing that the connection between politics or the government and job satisfaction need be a conscious calculation on the part of citizens. Rather, we see it as in part an unconscious relationship that is more likely to occur in a political environment where private and governmental boundaries are blurred or overlap.

7. There are, of course, exceptions to the rule, such as field experiments and nonparticipant observations, as well as in-depth interviews. A classic example combining parts of all three is the famous Hawthorne study conducted by Elton Mayo, Fritz Jules Roethlisberger, W. Lloyd Warner, and T. North Whitehead in 1939 (reported in Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939).

8. For measuring job autonomy we were forced to use an admittedly tenuous surrogate: self-employment. We are, of course, aware that many employees also enjoy a great deal of autonomy.

9. Inasmuch as this is an exploratory study, we chose to focus largely on individual items rather than scales, and on simple cross-tabulations rather than the more parsimonious but less intuitively obvious statistics. We did this to get a better feel for the specific relationships involved before moving on to more complex analyses. The cost involved in this approach is a plethora of tables, many of which are similar in the basic relationships they uncover. In this paper we try to present as many of the findings as possible without overwhelming the reader with detail. As a result, we choose representative tables to present, describing the rest of the findings in more summary fashion. Readers interested in the complete set of tables should contact the authors directly.

10. A certain degree of general malaise or pessimism seems prevalent among JDs. For example, they are 13 percent more likely to expect war in the next ten years than are JSs.

#### References

- Bell, D. 1975. *The Cultural Contradiction of Capitalism*. New York: Basic Books.
- Campbell, A., P. Converse, W. Miller, and D. Stokes. 1960. *The American Voter*. New York: Wiley.
- Campbell, A., P. Converse, and W. Rodgers. 1976. *The Quality of American Life*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Herzberg, F. 1968. *Work and the Nature of Man*. London: Staples Press.
- Herzberg, F., B. Mausner, R. D. Peterson, and D. F. Capwell. 1957. *Job Atti-*

- tudes: Review of Research and Opinion*. Pittsburgh: Psychological Service of Pittsburgh.
- Inkeles, A. 1960. Industrial man: the relation of status to experience, perception, and value. *American Journal of Sociology*, 66: 1-31.
- Kahn, R. L. 1972. The meaning of work: interpretation and proposals for measurement. In *The Human Meaning of Social Change*, ed. A. Campbell and P. E. Converse. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Kanter, R. 1976. *Work and Family in the United States*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Kornhauser, A. 1965. *Mental Health of the Industrial Worker*. New York: Wiley.
- Morse, N., and R. Weiss. 1955. The function and meaning of work and the job. *American Sociological Review*, 20: 191-198.
- O'Toole, James. (Ed.) 1974. *Work and the Quality of Life*. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press.
- Quinn, R. P., G. L. Staines, and M. R. McCullough. 1971. *Job Satisfaction: Is There a Trend?* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Roethlisberger, Fritz Jules, and William J. Dickson. 1939. *Management and the Worker*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Sarason, S. B. 1972. *The Creation of Settings and the Future Societies*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schlozman, K., and S. Verba. 1979. *Injury to Insult: Unemployment, Class, and Political Response*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Sheppard, H., and N. Herrick. 1972. *Where Have All the Jobs Gone?* New York: Free Press.
- Strauss, G. 1974. Is there a blue-collar revolt against work? In *Work and the Quality of Life*, ed. James O'Toole. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press.
- Wolfbein, S. 1971. *Work in American Society*. Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman.