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4 Economic Crisis, Dissatisfaction, and Protest

The possible impact of economic development on the political system is a classic theme in political science. There is an impressive body of literature to show that a certain level of economic development seems to be a prerequisite for liberal democracy (Jackman, 1975; Lerner, 1958; Neubauer, 1967). Apart from this there also seems to be a relationship between economic outlook and the optimism or pessimism with regard to parliamentary democracy.

The booming 1960s went along with an optimistic life-style. There was a lot of criticism on the quality of parliamentary democracy, but with the idea that it could be reformed to the better. The 1970s not only saw the forebodings of a real economic crisis, but also a growing cultural pessimism with regard to the future of parliamentary democracy. The economic crisis is sometimes even seen as caused by the mechanism of parliamentary democracy. However, there is all but one common scenario of the evolution of parliamentary democracy to its end. A first scenario of the end of parliamentary democracy has an outspoken advocate in the American economist, Milton Friedman (1976). He maintains that parliamentary democracy is in danger because of the increasing government budget which can only lead to a kind of state capitalism or even worse. According to Friedman, this will lead to an increasing loss of individual liberty, and therefore to a limitation of democratic values. He formulated the famous "line we dare not cross" if we want to avoid the total loss of parliamentary democracy. According to Friedman, this line would be at 60% of the GNP. This line has almost been crossed in the Netherlands. But even though Dutch people do complain about the bureaucratization of their society, it can hardly be said that individual liberty is at stake in that country. More interesting from the point of view of this book - the development of political orientations and action - are those theoretical notions which explain the

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increase of government spendings in terms of the attitudes and behavior of citizens and politicians.

The key words of a rich body of literature are *ungovernability* and *overload* (inter alia, Birch, 1984; Brittan, 1975; King, 1975; Rose and Peters, 1978). An overloaded political economy exists when the national product grows more slowly than the costs of public policy and the claims of take home pay, and there is not enough money in hand to meet both public and private claims (Rose and Peters, 1978, p. 29). The more common meaning of overload concerns not the economy but the political system or the government. Governments become overloaded when expectations are in excess of national resources, government institutions, and the impact that its outputs can achieve (Rose, 1975, p. 13). The general line of the arguments in a number of publications is that there has been a rapid growth in public expectations about what benefits could be provided by government in western democracies, that many of these expectations have inevitably been disappointed, and that the result is a serious decline of public confidence in government (Birch, 1984). Democracy itself has become the scapegoat for a host of political and economic ills - from declining governmental competence to budget deficits and inflation. These ills have been caused, according to these arguments, by the overload of government by demands from the citizenry, and democracy itself is to blame for stimulating these excessive demands (Bennett and Sharpe, 1984). Therefore it is not the economic crisis as such which is responsible for the decline of democracy, but in a time of economic recession demands of citizens can no longer be met. This will lead to a decline of public confidence and finally to the end of parliamentary democracy. The general argument why parliamentary democracy itself would lead to its own destruction has been explicated by Samuel Brittan in a seminal article (1975). He starts with the statement "that liberal representative democracy suffers from internal contradictions, which are likely to increase in time, and that, on present indications, the system is likely to pass away within the lifetime of people now adult" (p. 129). Brittan sees two endemic threats to liberal representative democracy:

- the generation of excessive expectations; and
- the disruptive effects of the pursuit of group self-interest in the market place.

As the first threat fits into the more general idea of government

overload, we shall limit ourselves to this one. Brittan's main arguments are based on Schumpeter's theory of democracy. In this theory politicians are seen as "entrepreneurs who deal in votes just as oilmen deal in oil" (Schumpeter, 1976, p.285). This competition between politicians for votes leads to the generation of excessive demands because of what Brittan calls the basic trouble: the lack of a budget constraint among voters. In their own private lives, people know that more of one thing means less of something else, on a given income and capital. However, in the political sphere they miss such knowledge. Therefore electorates tend to expect too much from government action at too little cost, and the temptation to encourage false expectations among the electorate becomes overwhelming to politicians. The opposition parties are bound to promise to do better, and the government party must join in the auction.

Brittan does not exclude the possibility that certainly during an economic recession excessive promises in the sense of "promising a larger cake" will become less common. In that case the outbidding will continue on promises about distribution. However, the more policy concentrates on eliminating disparities and differentials, the greater the sense of outrage likely to be engendered by those that remain (Brittan, 1975, pp. 133-158). As Brittan himself concedes, he does not indicate a specific scenario by which liberal democracy might disappear.

The best evidence to counter the theories so eloquently phrased by Brittan and others is the fact that no liberal democracy in the industrialized world has become the victim of the economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s. Apart from the possibility that the economic crisis was not severe enough to jeopardize parliamentary democracy, this might mean that the theory is invalid, as has been suggested before (e.g., Birch, 1984). Therefore the main purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, it will be seen to what extent in the 1970s the conditions have been met which, according to the theory, should be followed by a decline of parliamentary democracy. Second, the validity of the theory, which should explain the relationship between economic development and the fate of parliamentary democracy, will be tested.

However, this is not at all easy. Most publications which see a connection between demand overload and the economic crisis on the one hand and the decline of parliamentary democracy on the other have one characteristic in common: they consist of a number of bold and

sweeping statements, but are remarkably empty when it comes to a more specific theory which might explain a possible relationship between the economic crisis and the future of parliamentary democracy. To test the validity of all these vague theoretical notions, they should be translated into a more specific testable theory first.

From Vague Theoretical Notions to Research Questions

Brittan (1975, p. 141) gives at least a cue as to where to begin the analysis. He suggests that the gap between expectation and reality will be greater during periods of prosperity and advance, and perhaps greatest of all when expectations are frustrated by a sudden and unexpected check to progress. This hypothesis is consistent with the revolution theory by Davies (1962). Davies combines to a certain extent the revolution theories of Marx and de Tocqueville. According to Marx, an increasing deterioration of the situation of the working class leads to despair and finally to an inevitable revolution. De Tocqueville, on the contrary, states that revolutions will especially occur *after* a certain improvement has occurred. The regime which is overthrown by a revolution will usually be an improvement with respect to the regime which immediately preceded it. According to de Tocqueville, the misery is patiently suffered when it seems inevitable, but becomes unbearable once the prospect of escape has been offered. Combining these two theories, Davies states that a revolution is most likely when a long period of objective economic and social progress is followed by a sudden drop. During the time of progress the expectation is created that permanently increasing needs can also be satisfied. Once the development tends backward, a sense of frustration emerges when reality is no longer consistent with expectations.

Davies' theory hypothesizes a relationship between two characteristics at the macro-level, and has as such been tested by himself. The theory predicts a revolution under certain conditions, and a test can only be done either by historical data or by waiting if a revolution will occur in countries in which the specified conditions are present. Davies chose for the first possibility. However, our study concerns three contemporary countries and their development in a short period of the 1970s of this century. Sitting down until a revolution breaks out would mean,

hopefully, that this author would never be able to see it. The occurrence of a revolution in one of the liberal democracies involved in our study is highly unlikely. However, there is an alternative way to test the theoretical notions which we have let pass. Davies' theory is not different from Brittan's in the sense that it contains no clear statement about how or in what form revolution might occur. Both theories implicitly comprise a chain of arguments which concern at least partly the micro-level and which in principle might be tested.

Theories on the concept of overload are as such independent of economic development, but have become popular since the economic growth of the 1960s came to an end in the mid 1970s. The very idea of government overload might never have drawn much attention without an economic crisis. The possibly negative consequences of rising expectations were disguised in a growing economy by the simple fact that government spendings could increase without serious problems. Only when economic growth came to an end could a situation develop in which expectations might grow faster than the possible fulfillment of these expectations.

In its most simple form most of these theoretical ideas can be represented in the following scheme:

economic crisis → gap want/get → revolution/decline democracy

The first question to be answered is whether there really has been an economic crisis in the three countries involved in this study during the period of research. The second question is whether the gap between expectations and the fulfillment of these expectations has become wider. In the case of an economic crisis the level of production of government would be too low to meet the increasing expectations which, in a parliamentary democracy, would be the result of an autonomous process. The third question raised by this simple model is much more difficult to deal with. Why and in what way parliamentary democracy should go downhill when the gap in the second step becomes wider is not clear at all in most of the publications positing a relationship between these two steps. As has been said before, most theories which suppose a relationship between economic crisis and the decline of parliamentary democracy are formulated on the macro-level. However, it is difficult to explain this relationship without employing a theory on the micro-level. It is the attitudes and behavior of individual citizens which can connect the economic crisis with the fate of democracy.

studies, it is not unthinkable that unemployment makes itself gradually felt as a problem in the second half of the 1970s.

In the simple threefold model presented above, economic crisis leads to an increasing gap between the production of government and what people expect from their government which, according to some observers, would do nothing but increase. To see to what extent it is realistic to expect a widening of the gap, indicators of government performance, such as the total government expenditures, might be of interest. Because of the economic crises, governments were forced to bring their growing deficits under control, which led to a severe retrenchment policy. There is no sharp decrease in government receipts during the period involved. Rather, the gradual increase comes to a standstill, especially in the Netherlands.

However, from the point of view of the individual citizen the picture might be different. Even though total government expenditures might not really decrease, as at least the receipt figures suggest, the same amount of money has to be made available to more people, especially in the social security area. So, even though the total expenditures of the government do not really decrease, the individual claiming unemployment benefits is worse off than some years before. From the perspective of the mid-1980s one can see the first signs of the economic crisis in the mid-1970s. However, it is very unlikely that the stagnation of the economy between 1974 and 1979-1981 was perceptible enough to justify the prediction that people in general will have become more dissatisfied. There is no reason to predict any change in this respect. At the same time one might expect an increase of expectations according to the theory of rising expectations. Therefore the net results should be an increase of the gap between what people expect and what they receive. It will be seen to what extent this is true.

Expectations and Need Satisfaction

The gap between "what people expect and what they get" has been presented up to this point in a rather undefined way. It might be suggested that the problem involves a discrepancy between a purely subjective characteristic—expectation—and a more objectively defin-

able one—what people actually obtain. However, this is not a useful approach. All the theoretical notions which have been presented so far suppose a subjective translation of this gap. People are supposed to behave in a certain way because of the gap they *perceive* between what they expect and what they actually get. Therefore the actual level of material well being is less important than the perception people have of this level. Both the level of expectation and the level of fulfillment will be operationalized as subjective characteristics. In this connection the term expectation is somewhat inadequate. What is really meant is what people feel entitled to.

This brings us in line with the idea of personal dissatisfaction as introduced in *Political Action*. As has been explained extensively, one interpretation of relative deprivation emphasizes the difference between what one believes to be one's just deserts and what one believes one actually receives, the perceived difference between justice and achievement. A second interpretation we will come back to later on is the difference between the actual situation and the level attained by the individual in the past or in the future (*Political Action*, p. 385).

The Cantril scales which were used in our first study were used again as measurement instruments. The wording of the relevant questions is as follows:

First I'd like to ask you how you feel you and your family are doing these days. Number ten here at the top of the ladder represents the very best possible situation that you could imagine for yourself. And zero down here at the bottom represents the worst possible situation for you. Now, let's think first about the material side of your life today—the things you can buy and do—all the things that make up your material standard of living.

- A. All things considered, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you overall with the material side of your life today?
- B. Where would you have put yourself five years ago?
- C. And where do you expect you might put yourself in five years' time?
- D. And—still thinking just about your material standards— what do you think is the right point on the scale for people like yourself? I mean, what level of material satisfaction do you feel that people like yourself are entitled to?

The development of the gap between what people expect and what they

Table 1: Material Deprivation 1974/1979–1981 (Mean Scores and Differences)

	The Netherlands			West Germany			United States		
	1974	1979	Diff.	1974	1980	Diff.	1974	1981	Diff.
Material satisfaction	7.55	7.84	.29	6.76	7.09	.33	6.87	6.82	-.05*
Material entitlement	7.82	7.78	-.04*	7.99	7.91	-.08*	8.26	8.08	-.18
Material deprivation	-.27	.06	.33	-1.23	-.82	.41	-1.39	-1.26	.13*
N =	(1083)	(736)		(863)	(848)		(1577)	(1067)	

Note: 1980 data for West Germany are from the second panel wave.

* Not significant at .01 level.

get (in their own perception) can be seen by comparing the difference between the scores on questions A and D in both years.

Table 1 presents the average scores on both scales for both years.¹ In all three countries the level of satisfaction people feel entitled to has certainly not increased. There was a small decrease in each country, though only in the United States was the drop statistically significant. At the very least, one can say that these figures provide no support for the revolution of rising expectations either. The support for that theory becomes even smaller when actual material satisfaction is taken into account. Because expectations have dropped, the level of relative deprivation can only have increased if the level of need satisfaction has dropped even more. However, this is not the case at all. In the United States the level of satisfaction declined very slightly, but because the level of entitlement decreased even more the net result seems to be that the level of relative deprivation has become a bit lower. But the overall level of relative deprivation has at least not increased. Those who were surprised to find out what “an extraordinarily satisfied country” the Netherlands was in 1974 (*Political Action*, p. 386) will be inclined to rub their eyes seeing the figures in 1979. The level of satisfaction has actually increased from 1974 to 1979. This means that the Dutch seem to think in 1979 that on the average they get more than what they are

1. Unfortunately, some of the key questions on which the analysis in this chapter is based, were not asked at all in the second cross-section of the German study. Some other questions were repeated only in the German panel study. This is the case with the German data reported in Table 1.

entitled to! So each country has its own way of being frustrated. At least this one seems easy to handle. And in Germany the level of deprivation has decreased mainly because material satisfaction has increased.

So this first exploration of the data does not support the theory of rising expectations. The beginning of the economic crisis was not accompanied by a continuing increase of expectations and even less by a decreasing level of need satisfaction. The result is less instead of more relative deprivation. If the economic crisis should lead to a decline of parliamentary democracy by way of an increasing gap between expectations and fulfillment, there is no sign of such a development in the second half of the 1970s.

However, this is not indisputable evidence of the invalidity of all theories which foresee an increasing level of relative deprivation and finally a crisis of parliamentary democracy because of an economic crisis. Besides questioning the validity of the underlying micro-theory, which we will come to, one might question the existence of an economic crisis in the period between the two parts of our study. As we have observed, the symptoms of an economic crisis in this period had hardly any direct negative consequences for individual citizens. In this period the coming economic crisis began to manifest itself by increasing government budget deficits, a worsening balance of payments, and a decreasing economic growth rather than in the direct material well being of individual citizens. Unemployment figures have gone up but are stable in the period at hand. Only after 1979 is there a steep increase in the unemployment figures, at least in the Netherlands. The same is true for net available consumer incomes. As a matter of fact, in the Netherlands the net income of a great many people increased in the 1974-1979 period. The net minimum wages increased by no less than 20%. Wages and salaries of most people decreased for the first time in 1980, which is after the second wave of the Dutch study had been completed. Therefore, it is not impossible that relative deprivation has increased after the second wave of the study was completed.

Expectations and Need Satisfaction Among Subgroups

The figures above might lead to wrong projections for the future, when subgroups with a stable but high level of deprivation may be present in larger numbers. What groups should one think of? It has been shown before that there are hardly any differences in satisfaction between various socio-economic groups (*Political Action*, p. 387). The common explanation for this phenomenon is consistent with Davies' revolution theory. It is not the objective material circumstances which define the level of satisfaction, but sudden changes in it. A lengthy experience with a low level of need satisfaction according to objective measures leads to an adaptation of the aspiration level. The result is that the subjective level of need satisfaction will be just as high as that for a person having an objectively higher level of need satisfaction but with a higher level of aspiration (Inglehart, 1977b). A clear deviation from the population average might be expected among groups which have recently experienced a sudden change in the level of need satisfaction. In that case the level of aspiration has not been able yet to adapt to the changed circumstances.

A first candidate group is the growing army of unemployed. If the experience with unemployment or the fear of it will lead to an increasing level of relative deprivation, one might see an indication of the possible societal and political effect of a sudden increase of the level of unemployment.

Table 2 presents the relationship between the experience of unemployment and relative deprivation in 1974 and 1979-1981. It is hard to draw any consistent conclusions from this table. There are two cases where the deprivation of people who have recently experienced unemployment is significantly higher than among those who have not. This was the case in the United States and West Germany in 1974. In 1979-81 this is no longer true. The panel components of the study do offer in principle the opportunity to study the effects of a lengthy experience with unemployment. However, in all three countries the number of respondents who claimed an experience of unemployment at both time points is too small to justify any conclusions whatsoever.

The second group which might be more sensitive to a change in deprivation is youth. It has been reported before that the impact of age

Table 2: Unemployment and Material Deprivation 1974/1979-1981 (Mean Scores and Differences)

	Unemployment			1979-1981		
	1974 Yes	No	Diff.	Yes	No	Diff.
The Netherlands						
Material satisfaction	7.42	7.45	.03*	7.65	7.93	.28*
Material entitlement	7.48	7.76	.28*	7.80	7.80	0
Material deprivation	-.06 (50)	-.31 (537)	-.25*	-.15 (85)	.13 (380)	.28*
West Germany						
Material satisfaction	5.89	6.71	.82	6.79	7.09	.30*
Material entitlement	8.13	8.04	-.09*	7.59	7.96	.37*
Material deprivation	-2.24 (46)	-1.33 (1068)	.91	-.80 (94)	-.87 (426)	-.07*
United States						
Material satisfaction	5.64	6.86	1.22	6.82	6.73	-.09*
Material entitlement	8.12	8.25	.13*	8.15	8.15	0
Material deprivation	-2.48 (178)	-1.39 (713)	1.09	-1.33 (297)	-1.42 (497)	-.09*

Note: 1980 data for West Germany are from the second panel wave.

* Not significant at .01 level.

on deprivation is minimal (*Political Action*, p. 389). The very young combine a high level of aspiration with a low level of material satisfaction which, by definition, results in a high level of deprivation. Thinking in terms of a generation effect instead of a life cycle effect, one might wonder what the effect of a deteriorating economic situation may be on a younger generation. A new cohort is coming of age which has every reason to worry about aspects of its life which a former generation took for granted. A job is no longer automatically there, to mention just one aspect. The experience of being in a much worse starting situation than the previous generation might result in an extremely high level of deprivation which, in turn, might be fertile soil for mutinous thoughts which might, indeed, endanger parliamentary democracy. A different possible scenario is less dramatic. The ability to adapt to a new situation is a characteristic of youth. Therefore one might also expect that youth adapts its level of expectation to the new circumstances, which might keep their frustration within limits.

Figure 1: Levels of Deprivation Among Age Groups.

The data do not suggest a rebellion of youth. As can be seen in Figure 1, there is no significant relationship between age and the level of deprivation in the Netherlands and West Germany at either time point. In both countries the level of deprivation in all categories is lower at Time₁ than at Time₂. Only in the United States is there a significant relationship between age and the level of deprivation, which is stronger in 1981 than in 1974. The younger cohorts have become more deprived than in 1974, while the older cohorts have not.

However, the general conclusion must be that as far as the economic crisis developed in the mid 1970s, it has not brought along a growing gap between what people perceive they want and what they believe they receive. So as far as the end of parliamentary democracy being at hand, it had a different cause than the simple scheme presented above might suggest.

A Micro-Theory of Satisfaction and Protest

The third research question is whether the theory on the micro-level which might explain a possible relationship between economic crisis and the decline of parliamentary democracy is a valid one. The theoretical proposition that a sudden widening of the gap between what people want and what they receive might lead to a revolution, which in a nutshell is the very essence of Davies' revolution theory, can easily be translated into a micro-theory. This has been done by Grofman and Muller (1973). They translated the theory as follows to the individual level:

Mean potential for political violence will be greatest for those individuals who have experienced a perceived decrease in discrepancy between optimum achievement and actual achievement followed by a perceived increase in discrepancy between optimum achievement and actual achievement.

According to them a more stringent version of this hypothesis incorporates the assumption that a reversed J-curve leads to a high level of satisfaction. This version is formulated as follows:

If individuals are classified according to whether they have experienced a perceived Rise and Drop (J-curve) discrepancy shift, a No-Change discrepancy shift, or a Drop and Rise (Reverse J-curve) discrepancy shift, then mean potential for political

violence will be highest for those individuals in the Rise and Drop category and lowest for those individuals in the Drop and Rise category.

Grofman and Muller test this hypothesis on the basis of a number of questions which are very similar to those being used here. They distinguish different patterns of change using the assessments of the degree of satisfaction five years ago, at this moment, and five years from now. In their study they find that the hypothesis is invalid. The *direction* of change, as indicated in the J-curve hypothesis, does not appear to produce the highest potential for political violence. The potential for political violence appears to result from each change in the degree of congruence between level of expectation and actual need satisfaction. Therefore the greatest potential for political violence is present both with those people who experience a negative change and those who experience a positive change. Those who perceive no change have the lowest potential for violence.

This "V-curve hypothesis" was corroborated by the authors of *Political Action*. Contrary to the J-curve hypothesis, it was found that in all five countries those expecting a decreasing gap had the highest protest potential. In three countries those expecting an increasing gap were second, while in the two remaining countries this category which, according to the theory was supposed to deliver the potential revolutionaries, was lowest in protest potential. Therefore the empirical basis of all those theories which predict a decline of parliamentary democracy because of a growing discrepancy between rising expectations and decreasing satisfaction appears to rest on thin ice.

Our panel data offer the opportunity to study the relationship between the dynamic aspects of dissatisfaction and political protest in a more severe way. In the models presented by Grofman and Muller and again in *Political Action* the dynamics were totally the result of the perception of the respondents at the moment of the interview. The respondents themselves depicted past, present, and future satisfaction as they perceived it at the moment of the interviews. The panel data enable us to assess the effect of the dynamics of these patterns. The patterns of change are based on the answers to questions A, B, and C presented above. These answers can form nine different patterns, as Table 3 shows. These patterns were combined into the three main patterns which were distinguished by Grofman and Muller.

Table 4 shows the distribution of the three patterns in both years. One

Table 3: Patterns of Change in Material Expectations

1)	B < A > C	Decreasing
2)	B > A = C	
3)	B = A > C	
4)	B > A > C	
5)	B = A = C	No-change
6)	B > A < C	Increasing
7)	B = A < C	
8)	B < A = C	
9)	B < A < C	

A = today   B = five years ago   C = right point

Table 4: Changes in Material Expectations (Percentages)

	The Netherlands		West Germany		United States	
	1974	1979	1974	1980	1974	1981
Decreasing	30	35	42	41	22	28
No-change	25	30	15	20	15	13
Increasing	45	35	43	39	63	59
N =	(1030)	(733)	(820)	(781)	(1492)	(1031)

Note: 1980 data for West Germany are from the second panel wave.

might expect that the stagnating economic situation would be translated in a less optimistic pattern, which is to say a shift from the category with optimistic expectations to the category with pessimistic expectations. As one can see, this is the case indeed, at least in the Netherlands and the United States. In the Netherlands the category with an optimistic view dropped by close to 10%. In the United States the change in this category was less, but this is compensated for by the fact that the category with a pattern of decreasing satisfaction is growing more than in the Netherlands, where the "no change" category is strengthened. In West Germany there is hardly any change.

The observed changes are not spectacular, but nevertheless not without importance. We have seen before that the expectations with regard to material well being have not increased while at the same time the perception of need satisfaction did. From this it was concluded that

material deprivation had decreased instead of increased. The dynamic patterns of expectations seem to indicate a pattern which is more consistent with the predictions of those authors who foresee difficult times for parliamentary democracy because of a frustration of rising expectations. However, this is not the case at all because the relationship between political violence and expectations is just the other way around from what these authors seemed to think, as we have just seen. It is actually the category with the highest potential for political violence which has diminished, unless the relationship between the patterns of expectations and political protest has changed.

Table 5 shows the relationship between patterns of expectation and political protest. In this table the mean scores on the protest potential scale are presented for subgroups defined according to their level of material expectation on two points in time. If a change in expectation would be accompanied by a change in political protest, as the theory suggests, then comparison on a country-by-country basis of the rows and columns of Table 5 should show a similar difference. But the relationship between expectations and protest has altered little. It is apparent that the relationship between the pattern of change in material expectations and protest potential is almost exactly the same in both years. There is no evidence whatsoever that is consistent with the hypothesis that the *frustration* of rising expectations makes people more protest minded. Instead, it seems to be the rising of expectations itself which makes people politically active in a less orthodox way.

On the basis of these results one might wonder what this result really means. It is clear that there is no support for the J-curve hypothesis, as has been shown before. The alternative V-curve hypothesis, first formulated by Grofman and Muller, states that it is change in expected satisfaction itself which causes the protest potential. This hypothesis at least is consistent with the available data. Our panel data offer the opportunity to see if it is really the experience of change or a longer-term optimistic or pessimistic view as such which is responsible for the level of protest potential.

In the first case one might expect that a continuing experience of increasing or decreasing expectations acquires some stability of its own and is no longer an impetus for protest potential, or at least less so than a change in the outlook from the present situation. In this double meaning of change one might expect to find the highest protest potential

Table 5: Changes in Expectations and Protest Potential (Mean Protest Potential 0-7)

Expectations in 1974	Expectations in 1979-1981			
	Decreasing	No-change	Increasing	Total
Netherlands				
Decreasing	2.47 (79)	2.41 (51)	2.89 (56)	2.58 (186)*
No-change	2.10 (30)	2.37 (70)	2.65 (34)	2.38 (134)*
Increasing	2.55 (86)	2.42 (64)	2.71 (129)	2.59 (279)*
Total	2.45 (195)*	2.40 (185)*	2.75 (214)*	2.54 (599)
West Germany				
Decreasing	1.58 (142)	1.39 (56)	1.89 (92)	1.64 (290)*
No-change	1.32 (44)	1.39 (28)	2.45 (33)	1.70 (105)
Increasing	1.66 (105)	1.64 (53)	1.89 (144)	1.77 (307)*
Total	1.57 (291)*	1.49 (137)*	1.96 (274)*	1.71 (702)
United States				
Decreasing	2.64 (73)	2.13 (24)	2.68 (62)	2.58 (154)*
No-change	2.03 (31)	1.72 (25)	2.72 (46)	2.26 (102)
Increasing	1.66 (105)	2.68 (50)	3.26 (365)	3.13 (491)
Total	2.59 (180)*	2.30 (99)*	3.13 (473)	2.89 (752)

Note: Numbers in parentheses represent the total number of cases for the cell.

* Means within this row or column are not significantly different at the .01-level (Kruskal-Wallis test).

in 1979-1981 among those people whose pattern of change itself has altered, from decreasing to increasing or from increasing to decreasing. The second higher level of protest potential might be expected among those whose pattern has moved from no change to change or the other way around. Finally, the lowest level of protest potential might be expected among those whose expectations have not changed at all over the years.

The cumulative effect of the pattern of change in both years is displayed in the internal cells of Table 5. Even though most of the differences between the three groups are not statistically significant, a clear pattern emerges. A pattern of increasing expectations in 1979-81 dominates any effect from the 1974 pattern in the sense that almost all entries in the third column of the table are higher than any other cell value. However, this is not to say that the 1974 pattern has no effect. As a matter of fact,

the 1974 pattern keeps its original effect *within* the 1979-81 pattern. With one exception within each column the order of scores of protest potential is from increasing to no change to decreasing. The same is true within rows. In each row the 1979-81 pattern has the same effect. However, there is one exception. In West Germany and the Netherlands the lowest level of protest potential is to be found among those who had a no change pattern in 1974 and a decreasing pattern in 1979-81.

Therefore, the picture that emerges from this table, more than from one of the panel waves separately, is that the V-curve hypothesis is supported, but that the V is all but symmetric. Protest potential is higher among those who experience change in whatever direction. But first of all it seems to be popular among those whose outlook on their own development is or was at least partly on the sunny side. The change from a stable situation to a pattern of negative change seems only to lead to relative passivity, just as a continuing stable situation does. However, it is the people with a dynamic and preferably optimistic view on their own future who are most inclined to political protest. These people are scarcely societal outcasts. In general, they are younger and better educated (table not shown). They are the better off people who are confident about their own future. This conclusion is far away from any prediction that in a time of economic crisis frustrated expectations would be a fertile soil for revolutionary inclinations.

The Political Translation of Personal Dissatisfaction

Our conclusion for the moment is that the micro-theory which underlies the prevailing view and foresees the decline of parliamentary democracy because of the economic crisis is invalid in the sense that the prediction that frustrated expectations lead to protest behavior or even violent behavior is invalid. But then, why should it be valid? We have tested the hypothesis that frustration of expectations is related to protest potential. However, we have not yet gone into the argument of why such a relationship should exist. In the simple scheme presented earlier economic crisis leads to an increasing gap between what people want and what they get and from there to a decline of parliamentary

democracy or even to revolution. However, as we have stated before, it is not clear why such a gap should endanger parliamentary democracy.

A micro-theory which seems to be implicit in most of the arguments involves a few more steps than is accounted for in the simple scheme. First of all, relative deprivation should be translated politically. This means that people hold the government responsible for the lack of their need satisfaction, which is to say that personal dissatisfaction leads to dissatisfaction with government policy. However, this relationship, in turn, lacks every sense of logic unless it implies that people think government must and can solve their problems.

However, it is hard to see why dissatisfaction with government policy should be a threat to parliamentary democracy. It is the very essence of parliamentary democracy that a negative judgement of the incumbent government by the electorate can lead to a change of government. Therefore, the argument that relative deprivation is a threat to parliamentary democracy must imply one more step. The missing link is the supposition that dissatisfaction with government in turn leads to a negative attitude to parliamentary democracy itself. A lack of support is a weak basis for every political regime, but it only becomes a manifest threat when people are prepared to translate their dissatisfaction with the regime into direct action against it.

This reasoning can be formulated as a number of successive hypotheses which can be tested:

- (1) Citizens think government can and should solve their problems.
- (2) Personal dissatisfaction leads to dissatisfaction with government policy.
- (3) Dissatisfaction with government policy leads to a decline of support of parliamentary democracy.
- (4) A negative support of parliamentary democracy leads to political violence.

What People Expect From Government

The hypothesis that citizens think that government can and should solve their problems is not much more than an elaboration of the general

argument as expressed by Brittan and others. The increasing expansion of the welfare task of government has brought it under the pressure of the expectations which the state itself has raised. There has been an enormous increase of matters for which it holds itself responsible and for which politicians at least tend to believe that the electorate may hold them responsible (King, 1975, p. 166). Consequently, it has been called the mortal sin of the welfare state to suggest that many people cannot stand on their own feet and need the provisions of the state (Van Doorn, 1978, p. 42) Or in the words of Anthony King (1975, p. 166), "Once upon a time, then, man looked to God to order the world. Then he looked to the market. Now he looks to government." However, this sin of the welfare state would not pass without punishment. If this suggestion might be taken over by the population, and it is the very essence of the theory of rising expectations that it has been, the demand of welfare will increase until the political system collapses under its overload. Those problems which are seen as a direct consequence of the welfare state become more visible in a time of economic stagnation.

This is not the only problem confronting the welfare state. It has also been argued that government has gone too far in its caretaking. The ideology of the welfare state would be an obstacle to a real emancipation of citizens. Because the government takes care of everything, individuals at last have no reason to take care of themselves. Government has come to be regarded "as a sort of unlimited-liability insurance company, in the business of insuring all persons at all times against every conceivable risk" (King, 1975, p. 164). In its most extreme form it might be said that government should not only guarantee the pursuit of happiness, but happiness itself.

How much evidence is there to support such views? This same question was asked by Sniderman and Brody (1977) with regard to the development in the United States in the early 1970s. They refer to the criticism that in the welfare state "large segments of responsibility have been transferred from persons to anonymous collectivities." According to this criticism, Americans once took it as an article of faith that they were personally responsible for coping with their own problems. Now they would believe government should help them. On the basis of their study Sniderman and Brody (1977, p. 519) come to the conclusion that, in contrast to the prevailing view, "the ethic of self-reliance is far from dead." Few people think the government ought to help them with the personal problems they might conceivably deal with themselves. Also,

having been helped by the government before fails to sap people's belief that they should cope with their problems on their own. Americans as a rule do not believe government ought to help them with problems in their personal life. In this respect they make a clear distinction between *personal* and *societal* problems. The government should take responsibility for the last, but hardly for the first.

What might be a valid conclusion with regard to the United States is not necessarily so in western Europe. The ideology of the welfare state has much stronger roots in western Europe and certainly in the Netherlands than in the United States. It is not unlikely that in the Netherlands people are more inclined to hold the government responsible for solving their problems. More than any other country in the world the Netherlands is seen as the embodiment of the ideology that the state has the responsibility to guarantee the welfare of its citizens. The Netherlands has almost passed the line it should not dare to cross according to Friedman (1976) if it does not want to sacrifice parliamentary democracy on the dubious altar of welfare.

A number of questions used in the Sniderman and Brody study (1977) were also used in the second American and Dutch surveys. These questions are presented and discussed in chapter 5.² Here, the answers will be arranged in a somewhat different way. Table 6 shows the frequencies of the most important problems mentioned and the persons or agencies that should work on these problems.

The answers have been coded according to the code scheme used by Sniderman and Brody (1977). There are a few remarkable differences between the two countries. In the Netherlands about one-fourth of the answers refers to economic problems, while in the United States the proportion approaches one-half. The Netherlands spends a much higher percentage of its GDP on collective services than does the United States. From this perspective it is remarkable that the Dutch do worry more than the Americans about the quality of life of their family and also about the quality of life as a societal problem. Either this is a sign of rising expectations because of the welfare state or the welfare state has been less successful than people had hoped for.

2 The relevant questions, moreover, were not asked in the second part of the German study.

Table 6: Most Important Problem in 1979-1981 and Who Should Work on It (Percentages)

		Who should work on problem			
		Work out on own	Someone ought to be helping		
			Private person	Private agency	Government agency
The Netherlands					
Economic problems:					
Self-level or family-level	16	37	18	16	29
Society-level	10	50	15	7	28
Quality of life:					
Self-level	24	68	21	7	4
Family-level	17	58	28	10	4
Society-level	16	29	16	13	42
Health	17	51	39	7	3
Safety	1	0	50	0	50
Total	N = (400)	(50)	(24)	(10)	(16)
United States					
Economic problems:					
Self-level or family-level	27	72	9	2	16
Society-level	19	44	8	4	44
Quality of life:					
Self-level	25	72	16	2	10
Family-level	10	74	17	3	6
Society-level	6	68	9	2	21
Health	12	72	11	4	13
Safety	1	25	13	0	63
Total	N = (950)	(66)	(12)	(3)	(20)

Note: Row totals to the right of the first column add to 100 %, aside from rounding error.

However, the essential question we are concerned with here is whether people think they should and can solve their own problems or whether someone else, and especially the government, should help. Of the Americans, one-third of those who answer the successive questions think they are entitled to help from somebody else. In the Netherlands one-half thinks so. Differences between the two different political cultures become much more visible when one takes the kind of problem into account. There is not much difference of opinion between the two peoples as to who is accountable for the solution of the economic problems of the country. In both countries about half think this is a collective responsibility which cannot be left with individual people. But there is an enormous contrast between the two countries with regard to the solution of personal economic problems. It is quite clear that Americans are more inclined than the Dutch to see no more than a personal responsibility to solve these problems. The same is true with regard to problems with the quality of life at the society-level. More than twice as many Americans than Dutch see the solution of these problems as people's own responsibility.

Still, this does not necessarily mean that the Dutch hold the government more responsible for their well being. Table 6 shows which persons or agencies are mentioned in response to the question who should help them. Even though the Dutch are more inclined to think they are entitled to help than the Americans, fewer of them actually expect help from the government. The difference is mainly caused by the fact that more Americans mention problems which citizens of both countries expect the government to solve.

A more important conclusion is that in both countries only a small percentage of the population expects help from the government with the problems which worry them most. In the United States this is 18% of those who mention a problem, in the Netherlands only 13%. However, we should make one more step. Only in the case of failing government help is it reasonable to expect an increasing dissatisfaction with government policy, and finally perhaps a loss of confidence in the political system and active resistance against it. From this perspective the potential revolutionaries are to be found among those who expect help from the government but are frustrated in this expectation. As a matter of fact, respondents were not asked about their expectation with government help but how helpful (very, somewhat, not at all) they felt the government was on the problem they mentioned. Of the small

Table 7: Material Satisfaction and Policy Dissatisfaction (Pearson's r)

	Netherlands		United States	
Whole sample	$r = -.22$	$P = .00$ (571)	$r = -.11$	$P = .00$ (736)
The government ought to be helping but is not helpful at all	$R = -.43$	$P = .04$ (17)	$r = -.36$	$P = .00$ (62)

group (7% and 15% of the entire Dutch and American samples, respectively) who expected help from the government and answered this question in both the Netherlands and the United States, some 49% think the government was not being helpful at all. This is an impressive proportion, but of a small group. If the revolution should come from the people who think they are entitled to government help but have no confidence in government help, this revolution seems to depend on a small minority of the population.

Personal and Policy Dissatisfaction

The second hypothesis in the chain of arguments we presented before was that personal dissatisfaction leads to dissatisfaction with government policy. This statement rests on the assumption that people will hold the government responsible for the problems which caused this deprivation. A more differentiated formulation of this hypothesis might be that relative deprivation leads to dissatisfaction with government policy among those people who expect help from government to solve their problems and at the same time have little confidence in the helpfulness of that government. As a matter of fact this hypothesis can only be relevant to a very limited group of the population as the analysis in the last section has shown.

To measure the satisfaction with government policy, respondents were asked for their evaluation of governmental performance in twelve policy areas. In order to gauge the average evaluation a respondent gave to these twelve areas, a simple index of *policy dissatisfaction* was computed by taking the mean value over the twelve policy areas. Table 7 contains

the Pearson correlation coefficients between this index and material dissatisfaction. These coefficients for the whole sample are in the first column of the table. In both countries the coefficients are in a predicted direction, so there is a certain relationship between material satisfaction and policy dissatisfaction. In the Netherlands the relationship is more substantial than in the United States. What we are really interested in, though, is the strength of the relationship within the subgroup which feels that the government should help them to solve their problems and at the same time thinks the government is not very helpful. The correlations for this subgroup are in the second column of Table 7. In both countries the correlation is substantially higher now. However, the number of cases in the Netherlands is so small that the resulting correlation coefficient of $-.43$ is not significant at the $.01$ level.

Nevertheless, the results of this analysis do support the hypothesis that personal dissatisfaction leads to policy dissatisfaction.³ However, this in itself is not enough reason to worry about the fate of parliamentary democracy. This is only the case if hypothesis 3 is true and policy dissatisfaction leads to a decline of support for parliamentary democracy.

Policy Dissatisfaction and Support for Democracy

As has been said before, it is all but self-evident that policy dissatisfaction should lead to a decline of the support for parliamentary democra-

3 It must be conceded this is a far from a perfect set of questions for testing the hypothesis. In the questionnaires there is no direct relationship between the three variables involved, material satisfaction, the problems people have to deal with, and satisfaction on a number of policy areas. It is not impossible that people are dissatisfied because of one thing, mention a second matter as their most important problem, while neither of those two has anything to do with the policy matters on which their judgement is asked. Of course it would have been more elegant if these three matters were directly connected to each other. In a study of aggressive political participation by Muller the respondents were asked, with regard to living conditions, whether their situation was as good as what was properly due to them. This was followed by the question as to what extent the state was responsible for this condition. It is remarkable that most respondents were inclined to hold the government responsible (Muller, 1979, pp. 143-144).

cy. It is the very essence of parliamentary democracy that the electorate edicts its verdict on government policy. That judgement decides whether or not the incumbent government will be replaced by the opposition.

Easton's (1965, chs. 11-13) distinction between support for the political community, the regime, and the political authorities is well known. For our purposes only the distinction between the last two categories is of importance. According to Lipset (1963, ch. 3) the stability of a political system depends both on its effectiveness and its legitimacy. Systems which are both effective and legitimate are stable. When one of the elements in a political system is missing, it is unlikely that stability will remain for an extended period of time. In a system which is legitimate but ineffective the ineffectiveness will finally also erode the legitimacy. Effective but illegitimate regimes are in danger at the moment their effectiveness decreases. The importance of these two elements was—still according to Lipset—proven during the economic crisis of the 1930s, when the effectiveness of many political regimes decreased. The political regimes which were legitimate survived as democracies, while systems whose stability was only based on their effectiveness lost their democratic regime during the crisis (Germany, Italy).

According to this argument, policy dissatisfaction in a healthy democracy will only lead to a decline of the support for parliamentary democracy when dissatisfaction continues for a longer period of time and has become independent of the composition of the incumbent government. In that case failing government policy is no longer ascribed to the incumbent government but to the regime itself. Therefore, we might expect an effect of the evaluation of government policy on the level of support for the authorities. They are held responsible for government policy. This does not exclude the possibility that at the same time other political leaders are supported who might replace the incumbent government. There is no reason to suppose a negative evaluation would lead to a diminishing support for parliamentary democracy. In the second wave of our study respondents were asked to express their opinion on the statements contained in Table 8.

The first two statements refer to the incumbent government, while the last two statements refer to the political system as a whole. If the argument above is correct, dissatisfaction with government policy will cause people to disagree with the first two statements. However, the

Table 8: Policy Dissatisfaction and Support of Authorities and Political Regime

	Netherlands		United States	
	<i>r</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>r</i>	<i>R</i> ²
The present administration behaves in a just and fair manner	.52	.27	.44	.20
The present administration protects basic liberties	.43	.19	.42	.18
The political system of our country is just and fair	.31	.10	.27	.07
The [country name] political system protects our basic liberties	.28	.08	.30	.09

evaluation of government policy should hardly have any effect on the reaction to the other two statements, at least not in the short range.

To see if this is so, each of the four statements separately was subjected to a multiple stepwise regression analysis in which the judgements on the twelve policy areas were the independent variables. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 8. Essential for testing the hypothesis that policy dissatisfaction leads to declining support of parliamentary democracy is the amount of variance explained in each of the analyses. In line with the argument above, the amount of variance explained with regard to the first two statements should be considerably higher than with regard to the third and the fourth statements. The results of the analysis are consistent with the hypothesis. The amount of variance explained with regard to the statements which refer to the political system is 10% or less in both countries, whereas the amount of variance explained with the other two statements, which refer to the incumbent government, is considerably higher, especially in the Netherlands.

Nevertheless, it is also true that there is a significant effect of the evaluation of government policy on the support of the political system. This might be expected only when people have been dissatisfied with government policy for a longer period of time. Therefore one might expect a lower level of system support among those who had a high level of policy dissatisfaction, in both 1974 and 1979-1981, but not among those who were dissatisfied in 1979-81 only. However, the results based on the panel data (not shown) do not confirm this

Table 9: Protest Potential and Support of Authorities and Political Regime (Pearson's r)

	Netherlands		West Germany		United States	
Administration just and fair	-.29	P = .02 (718)	-.03	P = .41 (853)	-.13	P = .00 (1084)
Administration protects basic liberties	-.07	P = 0.5 (711)	-.03	P = .43 (863)	-.14	P = .00 (1037)
Political system just and fair	-.04	P = .31 (697)	-.08	P = .02 (853)	-.12	P = .00 (1045)
Political system protects basic liberties	-.09	P = .01 (683)	-.04	P = .31 (856)	-.10	P = .00 (1064)

Note: 1980 data for West Germany are from the second panel wave.

expectation. In the Netherlands policy dissatisfaction in 1979 does have an impact on support of the political regime, independent of the level of satisfaction in 1974. In the United States the results are contradictory to the expectation. Policy dissatisfaction in 1981 influences the level of system support among those who were not dissatisfied in 1974, but has no influence among those who were. The hypothesis about the impact of policy dissatisfaction on support can only partly be rejected. A negative judgement on government policy, even in the short term, does have some impact on the support for the political system.

Support and Protest

Dissatisfaction with the political regime is most certainly not the firmest basis for parliamentary democracy. However, it is no immediate threat either unless people who are dissatisfied are willing to fight it with means which immediately challenge parliamentary democracy. Therefore, the last hypothesis to be tested is that a negative support for parliamentary democracy leads to political obstruction. To test this hypothesis, both policy dissatisfaction and system dissatisfaction have been related to protest potential (see Table 9).

For the three countries together there is no convincing evidence for a relationship between protest potential and either support for authorities

or the political regime. Only in the United States is this clearly the case. In the Netherlands the correlation between protest potential and one of the statements on support for the political system is not significant, which happens to be the only statement in West Germany with a significant correlation. As far as these correlations have any substance at all, it is certainly not true that protest potential is more related to a lack of support for the political system than for the authorities. Based on these findings, there is no reason to believe that protest potential is more system than policy oriented.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to test a number of mostly implicit suppositions in a popular theory about the fate of parliamentary democracy in a time of a declining economy. Most of these suppositions are not supported by the data from this study. Material deprivation has, in contrast to theory, decreased instead of increased. In addition, the micro-theory on which most of the suppositions seem to be based is not supported by the evidence at hand. Political behavior which challenges the political system is not the most popular among people who are most dissatisfied but among those people who have an optimistic view of their own future. On the other hand, feelings of personal frustration seem to be translated in a political way. But to the extent that people are dissatisfied with government policy these feelings are mostly directed to the incumbent government and hardly to the political system as such. But even a negative attitude toward the political regime is not a great predictor of political actions which deviate from the conventional pattern of political behavior.

Can we therefore come to the conclusion that parliamentary democracy is in no danger at all? It is obvious that such a conclusion cannot be based solely on the kind of analysis presented here for several reasons. One important reason is that the time period involved is a short one, and the impact of the economic crisis during this period on the situation of individual citizens was in general very limited. It is not impossible that in a later period the results would be different. However, we are inclined to think this is unlikely. The results of the analysis are consistent with data from other studies which lead to the conclusion

that the pessimistic view on the development of parliamentary democracy is based on an invalid argumentation. The idea that parliamentary democracy is trapped in a spiral staircase from which it cannot possibly escape has proven to be wrong on a number of points. Citizens have much more realistic expectations about the possible impact of government policy on the economic situation than many critics, especially Brittan, are prepared to believe (see Alt, 1979, p. 264). Also there is abundant evidence from most western democracies in the last decade that political parties in power are willing to take unpopular measures to reduce overloaded government budgets and can get away with it at the elections (Bennett and Sharpe, 1984; Birch, 1984; Hecklo, 1981).

A second caveat with respect to jumping to unwarranted conclusions is that this chapter was not intended to predict the future of parliamentary democracy, but to test the validity of a certain argument with regard to that future. Even if we do have sufficient empirical evidence to reject this argument, there might still be innumerable other reasons why parliamentary democracy is in danger. In this respect social scientists sometimes are no different than the generals who are always preparing themselves for the last war but are taken by surprise by the next one.