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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

EFFECTS OF DEBATE VIEWING AND CITIZEN DISCUSSION ON POLITICAL MALAISE

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Julia A. Spiker

Norman, Oklahoma

1998

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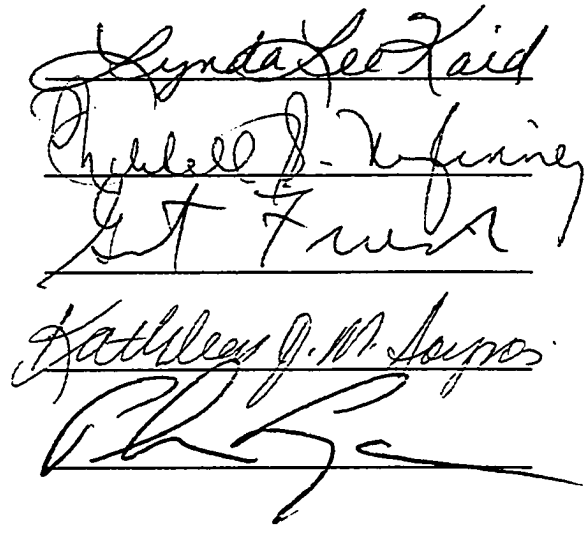
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EFFECTS OF DEBATE VIEWING AND CITIZEN DISCUSSION ON POLITICAL MALAISE

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

BY



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To name each person responsible for my having reached this point in my life is impossible, although I am grateful to each one for their impact on my life.

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EFFECTS OF DEBATE VIEWING AND CITIZEN DISCUSSION ON POLITICAL MALAISE

Abstract

The last Presidential election of the twentieth century is over; and, as the United States quickly approaches the next millennium, it is appropriate to examine the state of political attitudes. This study examines the state of political malaise--a vague sense of mental, moral, or physical uneasiness or ill-being directed toward politics--during the United States 1996 election season. On October 6, 1996, participants viewed the first presidential debate between Bill Clinton and Bob Dole and then participated in focus group discussions. To test for possible changes in participants' levels of political malaise, a repeated measure design--pretest, posttest, and post-posttest--was utilized whereby subjects responded to a series of political malaise scales prior to viewing the first 1996 presidential debate, immediately following the debate, and then again following participation in a focus group discussion about the debate and the political process. Participants consisted of 64 adult voters reflecting their community demographics. Data were gathered from six different groups located at five different geographic sites. Survey results indicate that the debates did not appear to influence political malaise levels while participation in focus group discussion resulted in higher levels of political malaise.

Focus group responses were categorized into these major areas: low personal political efficacy due to the overwhelming influence on the political system by special interests and the media; political corruption creating citizen disillusionment; and a growing preoccupation with citizen self interests overwhelming an already low sense of civic duty.

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EFFECTS OF DEBATE AND CITIZEN DISCUSSION ON POLITICAL MALAISE

Chapter I

Introduction

The last Presidential election of the twentieth century is over; and, as the United States quickly approaches the next millennium, it is appropriate to examine the state of political attitudes. What is the mood of American citizens? What do decreasing voting trends say about our democratic process? Are Americans still the great participators of associations they create, as once described by Alexis de Tocqueville? In our modern age, how much are political attitudes associated with the media?

In recent years across the country, print media headlines have heralded the existence of a negative trend in politics:

> "The year of the angry voter: Candidates battle festering cynicism" (Shepard & May, 1992, p. A1);
>
> "The alienated voters: Why are we so angry?" (Cook, 1994, p. 30);
>
> "Voter apathy? No, more like voter disgust" (Rosen, 1992, p. B7);
>
> "Voter malaise at least as deep as during Carter years,

say analysts" (Ingwerson, 1992, p. 1);

"Blame today's cynicism on Watergate" (Germond & Witcover, 1994, p. 1937);

"Some know no vote will banish bleakness" (Roberts, 1992, p. B2);

"Media are the source of public negativism" (Angle, 1994, p. 2646).

Headline use of key terminology like anger, alienation, apathy, malaise, cynicism, and blaming the media for public negativism suggest that something is happening with citizen attitudes toward the political process. According to the popular media, citizens are so fed up with the U.S. political system that they want nothing to do with it (Ingwerson, 1992; Peterson, 1992, Shepard & May, 1992). Citizens' confidence in the political system is eroding. A 1993 opinion poll found "that 32% of the public, or approximately 56 million Americans (an increase from 9% in 1990), are highly distrustful" (Louis Harris & Associates, 1993, p. 27). The distrustful index included questions toward government, voting, business, and technology. Another report indicated Americans' trust of government was as low as 18 percent in 1994 (Do We Trust Government?, 1994, p. 141). In 1996, when asked to rate their trust in the government to do the right thing, only four percent believed the government could be trusted "just about always" (The Washington Post et al., 1996). The clear majority, 71%, believed the government could be trusted "only some of the time" (The Washington Post et al., 1996).

A 1995 study found the public to be more cynical toward public officials in Washington, at 77%, than the media at 40% (Times Mirror Center for The People & The Press, 1995). In fact, media suggest that the public is always just a step away from completely changing the system--not a violent revolution, but sweeping reforms achieved through elections (Benson, 1992). However, a look at voting turnout percentages balances this perspective.

Insert Table 1 about here

Voting turnout has decreased with every election with the exception of 1992 in which voting turnout did increase slightly. The numbers did drop in 1994 and again in 1996 (Skiba, 1996; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995). In 1996, only 48.8% of the voting age population actually voted (Skiba, 1996). Reduced voting turnout does not suggest revolutionary reform through elections. There is some evidence, however, of a desire for change, as can be noted by the 1994 Republican takeover of Congress and the much publicized "Contract With America." The desire for change may have been reduced slightly by this takeover as evidenced from a 1996 poll in which 55% of the respondents believed that most members of the U.S. House of Representatives deserve re-election, up from 43% in 1994 (Benedetto, 1996). In fact, some individual's feel that Americans are not angry

with the political system and that the status quo is a good thing (Dionne, 1996).

Even if the anger is under more control, it still exists and erupts in the form of incivility. There have been long-term problems with hostility throughout the history of American politics, so the lack of civility is not an entirely new phenomena. The incivility occurring at city council meetings in Cedar Rapids, Iowa is just one example of what is occurring throughout the country. Some citizens tell the council members to "shut up" while others blow "derisive kisses" at the members (Mahtesian, 1997). One city council member even brings his legal, concealed weapon to these meetings, remembering an incident in a nearby town where one angry citizen "shot and killed the mayor and wounded two council members" (Mahtesian, 1997). The Cedar Rapids city council meetings were not always uncivil: they gradually became more so after the meetings were televised in 1993. It cannot be said that the televising of the meetings directly caused the incivility, but it certainly captures and magnifies such negative actions by making them part of the news of the day.

Voters are definitely experiencing negative political feelings. Taylor (1991) refers to a "spiritual blight" invading every aspect of society. The political system, a major unit of society, is certainly not exempt from this blight. The negative phenomenon upon which blame has been

placed for every possible wrong, has been labeled political malaise (Dahl, 1967; Robinson, 1976). For the present study, political malaise will be defined as a vague sense of mental, moral, or physical uneasiness or ill-being directed toward politics.

Political malaise is an important social issue, especially in a democracy like the United States. "The relationship between the individual and the state appears to be at the heart of public debate about the meaning of democracy" (McIntosh & Mac Iver, 1993, p. 383). The belief that participation in a democracy makes for a better citizen and a better country is generally accepted by many as true. This belief in participatory democracy received popular support during the sixties and seventies, even while actual citizen political participation began to decline. "The idea of the educative effect of democratic participation rose in the 1960's, flourished in the 1970's, and waned in the 1980's" (Mansbridge, 1997). In the eighties, there was the continued reduction in political participation, as well as reduced support for the notion that political participation was a good thing. Is civic duty important in the 1990's? Seymour Lipset cites Robert Putnam's point that "civic engagement has fallen precipitously over the past three decades, as indicated by declining membership in many types of civic associations, from religious groups to women's clubs and bowling leagues" (Lipset, 1995, p. 13). Lipset

(Lipset, 1995, p. 13) agrees with Putnam's claim that the decline is due to many factors including:

> the movement of women into the labor force, the decline in the size and the stability of the family, and high rates of geographic mobility...the increase in time spent watching television...[and] technological developments have also contributed to the individualization of the use of leisure time.

Technological developments can also have positive political repercussions. It may be argued that the use of nontraditional media such as television talk shows and town hall meetings generated new interest and higher levels of voter involvement in politics in 1992 (Weaver, 1994) and in the future may help reduce levels of political malaise. While all of these factors may be part of a more complex society and a growing trend in candidate/citizen communication, it is important to examine their full impact on society. If one were to judge the reduced voting trends and the decreased membership in civic associations as a sign of participatory democracy breaking down, then it might follow that civic duty is not stressed in our society and the result is citizens with negative feelings toward the political system. A citizen experiencing political malaise lacks trust in the political system, expresses cynicism towards it, and experiences low political efficacy and high disapprobation toward candidates (Kaid et al., 1989) and

special interest groups. These feelings negatively affect the political process and this is evidenced by a lack of or reduced communication between a citizen and government. In such a scenario, is democracy working as it should?

While there is agreement that political malaise exists, there is still great disagreement over what political malaise is and its causes. There have been many possible reasons offered for political malaise: media reliance; negative political advertising; malaise is an inherent part of society; an individuals age; past political experiences; gender; the decline of political parties; the level of personal wealth; the absence of a working class party; the complicated voting system; the increased mobility of citizens; a lack of political interest by citizens; and the level of political involvement. Many communication scholars have approached this phenomenon from the direction of media influence (Holtz-Bacha, 1990; Kaid et al., 1989; Robinson, 1976). As more people rely upon media for political information, political malaise has apparently increased. As Robert Entman (1989, p. 129) writes:

> If the media performed as ideally as they should, if they actually served an informed and interested citizenry, democracy might more closely approximate its ideal. Instead, democracy has gained little from the rise of media power.

Negative political advertising has been identified as one

factor which influences the level of citizens' distrust and cynicism (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Schenck-Hamlin et al., 1995). Other scholars have examined political malaise from a perspective that suggests it is an inherent part of modern society (Taylor, 1991).

An individual's age and past political experiences may suggest an inclination toward a certain level of political malaise, according to a 1995 survey by the Times Mirror Center for The People & The Press. The 30-39 age group was found to be the most cynical at 59%, followed by the 40-55 age group at 50%, the 56-64 age group at 47%, the 18-29 age group at 45%, and 65 and older at 40% (Times Mirror Center for The People & The Press, 1995). According to the study, the two most cynical age groups were labeled the "Vietnam-Watergate generation," suggesting that their negative political experiences of growing up in the United States during that turbulent era resulted in their higher levels of cynicism.

Gender may account for different motivations leading to the decision to participate or not in political activities (van Assendelft & O'Connor, 1994). The decline of political parties and the level of personal wealth as a link to political participation have also been identified as possible influences on political malaise (Black & Black, 1994; DiPalma, 1970; Duke, 1992; Maisel, 1993). The decline in political participation, in particular reduced voter

participation, has been linked with political malaise. Even though the Democratic party postures to working class citizens, it is this very group of working class and poorer citizens who represent the typical nonvoter. This grouping of working class and poorer citizens, typically, are active voting members of socialist and populist parties in other countries (Avey, 1989). Avey (1989) attributes reduced voter turnout in the United States to "the absence of a socialist party" and he claims that "a working-class party would give the economically disadvantaged a sense of political efficacy" (p. 84). While there is no existing political party representing only the working class and very poor, individual candidates do try to win the working class vote as seen in 1992, when Ross Perot campaigned to reach working class citizens who felt distanced by the political system. It has also been suggested that lower levels of voter turnout is due to "the complicated voter registration system, the high mobility of Americans, and a lack of voter interest" (Sneider, 1996). Some young voters say they just do not have the time to vote (Allam, 1996).

Contrary to expected notions of participation versus non-participation, The League of Women Voters' (1996) studied voters and nonvoters and concluded that alienation and cynicism "are not deciding factors in non voting." Both voters and nonvoters experience political malaise. Other factors stop nonvoters from voting, such as "the extent to

which people are encouraged to participate...the extent to which they feel an election matters...and the availability of information about the candidates, the issues and the voting process itself" (Woodwell, 1996, pp. 9-10). Information, therefore, is a vital factor in political participation. In support of the League of Women Voters' results, it can be said that "a well-informed citizen is more likely to be attentive to politics, engaged in various forms of participation, committed to democratic principles, opinionated, and to feel efficacious" (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). It should be noted that being politically informed does not inoculate a citizen against political malaise. Cappella and Jamieson's (1997) believe "that cynicism may be grounded in experience with those who are more active and more informed--more cynical" (p. 20). Thus, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) findings suggest that even though political participation may have caused cynicism to increase, such cynicism does not prevent political participation. Additional research also indicates that negative political feelings may not be the sole factor of reduced participation because sometimes negative political feelings spur a citizen to action. Austin and Pinkleton (1995) found that "negative feelings about politics...were simultaneously associated with heightened and dampened intent to participate in the elective process among young eligible voters" (p. 230).

Scholars have approached political malaise in different ways by identifying different influences and using different terminology to define the phenomenon. This term, political malaise, is used in the current study as an umbrella phrase designed to cover and unite various perspectives. Political malaise is a complex, nebulous attitude due to its several dimensions (trust or cynicism; political efficacy; and disapprobation; Kaid et al., 1989), and a variety of source influences.

Political malaise was first examined by surveying relevant literature to highlight previous definitions, research methods and results. From such a base, this research project was developed. The project focuses on the state of political malaise during the 1996 election season. The first presidential debate between President Bill Clinton and the challenger, Senator Robert Dole, was used as a stimulus for citizen groups to view; after viewing the debate, these citizens then participated in focus group discussions. The focus group discussion was also used as a stimulus. The data from the focus group discussions, plus survey data gathered at three different times, was analyzed to discover changes in subjects' levels of political malaise. The application of focus group methodology is a relatively new development in the study of political malaise and a section supporting this application is included. The next chapter will present historical definitions of the key

dimensions of political malaise to better understand this elusive phenomenon.

Chapter II

Literature Review

A first step in understanding political malaise is to examine the range of terminology and definitions used in existing research. Analysis of the dominant research methods and key research findings is also provided.

Defining Political Malaise

Popular media and academic research journals address the nature of the attitude of political malaise in many ways. A variety of labels have been used: apathy, anomie, alienation, voter anger, cynicism, distrust, discontent, disapprobation, political inefficacy, political malaise, and videomalaise. These labels have been applied to define this nebulous attitude in terms of its presence, its existence, and its components or dimensions. Although various perspectives utilize different labels, they each try to grasp aspects of this elusive attitude.

Political malaise has been studied from the perspective of communication, political science, sociology, religion, psychology, and philosophy, while some fields have even tried to merge their efforts.

Communication and political science merged in Robinson's 1976 study on "videomalaise." Individuals depending on the media for their political information are influenced by the medium of television. The results reveal that television programming and its format negatively affect the political attitudes of the viewers.

Sociologists rely a great deal on Durkheim's theory of anomie, which is based on societal upheaval. Its primary premise is that malaise is a result of the conflicts within society and this conflict is a fundamental part of society. However, anomie theory has also been attributed to an individual level of anomie which incorporates the social psychological aspect of personality. In this sense, sociology and psychology have begun to integrate in order to understand the political malaise phenomenon.

The sources for the various labels are varied. Malaise affects all parts of society, as there exists individual malaise, work malaise, religious malaise, and political malaise. This may help explain why so many areas study malaise and, why there are so many different labels. Next, the definitions of these labels are reviewed.

The phrase, political malaise, was first used in 1967 by Robert Dahl as he presented his perspective on the state of the city in a democracy. Dahl (1967, p. 967) stated:

> We may be approaching a crisis in the socialization of citizens into the political life of the democratic nation-state, a crisis that the challenges of nation-building, democratization, and overcoming the most

> blatant evils of industrialism have delayed or obscured. There are signs of malaise among young people, among the very citizens who shortly before the dawn of the 21st Century will have become--to use the word that has now become a mindless cliche--the establishment. If the malaise were only American, one could put it down to television, over-permissive child-rearing, the persistence of an unpopular and ugly war, or other causes more or less specific to the United States; but there are signs of this malaise among youth in almost all the democratic countries.

President Jimmy Carter brought the political malaise concept to national attention during his 1979 energy crisis speech, a speech which became known as his malaise speech. Carter addressed the crisis of confidence affecting the United States. In fact, the word "crisis" is used eight times in this famous speech (Denton, 1993), yet it was the media that labeled the address as Carter's "malaise" speech. In his address, Carter articulated his concerns for the state of democracy in the United States (Carter, 1993). In the following excerpt, Carter presents a descriptive picture of an invisible threat to democracy. He uses such phrases as "crisis of confidence," losing that faith," and "losing our confidence." Carter addresses the trend of reduced voting, and acknowledges a "growing disrespect" in our democratic society. Carter not only describes the crisis, but identifies possible causes of what the media labeled a malaise infecting the United States, and he ends with the acknowledgment that the nation has been wounded. Carter (1993, pp. 132-133) stated:

> I want to talk to you right now about a fundamental threat to American democracy.

I do not mean our political and civil liberties. They will endure. And I do not refer to the outward strength of America--the nation that is at peace tonight everywhere in the world with unmatched economic power and military might. The threat is nearly invisible in ordinary ways. It is a crisis of confidence. It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will.

We can see this crisis in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our nation.

The erosion of our confidence in the future is threatening to destroy the social and the political fabric of America. The confidence that we have always had as a people is not simply some romantic dream or a proverb in a dusty book that we read just on the Fourth of July. It is the idea which founded our nation and has guided our development as a people. Confidence in the future has supported everything else--public institutions and private enterprise, our own families and the very Constitution of the United States. Confidence has defined our course and has served as link between generations.

We've always believed in something called progress. We've always had a faith that the days of our children would be better than our own.

Our people are losing that faith. Not only in Government itself, but in the ability as citizens to serve as the ultimate rulers and shapers of our democracy. As a people, we know our past and we are proud of it. Our progress has been part of the living history of America, even the world. We always believed that we were part of a great movement of humanity itself called democracy, involved in the search for freedom. And that belief has always strengthened us in our purpose. But just as we are losing our confidence in the future, we are also beginning to close the door on our past.

In a nation that was proud of hard work, strong families, close-knit communities and our faith in God, too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption. Human identity is no longer defined by what one does but by what one owns.

But we've discovered that owning things and consuming things does not satisfy our longing for meaning.

> We've learned that piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives which have no confidence or purpose. The symptoms of this crisis of the American spirit are all around us. For the first time in the history of our country a majority of our people believe that the next five years will be worse than the past five years. Two-thirds of our people do not even vote. The productivity of American workers is actually dropping and the willingness of Americans to save for the future has fallen below that of all other people in the Western world.
>
> As you know there is a growing disrespect for Government and for churches and for schools, the news media and other institutions. This is not a message of happiness or reassurance but it is the truth. And it is a warning. These changes did not happen overnight. They've come upon us gradually over the last generation. Years that were filled with shocks and tragedy.
>
> We were sure that ours was a nation of the ballot, not the bullet, until the murders of John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. We were taught that our armies were always invincible and our causes were always just only to suffer the agony of Vietnam. We respected the Presidency as a place of honor until the shock of Watergate. We remember when the phrase "sound as a dollar" was an expression of absolute dependability until 10 years of inflation began to shrink our dollar and our savings. We believed that our nation's resources were limitless until 1973, when we had to face a growing dependence on foreign oil.
>
> These wounds are still very deep. They have never been healed.

Robinson (1976) connected political malaise with the dependence on television for political information. Such reliance, according to Robinson, creates social distrust; political cynicism; political inefficacy; and partisan disloyalty. Robinson also coined the term "videomalaise" to specify the relationship of television to political malaise. Becker and Fruit (1980) referred to political malaise as

"the lowered levels of knowledge of political affairs on the part of audience members and negative evaluations of the political system" (p. 17). Other researchers have used either political malaise or videomalaise in their studies (Holtz-Bacha, 1990; Kaid et al., 1989; Leshner & McKean, 1997; O'Keefe, 1980). Even the popular media has used the term political malaise in their reporting (Shogren & Hook, 1996).

For this study, political malaise will be defined as a vague sense of mental, moral, or physical uneasiness or ill-being directed toward politics. The phrase political malaise is used to label this phenomenon because it incorporates all the varying dimensions without overly emphasizing any one dimension. Defining key dimensions of political malaise leads to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The key dimensions to be defined in greater detail are alienation, apathy, cynicism, political inefficacy, and disapprobation. These dimensions were chosen because they appear to dominate both the research and popular media.

Alienation

Studies have defined alienation as a sense of separateness from the political system (Mutz, 1987; Takei & Porter, 1988; Wright, 1976). Many researchers rely on terms such as, "meaninglessness," "normlessness," and "powerlessness" to describe alienation (Giffin, 1970; Mutz,

1987). Mutz (1987, p. 470) acknowledges the popular use of the term alienation in the following passage:

> The term "political alienation" has been used to signify many forms of negative feelings about politics. As the popularity of the concept has increased, it also has become increasingly devoid of specific meaning.

The term "alienation" originates from Latin, "the Latin noun 'alienato,' [and] the verb 'alienare' [mean] to make something another, to take away, to remove" (Gilmour & Lamb, 1975). The citizen feels removed from the political system. The concept derives from the "sociological concept of anomie" (Gilmour & Lamb, 1975; Orru, 1987; Schwartz, 1973). "Anomie, as originally described by Durkheim and adapted by Merton, referred to a condition of society--a state of normlessness or confusion of norms in the culture" (Schwartz, 1973).

A problem with terminology is that meanings can change over time. Gilmour and Lamb (1975) traced the development of alienation back to "early Christian thought [described] for centuries, [as] the feeling of being at one with God [which] was contrasted with the feeling of being separated or alien from God" (Gilmour & Lamb, 1975).

The term developed additional meanings during the Middle Ages, including the transfer of property ownership; a description of mental disorders; and "interpersonal estrangement" or turning warm relationships cool; resulting in dislike (Gilmour & Lamb, 1975). The term alienation was also used by Marx in relation to workers lack of connection

to their work (Dimitrova, 1994; Herring, 1987; Schwartz, 1973). Today, according to Webster's New World Dictionary (1979), the term "alienate" is defined as: "1) to transfer the ownership of (property) to another; 2) to make unfriendly; estrange; 3) to cause a transference of (affection)" (p. 12). Clearly, today's meanings are similar to the meanings of the Middle Ages.

Apathy

Apathy is connected to politics and often used interchangeably with alienation. An alienated person is apathetic and may not participate (Robinson, 1976). This view also links apathy and alienation to participation. DeLucca (1995) describe apathy as "a loss or suppression of emotional affect with regard to, a listlessness, a loss of interest in, some issue, set of issues, or perhaps politics itself" (p. 191). However, in some cases, if someone is happy with the status quo, they may not participate (Lipset & Schneider, 1987).

Apathy is distinct from alienation. Apathy is "a nonresponse to politics" and refers to a lack of concern for politics (Gilmour & Lamb, 1975). According to Webster's New World Dictionary (1979), apathy is defined as: "1) lack of emotion; 2) indifference" (p. 21). Apathy is a passive nonresponse. "The apathetic citizen is uninterested and inattentive to politics and usually withdraws from active involvement" (Gilmour & Lamb, 1975, p. 21). This is not the

same thing as alienation, which is considered an active (and in some cases an angry) separation. It is a mistake for researchers to equate the two terms because apathy and alienation have different foundational meanings and thus should not be interchanged (Gilmour & Lamb, 1975). "Alienation leads logically to apathy...[but] the two ideas [are not] synonyms" (Gilmour & Lamb, 1975, p. 21).

Each term possesses a unique perspective of malaise. As with alienation, apathy cannot solely represent the phenomenon of political malaise. It explains only one dimension of the phenomenon.

Cynicism

Cynicism was identified as a concept during the time of Hellenic Greece. "Cynicism as a distinct and positive political philosophy began as a chosen project of poverty" (Goldfarb, 1991). Followers of this perspective separated themselves from material wealth and lived very simply. It emanated "from the intellectual power of the powerless. . .[and was a] philosophy of simplicity critically applied to the excesses of society and its powers" (Goldfarb, 1991). The cynics, it appears, were early critical theorists.

The first and most famous cynic, Diogenes was a "archetypical cynic," "a social satirist," and a "radical social critic" (Goldfarb, 1991). He appreciated simple pleasures of life and was not intimidated by human power, as demonstrated by a simple story. While sunbathing, Diogenes

was approached by Alexander the Great who offered to grant him one request. Diogenes replied by asking him to "stop blocking my sun!" (Goldfarb, 1991).

The contemporary approach to cynicism is noted by Goldfarb (1991, p. 16) in the following passage:

> Then and now mocking cynicism expresses resignation, if not support, for the way things are. When convention is mocked from the point of view of the powers, the powerful use their disregard for convention to further accumulate power. When the powerless observe this, their sense of powerlessness increases, and when despite this sense they try to act according to moral principles that reveal the problematic nature of the way things are, mocking, cynicism ridicules their effort. Such was the experience of antiquity, and it is our experience too.

This historical perspective on the term "cynicism" provides an insight into how it relates to the phenomenon of political malaise. In describing cynicism, Goldfarb (1991) refers to key characteristics of political malaise: resignation and a sense of powerlessness in response to the powerful of society. Cynicism is a key dimension of political malaise.

Cynicism is based on a lack of trust that any good will result from anything in politics (Goldfarb, 1991; Yoos, 1985). Cynicism expresses a critique of the status quo and also a resignation that the status quo will not change. Cappella and Jamieson (1997) describe the cynical perspective: "the cynic tends to hold that the political system is corrupt; its players are Machiavellian partisans uninterested in the public good, its process driven by a

concern with winning, not governing" (p. 19).

Media report this type of cynical perspective to the public (Patterson, 1994). The press assumed a larger role in presidential elections as political parties grew weaker. Corrupt actions in government during the 1970's--the Vietnam and Watergate Era--increased the cynicism of the press. What was investigative reporting to uncover wrongdoing on the part of government and politicians turned to attack journalism as the press turned to using opponents' claims as the basis for news reports (Patterson, 1994). Patterson (1994, p. 245) claims this type of reporting is not "watchdog journalism" because "it exalts controversy rather than accuracy." Exposing the public constantly to such "attack journalism" may not be good for the democratic political process. Patterson (1994, p. 246) makes such a claim:

> A certain degree of skepticism on the part of the press is healthy for democracy. However, when skepticism turns into cynicism and becomes an everyday theme of the news, democracy is not well served. News that incessantly and unjustifiably labels political leaders as insincere and inept fosters mistrust on the part of the public, and makes it harder for those in authority to provide the leadership that is required if government is to work effectively.

As one medium, television fosters public cynicism in a

unique way. "Television makes us see politics in a certain way, but it also makes us see seeing in a certain way" (Hart, 1994, p. 7). One of the reasons why the public watches politics on television is because "political television feels empowering" (Hart, 1994, p. 107). By relying upon television for political information, citizens feel as if they are politically informed; however, Hart (1994) claims there is a difference between such a feeling and actually being informed. Hart (1994, p. 12) states:

> Far too many Americans feel eminently knowledgeable about politics, and that is a danger of some consequence. A democracy, I will argue, becomes imperiled (1) when its people do not know what they think they know and (2) when they do not care about what they do not know. Television miseducates the citizenry but, worse, it makes that miseducation attractive.

In linking cynicism to media, specifically television, both Patterson and Hart identify key components of cynicism--mistrust of the political system and the sense of personal political power.

Cynicism is related to alienation in that someone may critique a system because they are not part of it. The resignation aspect relates cynicism to apathy. The sense of powerlessness ties cynicism to feelings of political efficacy.

Political Inefficacy

Mass media messages can contribute to the development of political attitudes. For example, the political efficacy of the American voter has been portrayed in many American films. Phelps (1985) analyzed 12 films made between 1932 and 1972 for the images these films portrayed of the ordinary American voter. The predominant image was "the voter as sucker" portrayed as ineffectual and incompetent. These films "portrayed an America in which 'democratic' institutions succeeded without the benefit of an informed and aroused citizenry" (Phelps, 1985, p. 173). Phelps further states:

> Thus, Hollywood films asked audiences to pledge their allegiance to American democracy and at the same time deny their own competence and virtue. American politics, according to these films, works in spite of the people, not because of them.

In this study, the terms of ineffectual and incompetent are used to identify the key characteristics of political efficacy.

Research has used both forms of this concept--political efficacy and political inefficacy. Both terms refer to the concept of personal political power. Typical political malaise expressions using political efficacy indicate that an individual has a low level of political efficacy. Typical political malaise expressions using political

inefficacy indicate that an individual has a high level of political inefficacy. Both uses of the expressions refer to the concept of low personal political power.

Hayes and Bean (1993) acknowledge two levels of the political efficacy dimension: internal and external. Internal efficacy "refers to beliefs about one's own competence to understand and to participate effectively in politics" (Hayes & Bean, 1993, p. 262). In earlier research, Robinson (1976) defined inefficacy as a low sense of personal political power. Years later, Hayes and Bean (1993) expanded the political efficacy dimension to include external efficacy which "refers to beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizens' demands" (p. 262). The level of political efficacy can be affected negatively by the dimension of disapprobation.

Disapprobation

According to Webster's New World Dictionary (1979), disapprobation means disapproval (p. 140). The term disapprobation has been used to describe disapproval toward a particular political candidate (Kaid et al., 1989).

Currently, there is a very high level of disfavor directed toward candidates. However, there is also a growing disapprobation toward other elements and institutions, such as special interest groups. For example, there is growing anger toward lobby groups, such as the

tobacco companies, who have great influence on tobacco legislation. There is also growing anger toward the media which may be viewed as blocking citizens direct access to a candidate. This anger directed toward the media is an ironic twist for an organization that purports to inform the public about political matters. While such resentment may change with future generations, this form of disapprobation might best be viewed as situational. It would be helpful to expand this definition to encompass situational disfavor and doing so would increase the flexibility of the dimension. As society changes, certain issues, people, and groups become more or less popular. Adding flexibility to the dimension of disapprobation strengthens it so as to survive "fad issues" whether directed toward candidates or special interest groups. Thus, the dimension will remain intact and stable while accommodating changing situations in society. Future research will need to explore this area.

This definition section has explored several current and historical definitions of the key dimensions of political malaise: alienation and apathy, cynicism, political inefficacy, and disapprobation. While each dimension individually does not explain political malaise, together they provide a description of the territory covered by the notion of political malaise.

For this study, political malaise is defined as a vague sense of mental, moral, or physical uneasiness or ill-being

directed toward politics. The key dimensions of alienation, apathy, cynicism, political efficacy, and disapprobation are regarded as components of political malaise. The exact relationship between these dimensions and political malaise is not clear at this point. There is no clear model of which dimension appears first in a citizen or which dimension is dominant. Such relationships represent another area for future research.

The present study defines alienation as feeling removed from the political system. It is an active separation. Apathy is defined as indifference to the political system, and represents a passive separation. Cynicism is defined as having a lack of trust in the political system and critical of the status quo. It is mostly directed to the institution of government. Political inefficacy is defined as a low sense of personal political power (Robinson, 1976). Disapprobation is defined as disapproval toward a particular candidate (Kaid et al., 1989) or special interest group.

These dimensions address political attitudes directed toward outside influences--the government as an institution (cynicism), candidates, special interests groups, and media as part of the political process (disapprobation). These dimensions also address political attitudes directed toward inward influences--a sense of personal political power (political inefficacy) and personal choices about one's level of connection to the political process (alienation,

apathy). All are interconnected and make up the phenomenon of political malaise.

The next section briefly summarizes the primary methods used in studying political malaise and describes key results.

Research Method Approaches

Survey methods, questionnaires, interviews, and content analysis have all been utilized in political malaise research. Much of the research utilizes similar measurements--questions are asked or statements presented, and scales are administered to determine levels of political malaise.

Much of the research is based upon national data collected by the Center for Political Studies at the University of Michigan (Craig, 1996; Wright, 1976). The Center for Political Studies (CPS) has been referred to as either the Survey Research Center (SRC) or the American National Election Study (ANES) series. This study will refer to this research facility as ANES for its method of including a few questions on political efficacy as part of its larger studies of the political system. The ANES asks participants to agree or disagree with a series of statements. Other researchers, instead, use a four point scale of: agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, and disagree strongly (Stewart et al., 1992).

The ANES utilizes a four item political efficacy scale

which was also utilized in a study by Wright (1975). The four items included:

1) People like me don't have any say about what the government does.
2) Voting is the only way that people like me can have any say about how the government runs things.
3) Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.
4) I don't think public officials care much what people like me think.

Many researchers still utilize the agree/disagree response to such prepared statements, although with mild variations. Wald and Lupfer (1978) increased the number of statements and categorized them using key dimensions of political malaise. They measured efficacy with three statements, trust with five, and cynicism with six.

Weaknesses in the ANES methods have been noted and a variety of options have been incorporated by various researchers (Nownes, 1992; Seligson, 1980; Wright, 1975). Researchers have identified two primary problems associated with the ANES research: (a) the agree/disagree scale and (b) the vagueness of the questions. Wright (1975) states, "serious problems arise when the acquiescing or 'agree' response for every item is a sign of the presence of the trait being measured." For the ANES method, "agree" equates

to political inefficacy. Seligson (1980) modified the ANES method by directing questions to a specific issue that is meaningful to the participant. This eliminates a vague feeling of efficacy that is usually measured.

Another variation of the dominant reliance on the ANES data is the incorporation of socio-demographic characteristics into political malaise research measurements. Steinberger (1981) studied the relationship of community with political efficacy. He referred to the writings of Tocqueville who "...appears to link the closeness and intimacy of communal life with a sense of political power and commitment" (p. 130). Steinberger found that community affects status which is the best predictor of local political efficacy. Guyton (1988) tried to link critical thinking with political participation.

Comparative research is a developing area of political communication research, particularly in the area of political malaise. Comparative research uses various methods and gathers data from different countries. Questions driving this research include: Is political malaise present in other countries? What factors influence changes in political malaise? In recent years, researchers have explored this potentially rich field (Hayes & Bean, 1993; Pettersen & Rose, 1996; Shrivastava, 1989) to answer these kinds of questions and increase understanding of the various dimensions of political malaise. Hayes and Bean

(1993) used "...identically worded items to measure political efficacy...[and] examine[d] the extent to which it is structured by the same underlying attitudes and sentiments in each of these four countries [United States, West Germany, Great Britain, and Australia] (p. 261)." Shrivastava (1989) analyzed political efficacy among students in the United States, the United Kingdom, and India. Pettersen and Rose (1996) examined factors involved with different types of local participation in Norway.

While individual researchers have made modifications on the method for their own projects, the ANES surveys also continue to make modifications. The ANES data collection continues across the nation and provides a solid database for many studies analyzing trends.

Political Malaise & Media Research Findings

Communication research often associates political malaise with the influence of the media in general and television in particular (Robinson, 1976). Television is a key communication medium in the democratic political information process and its influence on the political system is an important area of study. In fact, for many citizens, television is the sole source of political information. Television is also the base for most political campaign messages. This mutual reliance and the resulting effects sustain the use of the now popular phrase, mediated politics.

The mediated relationship between citizens and government continues to be explored. Some research has examined the effects of specific television programs or televised events. Other studies have focused on newspapers and media style in combination with national election data. Early communication research began the exploration into the relationship between the media, citizens, and political malaise (Campbell, 1960; Campbell et al., 1960; Miller & Reese, 1982; O'Keefe, 1980, O'Keefe & Liu, 1980; Robinson, 1976; Wald & Lupfer, 1978).

Data on America's changing political patterns within the political system and citizen's opinions were compiled from the ANES and by individual researchers (Campbell, 1960; Campbell et al., 1960). Factors which influence voter attitude and turnout were identified, and much of this work provided a base for later researchers.

Connecting communication and political science perspectives brought research a step closer to understanding political malaise. Television increases political malaise in individuals who rely upon it for political information (Robinson, 1976). Robinson believed "that television journalism does cause frustration, cynicism, self-doubt, and malaise" (p. 425) and the word "videomalaise" was coined in his 1976 study. Many studies after this continued to develop the idea of videomalaise, using it as a foundation for their work (Becker & Fruit, 1980; Holtz-Bacha, 1990;

O'Keefe, 1980; Wald & Lupfer, 1978).

Around the same time as Robinson (1976), Wald and Lupfer (1978) were looking at the connection between television and political attitudes. They examined the first televised debate in 1976 to determine its effect upon a variety of political conditions, including political malaise. The results indicate a temporary increase of political efficacy after the debate, but this level dropped one week later. Levels of trust dropped and cynicism increased after viewing the debate and both continued these negative directions one week later.

Becker and Fruit (1980) examined political malaise from the Robinson perspective and relied upon this point--television news dependence increases political malaise. As an individual grows older, the more dependent an individual becomes on television news for public affairs information. Becker and Fruit (1980) concluded: "ironically, the generally conflictual nature of television news has been offered as one explanation for the relationship between dependence on that medium and the negative evaluations of the political system" (p. 16).

Political malaise and its relationship with television reliance was the research focus of O'Keefe (1980). Here, the results did not support earlier findings from Robinson's (1976) study. O'Keefe (1980) found that positive political attitudes, such as feelings "that politicians were

altruistic and that voting was efficacious...[and] positive candidate images" (p. 125), were associated with greater television reliance.

In an attempt to clarify such contradictions in the research, Miller and Reese (1982) continued the work on the relationship between television and political malaise. Their results indicate that negative qualities associated with television, such as lower political activity and reduced political efficacy, affect the efficacy of non-television reliant individuals more than those reliant upon television (p. 246).

Another recent study contradicted Robinson's findings of videomalaise. Relying on television news did not affect cynicism toward politicians (Leshner & McKean, 1997). The study found increased levels of political knowledge among respondents who relied on television news. This study also encompassed newspaper use with similar results.

A possible explanation for the contradicting results is the varying levels of television dependence. Another reason might be the varying assumptions underlying the studies--i.e., television is an influence or it is not an influence. Use of varying terminology and definitions between studies makes comparison difficult.

A trend in recent research is to utilize dimensions (or components as discussed in the definition section of this paper) in order to create categories by which gathered

information can be organized (Kaid et al., 1989). Researchers look for indicators that are present when political malaise is present. These indicators fall within dimensions for political malaise and include: (a) political cynicism (distrust of institutions); (b) political efficacy (belief in personal political power); and (c) political disapprobation (disapproval with candidates [Kaid et al., 1989] or political groups). The use of underlying dimensions provides a common structure, thus making it easier to compare studies.

Another possible explanation for differences in findings may be the methods used to research political malaise. Are these methods really studying the attitude of political malaise? While the statements and measurement scales may be fine-tuned from time to time, if they are missing important qualities of political malaise then the findings are not truly accurate. It is important to double-check this point. Combining the methodologies of survey research with that of focus group methodology has not been utilized in previous political malaise research. This combination should yield valuable information. While the survey methodology will measure levels of malaise, the focus group research will answer such questions as, what are people really saying about political malaise? How do citizens describe the current political mood?

Research Questions

The presidential debates are high profile media events and as such can be considered a valid stimulus for research to examine political attitudes. "Debates are the closest thing to a job interview candidates and the public will ever experience" (Carlin, 1994, p. 3). This may be the reason high numbers of citizens view the debates in their search for political information to aid their approaching political decisions; specifically, information learned from watching a debate will be used in determining how to vote--or not to vote--and, more generally, whether or not to participate in the upcoming elections. The debates have been examined as a political media source for educating citizens about their government and for promoting feelings of civic responsibility (Wald & Lupfer, 1978). The timing for this research is logical because political campaigns come together during the debate season, a time when citizens are also forming their attitudes and opinions. As one type of political attitude, political malaise may solidify enough at this point in a campaign for feelings of malaise to be tapped. The high number of citizens relying upon the debates for political information and during a time when citizens are formulating their political attitudes and opinions makes a strong case for examining political malaise within the framework of a political debate. While survey research provides a measurement of political malaise, there

is also a need for understanding why political malaise exists and why the levels may change. The present research examines the relationship between debates, citizen discussions (as enacted in the focus group discussions), and political malaise. Just as previous research has created a profile of a non-voter (Ragsdale & Rusk, 1993), there is also an interest in identifying key characteristics of an individual experiencing political malaise. Are certain qualities--gender, party affiliation, geographic location--associated with political malaise? Focus groups can help in identifying reasons for political malaise by focusing on the content of such feelings--what is political malaise and why does political malaise exist?

The following research questions guide analysis of political malaise in the current study:

RQ1 Does exposure to debates increase or decrease political malaise?

RQ2 Does participation in focus group discussion following debates increase or decrease political malaise?

RQ3 Are there differences in political malaise levels in relation to geographic location?

RQ4 Are there differences in political malaise levels in relation to party affiliation?

RQ5 Are there differences in political malaise levels in relation to gender?

RQ6 What elements of political malaise are revealed in focus group discussions following debates?

RQ7 What are the key words and the language used to refer to political malaise in focus groups following debates?

Chapter III

Methodology

This chapter focuses on the design of this research. A rationale for the focus group methodology, participant and procedure descriptions, and the measuring instruments are described. Approval of procedures used in this study was obtained from the University of Oklahoma's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for use of human subjects as part of a larger study on 1996 elections conducted by the Political Communication Center. (See Appendix A for a copy of the IRB approval form).

Rationale for the Focus Group Methodology

Research on political malaise needs to connect with current language and moods. While other methods may report the existence and levels of political malaise by asking for agree/disagree responses, these methods do not help us understand the meanings of these responses and the opinions guiding the agree/disagree responses. Focus group methodology can identify these important meanings and opinions by going directly to people and analyzing their comments from discussions with others. The focus group

methodology is well suited to examining political malaise due to its open-ended nature and "because it taps into human tendencies...attitudes and perceptions" (Krueger, 1988, p. 23).

"Briefly, the focus group method involves bringing together a group, or more often, a series of groups, of subjects to discuss an issue in the presence of a moderator...[who] ensures that the discussion remains on the issue at hand, while eliciting a wide range of opinions on that issue" (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). "Participants get to talk at length in the focus group; they...raise issues that affect their daily lives, and they talk in and on their own terms about the topics raised" (Sypher, 1994, p. 38). It has most often been utilized as a precursor to quantitative research, although focus group research can be used alone as qualitative research.

There are advantages and disadvantages to the use of focus groups. They are a rich source of participants' opinions and are cheaper, both in time and money, than individual interviews. However, focus groups may be dominated by one or two opinionated individuals. Another argument against focus groups is the difficulty in making valid inferences to a larger population.

Even though the focus group methodology has not previously been used directly in political malaise research (focus group methodology has been utilized to understand

voter alienation, McKinney, 1996), its incorporation within this present research provides potential for valuable insight. The information from focus groups in combination with survey data should indicate the presence/absence of political malaise, the level of any presence, and also the meanings underlying the current state of political malaise.

This research utilized both survey and focus group methods to gather data using the stimulus of a televised presidential debate and also using the citizen discussion as stimulus. The survey data were gathered using a repeated measure design--pretest, posttest, and a post- posttest. The pretest was distributed immediately before the debate was aired. The debate was then viewed and a posttest followed the debate. Then focus group discussions were held, and the discussions were followed by administration of the post posttest.

This design allowed for an extensive analysis of political malaise. The survey methodology provides a measurable level of political malaise. The repetition of the survey at key points provides a record of any changes in the degree of political malaise. If there is any change, the direction of that change will be evident. The focus group methodology provides a rich source of data. The participants comments can be analyzed to help explain the levels of political malaise and help to explain any direction changes in the survey data. Essentially, the

survey data provide a measurable degree of political malaise. The focus group data provide data to explain the degree of political malaise, why it exists or not, and why the degree may or may not change. This design provides a measurement of political malaise but also explains the "why" behind the measurement which has not been utilized in previous political malaise research.

Participants

Participants in this study included 64 adult voters, whose average age was 43.14, with ages ranging from 20 to 78. Data were gathered on October 6, 1996, from six different groups located at five different sites: (a) Oklahoma (OK)--two separate focus groups were conducted at the University of Oklahoma in Norman; (b) Ohio (OH)--Ohio University in Athens; (c) Missouri (MO)--Truman State University in Kirksville; (d) Minnesota (MN)--Bethel College in St. Paul; and (e) California (CA)--Cosumnes River College in Sacramento. The average group size was 10.7 participants, with groups ranging from six to 12 participants. Of the 64 subjects, 33 participants were female and 31 were male. The participants' party identification was composed of 48.4 percent Republicans, 39.1 percent Democrats, and 12.5 percent Independents. Table 2 provides the percentage breakdown of participant characteristics by geographic site.

Insert Table 2 about here

The recruiting process relied upon the selected facilitator at each of the various sites who followed prepared recruiting instructions to recruit a group that reflected the community in which they lived. A form of stratification was utilized to achieve a level of balance based upon a general sense of the communities characteristics. Some facilitators randomly called telephone numbers while other facilitators recruited by asking people they knew to participate and to help identify other possible participants.

Procedures and Measuring Instruments

On the evening of October 6, 1996, participants were asked to arrive 30 minutes before the first televised presidential debate began, at which time they completed their pretest questionnaire. Immediately following their viewing of the ninety minute debate, the posttest was completed. Participants then took a short break before returning to participate in a focus group discussion lasting approximately one hour. Following the focus group discussion, participants completed their post-post questionnaire and were then presented with a $25 honorarium. The entire research session lasted approximately three and a half hours.

The survey for the pretest, posttest, and post-posttest included questions designed to measure political malaise levels and gather demographic information (see Appendices B, C, D). These surveys also contained other questions which were not utilized for this research. Participants in this present study were asked to respond to eight statements relating to political malaise. These statements were based upon survey questions utilized by the National Election Studies. The statements are:

a. Whether I vote or not has no influence on what politicians do.

b. One never really knows what politicians really think.

c. People like me don't have any say about what the government does.

d. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.

e. One can be confident that politicians will always do the right thing.

f. Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a political campaign is over.

g. Politicians are more interested in power than in what the people think.

h. One cannot always trust what politicians say.

Response choices included: strongly agree, agree somewhat, have no opinion, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly. With the exception of statement five (e), a strongly agree response indicated the highest level of political malaise. For statement five, a disagree strongly response indicated

highest malaise. For the statistical analysis, the values on the scale for statement five (e) were reversed so that the direction is the same for all items. The overall political malaise scale (all eight items together) had a reliability coefficient alpha of .60 on the pretest, .69 on the posttest, and .70 on the post-posttest.

Each focus group moderator followed a prepared set of questions related to the presidential debate--voter learning, comparison of sources for political information, the role of the media in the political process, political malaise, and community. See Appendix E for a complete listing of the focus group questions. Follow-up questions to each of these themes may differ from group to group depending upon the nature of each discussion.

In order to document the discussions from the six focus groups, each session was either audiotaped or videotaped, and in some cases both. A verbatim transcript for each focus group discussion was prepared from the audiotape by trained student aides. Both the verbatim transcripts and the audiotapes were reviewed to support accuracy. These transcripts (200 pages) were used to develop a thematic coding scheme for analysis. See Appendix F for the thematic coding scheme.

Chapter IV

Results

An analysis of the data provides the focus for this chapter. The results from analyzing the survey data are covered first, followed by the analysis of the transcripts of the focus group discussions.

Survey Results

To answer research questions one through five, the survey data were analyzed. The first two research questions sought to discover statistical differences between the effects of debate exposure and citizen discussion upon political malaise.

RQ1 Does exposure to debates decrease political malaise?

RQ2 Does participation in focus group discussion following debates decrease political malaise?

Mean scores for the eight political malaise statements were drawn from the combination of all six focus groups. The mean scores for the eight statements were also combined for an overall pre-, post-, and post-post political malaise level. These mean scores were analyzed with paired t-tests

to determine significant differences between the three measurement times of pre-, post-, and post-post.

Before viewing the debate, participants registered an overall mean score of 3.12; after watching the debate, participants' overall malaise score dropped slightly to 3.10; and finally, after participating in the focus group discussion, the overall malaise level increased to 3.24. There was no significant difference in the overall political malaise means between pre- and post- (t (63) = .67, p > .05). Thus, exposure to debates did not significantly decrease political malaise levels. The scores on the overall political malaise scale significantly differed between post- and post-post (t (62) = 2.65, p = .01). Thus, participation in focus group discussions significantly increased political malaise. The scores on the overall political malaise scale significantly differed between pre- and post-post (t (62) = 2.55, p < .05). Therefore, the combination of viewing televised debates and participating in focus group discussions significantly influenced the increased levels of political malaise.

Paired sample t-tests were conducted on the eight statements at the pre-, post-, and post-post measurements (see Table 3). The televised debate exposure had a significant effect on statement seven (g) (t (63) = 2.34, p < .05). In statement seven, measuring disapprobation--cynicism toward politicians, the mean dropped from 3.42 to

3.22 reflecting a significant decrease in political malaise after viewing the debate.

Participation in the focus group discussions had a significant effect on statements one (a) (t (62) = 2.46, p < .05), two (b) (t (62) = 3.21, p < .01), and four (d) (t (62) = 2.09, p < .05). Statements one and four measured citizen political efficacy. The political malaise mean increased significantly from 2.27 to 2.6 for statement one and significantly increased from 2.38 to 2.63 for statement four after participating in the focus group discussion. In statement two, measuring cynicism toward politicians (disapprobation), political malaise increased significantly as seen in the rise of the mean score from 3.21 to 3.57 after the focus group discussion.

The combination of viewing the presidential debate and participating in the focus group discussion had a significant effect on statements two (b) (t (62) = 2.30, p < .05), four (d) (t (62) = 3.08, p < .01), and five (e) (t (62) = 2.30, p < .05). Political malaise increased in statement two, measuring cynicism toward politicians (3.24 to 3.57), and statement four, measuring citizen personal political efficacy (2.19 to 2.63). Political malaise decreased in statement five, measuring trust toward politicians (4.38 to 4.08).

There was no significant difference in statements three (c), six (f), and eight (h) at any measurement time. These

statements measured personal efficacy, cynicism toward politicians campaign promises, and trust of politicians.

Insert Table 3 about here

For another analysis of the pattern of change in participants' political malaise, their mean scores were grouped into the three levels of low, moderate, and high malaise. The pretest, posttest, and post-posttest surveys contained eight political malaise statements which utilized a five-item response scale ranging from "1" (disagree strongly) to "5" (strongly agree). This division into three levels of political malaise was achieved by dividing the five-item response scale into three categories, with those respondents whose overall malaise score fell within the range of '1' to '2' (disagree strongly to disagree somewhat) categorized as expressing low political malaise; those whose score fell within the range of "3" (have no opinion) were placed in the moderate category; and those participants whose overall score fell within the '4' to '5' range (agree somewhat to strongly agree) were categorized as expressing high political malaise. Table 4 reports the frequency count and percentages of the three political malaise levels (low, moderate, high) at the pre-, post-, and post-post measurements. The scores in the high malaise level nearly doubled after the combination of viewing the debate and

participating in the focus group discussion.

Insert Table 4 about here

The next three research questions sought to discover if certain citizen characteristics-geographic location, party affiliation, and gender--were associated with political malaise.

RQ3 Are there differences in political malaise levels in relation to geographic location?

RQ4 Are there differences in political malaise levels in relation to party affiliation?

RQ5 Are there differences in political malaise levels in relation to gender?

Several tests were conducted to determine if such an association existed. Previous tests for the first two research questions combined all the groups' mean scores for all the eight malaise statements and then combined these scores for each testing time--pre-, post-, and post-post. This created an overall malaise score for each of the pre-, post-, and post-posttest measurements. The overall political malaise mean scores for each testing time (pre- 3.12, post- 3.10, post-post 3.24) were then averaged together to create one grand level of political malaise. The grand level of political malaise was a mean score of 3.15.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted on geographic location and the grand political malaise mean score. The grand malaise mean score for each focus group in their geographic location was: (a) 3.37 for California; (b) 3.49 for Minnesota; (c) 3.18 for Missouri; (d) 3.01 for Ohio; and, (e) 2.97 for one Oklahoma focus group and 2.83 for the second Oklahoma focus group. The effect of geographic location was not statistically significant, $F(5, 57) = 2.37$, $p > .05$. A one-way analysis of variance was conducted on party affiliation and the grand political malaise mean score. The grand malaise mean score for each political party affiliation was: (a) 3.17 for Republicans; (b) 3.05 for Democrats; and (c) 3.41 for Independents. The effect of party affiliation was not statistically significant, $F(2, 60) = 1.19$, $p > .05$.

An independent t-test was conducted on the relationship between the grand political malaise mean score and gender. The grand malaise mean score was 3.08 for males and 3.22 for females. There was no significant difference between the grand political malaise score and gender ($t(61) = -.94$, $p > .05$).

Focus Group Discussion Results

Reasons for Political Malaise

Answering the sixth and seventh research questions required analyzing the focus group transcripts (200 pages) to develop a list of primary themes characterizing the

participants' responses that reflect political malaise elements. Working with a framework of primary themes is as an appropriate structure to analyze what citizens said in the focus group discussions.

This listing of major themes was developed initially by reading the transcripts and identifying the major issue or idea expressed by the participant, then writing that theme in the margin next to the response. A list was developed from these identified themes. (See Appendix F for the thematic coding scheme.) This list was refined several times to eliminate duplicates; for example, if the issue of "special interest influence" was stated in four different comments, then it was only listed one time but a number four was marked after this issue. Another refinement step grouped together similar issues to develop categories. For example, issues like "my vote does not matter," "no say in the political process," and "complexity of issues makes it difficult to understand how to vote" were grouped together in the category of "why vote?" because each related to a sense of low personal political power--inefficacy. Another refinement step developed sub-categories for each category. For example, under the category of the election process, sub-categories like campaigning and the structure of the system were developed. These major themes were then incorporated with responses obtained from the transcripts as support to provide an organized analysis of RQ6 and RQ7.

The originating geographic region and the gender of the speaker will be identified for each participant response by identifying the state where the focus group was held and by using abbreviations of "F" for female and "M" for male. Moderator responses will be identified by using the abbreviation of "MOD."

RQ6: What elements of political malaise are revealed in focus group discussions following debates?

The focus group discussions revealed evidence of the key elements of political malaise: cynicism, inefficacy, and disapprobation. Many of the responses bridged themes--suggesting an interconnection between these influences. The major themes identified in the transcripts were grouped into five primary categories which affect the citizen: "system influences;" "political corruption;" "citizen self interests;" "why vote;" and "civic duty." Table 5 contains a listing of the major themes identified in the focus group discussions.

Insert Table 5 about here

"System influences" is a broad category and refers to the weight of certain forces on the entire political process as an operation. "System influences" addresses

organizations such as special interest groups and the media, in addition to the election process structure.

The second category is more narrow in scope than the first and addresses political figures and their actions in the political process. "Political corruption" covers any wrong doing or potential wrong doing by political players--whether it is individual politicians or a general feeling toward the government.

The third category continues the narrowing process and addresses typical individuals in society. This category also looks at the relationship of the individual with a much larger society. "Citizen self interests" focuses on the concerns each individual citizen must face while trying to achieve life dreams. In addition, "citizen self-interests" also addresses the changes a society experiences as it develops. These society changes also affect individuals.

The fourth and fifth categories center on the heart of a democracy--citizens who are eligible to vote. Category four addresses reasons why a citizen may not participate in the political process. Category five addresses reasons why a citizen should participate in the political process.

The fourth category of "Why vote" reflects the feelings and reasons why a citizen debates the issue of voting and rationalizes why someone may not vote. This includes an outlet for blame--blame against citizens for not being informed and blame against politicians and media for making

bills complicated and treating citizens as if they were incapable of understanding the process of governance.

The fifth and final category of "civic duty," alone among the theme categories, provides a reason to vote--duty as a citizen. The next few sections will combine each of these five theme categories--"system influences;" "political corruption;" "citizen self interests;" "why vote;" and "civic duty"--with comments from the transcripts to demonstrate how participants shared their opinions in the discussions of the political process.

System Influences

This first theme category of "system influences" addresses how the political system is swayed by certain forces. System influences refer to the political power of organizations within our society--like special interest groups and the media. It also refers to the election process as a structure within society, influencing the political actions of the individual citizen. Each of these three sub-categories--special interests, media, election process--are supported with participant exchanges from the transcripts.

Special Interests

Special interests is the first sub-category under the theme of "system influences." Citizen responses identified the heavy-handed and moneyed influence of special interest groups in the political process as a source of political

malaise because it undermines citizen power. The following statement from the Minnesota discussion explains this point:

> Male (M) Number one is, I don't think I make a difference when I vote. I don't think it matters who I vote for or who is elected. I think the special interest group lobbyists are going to determine, largely determine what the politicians do in terms of programs. I think the money that they dish out is what makes the difference...We're not part of that. We don't put the big bucks in and we don't influence the legislators. That's the main reason.

Another participant from Minnesota had this to say:

> M The one thing that they both seem to agree on tonight is the fact that if anything is going to happen with campaign reform, it is going to have to be a bipartisan neutral committee because neither of the parties has the spine or the guts or the will to change campaign financing. And I totally agree that one of the reasons that people are disillusioned in this country and one of the reasons they don't go vote is because of campaign

financing done by PACs, by special interest groups. And I think a lot [of people] don't vote because they just sort of figure the real power brokers who influence people are the people who pour the money into the campaigns and that's it. It came down to that and I think the one thing that was said tonight is the fact that if we don't get campaign finance [reform], disillusionment is going to get worse.

This next statement from the California focus group attacked special interests, as well as corrupt politicians in government:

M It seems like government isn't necessarily government anymore. Government is, you elect your representative to go up and vote for you and your beliefs, in what you want to be--a better person--and to live better. Then he gets up there and he finds out that he's in a position to be scrutinized and be bought by bigger money that's outside of the government. The government is not run by the government anymore. It's run by the big corporations who have the big dollars to say you will do it this way or forget it,

you'll be a nobody, you'll be a has-been, you'll be right back with the people who put you up here, that you've abused since you've been up here and enjoyed yourself. So they're going to vote [for big corporations].

The negative effect on citizen political efficacy due to special interest influences is noted in the following exchange from the discussion in Minnesota:

M I'm a little more radical than that because I believe they [special interests] don't want you to vote. Or they want you to believe that you don't make a difference. I think the people that do get out and vote are the minorities and the special interest groups. They're going to make sure they get out their number of people to vote.

M So it gets back to what Jerry said.

M If enough people of the same persuasion vote, then there is a voice to be heard.

M I believe if the majority voted 70% for what this country wants, what [ever] it is--welfare, the Ten Commandments on the blackboard at school--it would be that way. We would have what we wanted. But people aren't getting out and voting. And the

special interest groups along with the mass media, I believe, they elected Bill Clinton in '92. It had his record for Arkansas on page eight when it had Bush, everything about him on the front page, his record on the first two pages and anything negative about Bill was buried.

Special interests and media are considered co-conspirators in the decline of political participation. From Minnesota this exchange explains one view of special interest influence:

M If we [can] eliminate the media because these special interest groups and [similar] people give so much money to political figures. They need that money so that they can make their message known. So if you eliminate the media that is trying to send a message across to us then...

M The lobbyists and special interests don't need the media. They're not interested in the media putting the spotlight on what they find out. They would rather not have the media because they're willing to buy votes. That's what they're doing with their money.

These research findings demonstrate that participants believed the out of control special interest influence was a reason for political malaise. Special interests were viewed as intertwined with media and both displaced and reduced the role of the voter in the political process.

Media

Media is the second sub-category under the theme of "system influences." Participants described the role of the media in two perspectives--ideally and in reality. The role of media within the political process was viewed ideally as objective and informative. The reality of the media's role was described as negative and operating with partial information. The negative effect of media influence on citizens can be described by this exchange in Oklahoma:

> Female (F) Well, somehow people are becoming disassociated with the whole concept of politics. It would seem like they would be getting more involved with it because there is more coverage. But as the coverage gets bigger and bigger, fewer people are voting. The more you see them on TV, the more you hear about it and the more you're saturated with it. It seems like that's been the pattern over the last many years. In the past, fewer and fewer people are voting but

the coverage is getting bigger. So I don't know how that relates...

F It would have to. It would have to. The media would have to be sending some kind of signal for us not...either it's...

F Way out of our control.

F Right, but the media is saying we're not happy with it, so we must not be happy with it. So why should I vote? Or I feel like the media a lot of times treats us, the general public, as [if] we can't possibly be smart enough to do this, to make these kind of decisions when some people say I can't do it. So for these two reasons voter turnout is different.

According to participants, media is an active source of citizen's negative views toward the political process. Other participants in another Oklahoma focus group commented:

M Well, I think the media promotes negativism. They've actually contributed to this whole thing about against politicians. I still believe that most politicians are trying to do the right thing with what they believe in their hearts. I don't go along

with this thing about there are a bunch of crooks in Washington. I don't think that's true.

M Here's an idea. If they played just happy news all the time nobody would probably watch, you know, so it seems like they have to get negative.

M Yes, it has to do with all the news. Good news with all these good things happening we don't hear about them because that's not really news. We've to have violence. It isn't just politics it's all of society.

M Yeah, they won't give us what we want.

Media are also credited with negative traits by other participants from different geographic regions. A female in Minnesota responded with this:

I am so cynical with the media. You asked me what I learned. Well, I learned Clinton looks a little bit better under those lights. I learned if Dole turns his head just one way he looks pretty good but if looks straight on at the camera...he shouldn't do that too often. Jim Lehrer really looked bad, he looked like time to be put away. I looked at them and I thought, I'm not going to, I don't trust the media. I will go back to doing what I've been doing for the last year.

I will read from three or four sources, I will process what they say. I will listen to speeches that I hear on the radio and I will not watch the media.

In Missouri, another individual believed that media did not help the political process. He stated:

I think the whole point is though--how do they affect the process and I just think they clutter it up and not so much present it how it should be presented, you know. More of a...an investigation into I don't know...what's going to actually, it's hard to say, it's almost [like] they're searching on tangent issues. I think they take the focus of the whole political process and shift it kind of toward...a lot of the major issues to me get lost. I like to hear controversy, sure controversy stirs the soul but I don't think, I know it's a business for the news media, but I think it actually kind of hurts the political process a little bit.

Television is considered a major force in society. In Minnesota this view was stated:

M But what holds us together is the almighty television, but even that's falling apart because what he's saying is we have so many channels to choose from that we even splinter

on that except for maybe something like this that comes up when we have a debate, then you have a larger percentage of the nation watching it. And that's the only thing that keeps us together. But even that again is fractured.

Media coverage of election night received attention in more than one of the focus groups. A general theme espoused in the focus group discussions was the partial early results from the east coast negatively affected voting turnout in the west. In California this comment was made:

M Our presidential elections--the actual day of the elections has got to be one of the worst designed systems ever. That we know who is president before we even vote in California. That is absurd. It should be at 12:00 here and 3:00 in New York and it goes like that. There's no media coverage and you vote. Everybody gets to vote for 8 hours then they say here's the winner, here's the popular vote, here's the electoral vote.

A participant in Oklahoma echoed this same message that was stated in California:

M If you had a ban on polling before an election I

think that might increase voter turnout because it's almost like, it's decided way before the fact and people just don't bother because they see it on TV that so and so is going to win.

Polls conducted by the media were attributed with negatively influencing an individual's desire to vote. In Minnesota the discussion followed this theme:

M And it works on people's minds because when you see the polls reading only polls, no one wants to vote for a loser. So it would change around.

M I have one more comment too, this comes out of past election campaigns. News people in this country somehow should be forced not to be able to do anything about reporting numbers or predictions, especially predictions and polls until the polls are closed in Hawaii. When the polls are closed in Hawaii then they should be able to do predictions based on this and based on that. Until then, they should be absolutely forced to keep their blooming mouths shut.

MOD They shouldn't even report the numbers for the East Coast until Hawaii is closed.

M No, they should not do it, leave the election process alone, leave it to the people. Because once they get [voices overlap], you can have half of a percent in a main precinct and somebody will be making a prediction about what's going on and I think the media everywhere, as it sweeps across the country, I think they influence and they need to stay out of it.

M It does. I'm just sick of it.

F Because people will say, oh well, it looks like...I remember when Carter ran, it was like, oh well, they said that 50% of the polls have closed and this is where it's at. So why am I going to [to vote?].

M And that's the attitude. I'm sure people [inaudible] are going to say well, why go vote. Yeah, it's all ready been determined and it really hasn't because it's shown that things can change drastically if people really don't know [early media predictions].

Finally, in Ohio, this male participant said:

[We] have to quit listening to the polls. There are so many polls everyday that people finally say well Clinton's 11 points ahead, why vote?

Media is a major influence in society. Participants in the focus groups believed media was a source for political malaise. In addition, the very nature and structure of the election process was viewed as another source of political malaise.

Election Process

The "election process" is the third and final sub-category under the theme of "system influences." The political system operates and renews itself within the boundaries of the election system. Citizens registered to vote, do so during scheduled elections. This election system requires citizens to go through the acts of registering, learning about issues and candidates, and voting. Candidates campaign for office by presenting strategies and information through media outlets. Election days are scheduled during week days. In presidential elections, the electoral college exerts influence over which candidate is selected as president. Focus group participants cited certain aspects of this election process as contributing factors to the state of political malaise. The discussion in Oklahoma addressed the mechanics of picking the election day as a way to increase voter turnout:

> F I'm not sure of the mechanics involved here, but I do believe that if we held elections on Saturdays or Sundays, which of course in Europe as far as I know most of the elections

are on Sunday.

F Yeah, they vote on Sunday. Everybody goes to church and then they go to vote.

M Everybody goes to vote. I'm not sure about the former, but that might help some. I know that there's a certain constitutional thing, I mean I guess it's constitutional, that establish some dates. But there might be some mechanical things we can do.

A Minnesota male was unhappy with the electoral college. He stated, "I don't think it's just media though because I don't like the electoral college process." In Missouri, one participant believed that the election process needed reforming:

M Well, I think one of the reasons is that you only have two people to choose from. I believe in a truly democratic society you would have about 10 people running. And you should throw out this electoral college and I think they should be elected by popular vote. Who do you have to choose from? You get to choose [from] two people. I think there ought to be more people running, more Independents, more whatever. I think that would heighten the interest of people.

Having a variety of candidates to choose from in voting would open the door to different political parties. Philosophies of political parties were brought into the Oklahoma discussion as a reason why voter turnout was decreasing:

> M But in some countries, I won't say all of them, there are very diametrically opposed parties and there may be more at stake, like a serious directional change in the path of the country. That may not be [the case] if we have a moderate Democrat or a moderate Republican being elected to president. There might not seem to be that much at stake for an individual or if it's really that critical [so why vote?].

As part of the election process theme sub-category, certain types of candidate campaigning were identified by participants as a contributing factor of negative feelings toward the political process. Political advertisements, specifically negative television ads, were pinpointed as a major negative influence on the political process and on individuals as supported by this comment from Ohio:

> M And negative ads--negative ads turn me off completely. It could be the best candidate in the world but if he comes out negative on

everything he says--I'm not going to vote for him.

From Missouri this statement addresses political ads:

M Well, because political advertisement is the psychological approach of how to sell something, it's marketing at--perhaps its worst. Because it's now funded with taxpayer's dollars and the whole thing is not designed to be anything more than marketing of a candidate and sensationalism. Cheap shots have been the hallmark of that type of campaigning since the beginning and the electronic media has only enhanced it.

Another female participant in California had this to say about negative ads:

I may be naive and maybe it's just [that] I have this selective memory, but it seems to me when I was a kid and we saw commercials for campaigning, it wasn't a smear campaign. It was really on issues and things that went on. That was a long time ago, I realize, but it really seems to me that the whole format of what is allowed to go out, as far as slamming each other, they're not just saying--I think it was Ed that said they don't tell you anything because they're too busy

putting down the other guy, you know. That would be really helpful, if nothing else, if everyone had an equal chance to have some ads out there--everyone that said what his format was, the issues. And that would at least help the population to have some more information.

Participants did not appreciate the campaign technique of cutting the opponent down as evidenced by this comment from Missouri:

F Trying to build themselves up by cutting the other person down--tell them how bad the other one is so that means they're automatically going to be better.

This section identified "system influences"--special interests, media, election process--as a theme category containing reasons for political malaise among citizens. The responses by the focus group participants provides a greater depth to understanding the political malaise levels measured by the survey. The next section covers the second major theme category identified in the focus group discussions--"political corruption."

Political Corruption

This second category addresses "political corruption" within the political system. In particular, this section

identifies another reason for political malaise and the effect on citizens of such negative political behavior by individual politicians and in actions by the government. A California female referred to government as a "huge bureaucracy that just runs and we don't have any clue as to how it works."

This feeling of government as a huge machine capable of duping and abusing the average citizen was echoed in Minnesota:

> F I want to believe in it really, but I get really scared when I think of how--because what's happened in some of our states--and the way federal and state money is abused not for the sake of the people, but for special interest groups. So on the one hand, I say amen to what you're saying, on the other hand I say, oh my word, can we really...

As a result of past negative actions, citizens expressed a level of low trust in the government as evidenced by this comment from California:

> M I think of our society now and when we were back as kids--back before Watergate, back before some of those issues--people trusted government pretty much.

The discussion in Oklahoma ran along similar issues of trust as is evident from the following interaction in which a specific politician was targeted:

M Before the 1994 elections, I had a lot more respect I think for Congress. Then Newt Gingrich came in and that little click at the top and they had gridlock. Twice they shut the government down. Shut the government down twice. I really lost a lot of respect for Congress and the people that are in the leadership division.

F Powerless, ineffectual. I mean let's face it...they'll [politicians] sit there and they won't pass anything because they don't want them [opposing party] to get credit for [it] so they'll get re-elected. I mean it's all about, it's all them [politicians], about playing these games and I'm sick of it. I'm really sick of it.

Another California participant responded:

F I think they [citizens] don't trust it [government] and it's not really doing anything for them, they're [politicians] just helping themselves.

In Minnesota, more trust issues were raised. This

male did not feel he could trust a politicians' pledge. He stated:

> I think it's because we can't trust these people. We don't know what they will do next year. We know what they say today but again, political history tells us they'll do something different depending on the political climate.

Campaign promises made a target out of a specific candidate in the Minnesota discussion:

> M Let's take a statement made. Let's take Paul Wellstone, I'm not a Rudy Boschwitz supporter either but I remember Paul Wellstone in his campaign six years ago saying I will only serve one term in this profession of politician. Hey, what happened to that? He said I will not take money from big interest power groups. Hey, he's taking the money. So anybody who has voted for him, just because he made those two promises, wasted a vote.

The California discussion addressed the difficult position politicians are in due to the current state of government. Not all politicians have a strong enough character to fight or resist the pressures of the status

quo:

F It's like Jennifer says, if you want to do the right thing, but then you see what you're up against and what you would have to do, you don't have a choice. You just have to fall in or just fall out.

Another California participant referred negatively to politicians:

M Very self-serving in a sense that once they [politicians] get into office they forget the constituents and they say this is for me--now I can get ahead.

While in the Minnesota discussion, one male participant was quite blunt with his reference to politicians as he concluded, "professional politicians are a curse."

Citizens react negatively to the mix of political corruption and politicians. Malaise, in particular disapprobation, increases due to the influence of political corruption. Next, the category of "citizen self interests" addresses the third reason for political malaise.

Citizen Self Interests

The third theme category of "citizen self interests" addresses socio-economic status (SES) along with the day to day needs, pressures, and greed experienced by individuals.

Also, the changes in society have helped to fuel the idea of "me" and reduce the concept of "us" or community. The underlying notion that "me" comes first breaks down community and increases the sense of political malaise.

In Oklahoma, participants discussed how economic status can affect an individual's desire to vote. One participant discussed a couple she knows:

F They're just barely making it by. They have two children. They have to live in less than perfect, you know, apartments. And they don't feel, that it matters who they put in the White House. They're low income and they're ignored. And it's not going to help them, whoever gets in the White House.

M She's supporting this point of view that the lower income people don't vote here as much and for the reasons she gave--we're not going to make it anyway and nobody's going to do much for us.

This next female from Ohio comments on this same theme that the difficulties of surviving offers little time for anyone or anything else. She stated:

I think too that the economy right now is making it so [difficult]. I work a lot of hours in a day and a lot of days and I don't have time to worry about what

you're--to help you if you need help. I don't have time to go help my neighbor if she needs this or that. And I think the economy has a lot to do with why we're not together because we're all trying to survive and trying to work and pay our bills.

Another participant in Minnesota supported the idea that living is time consuming and detracts from political participation:

F I think we're all so busy taking care of our own little insignificant needs that we don't work together anymore.

Self-interest and selfishness contribute to the decline in political participation as evidenced in this exchange from the Ohio discussion:

F People are becoming very--they're alienated and they're isolated. I don't want to know about you and you don't need to know about me.

M What do you do for me.

F I've got my own problems.

Another participant from Ohio stated:

F I think people are so involved with themselves and so wrapped up in what they're doing and what's important to them that they don't look

outside that. It's a, I think we're now in a society, a "me" society--what can I do for me, me. And what am I going to do that they don't.

The individual and society influence each other. Society changes due to individual actions and society also influences or changes individuals, thus operating in a circular pattern of influence. In the realm of political attitudes, focus group participants cited society as an influence on individual political participation. Individual needs and improvements in technology work together to absorb time. In Ohio, this discussion occurred:

F It's the economy and it's also the demands of technology. I mean you have to work a lot harder now than somebody had to work 20, 30, 40 years ago.

F But then I think about that statement. I hear that and say yeah that's right, but how hard was it when women used to go to the creek and wash the clothes and bake their own bread and quilt their own quilts.

F Well, that's true. It was hard. When I say harder I think it's a lot more...and that's a whole other issue-you're right about the women's issues, but in terms of the

community.

F Well, and men built their own barns, yet they all did it so why is it now that we have all these wonderful modern conveniences but we don't have the time?

F Because we have to work so hard to keep them.

M You have to have a wife work to make enough money to buy them so that's the problem.

F You have to pay for that water that went down the drain.

M You're getting home at seven instead of four.

F You're tired when you get home.

Individuals change due to societal changes and society changes due to individual change. In California, this female participant supported the notion that individual needs and desires consume time. She stated:

> We've created a society and I believe that we have been a part of creating that society that you have to have both parents work because of what we wanted. We gave up that sacrifice thing and went to the "we want"--I want my bread-maker, I want my this...whatever.

Do fences make good neighbors? Today, fences are quite common throughout neighborhoods. They increase privacy, yet they can also create distance between neighbors. According

to one participant in Ohio, fences do not help with a feeling of community. This Ohio male stated, "And there are fences in the backyards. There are no neighbors anymore." A low sense of community does not encourage individuals to participate in community actions, such as voting.

As the population increases, the size of communities in which people live also increases. This unavoidable point was noted by a female participant in the Oklahoma discussion. She stated:

> It all has to do with geography and the size of your community. Democracy just works better with smaller groups of people.

As it grows, society is becoming more fractured rather than unified. One female in Ohio stated:

> I think it's natural for people to have, you know, self-interest and that's never going to change, but things are very fractured in this country. No, I don't think there's a sense of community and I do think it's something that we would want to have. I know I, everybody wants that, but you know the reality is that people have not been able to get beyond their self-interest and you know and in some cases the interests are so strong, but if we could ever get beyond that and I think that we should, then it would be wonderful.

This section identified citizen self interests as well as societal changes as reasons for increased levels of political malaise. Next, the fourth category of "why vote" continues the analysis of reasons for political malaise.

Why Vote?

The fourth category of "why vote" reflects the choice and reasons why some citizens do not vote. This category of "why vote" is divided into three sub-categories labeled "no power;" "blaming other citizens;" and "blaming politicians and media." First, some citizens may not vote because they do not feel as if their individual vote carries any power. Larger political forces control politics. The second and third sub-categories address the issue of blame which was also raised in the focus group discussions.

The second sub-category places blame upon fellow citizens who do not fulfill their civic obligation of being a politically informed citizen and an active voter. Participants in the discussions believed that citizens have the duty to stay informed on political matters. Even though the focus group participants generally acknowledged that issues and the bills written in Congress are complex, blame was placed upon individuals who do not stay informed. Because they are not informed, some citizens do not feel as if they have any political power or any connection to the political system.

The third sub-category places blame upon politicians

and media for reducing an individual citizens motivation to vote. A citizen that does try to stay politically informed feels frustrated because of his/her treatment by politicians and media. This blame was placed upon politicians and media because they treat the public as if they were incapable of comprehending politics. Even though some citizens may not stay politically informed, citizens believe they have the capability to understand politics if they were to choose to actively improve their knowledge of political affairs. To be treated as less than capable insults the average citizen and some citizens then choose to not participate politically--they do not vote.

One male in Oklahoma indicated that one reason why people do not vote may be because they take it for granted. He stated:

> We haven't had to fight for the right to vote, well for most groups since this country was founded, and women have had it for over a generation so it's easy to take those things for granted.

Another male participant in the same focus group suggested people may not be voting because the status quo is okay. He stated, "but maybe it's because everyone thinks people are happy with the way things are."

No Power

"No power" is the first sub-category under "why vote."

Citizen responses in this section express high levels of political inefficacy. From the Minnesota discussion, this exchange between participants demonstrates how the effectiveness of voting was debated:

M Why should I vote? If I vote a certain way then the person in the caucus representing my area [could] decide to vote a different way, even though I voted for somebody else.

F You're responsible to God. The way I look at it, Dole may not win but before the Lord I believe Dole's the man that I should vote for, so I don't care whether anybody else in the whole country votes for him. But for God I'm going to vote for him.

M Right, and that's why I vote. I think as a human being, it's like I have this perspective, I vote a certain way and it doesn't make any difference because the person who's representing me will vote how he/she thinks.

M Like he said, as a Christian, what is our responsibility? And that's where people fail. I don't think enough Christians are involved in the political process because they may think well, I'm not supposed to be political because I am a Christian. Okay,

since when? You know, and if you don't want to take responsibility, you know, why bother?

Another male in the Minnesota group stated, "I don't think I make a difference when I vote. I don't think it matters who I vote for or who is elected." His statement stirred up the debate in the focus group. He continued with this:

M I need a reason to vote. I didn't get it tonight. I seriously need a reason to vote in this coming election and they didn't give me one.

F Your reason to vote is because you're a citizen.

M Not if I don't make a difference. I don't make difference in this process.

F Are you sure you don't?

M No.

The participants returned to this same issue later in the discussion. The debate continued as follows:

F But by not voting, you forfeit your only participation in the process.

M My participation doesn't make a difference.

F I don't believe that.

M Here's someone coming into voting age. Is this your first time that you'll be voting?

F What do I think about the issue of whether my vote

counts or not? Well, I think it does. I mean, I understand where you're coming from because if I go on to vote, it probably isn't going to make...I mean... what I'm saying is, it isn't going to make a hill of beans because I'm only one person. But if everybody in the world starts saying that I'm only one person, my vote is not going to count, sooner or later, I mean if everybody says that, [then my vote won't count]. But if everybody didn't say it--then it's going to count--like the power of one. I mean if you say no, it's not [going to count]. But if you go out and vote, then you're one person out of millions that is going to--I mean, you do have influence. I know it's very small. It seems like you don't, but you do.

In Ohio, this same feeling of political helplessness was expressed:

M They don't feel it makes a difference. They don't feel their vote counts, and it does. That's a bad feeling that they don't [feel their vote makes a difference]. If everybody would vote, they'd know it counts.

While another participant later in the discussion stated:

F ...a lot of people just feel like they don't have any, you know--it's not going to make a difference. They don't feel that the vote is empowering. I think a lot of people think it's not going to make any difference and it's not going to make any difference for me.

One participant in California believes "it doesn't matter what I vote anyway" and he believed that others shared his feelings. He stated, "I think they're really disappointed in the whole system we have." In California the discussion revolved around the issues of information and the power of one vote as evidenced by this excerpt:

F Just like Jennifer said, we have to choose because of a personality. We have to. We really don't have the information behind us. Especially younger people.

M I think it's more than that. It's the futility of your vote. Yes, what is one vote going to do?

M You see, it doesn't really matter if I vote for Clinton or Dole so why should I go and vote.

M But it does matter.

The importance of personal political power, self-

efficacy, was stressed by a California male:

> M I think each person must really believe they can make a difference. I think if they don't have that, then they're just saying well, why should I care. That's not regarding whether it's making a difference as far as making it better for your fellow man--worrying about the environment, no matter what it is--if you don't believe personally that you as an individual can make a difference then you're not going to be involved.

While in Oklahoma, the discussion changes directions with this comment from a female participant who believed that people must rise above cynicism:

> But still there is a difference between the two parties and what they strive for. I mean you can't be so cynical that you don't realize that your vote is important, because there are differences. It just depends on that time what they are.

"No power" explains the feelings of high political inefficacy discussed in the focus group discussions. This section describes the participants' feelings and their views of other citizens. The next two sub-categories assign blame for citizen feelings of "why bother to vote."

Blame Other Citizens

"Blame other citizens" is the second sub-category under "why vote." That citizens should be informed is a key point of this section. Participants suggested that even though time is limited and issues are complex, citizens should be politically informed. Reduced voter turnout and reduced levels of political participation were discussed in the focus groups. In the next two sections, participants assign blame for this reduced participation to their fellow citizens, in addition to blaming politicians and the media.

In Missouri, participants debated reasons why voting percentages were decreasing. The reduced number of citizens voting was blamed upon citizens who do not actively stay informed. Participants suggested that their fellow citizens believed that the power a single vote held was considered to be minimal. This discussion also addressed another viewpoint, that of a possible benefit of reduced voting turnout--if someone is not politically informed, they should not vote. The Missouri exchange is as follows:

M ...I don't think it's a bad thing that not everybody votes because there are a lot of people particularly that I don't really want voting on my future because they're not informed on the issues...but I don't think that the percentage of voting is as important as people bring it out to be. Yes,

it'd be nice to have a higher percentage of people voting, but if we actually had a chance to look at those people who aren't voting, that might be voting, we might change our minds because they might not be voting because they really know what they're doing. They're just voting because Bill Clinton is the "A" slot instead of the "B" slot or "3" is their lucky number so they go down to the third person and check it or whatever.

M I don't think people are as stupid as you give them credit for. I think people are a lot smarter than that.

F Maybe some people don't vote because they think their vote is not going to count.

M That's never going to do any good.

M That's the biggest percentage of it right there. They don't think they have any say in government, so they aren't gong to waste their time.

MOD Why do you think that people think that?

M Because they are less educated than they could be. Yeah, I think there definitely are a lot of people who don't think that their vote counts and I mean I could be proven wrong in this district...but I think a lot of people who

think...that aren't educated and don't realize their vote really does count. There are a lot of people who aren't educated on voting issues and I guess that's their prerogative.

A California participant also argued that citizens need to learn about the candidates and issues:

F The thing about learning about the issues, would you say, I hate to say this but I think everybody just has to read the newspapers and stuff. I don't even trust television so much anymore. Editorials and stuff, that's where I feel, especially editorials in newspapers, that's where I feel I learn about what's happening.

Similar feelings about informed citizens arose in California. One male stated:

People just aren't taking the time to learn the issues, I think if they learned what the issues are and see there really is some definition out here about how to vote, things to look for, things like that--they'd take a lot more interest in it. You've got to learn the issues and as I said, you're not going to learn anything watching these darn ads. Frankly, I think the

media does a sloppy job so frequently reporting, even when these guys are making legitimate attempts to say something about what they are trying to achieve. Maybe they're not competent to deal with a particular issue but I'm more concerned it's just plain slop. There are days when I'll report this and I need one good line and little snippets here and off it goes and that's the end of it.

Issue complexity may intimidate citizens according to this excerpt from California:

F Due to complexity, we have to vote based on their personality. It's like we don't understand this, it's complicated okay, I like him.

F That's how we've been doing it for years.

F That's the sad thing.

The complexity of bills presented in Congress prevents the average person from being completely informed even if they know a candidate's voting record. This point is explained by a female participant from Missouri:

I think that even if you have access to a voting record to a candidate's voting record like has been said earlier, you really have to do some extra research to know why they voted that way. I mean

certainly...um...you know...there are several candidates who seem to vote always in favor of life or always in favor of abortion but..um..then there are a lot of people middle of the road and prefer to choose but..um...but so many other issues are entered into every vote, all that pork they call it, that's stuffed in to try to get it defeated. I mean they could throw something that's totally, totally unrelated and that is just going to die because nobody in their right mind would vote for that. So you really have to be highly educated to even sort through voting records for the most part and that, how many people feel like they really have the time to do that or would even be able to understand. I'm not saying people are stupid but I'm just saying there's a lot of jargon you have to wade through.

The problem with the complexity of issues was also expressed in Ohio:

M Some of the issues are so complex as I said earlier it takes a little time to explain them. If people understood the impact of some of the decisions being made they'd feel a little more part--have ownership. And I think they have to take time though, time to read and they have to read more than one

> thing to--certainly not campaign literature, you won't learn much from that--but, quality newspapers and things like that, that have quality writers or have something to say and over a period of time. I think you'll learn a lot.

Discussion on the problems with the complexity of issues also occurred in a fourth geographic region, Oklahoma. This female Oklahoman stated:

> Because you never know, you never know honestly what was in that bill that made that person say no. It could have been only one line, one sentence that was added in and that was the only problem. When you get into writing bills they get so twisted and so convoluted that it's hard for us to understand why someone would say no to something that sounds so good.

Even while acknowledging the complexity of issues, focus group participants blamed their fellow citizens for not staying informed politically. The next section assigns blame to politicians and media for not informing the public properly.

Blame Politicians and Media

"Blame politicians and media" is the third and final sub-category of "why vote." Participants felt that media

and politicians treat citizens as if they are stupid. In Oklahoma this comment was made:

> M Right, but the media is saying we're not happy with it, so we must not be happy with it. So why should I vote? I feel like the media a lot of times treats us, the general public, as if we can't possibly be smart enough to do this--to make these kinds of decisions. [As a result,] some people say I can't do it. So for those two reasons, voter turnout is different.

A female from California stated:

> I felt like he [Dole] spoke down to the American people, like we were stupid. ...I mean Clinton talked about his track record, and the issues and he just came across like we could understand what he was talking about.

These three sub-categories of "no power," "blame other citizens," and "blame politicians and media" complete the theme of "why vote." Citizens experience political malaise because they feel politically inefficacious, are not informed politically, and are treated (by politicians and media) as if they are incapable of participating in politics. Because of these three reasons: (a) a perceived

lack of political power; (b) a feeling of separateness from the political system due to a lack of political knowledge; and, (c) generally negative treatment by politicians and media toward citizen capabilities, citizens ask themselves the question on election day, "Why vote?" The next section, explores why a citizen should participate in the political process.

Civic Duty

The fifth and final category of the focus group analysis for research question six, "civic duty," provides the most common reason why someone should vote. The comments from the participants espousing this theme generally asserted that every citizen of the United States has a right and an obligation to vote. Civic duty was expressed by participants in such phrases as, duty to country--referring to President Kennedy's call to "ask what you can do for your country," the importance of a vote, rights associated with a vote, taught to vote, voting and religion, and taking a vote for granted. A large component of this theme was the importance of teaching civic duty, especially with respect to voting. One Oklahoma female indicated teaching civic duty was not stressed anymore:

> I think it's a failure in education that they are not teaching that voting is a duty. Nobody thinks of it that way anymore.

Supporters of the civic duty theme remembered being taught to vote. Other Oklahoma participants echoed this sentiment as seen in these two comments:

M Somebody told me that voting was my duty as a Democratic citizen. I vote for everything.

F I vote for everything too.

Later in the Oklahoma discussion, this point would arise again. The earlier comments encouraged further debate on the issue of civic duty:

F I don't think it's instilled in people how important it [voting] is anymore. I think that, I know when I was growing up that was a big thing. I mean we couldn't wait until we were 21 to be able to vote. Now I mean, it's 18 now and...my son, as soon as he turned 18, I told him, boy get down there and register so you can vote. Boy, as soon as he turned 18 he was down there to register and he has been voting. I don't know what my other children do, they're away from home, but I know that he votes for everything. I don't think it's instilled in children anymore as they're growing up how important it is.

M You mean they'll vote if they're taught to vote.

F I think so.

Another reason to vote was provided by a male in Oklahoma who stated: "By not voting you don't have the right to complain about it." He associates certain rights with voting. In Missouri, another male stated, "you get what you deserve, because we voted for it."

Responding to another participant's comments about needing a reason to vote, this Minnesota female participant stated, "your reason to vote is because you're a citizen." This comment effectively contains the heart of the civic duty theme.

Research question six sought to identify the malaise elements in the focus group discussions. Five elements of political malaise were identified--"system influences" (special interests, media, election process); "political corruption;" "citizen self interests;" "why vote" (low citizen power, blame assigned to citizens for not being informed, blame assigned to politicians and media for treating the public as politically incompetent; and "civic duty." Participant responses illustrated these themes. Next, the final research question will be analyzed.

Key Words & Language

Analyzing the transcripts for information on RQ6 resulted in a rich array of theme categories supported with multiple comments from several of the geographic regions. Even though participants were engaged in discussions in different regions, their comments appeared to be from the

same larger discussion on the political process. While specific issues and candidate names may have varied, overall, similar concerns over the state of the political system arose in each of the focus groups. The themes of "system influences;" "political corruption:" "citizen self interests;" "why vote;" and "civic duty" reflected and were supported by comments made over and over from participants in the various focus group discussions.

RQ7: What are the key words and the language used to refer to political malaise in focus groups following debates?

Focus group participants expressed responses typical of the feelings associated with political malaise. With the exception of the terms cynical, alienated, and apathetic, participants did not use specific research terms in their responses. However, the issues raised in their responses delve into the areas associated with terms used in political malaise research--cynicism, inefficacy, and disapprobation. Their responses expand the understanding of these research terms by using everyday language and current examples of issues or events to demonstrate the current state of political malaise.

Powerless, alienated, and frustration(ed) were the main terms used repeatedly in the discussions to describe

participants' feelings toward the political process. Other important terminology expressed in the discussions include: disassociated, not happy, disenfranchised, ignored, disillusioned, disappointed, isolated, anger, cynical, apolitical, apathetic, non-caring, empowering, skeptical, trust, patriotism, and respect. Participants used these terms after viewing a televised political event--the first presidential debate--and in response to questions in a moderated discussion about the political system. The types of terms participants utilized are associated with political malaise and its dimensions. Each of these terms used by participants support the key political malaise dimensions of alienation, apathy, cynicism, political inefficacy and disapprobation. Terms like patriotism and respect were used in the context of explaining how the public might reduce levels of political malaise. As noted, a few terms match the research terminology for the key dimensions of political malaise--alienated, apathetic, and cynical. Most terms represent similar meanings to the key dimensions of political malaise. For example, powerless is a key component of inefficacy. The issue of trust and the term, "ignored" suggests what a citizen feels when they demonstrate political inefficacy. Anger is a key component of disapprobation. Cynical and skeptical are similar terms and are reflective of the political malaise dimension of cynicism.

The choice of words a participant selected in response to questions about why people do not vote, or their view of the government, or a sense of community reflects their political attitudes. Some terminology choices indicate a negative perspective on the political system. Terms and phrases suggesting citizen participation in the political process does not make a difference can be placed within a negative perspective. Phrases that suggest special interest money controls politics can also be placed within a negative perspective. Other terminology and phrasing indicate a positive perspective toward the political system. Phrases that suggest people are content with the political status quo can be placed within a positive perspective. Phrases that indicate a belief in honest politicians who are trying to do their best can also be placed within a positive perspective. The majority of the comments made by participants during the focus groups leaned more toward the negative perspective than the positive perspective. To demonstrate how these terms were used in context, statements from the various geographic focus groups are presented next.

From Ohio, the following is a statement demonstrating how the terms alienated and isolated were expressed:

> F People are becoming very--they're alienated and they're isolated. I don't want to know about you and you don't need to know about me.

From California, this male also used the term alienated:

I was going to say that maybe this is a not a presidential issue, maybe it's more a world or people issue, relative to the sense that I think there are many groups, gender, things, that feel they're really alienated.

The term disassociated originated from the Oklahoma discussion:

F Somehow people are becoming disassociated with the whole concept of politics.

The Oklahoma focus group also had a participant use the terms powerless and disenfranchised:

M I think, I mean everyone says it's because people feel powerless, disenfranchised. They don't feel their vote matters and maybe that's true.

From Minnesota, here is a sample of the phrasing surrounding the term disillusioned:

M And I totally agree that one of the reasons that people are disillusioned in this country and one of the reasons they don't go vote is because of campaign financing done by PACs,

by special interest groups. I think a lot don't vote because they just sort of figure the real power brokers who influence people are the people who pour the money into the campaigns and that's it. It comes down to that and I think the one thing that was said tonight is the fact that if we don't get campaign finance, disillusionment is going to get worse.

This Ohio statement reflected the political malaise dimension of inefficacy:

F It's not going to make a difference, they don't feel that the vote is empowering.

Does one vote have power? This California male did not believe it did:

It's the futility of your vote. Yes, what is one vote going to do?

Politicians received the attention of this Missouri participant who used the term skeptical:

F They say they are going to do things but they don't tell us how they are going to do it, so I'm skeptical of politicians.

Media were associated with the term cynical during the Minnesota focus group discussion:

F I'm so cynical with the media.

The quality of respect is no longer prevalent in society and in particular political leaders. In Ohio, this statement was made:

M That bothers me because I was raised to respect somebody in a position of authority [no matter] whether you like them--respect.

Society and politics are missing an important quality--patriotism. From Oklahoma this male stated:

Nobody seems really fired up, patriotic anymore. Even when Reagan was in office he seemed to be able to motivate people to wave the flag a lot. You don't see that anymore. I'm not sure if that's a good or a bad thing.

The variety of terminology used by focus group participants adds a temporal depth to aid in understanding the nature of political malaise. The language and issues that are important to citizens in 1996 represent the perspectives of a sampling of citizens. The predominant perspective suggests an unhappiness with the political status quo because citizens were aware of imperfections.

Never the less, hope for a better, stronger political system was still expressed.

Chapter V

Discussion

This chapter will address the implications of survey and the focus group results, limitations of this study, suggestions for future research, and the conclusion.

Survey Result Implications

The first two research questions sought to discover measurable changes in political malaise resulting from viewing a televised presidential debate and then from participating in a focus group discussion. Interestingly, the debate did not seem to affect political malaise in the same manner as participation in the focus group discussion. As noted, overall post- political malaise mean scores decreased after viewing the debate, but not significantly, while the overall post-post malaise scores increased significantly after focus group participation.

Examination of the eight statements at the pre-, post-, and post-post measurement times confirms a difference in the relationship between debates, focus group discussion, and political malaise. As seen in Table 2, with five of the eight statements, political malaise levels decreased after

viewing the televised presidential debate. With six of the eight statements, political malaise levels increased after participating in the focus group discussions. This was the predominant pattern in changes of the political malaise mean even though each of these decreases and increases in malaise were not all significant differences.

This finding that participants responded differently to the debates and discussion is also supported from the data in Table 3. The category of low political malaise category increased slightly after the viewing of the debate, but then decreased to lower than the starting point after participating in the focus group discussion. This suggests that passive television viewing has less effect upon political malaise than active participation through discussion. Information gain as from viewing a presidential debate may reduce political malaise while these findings suggest that through actively discussing political information, citizens' political attitudes reflect increased malaise levels.

As evidenced in the means of the eight statements, there were two unique variations in the measurement of political malaise. These variations were specific to the dimensions of political efficacy and cynicism/trust toward politicians. At one point, with the dimension of personal political efficacy, the means increased after both viewing the debate and participating in the focus group discussion.

Participants' sense of political power decreased after exposure to debates and focus group discussions. Also, the dimension relating to cynicism and trust in politicians demonstrated a variation from the dominant mean pattern. At one point, political malaise levels decreased after both viewing the debate and participating in the focus group discussion. Participants developed a more positive attitude toward politicians. Again, these changes in the mean were not significant. However, noting that some of the statements addressing the dimensions of political efficacy and disapprobation demonstrated variation from the dominant pattern signals that these two dimensions require further study.

Citizens watch presidential debates to gain political information. In this research, by viewing the televised debate, citizens gained information on the presidential candidates and citizen levels of political malaise decreased. However, these same citizens experienced higher malaise after participating in the focus group discussions. They cited the difficulties of being an informed citizen--self interests, complexity of issues and bills, lowered quality of information dissemination by media and politicians. Participants may have reinforced each other in their feelings of low personal political efficacy. The increase in political malaise may have been due to what McCombs (1972) referred to as the process of

"crystallization," the "strengthening and shaping of some previously vague predilection." Participants may have been experiencing some vague sense of uneasiness toward politics prior to entering this research session. The combination of answering the survey questions on political malaise and then participating in a discussion on the same subject may have crystallized their attitudes. Higher levels of political malaise resulted. Malaise levels were able to be measured because this research was conducted at a point in the campaign season when citizens form political attitudes and opinions. Thus, this research session may have helped to solidify the nebulous attitude of political malaise experienced by citizens enough so that it could be measured.

These research findings support the belief that citizen exposure to candidate and issue information, as well as participating in political discussions helps citizens form political opinions. As demonstrated in Table 3, the number of participants expressing a moderate level of political malaise decreased at each step as they were exposed to information from the debate and also from the focus group discussion. The high political malaise category increased with every step. Exposure to and discussion of political information does help to crystallize political opinions. Even though participants' overall levels of political malaise increased, especially after participating in the focus group discussion, increasing political knowledge and

developing political opinions may encourage participation and thus benefit a democratic society.

Research questions three, four, and five sought to discover differences in political malaise levels due to geographic location, gender, and party affiliation. A limited profile of a citizen experiencing political malaise could have been created. However, these three characteristics were not significant in relation to malaise. This suggests that political malaise is experienced by citizens who are Republicans, Democrats, Independents, males, females, and who reside in California, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Oklahoma. Political malaise is not distinctive of any one type of citizen based upon these listed characteristics. The implications of this lack of statistical significance are important to the understanding of political malaise. Particular groups of citizens, based upon these five geographic sites, political party affiliation, and gender, are equally susceptible to political malaise. These statistics were supported by focus group comments. As noted previously, similar types of comments were made by participants from all of the focus group sites. It gave the impression that the comments were all made as part of one large discussion.

Focus Group Implications

The focus group methodology provided valuable information to accompany the results from the survey

measurements. The themes obtained from the participant discussions helps to explain the reasons underlying the measured levels of political malaise and to explain some of the possible reasons why changes occurred in the malaise levels.

RQ6 sought to discover the causes of political malaise. Several themes emerged from the discussions. A majority of the participants felt the power of the individual citizen and the importance of civic duty were not stressed enough in society. It is important to note that a strong sense of civic duty still exists among citizens. However, civic duty appears to be balanced with, and at times overwhelmed by, the combination of larger system influences, political corruption, and citizen self interests. The result of this mix on the part of citizens is a feeling of "why bother to vote?"

Participants viewed the voter as a very small part of the political process and subject to the battles of the larger, more powerful special interests, media, and government. Organized special interests were viewed as too powerful and considered disruptive to the majority will. Media was considered a partner with special interests. The citizens felt they could only react to all of the larger influences on the political system. This is an interesting point when some perspectives view the citizen as the heart of a democracy. If the individual citizen feels politically

insignificant, what does that say for the democracy?

An ideal expectation exists when citizens believe government is supposed to provide help and solutions to all people in all situations. Politicians are supposed to be the ideal agents of this governmental action. Citizens are disillusioned when it is discovered that government and politicians make mistakes and this disillusionment increases further when political corruption appears to dominate all aspects of the political system as evidenced by media reports. Special interest money is one cause of political corruption. Such money is used by politicians to combat high campaign expenses due to a heavy reliance on expensive television advertising. Corrupt politicians will then favor such special interests with special governmental privileges. The current political structure allows politicians to accept large amounts of special interest money. The resulting favoritism politicians show toward special interest groups angers individual citizens who feel left out of the political process because they do not or can not give money to politicians.

Individual citizens blame special interests, media, corrupt political figures, and other citizens for their unhappiness with the political process. Other citizens are blamed because they do not take the time to become informed on the issues, candidate's records, and the rules of the political process. Citizens acknowledge that issues and the

accompanying bills are complex and time is a precious commodity for everyone. Average citizens are working so hard to survive and to take care of themselves and their families' needs that taking time to research and investigate political figures, issues, and events is considered a luxury. In addition, participants often blamed the media for not informing the public on these complex issues by providing balanced stories on the key facts of an issue with historical context since the average person is not going to have the time to research each issue. The media is viewed as a business looking for scandal and catchy headlines rather than contributing to the democracy by informing the public. Participants expressed a frustration toward media and politicians because both groups often treat the average citizen as incapable of understanding politics. These participants expressed a desire for politicians and media to acknowledge the citizen as holding an important role in the governing of our democracy. The focus group discussions present an image of the citizen as overwhelmed by day-to-day concerns and the amount of information associated with political issues, not to mention the complexity of some issues. An informed public is a necessary part of the duties of a citizen. However, civic duty takes a back seat to personal interests, and even more so to the influences of organized special interests, media, and politicians. An increased sense of civic duty is desired and necessary for

the future of increased citizen participation in the U. S. political system.

The seventh and final research question sought to discover the terminology utilized in expressing political malaise. This research presents rich data containing citizen opinions and viewpoints toward the political process. Terms used throughout the discussions include: powerless, alienated, frustration(ed), disassociated, not happy, disenfranchised, ignored, disillusioned, disappointed, isolated, anger, cynical, apolitical, apathetic, non-caring, empowering, skeptical, trust, patriotism, and respect. Citizens did use negative words to describe their feelings toward special interests, media, government, politicians, and fellow citizens. However, most of these terms were used with an attempt at reasoned logic and with the support of examples. Personal experience often did involve an emotional element in the discussions. The use of this terminology seemed to be an acknowledgement of flaws with the political system rather than a condemnation. The expressed terminology did not represent radical or revolutionary anger. A sense of hope was expressed that these identified problems could be corrected. Citizens, in the end, still expressed a belief in their country. The duality of expressing negative feelings toward the political process while also expressing positive sentiments demonstrate the complex nature of the political malaise

phenomenon. Austin and Pinkleton (1995) found such a duality in their research, and they concluded that while political malaise may discourage some citizens from participating in the political process, the same feelings of political malaise may actually motivate other citizens to participate.

Limitations

As with any study, there are limitations which must be noted. One limitation is that the ability to generalize to the greater population of the United States is a problem due to the small sample size of 64 participants. Also, missing data from one participant in the post-posttest further reduced the sample size. As the results indicate, political malaise levels increased after participation in the focus group discussion. Possible explanations for this increase may be due to the measuring instruments--the questions used in the survey portion and those used in the focus group discussions; moderator influence; and the time factor and tiredness of participants. These limitations are noted because no research project is perfect (however well planned); however, it is not believed that any limitation noted here was a major flaw with the design of the research project. Simply stated, there is always room for improvement.

However rich the data, 64 participants do not represent the population of the United States. Based on this study,

more is known about political malaise, but it cannot be stated that these results represent the greater population. The smaller sample size also increases the difficulty of finding significance in statistical tests. The number of participants in each focus group was similar with the exception of the Ohio focus group which contained only six participants. Also, the Oklahoma site held two focus groups with a total of 24 participants. This difference in participant numbers was an imbalance possibly affecting differences among geographic sites. To balance this limitation, it should be noted that some level of the geographic balance of the nation was achieved by the attempt to incorporate multiple sites for the focus group discussions. It should also be noted that the sample was comprised of 63 registered voters who volunteered approximately three hours of their time to participate in this study; thus, these citizens may not have represented the most alienated members of society.

Limitations with the analysis of the transcript data and the measuring instruments should be noted. The thematic analysis of the transcripts was subjective and conducted by the researcher. Developing a coding scheme and conducting a content analysis of the transcripts would be useful in future research. Further refinement of the measuring instruments is needed. The number of survey questions could be expanded in future research to include a higher number

and a balanced representation of political malaise dimensions. (See Appendices B, C, D for a review of the political malaise statements.) It might also be helpful to include a balanced number of positive statements measuring political attitudes. Some of the participants in the Oklahoma focus groups were observed commenting on the negative tone of some of the survey statements. Including a positive, negative, and neutral statement for each of the political malaise dimensions and interspersing them throughout the survey would create a balance which might help reduce the leading influence on participants' responses.

The survey questions used a five point response scale with "5" representing strongly agree, "4" was agree somewhat,"3" representing have no opinion, "2" was disagree somewhat, and "1" representing disagree strongly. The majority of individual responses tended to be in the opinion range of "agree" or "disagree." However, after averaging the responses, the responses ended up in the "have no opinion" category. The mean resulted in mild levels of political malaise (3.12, 3.10, 3.24).

The order of the focus group questions and the phrasing of the questions may have slightly contributed to the increased level of political malaise measured after the focus group discussions. (The focus group questions may be found in Appendix E.) The order of the focus group

questions may have triggered higher levels of anger toward the media. Placing the media questions directly before the alienation questions could have set up the connection that media caused political malaise. The discussion flowed from the media question--problems with the media--to the question of why people don't vote. This may have been a form of leading the participants to blame the media for political malaise among the public.

An alternative order of the theme questions may begin with voter learning since it flowed from what was learned by viewing the debate, a natural beginning for a discussion. Next, a move could be made into the area of attitudes in general toward the political process and government. Questions could include any of the following: "What responsibility does government have toward you?" and "What is your role in the political process?" Here is where political malaise attitudes may or may not have emerged depending upon participant responses. Next, exploring the sources of political knowledge and attitudes would begin to open the discussion up again. Finally, having explored where people obtained political information, this could be extended to incorporate the theme of community by exploring the interpersonal relationships developed or not developed by gathering information and making the political process work or not work.

The phrasing of the questions may have contributed to

the increase of political malaise. The phrasing of the question is important so as to not lead the participants into responding with what they perceive is the "correct answer." For example the question: "In recent presidential elections, roughly half of those who can, actually do vote. "Why do you think so many people seem to be uninterested or don't participate in the political process?" is a negative question. Participants look for the negative reasons why people do not vote. Using the word "uninterested" sets a negative tone for the discussion by assuming that someone who does not vote is uninterested. There are other reasons why citizens do not vote--contentment with the status quo, physical inability to go to the polls, increased mobility with the result that registration deadlines were missed in the process of moving, and refusal to register to avoid jury duty. The phrase "don't participate" also creates a negative atmosphere by setting up the assumption that voting is the only way to participate in the political process. While voting is often used in research to represent political participation, the general public may see other forms of participation in the political process as viable options. The discussion question is phrased in such a way that the participant picks up on the implication that something is wrong with not voting and the negative tone is set for the participants to explain "bad" citizen behavior. The status of "not voting" as a positive sign or a negative

sign continues to be debated by citizens. While this present research does support the notion that an informed and involved electorate is a good and necessary component of a functioning democracy, it is very important to avoid passing this assumption on to focus group participants because this action may lead the discussion in only one direction and, thus, overlook other potential perspectives. An alternate way to phrase the question is: How would you describe the mood of citizens this election year? The next question was more appropriately neutral: "How do you think most people view the government?" However, following the discussion that there was a problem with citizen participation, the comments may have been influenced negatively.

The focus group question form also used various headings above each of the question categories. While these headings generally provide a helpful direction guide for the moderator during a focus group discussion, some moderators incorporated these headings into the discussions. In some of the transcripts, the moderator would make reference to these headings either by reading them out loud or by stating the heading could not be read to the participants. These actions on the part of some moderators might have cued the participants as to what direction the discussion "should" move. In particular, the heading labeled "alienation" sets up a negative mind frame in the moderator who then might

feel the inclination to elicit negative comments. Additional training for moderators to be sensitive to this point would reduce the possible of a prior negative mind frame. Or a suggested alternate heading is "political participation."

In some of the transcripts, the moderator appeared to leave the necessary stance of neutrality by interjecting personal opinions and information into the discussion. Also, in some cases, the moderator cut off discussion of a particular area before the participants were ready to move to the next question. While there is a time factor to be aware of, there is also a need to be sensitive to the participant's desire to comment. At one point near the start of one of the focus group discussions, the moderator asked the next question--apparently before discussion on the previous question was concluded. One participant strongly told the moderator he was not finished with the previous question and he wanted to continue with this point for a while. Are most participants bold enough to respond in this manner? It is granted that the skill of knowing when to move on to the next question often improves with more experience as a moderator. It is noted here because this particular participant's response was so strong that it suggests perhaps this was a problem at other points in the discussion. If participants are invited to a focus group and told their opinions are important, there is an

expectation that someone will listen to their comments. Yet, if the participant is not given the chance to state their opinions, then the expectation can easily turn to frustration which could be vented in the post-post questionnaire.

Pilot testing of alternative ordering and phrasing of the questions may provide greater insight into the effects of question ordering and phrasing. Training of moderators is also necessary, with an emphasis on: asking the questions in order with no reference to question guide headings; sensitizing the moderator to use follow-up questions in a neutral manner without interjecting the moderator's opinion; and sensitizing the moderator to be aware when to move on to the next question. Emphasizing the moderator training in these areas would help reduce the factor of moderator influence upon participant responses.

The time factor may have also played a role in the increase of political malaise after the focus group discussions. Groups met in three different time zones--eastern, central, and pacific. The debate was aired at 9 p.m. for the east coast and the west coast. Two groups were conducted in the eastern and pacific time zones. The focus group discussions began at 11 p.m and lasted for approximately one hour. The debate was aired at 8 p.m. for the central time zone, and four groups were conducted in the central time zone. Here, the approximately one hour focus

group discussions began at 10 p.m. The debate occurred on a Sunday night and most people would have had to go to work Monday morning. Participants were asked to arrive about 30 minutes before the debate. They were asked to participate for approximately three and a half hours and by the time they finished it was quite late--around midnight in the eastern and pacific time zones and around 11 p.m. in the central time zone. It is reasonable to believe the factor of tiredness due to the late hour, plus the length of the participation, may have influenced the subjects to some degree. In some cases, perhaps the participant had a comment to make but due to being tired did not feel like jumping into the discussion. Toward the end of the focus group discussions, a couple of the participants directly stated they were too tired to think and participate further. Being tired can influence ones mood and perhaps being tired, some participants were more easily frustrated or irritated and this was reflected in their responses to the post-posttest survey.

As with any study, there is room for improvement and these limitations are noted in an attempt to improve future research on the phenomenon of political malaise.

Future Research

Future research should continue to improve the instruments used to measure and understand political malaise. Using the particular terms obtained from this

research within future research sessions will hopefully open new areas within political malaise for study. Additional areas of future research should include the measurement of political malaise over time; examining the level of political malaise at local and state levels of government; comparing levels of political malaise among countries; comparing voters and non voters; comparing citizens who participate in the political process--and exploring the variety of such participation--with citizens who do not participate; exploring the effect of increased political knowledge on political malaise; and exploring the relationship between each of the political malaise dimensions.

Conducting surveys and focus group discussions at various reference points during an election year might provide greater insight into the ebb and flow of political malaise. Research sessions could be conducted at key points in an election year--the primary season, the party national conventions, the debates, and the general election. Another option to account for changes in time is to measure citizen political attitudes in January of a presidential election year, and once again in the following January after a president is elected. These changes in time could be conducted with a panel study or with random citizens for each research session. Measuring political malaise over time is a necessary project. The time factor is important

not only for the patterns of malaise over an election season but also for the effects of this research. The level of political malaise at the end of the research session was higher than at the beginning. Was this a permanent or temporary increase in political malaise? Conducting a follow-up telephone survey a certain number of weeks after the research session might provide valuable information on the lasting combined effect of viewing debates and participating in focus group discussions.

Examining political malaise at the local, state, and national levels of government could provide valuable comparisons. This research used the presidential debates--a national political event--to measure political malaise. This type of research could be conducted with a local or a state political event of similar importance. What would be the level of political malaise?

Certainly, studying political malaise in other countries would be helpful. Does political malaise exist in established democratic countries? What of newly formed democratic countries? How do their political malaise levels compare with the United States?

Future research must also include the development of research designs which specifically tap into withdrawn citizens. Another research direction is to replicate the 1996 League of Women Voters' study of voters and non voters. The League of Women Voters' study (1996) found that both

voters and non voters experienced political malaise. Other reasons, such as, the availability of information, whether issues directly affect voters, and whether a citizen is encouraged to vote each play a greater role in the individual citizens decision to vote or not to vote. Replicating such a study would test the validity of its results--examining the motivations of political participators compared to citizens choosing not to participate. Future research might explore the possibility of comparing individuals with different levels of political experience or participation to determine levels of political malaise. Exploring the variety of political participation options would be a necessary part of this direction. Citizens may participate in other political activities and choose not to vote. Exploring the relationship between the motivation of political participation and political malaise should provide further insight.

A recent study reported the strength of "a learning model of behavior change in which knowledge precedes attitudes, which in turn influences behavior" (Valente et al., 1998). Future research would need to test this learning model specifically with the phenomenon of political malaise; specifically, does increased political knowledge lead to lowered levels of political malaise and then lead to future political participation? Information--citizen political knowledge--is important to a functioning

democratic society. As noted previously, The League of Women Voters study (1996) reported the availability of political information was a key factor in political participation while political alienation was not.

Both The League of Women Voters study (1996) and Valente et al. (1998) support the notion that information and knowledge are key factors in behavioral change. The League of Women Voters study directly addresses political cynicism and alienation--key components of malaise. Thus, while citizens' levels of political malaise may increase from participating in political discussions, if they gain information, they may still participate in the political process. This is an important point in identifying solutions to reducing the negative effects of political malaise upon the political process. A campaign designed to change citizen behavior by increasing political participation would need to increase the political knowledge of citizens.

Research continues to explore the causes of and the dimensions of political malaise. Political malaise is a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon. Identification of all the dimensions and the causes for each dimension is only one piece of the puzzle. Identification of one dimension and one cause does not mean that this one component of political malaise can be "fixed." Each person may experience political malaise differently and, thus,

emphasize different dimensions or causes. For example, high levels of candidate disapprobation may motivate one citizen to take a certain course for political action. Another citizen may experience profound political inefficacy which then dictates another form of political action. How the various dimensions work together to create the existence political malaise within a citizen is an important area. Is there a hierarchy of dimensions? What is the model for political malaise dimensions?

Conclusion

This research examined the state of political malaise and the effects of a televised presidential debate and focus group discussions on political malaise levels among a sample of U. S. citizens. Even with some fluctuation, the levels of political malaise remained in the moderate range. The moderate level does not suggest that these citizens are entirely satisfied with the status quo of the political system. Rather, the moderate tone of the participants suggests that perhaps these citizens are not as angry with politics as the media purports. Participant responses contained language expressing dimensions of political malaise--powerless, alienated, cynical. Causes of political malaise included resentment toward special interest and media influence on the political process, corruption in politics, and confusion on how to balance self interests with a sense of civic duty. A female participant from the

Oklahoma focus group discussion offered a simple suggestion on how to balance the responsibilities involved in being a citizen of a democratic society. She stated:

> I think if the country itself got together...that kind of thing brings together a sense of community, and a sense of involving. And I make a difference. And I belong to this, this is my group...if we work together and become a country...let's all work together even if we don't agree. You don't have to agree. We all want the same kinds of things. We want better lives, happier lives, happier children, better education, those kinds of things.

Does political malaise affect democracy? Time and future research will provide a clearer answer. At this time, the status of democracy can be found in such expressions of democracy as the televising of presidential debates and citizens gathering to discuss politics. Within this interplay exists a freedom of ideas which will carry democracy into the next millennium.

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TABLES

Table 1

Voter Turnout In Presidential Elections*

Percentages

Year	%
1960	62.77
1964	61.92
1968	60.84
1972	55.21
1976	53.55
1980	52.56
1984	53.11
1988	50.11
1992	55.24
1996	48.80

*Sources: Election Data Services, Congressional Research Service

Table 2

Participant Traits By Geographic Site

Frequency Counts and Percentages

	Site					
Traits	CA n=11 %	MN n=12 %	MO n=11 %	OH n=6 %	OK n=24 %	Totals N=64 %
Male	6 54.5	5 41.7	5 45.5	2 33.3	13 54.2	31 48.4
Female	5 45.5	7 58.3	6 54.5	4 66.7	11 45.8	33 51.6
Repub.	4 36.4	8 66.7	8 72.7	2 33.3	9 37.5	31 48.4
Democ.	6 54.5	2 16.7	0 0	3 50.0	14 58.3	25 39.1
Indep./ other	1 9.1	2 16.7	3 27.3	1 16.7	1 4.2	8 12.5
Age Mean	38.1	43.8	42.3	38.5	46.7	43.1

Table 3

8 Political Malaise Statements For All Focus Group Sites Combined

Means*

Statement	Pre-(n=64)	Post-(n=64)	Post-Post (n=63)**
1. Whether I vote or not has no influence on what politicians do.	2.33_{ab}	2.25_{a}	2.60_{b}
2. One never really knows what politicians really think.	3.27_{a}	3.23_{a}	3.57_{b}
3. People like me don't have any say about what the government does.	1.89_{a}	2.00_{a}	2.03_{a}
4. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.	2.22_{a}	2.41_{a}	2.63_{b}
5. One can be confident that politicians will always do the right thing.***	4.39_{a}	4.20_{ab}	4.08_{b}
6. Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a political campaign is over.	3.45_{a}	3.48_{a}	3.65_{a}
7. Politicians are more interested in power than in what the people think.	3.42_{a}	3.22_{b}	3.40_{ab}
8. One cannot always trust what politicians say.	3.95_{a}	3.98_{a}	3.97_{a}

*groups with same letters were not significantly different at .05

**one score was eliminated in pre- and post- due to missing data in post-post from one subject

***values on this scale were reversed so that the direction is the same for all items

Table 4

Overall Political Malaise Levels

Frequency Counts and Percentages

Level	Pre-(n=64)	Post-(n=64)	Post-Post (n=63)*
Low (1-2.44)	7 10.94%	9 14.06%	6 9.38%
Moderate (2.45-3.44)	42 65.63%	38 59.38%	30 46.88%
High (3.45-5)	15 23.44%	17 26.56%	27 42.19%

*one score was missing from the post-posttest

Table 5

Major Themes From Focus Group Discussions--All Sites Combined

---

System Influences
- Special Interest Groups
- Media
- Election Process

Political Corruption

Citizen Self Interests

Why Vote
- No Power
- Blame Other Citizens
- Blame Politicians and Media

Civic Duty

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

APPROVAL FORM

The University of Oklahoma
OFFICE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION

September 13, 1996

Dr. Lynda Lee Kaid
Department of Communication
University of Oklahoma

Dear Dr. Kaid:

Your research proposal, "Reactions to Televised Political Messages During the 1996 Elections," has been reviewed by Dr. E. Laurette Taylor, Chair of the Institutional Review Board, and found to be exempt from the requirements for full board review and approval under the regulations of the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research Activities.

Should you wish to deviate from the described protocol, you must notify me and obtain prior approval from the Board for the changes. If the research is to extend beyond 12 months, you must contact this office, in writing, noting any changes or revisions in the protocol and/or informed consent form, and request an extension of this ruling.

If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely yours,

Karen M. Petry
Administrative Officer
Institutional Review Board

KMP:sg
97-002

cc: Dr. E. Laurette Taylor, Chair, IRB
Dr. Mitchell McKinney, Communication

1000 Asp Avenue, Suite 314, Norman, Oklahoma 73019-0430 PHONE: (405) 325-4757 FAX: (405) 325-6029

APPENDIX B

PRETEST

Subject Number: __ __ __ Id. _____

Cell No. __ __ Dial Box No. __ __

1. When you think about an ideal president, what would the ideal president for the United States in the next years be like, what qualities should he/she have?

_____

2. Following are some feelings about politics and politicians. For each one, please say whether you strongly agree, agree somewhat, have no opinion, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly. _____

a. Whether I vote or not has no influence on what politicians do.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

b. One never really knows what politicians really think.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

c. People like me don't have any say about what the government does.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

d. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

e. One can be confident that politicians will always do the right thing.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

f. Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a political campaign is over.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

g. Politicians are more interested in power than in what the people think.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

h. One cannot always trust what politicians say.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

3. Please give us your feelings toward **Bill Clinton** on this feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward Clinton. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 mean that you don't feel favorable toward him and that you don't care too much for him. If you don't feel particularly warm or cold, you would rate Clinton at the 50 degree mark.

0----------50----------100

Clinton _____ degrees

4. Please give us your feelings toward **Bob Dole** on this feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward Dole. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 mean that you don't feel favorable toward him and that you don't care too much for him. If you don't feel particularly warm or cold, you would rate Dole at the 50 degree mark.

0----------50----------100

Dole _____ degrees

5. Please identify the five most important issues of the 1996 presidential campaign.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. Please react to both of the presidential candidates on the scale provided for the candidate. For example, if you think the candidate is very pleasant you would check the UNPLEASANT-PLEASANT scale as follows:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
UNPLEASANT:	___	___	___	___	___	___	_x_	:PLEASANT

On the other hand, if you think he is very unpleasant, you rate him as follows:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
UNPLEASANT:	_x_	___	___	___	___	___	___	:PLEASANT

If you think he is somewhere between these two extremes, then you would check the space that best represents your reaction on that scale.

If you feel you have no reaction to the candidate on any one scale, please check space number **4** to indicate your neutrality.

Please begin by rating: Bill Clinton

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
UNQUALIFIED:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:QUALIFIED
UNSOPHISTICATED:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:SOPHISTICATED
DISHONEST:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:HONEST
BELIEVABLE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:UNBELIEVABLE
UNSUCCESSFUL:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:SUCCESSFUL
ATTRACTIVE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:UNATTRACTIVE
UNFRIENDLY:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:FRIENDLY
INSINCERE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:SINCERE
CALM:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:EXCITABLE
AGGRESSIVE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:UNAGGRESSIVE
STRONG:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:WEAK
INACTIVE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:ACTIVE

7. Using the same scale, please rate:

Bob Dole

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
UNQUALIFIED:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:QUALIFIED
UNSOPHISTICATED:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:SOPHISTICATED
DISHONEST:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:HONEST
BELIEVABLE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:UNBELIEVABLE
UNSUCCESSFUL:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:SUCCESSFUL
ATTRACTIVE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:UNATTRACTIVE
UNFRIENDLY:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:FRIENDLY
INSINCERE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:SINCERE
CALM:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:EXCITABLE
AGGRESSIVE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:UNAGGRESSIVE
STRONG:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:WEAK
INACTIVE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:ACTIVE

_____

8. Please indicate your sex: Male _____ Female _____

9. Which of the following best represents your political affiliation?

Republican _____ Democrat _____ Independent _____

Other, please specify _____

10. Are you registered to vote? Yes _____ No _____

11. If the presidential election was held today, for which candidate would you vote?

Clinton___ Dole___ Undecided___ Other, please list_____

12. How much media coverage of the debates have you been exposed to in the past week?

None___ Very little___ Don't know___ Some___ A Great Deal___

STOP

DO NOT FILL OUT OR LOOK AHEAD TO ANY ADDITIONAL PAGES UNTIL INSTRUCTED TO DO SO.

APPENDIX C

POSTTEST

Subject Number: __ __ __ Id. _____

Cell No. __ __ Dial Box No. __ __

1. Following are some feelings about politics and politicians. For each one, please say whether you strongly agree, agree somewhat, have no opinion, _____ disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly.

a. Whether I vote or not has no influence on what politicians do.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

b. One never really knows what politicians really think.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

c. People like me don't have any say about what the government does.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

d. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

e. One can be confident that politicians will always do the right thing.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

f. Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a political campaign is over.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

g. Politicians are more interested in power than in what the people think.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

h. One cannot always trust what politicians say.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

2. Please give us your feelings toward **Bill Clinton** on this feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward Clinton. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 mean that you don't feel favorable toward him and that you don't care too much for him. If you don't feel particularly warm or cold, you would rate Clinton at the 50 degree mark.

0----------50----------100

Clinton _____ degrees

3. Please give us your feelings toward **Bob Dole** on this feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward Dole. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 mean that you don't feel favorable toward him and that you don't care too much for him. If you don't feel particularly warm or cold, you would rate Dole at the 50 degree mark.

0----------50----------100

Dole _____ degrees

4. Please identify the five most important issues of the 1996 presidential campaign.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Please react to both of the presidential candidates on the scale provided for the candidate. For example, if you think the candidate is very pleasant you would check the UNPLEASANT-PLEASANT scale as follows:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
UNPLEASANT:	___	___	___	___	___	___	_x_	:PLEASANT

On the other hand, if you think he is very unpleasant, you rate him as follows:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
UNPLEASANT:	_x_	___	___	___	___	___	___	:PLEASANT

If you think he is somewhere between these two extremes, then you would check the space that best represents your reaction on that scale.

If you feel you have no reaction to the candidate on any one scale, please check space number **4** to indicate your neutrality.

Please begin by rating: Bill Clinton

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
UNQUALIFIED:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:QUALIFIED
UNSOPHISTICATED:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:SOPHISTICATED
DISHONEST:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:HONEST
BELIEVABLE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:UNBELIEVABLE
UNSUCCESSFUL:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:SUCCESSFUL
ATTRACTIVE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:UNATTRACTIVE
UNFRIENDLY:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:FRIENDLY
INSINCERE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:SINCERE
CALM:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:EXCITABLE
AGGRESSIVE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:UNAGGRESSIVE
STRONG:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:WEAK
INACTIVE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:ACTIVE

6. Using the same scale, please rate:

Bob Dole

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
UNQUALIFIED:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:QUALIFIED
UNSOPHISTICATED:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:SOPHISTICATED
DISHONEST:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:HONEST
BELIEVABLE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:UNBELIEVABLE
UNSUCCESSFUL:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:SUCCESSFUL
ATTRACTIVE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:UNATTRACTIVE
UNFRIENDLY:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:FRIENDLY
INSINCERE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:SINCERE
CALM:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:EXCITABLE
AGGRESSIVE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:UNAGGRESSIVE
STRONG:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:WEAK
INACTIVE:	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	:ACTIVE

_____

7. Please think for a minute about the debate you just saw/heard. Please rate each candidate's overall performance. (please circle)

Bill Clinton

Very Poor Poor Average Good Excellent

Bob Dole

Very Poor Poor Average Good Excellent

8. Which of the candidate had the nicest physical appearance? **Omit this question if you listened to the debate on radio.**

Clinton ____ Dole ____ Don't know ____

9. Please place an **X** near the candidate you think won the debate.

Clinton ____ Dole ____ Undecided ____

10. Please list the major issues stressed in the debate.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Please circle your response to the following statements or questions.

11. In general, the candidates addressed the issues.

strongly disagree disagree no opinion agree strongly agree

12. How much did you learn about the issues from Bill Clinton?

nothing very little some a great deal

13. How much did you learn about the issues from Bob Dole?

nothing very little some a great deal

14. After watching the debate, what characteristics of Bill Clinton stand out in your mind?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

15. After watching the debate, what characteristics of Bob Dole stand out in your mind?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

16. Questions asked by the moderator were fair.

strongly disagree disagree no opinion agree strongly agree

17. Do you think one candidate or the other benefitted from the questions asked in the debate?

Yes _____ No _____

If so, which candidate benefitted from the questions?

_____

18. Do you think one candidate or the other was disadvantaged by the questions asked in the debate?

Yes _____ No _____

If so, which candidate was disadvantaged from the questions?

_____

19. How much did you learn about the personality/character of Bill Clinton?

nothing very little some a great deal

20. How much did you learn about the personality/character of Bob Dole?

nothing very little some a great deal

21. If the presidential election were held tomorrow, for which candidate would you vote?

Clinton___ Dole___ Undecided___ Other, please list_____

22. Did you enjoy the debate? Yes _____ No _____

23. What is your age? _____

24. Occupation (please specify) _____

25. Which of the following best represents your ethnic background?

Asian _____ Black/African American _____ Hispanic _____

White/Caucasian _____ Native American _____

Other (please specify) _____

APPENDIX D

POST-POSTTEST

Subject Number: __ __ __ Id. _____

Cell No. __ __ Dial Box No. __ __

1. Following are some feelings about politics and politicians. For each one, please say whether you strongly agree, agree somewhat, have no opinion, _____ disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly.

a. Whether I vote or not has no influence on what politicians do.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

b. One never really knows what politicians really think.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

c. People like me don't have any say about what the government does.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

d. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

e. One can be confident that politicians will always do the right thing.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

f. Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a political campaign is over.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

g. Politicians are more interested in power than in what the people think.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

h. One cannot always trust what politicians say.

Strongly agree Agree somewhat Have no opinion Disagree somewhat Disagree strongly

2. Please give us your feelings toward **Bill Clinton** on this feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward Clinton. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 mean that you don't feel favorable toward him and that you don't care too much for him. If you don't feel particularly warm or cold, you would rate Clinton at the 50 degree mark.

0----------50----------100

Clinton _____ degrees

3. Please give us your feelings toward **Bob Dole** on this feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward Dole. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 mean that you don't feel favorable toward him and that you don't care too much for him. If you don't feel particularly warm or cold, you would rate Dole at the 50 degree mark.

0----------50----------100

Dole _____ degrees

4. After participating in the discussion following the debate, please identify the five most important issues of the 1996 presidential campaign.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Please an **X** near the candidate you think won the debate.

Clinton ____ Dole ____ Undecided ____

6. If the presidential election were held tomorrow, for which candidate would you vote?

Clinton ____ Dole ____ Undecided ____

Other (please specify) _____

APPENDIX E

Focus Group Discussion Questions

Introduction

The purpose of this focus group discussion is to examine voter reactions to the presidential debate we just viewed. I am interested in your candid responses to the questions I will ask. There are no right or wrong answers. Your opinions are important, and we are not seeking to reach agreement; thus, feel free to disagree with comments made by others. We will discuss a topic until everyone has said everything desired and then we will proceed to the next question. We are recording this session so please speak clearly. The tape will be used to produce a transcript of the discussion, and your full name will not be identified on the transcript. Are there any questions? Let's get started.

I. Voter Learning:

1. Did you learn anything about the candidates or issues that you did not know prior to viewing the debate?
2. Did the debate influence your attitudes about the candidates or the issues?
3. Are there any issues of interest to you that were not discussed during the debate?
4. Were there any issues raised that you considered irrelevant or unimportant?

II. Sources of Information:

5. How does this debate compare with other sources of campaign information in helping you learn about the candidates and issues? (Probe: Other sources such as network news, political ads, the party conventions, candidate speeches or rallies, call-in shows, on-line resources, etc.)

III. Media:

6. What do you feel should be the role of the media in the political process?
7. What do you feel the media do well in their reporting, and what can they do to improve their reporting of political news?

IV. Alienation:

8. In recent presidential elections, roughly half of those who can, actually do vote.
   Why do you think so many people seem to be uninterested or don't participate in the political process?

9. How do you think most people view the government?

V. Community:

10. Do you feel as though we have a sense of community in this nation?
    --If so, what do you feel it is that holds us together?
    --If not, what seems to prevent us from being able to relate better to one another?
    --What can be done to help us get along better?

APPENDIX F

Thematic Coding Scheme From Focus Group Discussions

SYSTEM INFLUENCES
move to moderate
society
size of community
fences
MEDIA
media influence - 3
media coverage of election night
TV holds society together or splinters it
media coverage of candidates
new media enhance old forms of politics
media hurts political process
polls
cynical with media
polls & why vote
SPECIAL INTERESTS
special interest influence - 4
PACS
only special interest groups voting
majority vs. minority
ELECTION PROCESS
SYSTEM
election process - 2
day of week change for voting
TURNOUT
young not registered - 2
nonvoting young
percentage of turnout
political parties
CAMPAIGNING
negative ads - 2
voting record
build self up by cutting opponent down
campaign finance reform
more opposing parties
public debate with all parties
party
political ads

POLITICAL CORRUPTION
POLITICIANS (DISAPPROBATION)
politicians all the same
politicians campaign promises
politicians are scoundrels
politicians

professional politicians
politicians & values
skeptical of politicians
gridlock
Newt & gridlock

GOVERNMENT

taxes - 2
trust in government - 2
handouts & status quo
government bungles & wastes
bureaucracy
government abuse of money

WHY VOTE (INEFFICACY)

NO POWER

vote does not matter/count/make a difference - 6
no say
effectiveness of vote
importance of voting questioned
power of one vote
futility of vote
belief in ability to make a difference
why go vote

BLAME CITIZENS

uninformed public
informed electorate
informed voter
information level
informed public

BLAME SYSTEM [politicians, media]

public made to feel not smart
ineffectual
polls & why vote
politicians treat public as if stupid
complexity of issue vs. personality of politicians
complexity of bills
complex issues
complexity of bills
public not stupid

CITIZEN SELF INTERESTS

"ME"

family
sacrifice or give me

SES

education - 3
economy changes - 2
low income

CIVIC DUTY
duty - 3
duty to country -- Kennedy - 2
rights associated with vote
taught to vote
take vote for granted
voting & religion
importance of vote

TERMINOLOGY / EMOTIONS EXPRESSED

NEGATIVE

powerless - 3
alienated - 2
frustration(ed) - 2
disassociated
not happy
disenfranchised
ignored
trust
disillusioned
disappointed
isolated
anger
cynical
apolitical
apathetic
non-caring
skeptical

POSITIVE

patriotic
respect
content public