

COMMUNISM,

A Cross-Section

CONFORMITY &

of the Nation

CIVIL LIBERTIES

Speaks Its Mind

Samuel A. Stouffer

With a new introduction by James A. Davis

Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties

A Cross-Section of the Nation
Speaks Its Mind

Samuel A. Stouffer

With a New Introduction by James A. Davis



Transaction Publishers
New Brunswick (U.S.A.) and London (U.K.)

New material this edition copyright © 1992 by Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08903. Originally published in 1955 by Doubleday & Co., Inc.

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher. All inquiries should be addressed to Transaction Publishers, Rutgers—The State University, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08903.

Library of Congress Catalog Number: 91-42668

ISBN: 1-56000-613-7

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Stouffer, Samuel Andrews, 1900—

Communism, conformity, and civil liberties: a cross-section of the nation speaks its mind/Samuel A. Stouffer with a new introduction by James A. Davis.

p. cm.

ISBN 1-56000-613-7

1. Civil rights—United States. 2. Communism—United States—1917- 3. Public Opinion—United States. I. Title.

JC599.U5S82 1992

320.5'32'097309045—dc20

91-42668

CIP

Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION TO THE TRANSACTION EDITION	3
INTRODUCTION TO THE ORIGINAL EDITION	9
<i>Chapter 1</i> WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT	13
<i>Chapter 2</i> ARE CIVIC LEADERS MORE TOLERANT THAN OTHER PEOPLE?	26
<i>Chapter 3</i> IS THERE A NATIONAL ANXIETY NEUROSIS?	58
<i>Chapter 4</i> HOW TOLERANT IS THE NEW GENERATION?	89
<i>Chapter 5</i> DOES IT MATTER WHERE PEOPLE LIVE?	109
<i>Chapter 6</i> DO WOMEN HAVE VIEWPOINTS DIFFERENT FROM MEN?	131
<i>Chapter 7</i> WHAT ASPECTS OF COMMUNISM DO AMERICANS DISTRUST MOST?	156
<i>Chapter 8</i> HOW FAR DOES THE COMMUNIST THREAT ACCOUNT FOR INTOLERANCE OF NONCONFORMISTS?	188
<i>Chapter 9</i> WHAT THE ANSWERS TO SOME OF THESE QUESTIONS MEAN FOR PEOPLE WHO CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT THEM	220
APPENDICES	237

INTRODUCTION TO THE TRANSACTION EDITION

Samuel A. ("Sam") Stouffer was born in Sac City Iowa in 1900, earned his Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Chicago in 1930, was a professor of sociology at Harvard 1946 to 1960, was elected president of both The American Sociological Association and The American Association for Public Opinion Research, and succumbed to an appallingly swift cancer at age sixty.

Sam didn't look charismatic. He looked a bit like the men who played fussy bookkeepers in 1930s screwball comedies. This effect was mitigated by his cigarette habit. He lit them off the butts and didn't believe in ashtrays. We students watched, hypnotized, as the cigarette ash slowly grew and grew and then, after a nod of his head, was deposited all over his suit jacket. His usual appearance, then, was of a fussy bookkeeper who had narrowly escaped a volcano eruption.

Stouffer was not charismatic, personally. He had no groupies among the Harvard graduate students. He was not disliked. Indeed, he was a kindly person. Rather, he simply lacked the combination of paternalism and narcissism that motivates the Great Man. Sam simply wanted to get on with the job, and if students wanted to listen in, fine. He left little behind him at Harvard, save for a belated plaque in a lounge. Gaining a foothold for empirical sociology in Ivy League sociology cannot be done by one person in one lifetime.

But Sam was a great sociologist, with at least two landmarks to his credit.

The first was *The American Soldier* research, possibly the most successful venture in applied sociology. From 1941 to 1946 Stouffer was "Director of the Professional Staff of the Research Branch, Information and Education Division of the War Department," heading a stellar team of researchers whose surveys of army personnel reshaped thinking about morale, mental health, and team performance. Their work contributed importantly to

making the World War II military responsive to the needs of ten million citizen soldiers. *Communism, Conformity and Civil Liberties* is his second landmark.

As I write this, there are hardly any "communists in high places" in the USSR, much less in the United States. In 1954, things seemed different. Sane people, spurred on by shameless demagogues, were seriously worried that "subversion" was rife. Sam's own data showed 43 percent of United States adults saying *American* communists were a "great" or "very great" danger to the country. But other sane people were worried that a national climate of hysteria was developing and basic civil liberties were in danger. The latter concern motivated the then courageous Ford Foundation to fund a national inquiry, whose final report is *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties*. Stouffer, an Iowa-reared, War Department vetted Republican, as well as an outstanding scientist, was the inevitable and perfect choice to lead the project.

Two leading survey agencies, AIPO (the Gallup poll) and NORC (National Opinion Research Center), collected the 6,000 personal interviews but the analysis and writing were Sam's. He did all the work himself, with an undergraduate assistant. He hovered over the old fashioned IBM card sorter like an anxious chef with a tricky soufflé to be seasoned with cigarette ash.

His report was published in 1955, less than a year after the field work. It remains a great classic of empirical sociology.

For the professional, *Communism* is a model of craftsmanship from sampling to write up. I believe this was the first national probability sample devoted to nonpolitical academic research and it had an excellent completion rate, 84 percent, plus a neat Stoufferian twist. The assignments were split between Gallup and NORC so their results could be compared. The agreement was near perfect, documenting what might be called the fundamental theorem of survey research: independent investigators with identical questionnaires and identical probability samples get identical results. Obvious? Perhaps, but it is seldom documented and were it untrue, survey research would be pointless.

The statistical work may seem elementary. There are no fancy statistics, just percentage tables. But the argumentation is exemplary. The key findings are buttressed with appropriate and ingenious controls. The sex difference in tolerance, for example, is tested with no less than eleven control variables: interest in the topic, education, age, region, size of place, worries, labor force participation, occupation, religion, church attendance, and authoritarianism.

The presentation has never been surpassed, perhaps never equaled. Despite a master's degree in English literature from Harvard, Sam had the

gift of simple writing. The item wordings in the *American Soldier* questionnaires are famous for their clarity and simplicity. My guess is the book would come in at about the eighth or ninth grade level on a readability index, while this prose is at about the eleventh grade level. The tables are as elegant as the words. The layouts are crisp, the graphics are appropriate, and, bless his memory, he reports his "Ns" even for subgroups! He even includes footnotes on how to read the more complex tables (See table 2, chapter 5 or table 1, chapter 8.) If you wish to present statistics to the "educated layman" without compromising the science, copy Stouffer.

Despite what you see in the leading professional journals, technique isn't everything in sociology. What about the content?

The main conclusion is in chapter Three, "Is there a national anxiety neurosis?" His answer is no. Despite wide concern about domestic communism, few respondents had it at the top or even near the top of their worry lists. His key evidence is that hardly anybody mentioned communism in response to the open-ended question, "What kinds of things do you worry about most?" To be honest, I don't think this is the best part of the study. Stouffer did unearth a fundamental point here — how distant the world of political issues is from the lives of most Americans. (See Richard F. Hamilton and James D. Wright, *The State of The Masses*, Aldine, 1986). But it could be that political concerns were *relatively* salient in the early 1950s. (See John Mueller, "Trends in Political Tolerance," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Spring 1988, 1-25.) In methodological terms, his design was flawed by the absence of comparative data from other periods.

More impressive is his finding that a special sample of community leaders (mayors, Chamber of Commerce presidents, newspaper publishers, D.A.R. and American Legion officers, and so on) was more supportive of civil liberties than the national cross section. We are now familiar with the proposition that elite groups tend to be relatively "liberal" on social issues, and relatively "conservative" on economic ones. At the time, the finding reassured us a reactionary power elite was not oppressing a freedom loving grass roots.

Where he really shines is in uncovering social differences in tolerance. His measure was a scale based on questions of the general form "Would you allow an X to do Y?" (allow a communist to give a speech, allow an atheist to teach in a college, allow a socialist's book to remain in the library, and so on). They are now known as "the standard Stouffer questions." He uses the index to illuminate a wide array of tolerance differences — by age, education, sex, region, city size, leadership position, authoritarianism, and so on.

But *Communism* doesn't belong on the ancient history shelf.

"Paradigm" is now a buzz word for academic subspecialty. Actually, it denotes a scientific approach that creates research opportunities for the young and tenure seeking. (See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, 1970, 10.) *Communism* launched many a career and still generates research.

First, there is the problem of tolerance, itself. Common sense and Sam's critics say you can not tolerate something you like ("Should Mother Theresa be allowed to give a speech in your community?"). If so, it could be the classic tolerance scale is really an indirect measure of, pardon the expression, softness on communism. Perhaps young people, the better educated, urbanites, nonreligionists and the like are not really more tolerant, just more to the left in their politics. Since Sam's targets (communists, atheists, socialists) were all on the "left," the original study could not settle the problem. Professors John L. Sullivan, James Piereson, and George E. Marcus have worked at length on the matter. (See their *Political Tolerance and American Democracy*, University of Chicago Press, 1982.) Sam himself wrestles with it in chapter Eight. In 1972 we included some original Stouffer questions in the NORC General Social Survey, an annual sampling of the United States adult population, with dozens of questions repeated from year to year to monitor trends. Beginning in 1976 we added "Stouffer items" with right-wing targets such as racists and militarists. The ensuing analysis suggests that Sam's key tolerance predictors work the same way for both left- and right-wing targets. (See Lawrence Bobo and Frederick C. Licari, "Education and Political Tolerance," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1989, 285-308 and Robert L. Hall, Mark Rodeghier, and Bert Useem, "Effects of Education on Attitude to Protest," *American Sociological Review*, 1986, 564-573.)

The famous chapter "How Tolerant is the New Generation?" is a similar career builder. His finding is clear cut: younger Americans were more tolerant regardless of their schooling, the better educated were more tolerant regardless of their ages. No previous national study had shown both findings simultaneously. Stouffer elaborated this into a theory of long-term social change. He argued that two contradictory processes are at work. First, he believed we all become less tolerant as we age because of the frustrations and deprivations of what is now called "later maturity." Second, however, he believed the increasing educational levels of oncoming generations (birth cohorts) would raise tolerance. He doesn't flatly predict which effect will be stronger, but the last sentence of the chapter implies the race would go to the tolerance enhancing effects of cohort succession. It did.

Clyde Z. Nunn, Harry J. Crockett, Jr. and J. Allen William, Jr. confirmed the optimistic prediction in a 1973 national sample (*Tolerance For Noncon-*

formity, Jossey-Bass, 1978) and analyses of GSS data have tracked similar, though smaller increases in tolerance through the 1970s and 1980s.

These relationships are not immutable laws by any means. Current data cast doubt on the proposition that aging lowers tolerance. The GSS samples suggest the very youngest birth cohorts—the baby boomers and their successors who entered adulthood in the late 1970s and after—are not more tolerant than their immediate predecessors. Nevertheless, the Stouffer framework remains central for studying tolerance and its trends.

In both traditions — “what is tolerance” and “does tolerance evolve?” — the Stouffer approach is still generating research questions. The 1990 edition of *The Annotated Bibliography of Papers Using the General Social Surveys* (Tom W. Smith and Bradley J. Arnold, NORC, 1990) lists 2036 articles, books, and theses using data from the General Social Survey. Its index tells us 197 references, almost ten percent of the total, make use of the Stouffer item on Free Speech for Communists!

The book is not flawless. I think the overall organization is poor and many chapters trail off at the end, suggesting hasty writing. I also wish he has not limited so many of his analyses to “interested” people. But perfection is not required in a classic. If a classic is a model of craftsmanship, this book is a classic. If a classic is a study that continues to illuminate an important problem, this book is a classic.

Samuel A. Stouffer may not have been charismatic, but he certainly was and remains paradigmatic. No scientific craftsman could hope for a better posterity.

We hope this reprinting of *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties* will stimulate a new generation to continue the task of delineating the social roots of tolerance and intolerance and to track their evolution as its generations flow into the twenty-first century.

James A. Davis

INTRODUCTION TO THE ORIGINAL EDITION

This study was authorized by the Board of Directors of the Fund for the Republic during the period I served as President of the Fund. It is an honor to be asked to write these few introductory words, for I regard this study as a significant and valuable undertaking.

Some Americans will be surprised by what they find in these pages. Most readers, I think, will be helped to a better understanding of the disturbing situations that have marked the last few years in this country. Educators and others especially responsible for keeping our fellow citizens informed and alert will discern in *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties* how much they have left to do.

To Professor Stouffer, his eminent committee, and my former colleagues on the Board of the Fund for the Republic belongs by far the major share of credit for conceiving and carrying through this important piece of work. The Fund is concerned with preserving and strengthening the fundamental liberties of all Americans. This book reminds us that this is a continuing and much-needed job.

CLIFFORD P. CASE

**COMMUNISM, CONFORMITY, AND
CIVIL LIBERTIES**

Chapter One

WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

This is a report to the American people on the findings of a survey which was unique in its scope and in some of its methods.

More than 6000 men and women, in all parts of the country and in all walks of life, confided their thoughts in an interview which was as impartial as fallible ingenuity was able to devise. Over 500 skilled interviewers from two national research agencies did the field work.

The survey examines in some depth the reactions of Americans to two dangers.

One, from the Communist conspiracy outside and inside the country. Two, from those who in thwarting the conspiracy would sacrifice some of the very liberties which the enemy would destroy.

This inquiry, made in the summer of 1954, was concerned not with transient opinions but with deeper latent attitudes or dispositions. Some types of reactions to the Communist threat are not new and will be encountered in years to come. To think otherwise is to ignore what has happened throughout the long perspective of American history. Our Constitution was scarcely ten years old when national tempers were expressed in the Alien and Sedition Acts, under which editors went to jail for criticizing the government, and even bystanders at political meetings who made contemptuous remarks were hurried off to court. Eventually the "sober second thought of the people" prevailed. The Know-Nothing Party before the Civil War and the Ku Klux Klan in the Reconstruction period and again after World War I are other manifestations of intolerance. In the light of this record, will future historians find that the intolerance which thus far has marked the 1950s has been so extraordinary, considering the imagined provocation? There are people who see the danger from Communists as justifying drastic measures of repression, including the forfeiture of rights which were centuries in the making. Just as in the Civil War the North felt obliged to suspend the right of habeas corpus to cope