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The reduction of citizen alienation has stood prominently as a goal for the decentralization of public services. This is because concern over excessive alienation in American society has been a growing theme over the last few years. The theme has taken many forms, e.g., the generation gap, the impersonalization of American society due to technological advances, the decline of local community institutions and the family, and the growing distance between government and the governed. But whatever the form, the theme is the same: there has been a progressive estrangement of the individual from his social environment. For one author, the high rate of residential mobility, for instance, has made us "A Nation of Strangers."¹ Moreover, the results of occasional surveys have supported the basic assumption that alienation is increasing.²

The use of governmental action to reduce alienation follows a straightforward line of reasoning. Put simply, the argument is that decentralization reduces organizational scale and makes government more responsive to neighborhood needs; the citizen is more active in relation to neighborhood institutions, receives better services, and somehow becomes less alienated.³ Thus, many municipal governments, especially after the urban riots and the Riot Commission Report, have claimed that alienation reduction is a major goal for their own attempts at decentralization. Unfortunately, however, the claims for decentralization often border more on rhetoric than on reason. The purpose of this paper is to examine more closely the potential relationship of several types of decentralization to alienation, and then to review available empirical evidence dealing with correlates of alienation.

Decentralization to the Neighborhood Level

Significant decentralization changes have occurred in many cities during the last five years. Despite these changes, research on

decentralization has been considerably fragmented, with each analyst tending to focus on a single type of decentralization without developing a broader framework for comparing the different types.⁴ Our review of relevant events in the cities has revealed that neighborhood decentralization, if interpreted broadly, has taken four different forms, each of which can exist independently or in combination with the others:

- o A physical dispersion of information services (outreach programs);
- o A shift of actual decision-making to neighborhood levels of administration (administrative decentralization);
- o A shift of control over municipal resources to a neighborhood based citizenry (political decentralization); and
- o A creation of new neighborhood institutions that replace or ignore the traditional municipal bureaucracy (development of alternative institutions).

Each of these forms has different implications for the organization of social services and for the flow of political influence in the neighborhood. In addition, the forms can be said to impact on citizen alienation in slightly different ways.

Outreach Programs. This type of decentralization is typified by the opening of new, neighborhood-based facilities, often local storefronts. These facilities attempt to bring government closer to citizens by acting as a neighborhood distribution point for information services and as a local investigator of citizen grievances. The Riot Commission Report very strongly urged the development of such facilities, and many cities have indeed attempted outreach programs of one sort or another.⁵ The outreach facilities, however, involve no significant changes in the administration of or control over service delivery. Although the major expectation is that more

frequent communication will improve citizen satisfaction with services, the outreach programs are also supposed to reduce alienation by giving citizens an awareness that government is closer to them and hence likely to be more responsive to their needs.

Administrative Decentralization. This type of decentralization involves a shifting of bureaucratic authority from central commands to local, district-based officials. Whether the local district official is the police precinct commander, the sanitation district superintendent, or the district welfare center director, he is supposed to have greater knowledge of neighborhood needs, and can therefore use the increased discretion to provide improved service. A few cities have tried this type of decentralization on a limited basis.⁶ The formal citizen role in this type of decentralization is usually a minimal one, however, and any alienation reduction must be attributable to improved services or the citizens' knowledge that the services are now in the hands of local district officials.

Political Decentralization. Here, actual control over municipal resources is transferred to a neighborhood-based polity. The prime example of this type of decentralization has been in public school systems. In Detroit and New York City, this has meant that a school system previously administered on a city-wide basis by a central board of education has been divided into many local school districts, each with a local governing board.⁷ Another popularly mentioned but rarely implemented form of political decentralization is neighborhood government, which would require amendment to a state's constitution in order to be initiated, but which might then serve as a truly local, general-purpose government.⁸ In terms of alienation reduction, political decentralization can have at least two different impacts. For the citizen participants (e.g., members of the decentralized school board), alienation reduction may occur either because they have actually gained and exercised new powers over a local public service, or because services have improved. For the members of the neighborhood not actively participating in decentralized organization, alienation reduction may occur for reasons similar to administrative decentralization, i.e.,

because of improved services or because of the knowledge that the services are in the hands of locally based persons, in this case their fellow residents.

Development of Alternative Institutions. Programs that emphasize the development of new neighborhood institutions might include the federally supported antipoverty and Model Cities programs. Here, while no decentralization of the municipal bureaucracy has occurred, the development of alternative institutions has been used to achieve a similar purpose, i.e., to provide neighborhood services that have previously not been sufficient; moreover, decentralization in a broader sense has occurred, with federal resources now under local control.⁹ The potential impact on alienation reduction is similar to that of political decentralization: participants may become less alienated because they actually exercise more control over their environment or because of service improvement, and nonparticipants gain because of service improvement or because of their knowledge of the neighborhood's new resources.

These four types of decentralization, then, appear to be able to reduce alienation in only three ways. First, where decentralization provides a participatory opportunity (as in political decentralization and in the development of alternative institutions), the participants' alienation may be reduced because of the increased control over and knowledge about government resulting from their participant experiences--the *participation* hypothesis. Second, where decentralization does not provide such opportunities, or for those people who choose not to participate where opportunities do exist, alienation may be reduced because of the knowledge that decentralization has brought information services to the neighborhood, or that it has actually placed the control of resources in local hands--the *local awareness* hypothesis. Third, the alienation of either participants or nonparticipants may be reduced because of improved services--the *service improvement* hypothesis.

The ideal experiment would test these three hypotheses by assessing alienation before and after all four types of decentralization occurred, with measures distinguishing between participants (if any) and nonparticipants. Such an experiment does not exist.¹⁰ However, some of the

available evidence appears to yield consistent clues as to the likely outcome of such an experiment.

Defining Alienation: Distrust and Sense of Powerlessness

The first task is to define alienation. There is controversy over what the concept really means, how many components it has, and whether available techniques accurately measure it.¹¹ However, by assuming that decentralization of public services must at a minimum affect citizen attitudes toward governmental affairs, the search for a definition can be narrowed to *political* alienation. If decentralization does not reduce the political alienation of citizens, it is unlikely to affect more general citizen orientations toward occupational conditions or the social milieu.

There is growing evidence that political alienation has two separable dimensions: distrust of government and sense of political powerlessness. The most direct evidence for these components comes from a study by Ada Finifter, based on a national survey conducted in 1960.¹² Finifter analyzed 26 survey questions whose manifest content related to political alienation. Although she started from a theory that posited the existence of four dimensions of political alienation, a factor analysis identified only two independent factors. While she termed the dimensions "powerlessness" and "normlessness," consideration of the content of the questions suggests that "distrust" would serve equally well as a name for the second dimension, for Finifter's definition of the second dimension is that the citizen "believes that frequent deviations from accepted norms occur in the political process." The first dimension, powerlessness, "is closely related (inversely) to the concept of 'political efficacy' which has achieved such prominence in studies of voting behavior."

Other studies, based on different population samples and asking different questions, have similarly defined political alienation according to these two dimensions and found them to be independent of each other.¹³ We shall therefore review the participation, local awareness, and services satisfaction hypotheses in relation to distrust

and powerlessness (or in terms of their opposites, trust and efficacy).

The Participation Hypothesis

The hypothesis is that decentralization, when it provides opportunity for local participation, decreases alienation by involving citizens in decisions. Such involvement gives the citizen greater confidence in government agencies and a deeper understanding of the difficulties the agencies face. Because the participant is active, he also gains confidence on his own ability to affect his fate. In short, decentralization, by increasing local participation, reduces both distrust and sense of powerlessness.

The literature on political participation and organization membership suggests that this view is only partially substantiated: Trust/distrust is not related to participation; efficacy/powerlessness is. In the Finifter study cited above, the analysis not only established the two independent dimensions of distrust and powerlessness, but also went on to test the relationship between these dimensions and a variety of socioeconomic, attitudinal, and behavioral attributes. The results showed that participation in the political arena was the most significant correlate of powerlessness; the greater the participation, the lower the sense of powerlessness. However, the same participatory attribute bore no relationship to distrust.

Other evidence on political participation is consistent with Finifter's findings. For instance, Verba and Nie analyzed responses to a national survey conducted in 1967.¹⁴ They characterized all respondents according to the degree of participation, differentiating among those who were totally inactive, voted only, contacted government only on personal issues, engaged in partisan political activity, or engaged in community organizational activity. The sense of political efficacy/powerlessness was examined with a four-question index, and the results showed that the sense of efficacy was higher for all types of participants who did more than vote.

Our analysis of 1970 national survey data produced by the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center showed similar results as

these other studies with regard to both powerlessness and distrust.¹⁵ Our findings are highlighted by the pattern of responses to two questions, though the responses to other similar questions followed the same pattern (see Table 1).

Table 1
PARTICIPATION AND POLITICAL ALIENATION, 1970 NATIONAL SURVEY

People like me don't have any say about what the government does. (Powerlessness)

<u>Response</u>	<u>Nonvoters (N=493)</u>	<u>Voters Only (N=935)</u>	<u>Active Participants^a (N=127)</u>
Agree	43%	33%	21%
Disagree	57%	67%	79%
	100%	100%	100%

How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington? (Distrust)

<u>Response</u>	<u>Nonvoters (N=493)</u>	<u>Voters Only (N=935)</u>	<u>Active Participants^a (N=127)</u>
Always	8%	6%	5%
Most of the time	46%	49%	50%
Some of the time	46%	45%	45%
	100%	100%	100%

^a Respondents who voted and also participated in political affairs by attending rallies, meetings, and so forth.

The responses indicated an inverse relationship between sense of powerlessness and participation, with active participants expressing less powerlessness than voters, who in turn felt less powerlessness than nonvoters; distrust, however, did not vary with any level of participation.

Another broad study of local organization membership lends yet further support to this pattern. A ten-city survey conducted by the National Urban Observatory in 1970 asked the question, "Do you belong to any clubs, neighborhood groups or other organizations that are

working on city problems?" In addition, the survey included questions relating to efficacy and trust. Steggert combined these questions into two separate indices for efficacy and trust and compared people who belonged to local organizations with people who did not according to their scores on these indices.¹⁶ The results again showed that participation was not related to trust, but that it was related to efficacy.

All of these studies suggest that increased political participation is associated with a higher sense of efficacy or control over government, but that participation is not associated with greater trust in government. This result appears to persist even though the studies cover different types of participation, different measures of efficacy and trust, and different sets of respondents. If participation causes a reduction in the two types of alienation, there would be a correlation between them and participation. Since the necessary associational bond between participation and trust does not exist, we must conclude that increased participation will not lead to increased trust in government.

The association between efficacy and participation does not, however, mean that increased participation necessarily leads to an increase in efficacy. Other causal explanations can also account for the association. Notably, participants may be highly efficacious people at the outset. In other words, the association between participation and efficacy can be attributed either to the explanation that highly efficacious individuals choose to participate, or to the view that participation produces an increase in sense of efficacy, or both. A longitudinal study assessing efficacy before and after a participatory experience is thus necessary to distinguish between these two competing explanations. In summary, while decentralization has little promise of reducing distrust through increased participation, it may have a potential role in decreasing citizens' sense of powerlessness.

The Local Awareness Hypothesis

Whether or not decentralization creates new opportunities for participation, it can be argued that bringing outreach services

or actual decisions down to the neighborhood level will decrease alienation. Neighborhood residents will become aware that new neighborhood services exist, or that decisions are being made locally, and the decisions are based on greater familiarity with the neighborhood. This awareness might serve to increase trust in local government. Awareness of decision-making proximity may also lead the residents to feel a heightened sense of efficacy, since they may feel that they have an improved chance of influencing decisions personally.

The available evidence suggests that this hypothesis is largely incorrect. First, it assumes that a large number of citizens will be aware of the decentralization, an assumption that has seldom been tested, and when tested not supported. Second, even for those citizens who are aware of decentralized authority, the awareness is not related to increased trust of government and again has an ambiguous relationship with a sense of powerlessness.

The most systematic evidence on this topic comes from a study of local draft boards. Until the recent installation of the draft lottery, the 4,000-odd draft boards around the country exercised substantial power over the selection of draftees. Their main function, according to General Hershey, was to serve as "little groups of neighbors on whom is placed the responsibility to determine who is to serve the nation in the armed forces and who is to serve in industry, agriculture, and other deferred classifications."¹⁷ The traditional draft board system was one of the few national systems actually administered in a decentralized manner.

In 1966, Davis and Dolbeare studies draft board membership and the attitudes towards the draft and draft boards by a statewide sample of Wisconsin residents.¹⁸ As part of the study, respondents were asked

Some people say that local draft boards decide for themselves which men should be drafted. Others say that the boards just follow instructions from Washington. Which of these two views do you think really is the way it happens?

Despite the long-standing decentralized nature of the Selective Service System, and despite public awareness of the draft and the Vietnam war, only 31 percent of the respondents indicated that the local board made decisions for itself, whereas 69 percent felt that the local board merely followed orders from Washington. Awareness of decentralization of less dramatic municipal functions cannot be assumed to be even this high.

Moreover, the study found that awareness of the local and decentralized nature of the local board decisions was *negatively* related to perceptions of the fairness of the draft (see Table 2). Respondents who believed the local draft board exerted considerable power tended to be those who also believed the draft was unfair; residents who felt that the draft board had little power tended to be those who believed the draft was fair. In brief, citizens appear to have less trust in

Table 2
WISCONSIN RESIDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE DRAFT

<u>Attitude toward Draft</u>	<u>Local board decides for itself (N=67)</u>	<u>Local board just follows instruc- tions from Wash- ington (N=148)</u>
The draft is fair	39%	62%
The draft is not fair	61%	38%
	100%	100%

the fairness of decisions when they believe that local administrators are given discretion. If the judgment on the fairness of the draft is interpreted as a reflection of a faith in governmental procedure that is requisite for trust, these results suggest that for nonparticipants, decentralized power may actually be negatively associated with trust. The finding is consistent with other surveys showing that people trust the national government more than they trust local government, and consider local government to be more dominated by considerations of

patronage than of merit.¹⁹

Awareness of the local nature of Selective Service activities, however, was strongly related to the sense of political efficacy. Three-fourths of the highly efficacious respondents knew about the decentralized character of the boards, compared to just over one-fourth of those with a low sense of efficacy. Thus, one condition for the assertion that awareness of localized decision-making leads to reduced alienation is satisfied: there is a relationship between awareness and sense of efficacy. Again, however, the explanation for this relationship is ambiguous. The evidence does not reveal whether knowledgeable, already efficacious people tend to seek knowledge about local decision-making or whether the heightened knowledge of local decision structures actually leads to a greater sense of efficacy, or both.

Few other studies have attempted to assess both the trust and efficacy of large samples of nonparticipants in relation to their awareness of local government actions. The existing studies tend to focus on isolated communities, subject to idiosyncratic influences, and the results have been inconsistent. For instance, a Detroit study of two matched school organizations found that awareness of local decision-making was negatively related to sense of efficacy;²⁰ in another study, residents of a black community who perceived a ghetto corporation as a place to take their problems were no less alienated than those who would not take their problems there.²¹ The studies are in the aggregate consistent with the research on Wisconsin draft boards, however. First, there is no evidence that awareness of decentralized decision-making is positively related to trust, and there is some evidence for a negative relationship. Second, awareness and sense of efficacy appear to be positively related, but the causal explanation for that relationship is not clear.

Service Improvement Hypothesis

A third way decentralization might decrease the alienation of citizens is simply by improving the services. Whether or not the

individual participates or is even aware that decentralization occurs, if the services improve, he might become less alienated. This hypothesis requires a rather complex set of intermediate links, and we have found very few attempts at testing any of them. The individual must first perceive the improvement. If the improvement comes in cost savings of internal administrative efficiency there is question as to whether anyone beyond the service staff will see the change. Thus, there must be some change in service output in order to affect alienation. Furthermore, even the external change must be of a substantial magnitude to be perceived, and then there is the chance that standards of comparison will change and the new levels of performance will be equally unappreciated. The most important link, however, is between any type of decentralization and service improvement, and here the meager evidence is negative. No documentation has been found for a case where decentralization has led to improved service output. On the contrary, preliminary analysis of the recent school decentralization in New York City suggests that, if reading scores are accepted as measures of service output, decentralized control has been associated with continued decline in such scores.²² In the long run, decentralization may lead to improvement, but the evidence has not yet been forthcoming.

In summary, the likelihood that decentralization will decrease alienation by improving services seems quite remote, whether alienation is considered in terms of distrust or powerlessness.

Conclusion

We have considered three ways in which decentralization might affect the two components of political alienation. For participation and awareness, the available evidence seems to rule out the possibility that decentralization will increase trust of government; neither participation nor awareness of local decision-making is related to such trust. Either participation or awareness may have an impact on the sense of efficacy of the individual, however, but only a longitudinal study can determine the causal relationships. For program improvement, there is no evidence that decentralization improves service

outputs, or that such an improvement is related to different degrees of trust or efficacy. Although a careful longitudinal evaluation of citizen trust and efficacy is necessary before making a definitive judgment, the interim conclusion must be that no available evidence justifies decentralization on the grounds of reducing alienation.

Moreover, there is considerable reason to expect that decentralization should not affect alienation. Attitudes change slowly, and citizen opinions about their government are a function of a vast array of events. Decentralization of public services may only play a minor role in the totality of the individual's contacts with and information about his government. For instance, knowledge of decentralized municipal services has to compete with reports about foreign affairs, taxes, and political personalities, as well as with such inflammatory issues as the Vietnam war or school busing. Decentralization can thus be expected to have only a marginal impact on citizen alienation in that context. As part of a broad and consistent strategy to improve the linkage between the citizen and his government, decentralization may be one of many steps that together could decrease alienation, but too often it is suggested as a cure-all and as an easy means to reverse a steady increase in citizen alienation. In summary, decentralization as an isolated remedy for alienation will almost certainly fail; one must look beyond the simple structure of government organization to the other problems that appear to be the source of the alienation citizens feel toward their government.

FOOTNOTES

1. Vance Packard, *A Nation of Strangers* (New York: David McKay, 1972).
2. For instance, see the report of the Harris poll, *The Washington Post*, December 7, 1972, p. H13; our own analysis of surveys conducted in 1958 and 1970 by the Survey Research Center, University of Michigan also confirms this change.
3. For instance, see Michael P. Smith, "Alienation and Participation: The Role of Participatory Administration," *Public Administration Review*, November-December 1971, 31:658-664. For one of the most thoughtful treatments of the subject by a public official, see Elliot Richardson, "Significant Individual Participation," *Law School Record*, University of Chicago, Autumn 1967, 15:1.
4. For one of the few reviews, see Henry J. Schmandt, "Municipal Decentralization: An Overview," *Public Administration Review*, October 1972, 32:571-588. See also Herbert Kaufman, "Administrative Decentralization and Political Power," *Public Administration Review*, January-February 1969, 29:3-15.
5. See *Report of the National Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam, 1968), pp. 291-293; for a review of the municipal activities, see George J. Washnis, *Neighborhood Facilities and Municipal Decentralization* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Governmental Studies, 1971).
6. For a case study of one of them, see Robert K. Yin, Robert W. Hearn, and Paula M. Shapiro, "Neighborhood Government in New York City," Unpublished manuscript, The Rand Corporation, December 1972.
7. For a brief review, see George LaNoue and Bruce L. R. Smith, "The Political Evolution of School Decentralization," *American Behavioral Scientist*, September-October 1971, 15:73-93.
8. Douglas Yates, "Neighborhood Government," in Robert K. Yin (ed.), *The City in the Seventies* (Itasca, Ill.: Peacock, 1972), pp. 119-127.
9. For a review of the federal programs, see Hans B. C. Spiegel, "Citizen Participation in Federal Programs," *Journal of Voluntary Action Research*, 1971, Monograph No. 1.
10. The Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University, has begun one set of surveys recently, however, that may eventually provide pre- and post-decentralization attitudinal data.

11. See, for example, Melvin Seeman, "On the Meaning of Alienation," *American Sociological Review*, December 1959, 24:783-791; and Dwight Dean, "Alienation: Its Meaning and Measurement," *American Sociological Review*, 1961, 26:753-758.
12. Ada W. Finifter, "Dimensions of Political Alienation," *American Political Science Review*, June 1970, 64:389-410.
13. For instance, see Jeffery M. Paige, "Political Orientation and Riot Participation," *American Sociological Review*, October 1971, 36:810-820; and Joel Aberbach, "Alienation and Political Behavior," *American Political Science Review*, March 1969, 63:86-99.
14. Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 87-88.
15. The surveys are in a series available to universities and related institutions for analysis, and have served as the basis for many studies in political science and related fields.
16. Frank X. Steggert, "Citizen Participation and City Government: Groups, Issues, and Impact," Unpublished manuscript, National League of Cities/U.S. Conference of Mayors, November 1972.
17. James W. Davis, Jr., and Kenneth M. Dolbeare, *Little Groups of Neighbors: The Selective Service System* (Chicago: Markham, 1968).
18. Ibid.
19. For instance, see David O. Sears, "Political Behavior," in Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson (eds.), *The Handbook of Social Psychology* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969), Vol. V, pp. 315-458.
20. Joseph L. Falkson and Marc A. Grainer, "Neighborhood School Politics and Constituency Organizations," *School Review*, November 1972, 81:35-61.
21. Raymond Owens, "Community Organization and Participatory Democracy," Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1971.
22. For instance, see Diane Ravitch, "Community Control Revisited," *Commentary*, February 1972, 53:69-74.