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ON THE MEASUREMENT OF DIFFUSE SUPPORT: SOME EVIDENCE FROM MEXICO*

ABSTRACT. A large body of theoretical research suggests a strong association between diffuse support for the political system and political stability. Yet, empirical research has paid little attention to the measurement of diffuse support, preferring instead to rely uncritically upon the Trust in Government index devised many years ago. This paper seeks to test a new measure, Political Support—Alienation with data from Mexico. The alternative measure is shown to have greater reliability and validity than the standard measure. Important implications for the interpretation of levels of diffuse support in Mexico emerge from the analysis. Data from the United States and Costa Rica are introduced to provide comparative perspective.

Over a decade ago, David Easton emphasized that the maintenance of diffuse support is critical if a political system is to survive: "Where such support threatens to fall below a minimal level, regardless of the cause, the system must either provide mechanisms to revive the flagging support or its days will be numbered" (Easton, 1965, p. 124). More recently, observers concerned about the cumulative impact of political assassinations, the Vietnam war, and Watergate, have been suggesting that such events have caused an erosion of diffuse support in America. Miller (1974a, p. 951) warns ominously that, "When such support wanes, underlying discontent is the necessary result, and the potential for revolutionary alteration of the political and social system is enhanced".

In light of the apparent importance of diffuse support for political stability, one would expect it to have been the object of careful measurement. Surprisingly, little research has focused on this problem. Rather, researchers have generally made uncritical use of the Trust in Government Scale (hereafter called SRCT) developed by the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan (Robinson *et al.*, 1969, pp. 626–647). This paper attempts to improve the measurement of diffuse support by comparing the reliability and validity of the SRCT measure to a new measure, Political Support—Alienation (hereafter PSA), developed by Muller and Jukam (1977). It then goes on to show that depending upon the measure which is chosen, dramati-

cally different interpretations of the degree of diffuse support are obtained. In the main, the data in the paper come from Mexico, although comparative data from the United States and Costa Rica are introduced in the final section.

I. DEFINING DIFFUSE SUPPORT

Although terminology for diffuse support differs, there is general agreement on its definition. Easton (1975, p. 445), relying on Parsons (1958), defines diffuse support as "support which underlies the regime as a whole and the political community". Almond and Verba (1965, p. 63) use the term 'system affect', meaning "generalized attitudes toward the system as a whole...", while Miller (1974a, p. 952) refers to 'Political Trust', which is a "...basic evaluative or affective orientation toward the government".

Diffuse support is generally conceived of as a continuum which runs from support, at the positive end, to alienation, at the negative end. Citrin *et al.* (1975, p. 3) follow this view in their discussion of the variable 'alienation/allegiance':

> To be politically alienated is to feel a relatively enduring sense of estrangement from existing political institutions, values and leaders. At the far end of the continuum, the politically alienated feel themselves outsiders, gripped in an alien political order; they would welcome fundamental changes in the ongoing regime. By contrast, the politically allegiant feel themselves an integral part of the political system; they belong to it psychologically as well as legally. Allegiant citizens evaluate the regime positively, see it as morally worthy, and believe it has a legitimate claim to their loyalty.

Other terminology and definitions appear in scores of articles published since the early 1960s,[1] but it is clear that diffuse support is not limited to support for (or approval of) the particular incumbents of the day: rather, diffuse support is believed to be relatively immune from evaluation of individual incumbents (i.e., specific support), at least in the relatively short term. Diffuse support is thought to serve as a reservoir which exists "independently of the specific rewards which the member may feel he obtains from belonging to the system" (Easton, 1965, p. 125). Citrin *et al.* (p.4) emphasize that alienation/allegiance "must be distinguished from responses based on fleeting dissatisfactions or short-run shifts of mood... *We reserve the term alienation for negative responses that go beyond the activities of incumbent leaders to the essential principals and institutions of the system itself*".

One of the few attempts to explore the measurement of diffuse support is

Miller's study (1974b, p. 1000) of data from the 1964–1970 period. He concluded that the Trust in Government Scale is a valid measure of political discontent. Citrin (1974), however, comes to precisely the opposite conclusion in his analysis of the same data. Citrin argues that the Trust in Government Scale is primarily a measure of dissatisfaction with the performance of incumbents rather than of generalized dissatisfaction with the system of government. His evidence rests on data which, he argues, show that individuals can have a diffuse sense of pride in the system while at the same time exhibiting a very low trust in government as measured by the SRC Scale. Citrin (p. 976) concludes that: "the Trust in Government Scale fails to discriminate between the politically alienated and those who mistrust particular leaders or politicians as a class without repudiating regime values or institutions". Easton's (1975, p. 450) consideration of the Trust in Government Scale has led him to a similar conclusion.

Both Citrin *et al.* (p. 5) and Easton (1975, p. 450) argue for a test of the validity of the Trust in Government measure. In response to this challenge, Citrin *et al.* developed a "Political Alienation Index (PAI)" drawn from questions they administered in the San Francisco Bay area. Their efforts, however, are of limited utility. As the authors themselves point out, "the procedures we have employed to construct the PAI are eclectic and in some respects unconventional" (p. 8). The items are a curious mixture of the standard Trust in Government items, pride in the system, and evaluative adjectives. Moreover, since the PAI measure was not compared to the Trust in Government Index, no true test of its comparative discriminant validity was provided.

In a recent article, Muller and Jukam have taken up the challenge presented by Citrin and Easton, developing a new measure of diffuse support, or what Muller (1979) has called "Political Support–Alienation" (hereafter PSA). Using data from the Federal Republic of Germany, they have attempted to contrast the reliability and validity of political Support–Alienation with that of the Trust in Government Scale, but have been able to do so in only a limited way since they had not included in their questionnaire the actual Trust in Government items. Instead, they had used two 'variants' of SRC items and two other items which they considered "analogous" to the SRC items (Muller and Jukam, p. 1569). While it would appear that the overall Political Trust Scale used by Muller and Jukam is indeed analogous to

the SRC Trust in Government Scale, a test should be made using the identical items.

In this paper I attempt to test the reliability and validity of the SRC Trust in Government measure against the Political Support--Alienation Scale using data from Mexico. The Mexican case presents a more rigorous test of the validity of the two measures since the distinction between incumbent and regime is frequently blurred in one-party systems. The incumbents are generally a product of, indeed a part of, the regime in such systems. Competitive systems, in contrast, such as that found in Germany, often present clearer system incumbent distinctions. If the PSA measure is superior to SRCT, it should, first of all, prove to have greater reliability. Second, PSA should demonstrate greater validity, especially in key tests which discriminate between system vs. incumbent support. After briefly discussing the Mexican context and the important, albeit subtle, system/incumbent distinction found there, the paper discusses the data base and then goes on to provide tests of reliability and validity. Finally, the levels of diffuse support found by the data are presented, with comparisons of data from the United States and Costa Rica.

II. THE MEXICAN CONTEXT

Since its establishment in 1929 (under a different name) the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) has won every presidential election by an overwhelming majority. Indeed, the PRI has also won the great bulk of Mexico's congressional seats (Cline, 1962, pp. 149–157; Scott, 1974, pp. 145 196; Padgett, 1976, pp. 62–117). The selection of the PRI's presidential candidate is left up to the incumbent president, although it is presumed that considerable consultation goes on before the name of *el tapado* (the disguised one) is revealed to the Party leadership (Scott, pp. 197–243). Mexico, therefore, contrasts considerably with two- and multi-party regimes, in which there are regular shifts of power from one party to another and in which voters can decide whether or not to "throw the rascals out" and bring in a new administration. Mexican voters, in effect, merely ratify the choice of the outgoing president rather than choosing between alternatives, since an opposition candidate stands virtually no chance of winning. Indeed, in the 1976 election there was no opposition candidate on the ballot (although write-ins were permitted).

However, despite one-party rule the Mexican electorate does see a new personality assume the leadership position every six years; each president makes his own imprint on Mexican life, and significant changes of style and substance occur from regime to regime. In the broadest terms, the Mexican presidency has oscillated between a tilt to the left and a tilt to the right.

All observers agree that these differences do not go unnoticed by the Mexican public. Indeed, one encounters many Mexicans expressing strong attachments to one president and antipathy toward another. The question, of course, is whether the indicators we have are capable of picking up this comparatively suble system-incumbent distinction.

III. DATA

The data analyzed in the present investigation were gathered in 1978 in the northern Mexican cities of Mexicali, Nogales, Agua Prieta, Ciudad Juàrez, Ciudad Acuña, and San Luis Río Colorado. The investigation centered on blue collar workers employed in factories established under the Mexican Border Industrialization Program. These factories function as assembly plants for products which are later shipped to parent companies in the United States for sale there. In total, 261 workers — of whom the interviewers rated 210 as highly cooperative and fully comprehending the schedule — responded to the system support items. The sample analyzed in this paper focuses on these 210 respondents. Further information regarding the sample design and data is contained in Seligson and Williams (1982).

IV. RELIABILITY

SRCT. The SRC Trust in Government items were included in the question-naire as reported in Table I. Unfortunately, these items present difficulties when one tries to treat them as a scale because three of them are trichoto-mies and two dichotomies. Several approaches may be taken in recoding the data so as to permit their further analysis; but the one used here follows Miller (1974a, p. 953) (the paper which makes the strongest case for using SRCT as a diffust support measure), in which trichotomies are collapsed into dichotomies.

The reliability of these items is nearly identical in the Mexican and U.S. contexts. For the U.S., looking at the 1968 SRC national election study,

TABLE I

Reliability measures of political support—alienation and trust in government

Item		Item—scale correlation (r)	Alpha if item deleted
A. *Political Support Alienation (PSA)* [a]			
mean inter-item $r = 0.44$/overall standardized item *alpha* = 0.83.			
PSA1.	To what extent to you believe that the courts in Mexico guarantee a fair trial?	0.49	0.82
PSA2.	To what extent do you think that the basic rights of the citizen are well protected by the Mexican political system?	0.60	0.79
PSA3.	To what extent do you feel proud to live under the Mexican political system?	0.69	0.77
PSA4.	To what extent do you think that the Mexican political system is the best system possible?	0.60	0.80
PSA5.	To what extent do you think that one ought to support the Mexican government?	0.59	0.80
PSA6.	To what extend do you think that you and your friends are well represented in the Mexican political system?	0.60	0.80
B. *Trust in Government (SRCT)* [b]			
mean inter-item $r = 0.25$/overall standardized item *alpha* = 0.63.			
People have different ideas about the Federal government in Mexico. These ideas do not refer to the President, but to the government in general. For example...			
SRCT1.	How much do you think that you can trust the Federal government to do what is right – just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?	0.39	0.57
SRCT2.	Do you think that the people in the government waste a lot of the money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it?	0.39	0.57

Table 1 (continued)

Item		Item–scale correlation (r)	*Alpha* if item deleted
SRCT3.	Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves, or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?	0.52	0.49
SRCT4.	Do you feel that almost all the people running the government are smart people who usually know what they are doing, or do you think that quite a lot of them don't seem to know what they are doing?	0.07	0.68
SRCT5.	Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are a little crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked at all?	0.47	0.52

[a] Dichotomization of original seven-point scale. See Note 3.
[b] As dichotomized by Miller (1974, p. 953).

Wright (1976, p. 92, Note 7) resports an *r* of 0.27. An analysis I performed of the 1976 SRC election study (coded following the suggestions of Miller) reveals that the mean inter-item correlation (*r*) is 0.29 and the standardized item *alpha* is 0.68. In a more recent study of residents of New York City, the reliability of the SRCT items was 0.70 (Muller *et al.*, 1982). In the Mexican data, the inter-item correlation is 0.25 and the *alpha*, 0.63, far below the standard of 0.80 usually applied to basic research.[2]

Item 4 ('smart') appears to be the most problematical in both the United States and Mexico. Removal of Item 4 raises the *alpha* in the Mexican data to 0.68, whereas the removal of any other item lowers it. Similarly, in the 1976 U.S. data, removal of Item 4 raises the *alpha* to 0.70. Wright (p. 94) comments that "Clearly, item four is the most serious 'offender'..." and attempts to explain the difficulty by arguing that the word 'smart' has two meanings: intelligent and clever. The same problem was reported by our Mexican interviewers, who noted that the word *listo* (smart) sometimes was interpreted as 'sharp' or 'clever' by some respondents who would add, "They sure do know what they are doing - they're cheating us". In the construct validity portion of this paper which appears below, the difficulties of the

'smart' item will become even more apparent. It should be noted, however, that since 1974 minor changes have been made by the SRC on this item and on SRCT5, but noticeable increases in reliability have not resulted.

PSA. The items chosen to measure diffuse support in Mexico were similar, but not identical, to the ones used by Muller in Germany (see Table I). Jukam and Muller (1979) have since revised the items used in Germany and applied them to a sample of New York city residents. This paper uses six of the revised items.[3] The mean inter-item correlation (*r*) of the six items in the PSA set is found to be 0.44 and the standardized item *alpha* coefficient 0.83, a satisfactory level of reliability.

This exploration of the reliability of the competing measures of political support reveals that Trust in Government shows the same (low) levels of reliability in the Mexican sample as it does in cross-sectional studies of the United States. The reliability coefficient of 0.63 produced by the SRCT items from the Mexican sample falls far below the standard of 0.80, whereas the PSA items produce a satisfactorily high coefficient of 0.83. It would appear, therefore, that there is good reason to support those who have argued that the Trust in Government measure is not a particularly reliable one.

V. VALIDITY

Dimensional Validity

Kerlinger (1966, p. 454) argues that factor analysis is the most important technique for establishing validity, by demonstrating that two or more measures are distinct from a factor analytic perspective. If the measures are truly unique, then it should be possible for a varimax rotation of the factor matrix to reveal a distinct factor for each measure.

The initial factor analysis performed on the data was accomplished on the entire set of dichotomized SRCT and PSA items, ignoring for the moment the findings reported in the previous section regarding the low reliability of the 'smart' SRCT item. As was expected Table IIa shows that with that item included, a very unsatisfactory three-factor solution emerged in which the 'smart' item splits off as a separate factor. When the 'smart' item is dropped, however, a much more satisfactory two-factor solution emerges. As is seen in Table IIb, the first factor is quite clearly PSA and the second factor SRCT.[4]

The factor analysis shown in Table II reveals quite clearly that from a dimensional validity perspective, the SRCT and PSA measures are quite

TABLE II

Varimax rotated factor matrix[a] of SRCT and PSA items

IIa. *Initial version*

		Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	h^2
PSA1	Courts	0.53	0.37	− 0.32	0.52
PSA2	Rights	0.70	0.24	− 0.19	0.58
PSA3	Pride	0.78	0.20	0.21	0.70
PSA4	Best system	0.60	0.44	0.02	0.55
PSA5	Support	0.76	0.09	0.06	0.58
PSA6	Represented	0.79	− 0.01	0.19	0.66
SRCT1	Trust	0.20	0.61	− 0.05	0.42
SRCT2	Waste taxes	0.06	0.66	0.01	0.44
SRCT3	Big interests	0.20	0.77	− 0.01	0.63
SRCT4	Smart	0.13	0.12	0.89	0.82
SRCT5	Crooked	0.09	0.67	0.26	0.53
Eigenvalue		3.98	1.39	1.07	
Variance explained		36.2%	12.6%	9.7%	
				($N = 210$)	

IIb. *Final version*

		PSA Factor 1	SRCT Factor 2	h^2
PSA1	Courts	0.51	0.35	0.39
PSA2	Rights	0.69	0.23	0.53
PSA3	Pride	0.79	0.20	0.67
PSA4	Best system	0.60	0.44	0.56
PSA5	Support	0.76	0.08	0.59
PSA6	Represented	0.80	− 0.01	0.63
SRCT1	Trust	0.20	0.61	0.42
SRCT2	Waste taxes	0.06	0.66	0.44
SRCT3	Big interests	0.20	0.77	0.63
SRCT5	Crooked	0.11	0.68	0.47
Eigenvalue		3.93	1.39	
Variance explained		39.3%	13.9%	
			($N = 210$)	

[a] The model employed is component analysis with unities on the principal diagonal.

distinct. Measurement theory would lead to the conclusion, therefore, that each measure is picking up on a relatively distinct set of attitudes. However, the factor analysis also revealed that SRCT ought not to be used as it generally is, with all five items included. The findings of Wright, reported above, which uncovered difficulties with the 'smart' item in the U.S. context, emerge again

in the dimensional analysis of the Mexican data. Coupled with the finding of low reliability reported above, there would seem little reason to continue to include this item in future studies.

Construct Validity

The final test performed on the two measures under consideration is that of construct validity. This procedure involves finding "the correspondence between the variable or concept being measured and other variables or concepts which, according to one's theoretical notions, should relate with it" (Jones, 1971, p. 49). "If", as Frey (1970, p. 251) notes, "these relationships turn out as theoretically predicted, then we have increased confidence in the validity of our measurement". Performing this test involves an examination of the relationship of PSA and SCRT to both a measure of political attitudes (ideology) and a measure of political behavior (voting).

Ideology and Political Affect. In Mexico the dominant party is populist in nature.[5] That is, it attempts to incorporate nearly all sectors of Mexican society. Most observers agree that Mexico has been among the most successful "inclusionary corporatist" regimes in Latin America (see Stepan, 1978, pp. 89 113). However, not all sectors incorporated in the PRI have shared equally in its riches. In particular, workers and peasants have received a far smaller slice of the pie than have the middle and upper classes. Hansen (1971, p. 71) echoes what most experts argue is fundamental to the understanding of the Mexican political economy:

> Monetary, fiscal, commercial and labor policies in Mexico have generally been designed to entice the business community to save and invest increasing proportions of its expanding profits in the domestic market. But these same policies, effectively implemented to accelerate growth, have tended to produce   or at least to reinforce – a highly inequitable pattern of income distribution. In other words, a large part of the bill for the past thirty years of rapid industrialization has been paid in terms of foregone increases in consumption by the large majority of Mexican society located toward the bottom of the income scale. Between 1940 and the early 1960s, the rich in Mexico became richer and the poor, poorer, some in a relative sense and some absolutely. Measurements of income distribution in recent decades indicate that at least as late as 1963 Mexico continued to lead almost all other Latin American countries in terms of income inequality. Even in the realm of government services that improve lower-class standards of living, Mexico has lagged well behind other major Latin American countries in providing for the well-being of the poorer half of its society.

Leftists in Mexico have been persistent critics of the glaring inequalities engendered by the policies of the PRI (González Casanova, 1965: pp. 104--

119). Their view is that fundamental changes need to take place in the system of government in order for these inequalities to be redressed. If PSA is truly a measure of diffuse support, one would expect it to be correlated with ideological orientation, thereby reflecting the fundamental dissatisfaction expressed by leftists. Conversely, if SRCT does not tap system affect, one would expect it to be unrelated to ideological orientation. Stated formally: in Mexico, a measure of political affect which taps diffuse support should be correlated with left-right ideological orientation such that leftists would score low on diffuse support and rightists should score high.

Ideological orientation was operationalized by presenting the respondent with a line divided into ten segments of equal length. On the extreme left, the line was labeled 'left'; and, on the extreme right, the line was labeled 'right'. Respondents were asked to locate themselves on this continuum. A summated index was computed for both PSA and SRCT.[6] The results of the analysis support the hypothesis presented above. When the SRCT and PSA indexes are correlated with ideological orientation, only PSA has any significant association ($r = 0.27$, sig. < 0.001).

Further details of the association between PSA and ideological orientation are revealed in Table III. To get a clear picture of the relationship between the variables, PSA scores were collapsed into six categories. Ideological orientation has been collapsed into five categories: 'extreme left', 'left', 'center', 'right' and 'extreme right'. Recalculating the strength and relationship on the collapsed Table yields a *Tau c* of 0.21 (sig. < 0.001) as compared with the *Tau b* of 0.26 derived from a similar table reported by Muller and Jukam (p. 1573). Hence, although the relationship in the Mexican data is not a very strong one, it is noteworthy that the German data set did not yield a strength of association much higher in spite of the much larger number of university educated respondents in that sample. Samples drawn from among university students are far more likely to contain a considerably larger proportion of extreme leftists than the sample being analyzed here. Similarly, strong supporters of a rightist position are probably clustered in various business rôles and political élite rôles. The sample analyzed in this paper is uniformly working class, and therefore is devoid of either university students or business and government leaders.

Examining Table III closely, one notes that only 20.4 percent of the respondents consider themselves to be on the left side of the continuum. Of those on the 'extreme left', 20.0 percent score 'very alienated' on PSA while

TABLE III

Political support–alienation and Left–Right ideological orientation

Political support–alienation	Ideological orientation									
	Extreme left		Left		Center		Right		Extreme Right	
Very alienated	20.0	(3)	7.7	(2)	7.7	(3)	4.5	(3)	1.9	(1)
	20.0	(3)	30.8	(8)	7.7	(3)	13.4	(9)	9.3	(5)
	26.7	(4)	19.2	(5)	20.5	(8)	28.4	(9)	14.8	(8)
	13.3	(2)	19.2	(5)	23.1	(9)	29.9	(20)	18.5	(10)
	13.3	(2)	19.2	(5)	30.8	(12)	16.4	(11)	27.8	(15)
Very supportive	6.7	(1)	3.8	(1)	10.3	(4)	7.5	(5)	27.8	(15)
	100.0	(15)	100.0	(26)	100.0	(39)	100.0	(67)	100.0	(54)

Tau c = 0.21; sig. < 0.001; *N* = 201

only 6.7 percent score 'very supportive'. Summing the percentages in the two most alienated cells of those whose ideological orientation is extreme left yields 40.0 percent of the respondents, whereas only 20.0 percent are in the two most supportive cells. The pattern for those in the 'left' category is similar, with the bulk of respondents scoring in the alienated zone of PSA. At the other end of the ideological continuum, 27.8 percent of those in the extreme right score in the very supportive zone on PSA compared to only 1.9 who scored in the very alienated zone. Fully 74.1 percent of those respondents who are on the extreme right score in the supportive zone of PSA, as contrasted with 26.9 percent on the extreme right who score in the alienated zone. Those at the 'center' tend to be more supportive than negative, indicating that a centrist position in Mexico is one which tends toward system support.

Voting. The ultimate test of the construct validity of the two affect measures should be their ability to predict political behavior. Several studies have pointed to a positive association between political support and institutionalized[7] political participation (Milbrath and Goel, 1977, p. 64).[8] In Mexico, the form of political behavior *par excellence*, considered by most observers to be the best observable indication of political alienation, is abstention from voting. Mexican political leaders repeatedly make reference to the 'problem of abstentionism' and, in recent years, have waged vigorous compaigns against it. There is little question that élites view growing abstention from the vote as a clear sign that support for the Mexican system of government is declining. In the last few elections the problem has become so great that leading politicians have threatened to apply little-used election laws, which make abstention punishable by a fine, a prison term of up to six months, and the loss of one's political rights for up to a year. In the 1970 presidential election 36 percent of the registered voters stayed home, resulting in the PRI candidate's receiving the votes of only 55 percent of the registered voters. In Mexico City, by far the largest, most politically important city in all of Mexico, only 43 percent of the reigstered voters supported the PRI (Scott, p. 398). Despite the vigorous compaign to get out the vote, abstentionism declined only slightly in the 1976 presidential election (*Latin America* July 9, 1976, p. 209), and in the 1979 congressional election abstention increased once again, reaching an all-time high of just over 50 percent, up over 10 percent from the previous election. Over 800 000 of the 14 million ballots cast were spoiled

by the voters, an act which many observers have taken to indicate an active form of protest (*Latin American Political Report*, August 10, 1979, p. 246).

The explicit connection between diffuse support and voting has been formulated by Coleman (1976, p. 18) in a recent paper:

Political authorities in one-party regimes will tend to define voting as an act of allegiance to the regime and to the political community itself. Supportive citizens will be encouraged (and would be expected even without encouragement) to vote frequently as an expression of their underlying allegiance. Nonsupportive citizens may be expected to vote less frequently as an act of (passive) resistance or out of a sense of futility. The underlying support/nonsupport predisposition will determine what use citizens make of the opportunity not to vote provided by any given one-party system. The opportunity may be relatively great, as in the Mexican case, or minimal, as in the Soviet case. But regardless of systemic variation in opportunity, diffuse support orientations will be related to nonvoting.

Coleman's (pp. 27–33) research in Mexico City among a probability sample of residents confirmed his hypothesis, finding a significant ($r = -0.35$) correlation between his measure of diffuse support and abstentionism.[9] Research by Handelman (1979, pp. 164–166) among workers in Mexico City and Guadalajara found that worker radicalism was associated with abstentionism.

The turnout for the 1976 presidential election provides an excellent test of the relationship between diffuse support and absentionism since in that year there was only one candidate on the ballot (López Portillo of the PRI).[10] In order to develop a clear picture of the relationship between support and voting, both PSA and SRCT were again collapsed into six categories as is shown in Table IV. Using as the dependent variable voting in the 1976 presidential election, no significant relationship between SRCT and voting in uncovered (Table IVa), although there is a tendency in the predicted direction. The relationship between PSA and voting (Table IVb), however, is significant ($p < 0.001$; *Tau c* = - 0.28).

Although there are indications that SRCT is also higher among those who vote and lower among those who abstain, the pattern is very unclear and in some cases contradictory. For example, as is shown in Table IVa, respondents with the highest levels of trust are only slightly more likely to vote than those whose trust falls into the next-to-lowest category. A more distressing result of the analysis of SRCT and voting is that even among the most distrustful of the respondents well over half (56.7 percent) cast their votes. The PSA measure, in contrast, not only reveals a clear monotonic relationship between diffuse support and voting behavior, but also finds that two-thirds of those

TABLE IV

Relationship between political affect and voting, 1976 presidential election

IVa. *Trust in government (SRCT)*

Vote	Low trust										High trust	
	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)
Voted	56.7	(17)	70.7	(29)	61.2	(30)	79.3	(23)	85.3	(29)	75.0	(12)
Abstained	43.3	(13)	29.3	(12)	38.8	(19)	20.7	(6)	14.7	(5)	25.0	(4)
TOTAL	100.0	(30)	100.0	(41)	100.0	(49)	100.0	(29)	100.0	(34)	100.0	(16)

$X^2 = 9.57$ $(N = 199)$; p = NS

IVb. *Political support - alienation (PSA)*

Vote	Support										Alienation	
	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)
Voted	33.3	(4)	51.7	(15)	68.9	(31)	79.2	(38)	81.4	(35)	83.3	(20)
Abstained	66.7	(8)	48.3	(14)	31.1	(14)	20.8	(10)	18.6	(8)	16.7	(4)
TOTAL	100.0	(12)	100.0	(29)	100.0	(45)	100.0	(48)	100.0	(43)	100.0	(24)

$X^2 = 19.24$; p = < 0.001; $tau\ c$ = −0.28 $(N = 201)$

TABLE V

Comparison of SRC Trust and Political Support – Alienation in Mexico, United States and Costa Rica[a]

		MEXICO SRCT		PSA		NEW YORK CITY SRCT		PSA		COSTA RICA SRCT		PSA	
Alienated	0	14.8	(30)	5.9	(12)	14.9	(24)	0.9	(3)	6.6	(6)	0	(0)
	1	20.2	(41)	14.1	(29)	26.7	(43)	1.1	(4)	15.4	(14)	4.3	(4)
	2	24.6	(50)	22.0	(45)	20.5	(33)	9.1	(32)	14.3	(13)	4.3	(4)
	3	14.3	(29)	23.4	(48)	13.7	(22)	17.1	(60)	19.8	(18)	11.8	(11)
	4	17.7	(36)	22.0	(45)	15.5	(25)	30.9	(108)	30.8	(28)	30.1	(28)
Supportive	5	8.4	(17)	12.7	(26)	8.7	(14)	40.9	(143)	13.2	(12)	49.5	(46)
TOTAL		100.0%	(203)	100.0%	(205)	100.0%	(161)	100.0%	(350)	100.0%	(91)	100.0%	(93)
$\bar{X}$		2.25		2.80		2.14		3.07		2.93		4.15	
S.D.		1.53		1.42		1.11		1.09		1.47		1.08	
		$t = -5.01$; sig. < 0.001				$t = 44.87$; sig. < 0.001				$t = -8.09$; sig. < 0.001			

[a] As indicated in the text, samples are all blue-collar, urban residents.

in the lowest support category abstain, whereas four-fifths in the highest two support categories vote.

The analysis presented thus far has revealed that, for the present data set at least, PSA has greater reliability and validity than SRCT. The implications of those findings are highlighted in the final section of this paper, which attempts to reveal, in comparative perspective, the differing interpretations of the levels of diffuse support which are given by the SRCT and PSA measures.

VI. COMPARATIVE LEVELS OF DIFFUSE SUPPORT

The real payoff of developing better operational measures of political variables is that they provide us with a clearer, more accurate assessment of political reality. As discussed above, the Mexican case is one in which several investigators have questioned the long run stability of the system, arguing that diffuse support is on the wane. While I do not have longitudinal data which can help determine the direction of change, if any, in diffuse support, nor do I have a cross-section sample which would be representative of all Mexicans, I do have access to some data from the United States and Costa Rica which will help put the Mexican data in comparative perspective.

The data presented in Table V attempt to do two things. First, they permit a comparison of the SRCT and PSA measures. Not unexpectedly, they provide rather different pictures of the levels of support found in Mexico. Second, they permit a comparison of support levels in Mexico with support levels found in similar samples in the United States and Costa Rica.

The United States sample was drawn in its entirety from New York City by Muller and Jukam in 1978. The survey was designed to be a representative cross-sectional sample of New York City. The Costa Rican data was collected in 1978 by Lic. Miguel Gómez B. of the Universidad de Costa Rica. The sample is a representative cross-section of Metropolitan San José, the capital of Costa Rica, and the country's major urban provincial capitals. In both studies a subset of working class respondents was selected out of the sample and used for the analysis presented in Table V.

Looking first at the SRCT PSA comparisons, we see that SRCT indicates much lower levels of support than does PSA. At the negative end of the continuum, the SRCT measure finds 14.8 percent of the Mexican workers express-

ing strong alienation. In contrast, according to the PSA measure only 5.9 percent of the workers were located at the extreme negative of the continuum. In the negative zone on SRCT (codes 0 through 2) fall 59.6 percent of the sample in contrast to 42.0 percent as measured by PSA. Treating the scores on these variables as an interval scale, Table V shows that the mean scores for SRCT is 2.25, whereas the mean for PSA is 2.80, the difference being significant (t-test) at < 0.001.

Comparing SRCT and PSA in the United States reveals the same pattern: SRCT presents a picture of significantly lower support than does PSA. In New York, 14.9 percent of the working class components of sample are extremely alienated according to the SRCT measure, whereas only 0.9 percent are this alienated on PSA. Why is this so? Jukam and Muller (p. 24) explain:

Depending on which of these instruments one were to select, it is obvious that radically different conclusions could be drawn about the level of diffuse political affect in New York City. The distributions on these measures of diffuse political affect suggest to us that the SRC Trust in Government variable is an indicator of a relatively superficial attitude whose negative ranks include many persons who, in the words of Jack Citrin, "are verbalizing a casual and ritualistic negativism rather than an enduring sense of estrangement..." (Citrin, p. 975).

The wording of the SRCT measures appear to lend themselves to this "ritualistic negativism" much more readily than do the PSA items. As a consequence, SRCT produces higher levels of alienation than PSA.

Comparing levels of diffuse support cross-nationally is, of course, a risky operation (Frey). It is difficult to assert with complete confidence that the items used in the scale mean the same thing to individuals of different cultures. Analysis of data from a second Latin American country, Costa Rica, help test the scale's cross-cultural validity. In so doing it is possible to hold constant, at least to some extent, the impact of Latin American culture on levels of diffuse support, so that differences between the two systems can be more directly attributed to actual differences in support levels rather than to artifacts of a different cultural milieu. The expectation is that the support levels in Costa Rica should look much like they do in the United States, far higher than in Mexico. Both Costa Rica and the U.S. have long traditions of non-repressive participatory democracy in which the political system generally strives to reduce social and economic inequalities (see Seligson,

forthcoming). Mexico, however, has witnessed periodic instances of government repression and electoral fraud, while most observers believe that economic inequalities are among the sharpest in the world (Hellman, 1978, pp. 95 -146).

The PSA measure confirms that diffuse support among Mexican workers is considerably lower than it is in either the United States or Costa Rica. While 5.9 percent of the Mexican respondents scored at the extreme negative end of the PSA continuum, only 0.9 percent of workers in New York City did so and none of the workers in Costa Rica scored this low. In the negative zone of PSA (0 through 2) fall 42.0 percent of the Mexican workers, 11.1 percent of the American workers and 8.6 percent of the Costa Rican workers. At the high support end of the PSA continuum are 12.7 percent of the Mexicans, 40.9 percent of the Americans, and 49.5 percent of the Costa Ricans. The SRCT measure, however, behaves unpredictably. It finds virtually the same proportion of respondents in the Mexican and U.S. data sets at the extreme ends of the scales. The SRCT measure behaves a bit more according to expectation in Costa Rica, but still seems to under-represent woefully the proportion of respondents in the highest support category.

While these findings need to be viewed with caution, the greatly lower support levels found in the Mexican data confirm expectations and help bolster the cross-cultural validity of the PSA measure. Indeed, had support been found to be higher in Mexico than in either Costa Rica or the United States, the validity of PSA would have been open to serious question.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Diffuse support is a concept which has been used for many years by political scientists, yet, as this paper has attempted to show, only recently have there been efforts to develop reliable and valid measures of it. It has been shown that the University of Michigan Survey Research Center's Trust in Government Scale has a number of weaknesses which result in low reliability and questionable validity. A new measure, called Political Support Alienation, has been shown to exhibit both greater reliability and validity. The findings were obtained using data from Mexico, which has a system in which the distinction between diffuse support for the system and support for the incumbents is particularly difficult to measure. The tests performed here, therefore, suggest

that PSA is the measure of choice. Future studies which attempt to measure diffuse support should seriously consider using the PSA scale.

Substantive conclusions are apparent from the analysis, but their generalizability is restricted as a result of the nature of the sample design. Nevertheless, there is evidence that diffuse support among Mexican blue collar workers is linked to center-right ideological orientations. More importantly, perhaps, a lack of diffuse support is found to be linked to electoral abstention. Finally, the level of diffuse support in Mexico is considerably lower than it is in either the United States or Costa Rica. The use of the SRCT measure, however, would cause one to underestimate seriously the degree of diffuse support in the sample analyzed here, thereby possibly leading to unwarranted conclusions regarding the stability of the Mexican system. The PSA measure indicates considerably more support than does SRCT.

While it is true that diffuse support among the blue collar workers interviewed for this study is lower than it is for similar workers in the United States and Costa Rica, 58 percent of the respondents expressed support for the system. This finding is consistent with Davis's study (1976, p. 655, Note 2) of lower class respondents in Mexico City, between 50 and 68 percent of whom (depending on the measure used) expressed support for the system. Since it is the poor in Mexico who have received the fewest rewards of the Mexican Revolution, those who see a crisis of support in Mexico argue that it is this sector which bears watching very closely (Hellman, 1978; Johnson, 1978). The data presented in this paper do not appear to reveal the beginnings of such a crisis among the blue collar workers surveyed. However, it must be kept in mind that all of the respondents were employed, and payed at or above the minimum wage, and in that sense were relatively privileged. A survey of under- and unemployed workers and peasants might well reveal startlingly different results. It is this sector of the Mexican populace which has been migrating to the United States in ever increasing numbers. We suspect, as has been shown elsewhere (Seligson and Williams), that the failures of the Mexican system to provide employment for these individuals reveals itself in low levels of support. The importance of having a reliable and valid scale of diffuse support takes on added importance in this context.

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NOTES

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[1] For a list of some of these papers, see Muller and Jukam (1977, p. 1562, Note 6) and the references in Wright (1976).

[2] This is the standard used by Nunnally (1967, p. 226) and followed by Muller and Jukam (1977, p. 1568, Note 26).

It should be noted that Muller and Jukam (1977, p. 1569) report a realiability coefficient of 0.770 for the items which they use as analogs to the SRCT measure. One reason for the higher reliability of their trust measure is that they eliminated the 'smart' item. A further reason may be the nature of their sample, which included a very high proportion of university educated respondents (41 percent).

[3] One change that was introduced was the rephrasing of questions from the original agree-disagree format used in Germany, for it has been frequently noted that an acquiescence response set can arise when items are worded in that fashion. Consequently, the items were restructured so as to use a seven-point scale to measure the respondent's intensity of feeling about each statement. For example, the item, "My friends and I feel that we are quite well represented in our political system" was rephrased to read, "To what extent do you think you and your friends are well represented by the Mexican system of government?". However, in order to compare these items with the SRC trust measures we dichotomized them so that both variables would use identical scoring. Two additional items were added to the series (Item 4 and 5) in an effort to increase the number of questions which use a specific system referent.

The New York City questionnaire includes two items not used in this paper. One of these ("To what extent do you feel that your own political values differ from those of our political system") produced a split loading in the Mexican data. For this reason it was dropped here. In Mexico, the PSA items were the first series in the questionnaire in which the respondents were requested to respond with reference to a continuum, whereas in the New York City study the continuum had been used in several previous batteries of items. Apparently because of the Mexican respondents' initial unfamiliarity with the continuum format, the first item in the PSA series ("To what extent do you have respect for the political institutions in [country]?", proved to be comparatively unreliable and was therefore dropped in this paper.

[4] It should be pointed out that the factor solution reported in Table IIb is still not an ideal one because Items PSA2 and PSA5 still exhibit a tendency toward distributed loadings. These items were dropped, and the entire analysis presented in Tables III through V was replicated. No substantial differences in the results emerged. It was decided that these items be retained because their elimination did not change the results. Moreover, dropping items from the PSA set would make the analysis less directly comparable with Muller and Jukam's research in Germany and the United States.

[5] For an introduction to the Latin American variant of populism, see di Tella (1965).

[6] It was decided that cases which had any data missing be dropped, since an investigation such as this endeavors to avoid confusing questions of reliability and validity with those produced by missing data. Moreover, since only 2.4 percent of the cases on SRCT and 1.0 percent of the cases on PSA involved missing observations on any variables included in the set, little distortion in results is produced by following this procedure.

Miller (1974a, p. 954, Note 12; 1974b, p. 991, Note 7) makes a strong case for the use of Guttman scale scores rather than a simple summation procedure. However, since neither SRCT nor PSA fit the psychological model implicit in the Guttman technique (see Robinson, 1973, and Seligson, 1979, p. 144, Note 4), it was decided not to follow Miller's suggestion.

[7] The term 'institutionalized' is used to distinguish this form of activism from mobilized participation. For an explanation of this distinction, see Seligson (1980, Note 1). The literature on institutionalized participation points in the direction of a positive association between political alienation and mobilized participation. This is one central finding of Muller and Jukam (1977), Muller (1979), and Muller, Jukam and Seligson, (1982). For a discussion and analysis of the relationship between attitudes and participation, especially focusing on political affect and political efficacy, see Seligson (1979; 1980).

[8] Other research, Milbrath and Goel (1977, p. 65) point out, has found that when SES is held constant the relationship between political affect and participation declines or disappears. They argue that the weakening of the relationship when SES is introduced may be a function of the positive association found between low SES and political alienation. The present sample, however, is uniformly working class. When the relationships explored in this paper were re-examined using controls for SES (i.e., income, education, artifacts in the home, etc.), no substantial differences appear in the results. Indeed, because of the uniformity of the SES of the respondents there are no statistically significant correlations ($p = 0.05$ or better) between the SES measures and SRCT or PSA.

[9] Coleman uses three measures of diffuse support (diffuse support for Congress, diffuse support for the electoral system, and diffuse support for the Presidency). In a multiple regression analysis, using all three measures of support, only diffuse support of Congress makes a significant contribution to the equation (multiple R squared = 0.12). Cross-tabulation data provided by Coleman, however, reveal that both diffuse support for Congress and for the Presidency are significantly related ($Tau\ c = 0.19$ and 0.24 respectively) to voting. The inter-relatedness of the measures of diffuse support probably account for diffuse support for the electoral system dropping to insignificance in the multiple regression equation.

[10] As pointed out above, write-in candidates, however, were permitted, and at least three individuals campaigned as write-ins.

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