

The Midterm elections 2014: The Lesson for Conservatism

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Without crossing national borders, candidates for national office in the United States campaign for election in two different countries in alternate years. Candidates face different electorates when the election occurs in a year of the Summer Olympics or in a year of the Winter Olympics. In the 2012 presidential election, held less than three months after the Summer Olympics in London, liberal Democrat Barack Obama was easily reelected. In the 2014 midterm election, held eight months after the Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, conservative Republicans kept their House majority and won control of the Senate. What are the lessons from the 2014 election for conservatism?

American national elections divide into two categories: *presidential* elections versus those variously described as *midterm*, *off-year*, or *congressional* elections. Presidential elections are held every four years when there is a Summer Olympics. They might be called "hot" elections. (I may be the first person to call them that, however.) Elections held every two years between presidential elections fall during the Winter Olympics. They could be called "cold" elections.

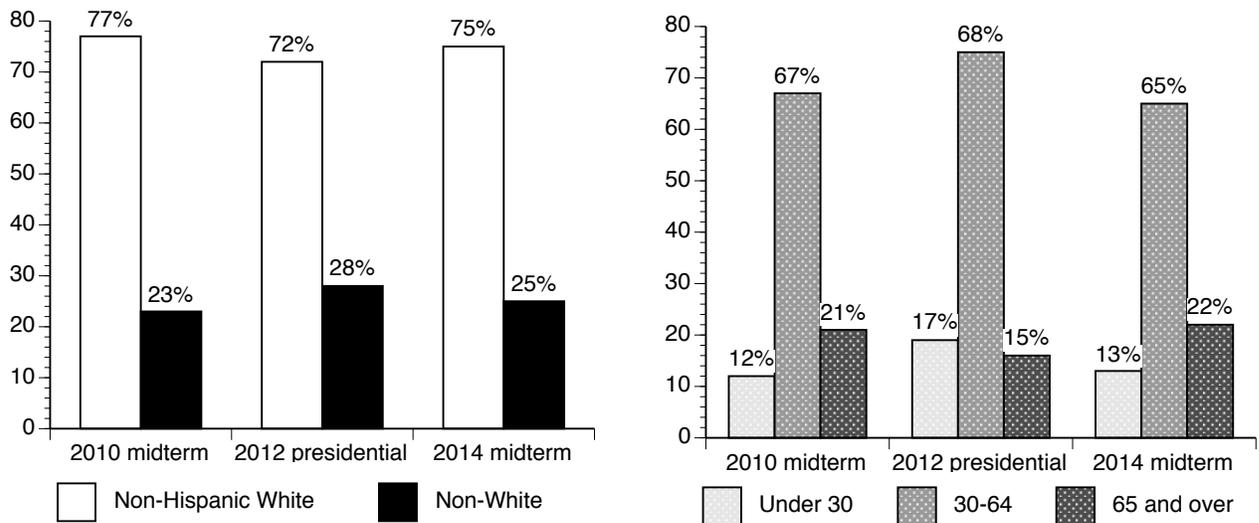
In either type of election—hot or cold—citizens can decide whether or not to vote. Many fewer United States citizens vote in cold midterm elections than in hot presidential elections. For example, in the 2010 and 2014 midterm elections, only 42 and 36 percent of eligible voters respectively cast ballots versus 59 percent in the 2012 presidential election.¹ This saw-toothed pattern of voting turnout—bordering on 40 percent for cold elections and on 60 percent for hot ones—is an established characteristic of the American electoral system.

It is tempting to explain the difference in voting turnout in terms of the weather: more people being likely to vote when it is hot than cold. But U.S. national elections are held the first Tuesday in November, so across most of the country the temperature lies between varying degrees of cold when voters cast their ballots. Instead of temperature, the hot/cold designation for elections ties into the degrees of interest that American voters have in the offices being elected. More people are interested in electing one person to be president than in electing multiple people to serve in congress. Presidential elections are "hot" elections because they draw more voter interest. Nearly twenty percent more of the electorate is motivated to vote during hot presidential elections than in cold midterm elections.

If cold electorates were simply smaller random samples of hot electorates, the two would not be fundamentally different. One would just be larger than the other. However, the social composition of hot and cold electorates is quite different. Thus, their *political* composition is also likely to differ. Although this paper focuses on political differences between hot and cold electorates, it first considers social differences, especially ethnicity and age. Past studies demonstrate that non-white voters and

young voters are more inclined to vote for Democratic candidates than are non-Hispanic whites and older voters. Significantly more non-whites and young people vote in hot presidential elections than in cold midterm election. Figure 1 reports the data for the last three election cycles.

Figure 1: Social Composition of Voters in Cold Midterm and Hot Presidential Elections^a



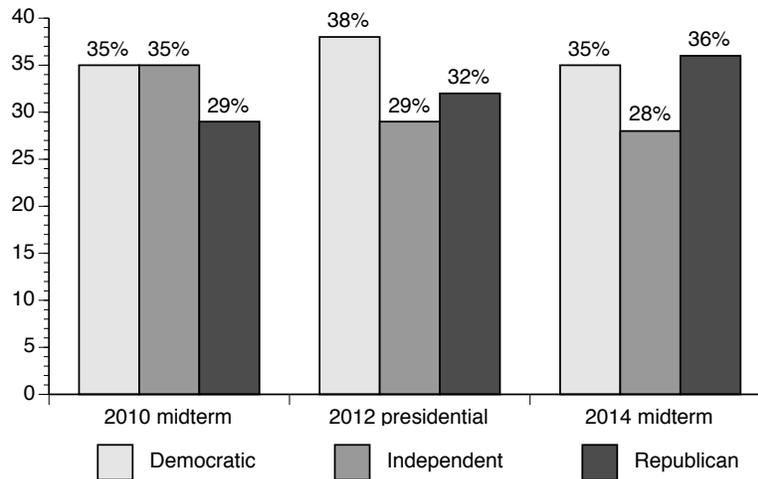
^aAll data in Figures 1-5 come from post-election exit polls posted at <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls.main/>; <http://www.cnn.com/election/2012/results/race/president/>; and <http://www.cnn.com/election/2014/results/race/house>

The first graph in Figure 1 shows that the percentages of non-white voters were 3 to 5 percentage points lower in the adjacent midterm elections than in the 2012 presidential election. (The smaller difference in 2014 was no doubt due to the steady increase of non-whites in the population.) The second graph shows that the percentages of young voters under 30 were 4 to 5 percentage points lower in the midterm elections than in the presidential election. In raw numbers, about 130 million voted in 2012 and about 82 million in 2014. (That difference of 48 million between the electorates in recent hot and cold elections is nearly four times the population of Bavaria.) Applying the percentages to the sizes of the electorates in 2012 and 2014 computes to 4 million non-whites and 3 million young people who voted in the 2012 presidential election but not in the 2014 midterm election. These sociological differences between the electorates in cold and hot elections translate into political differences. We examine the differences in party identification and ideology in hot and cold elections.

A popular view is that cold midterm elections attract more voters who identify with one of the two major parties, while hot presidential elections draw more self-described independents. According to the 2012 American National Election Study, political independents constituted 45 percent of the population. Decades of survey research in the United States show that citizens who do not identify with political parties are less likely to vote in elections. Indeed, the exit polls in Figure 2 report that independents made up only 29 percent of the actual voters in 2012—even fewer than in 2010. The proportion of independents that voted in 2014 was nearly the same as in 2012. These charts demonstrate that hot presidential elections versus cold midterm

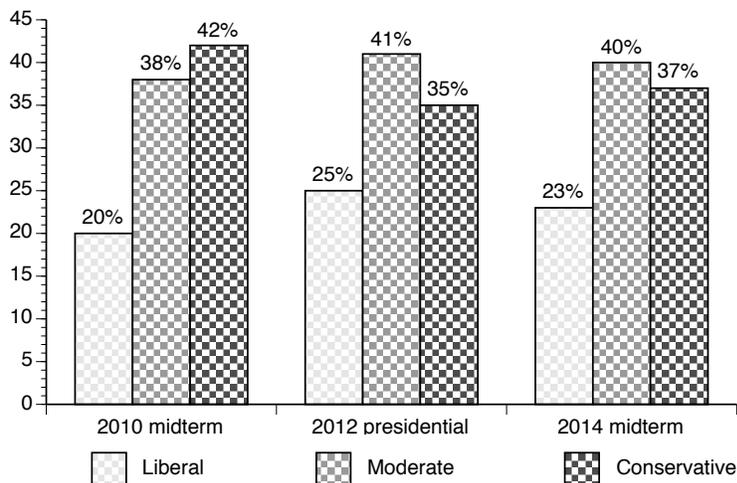
elections do not differ systematically or substantially in the partisan composition of their electorates.

Figure 2: Party Identifiers in Presidential and Midterm election



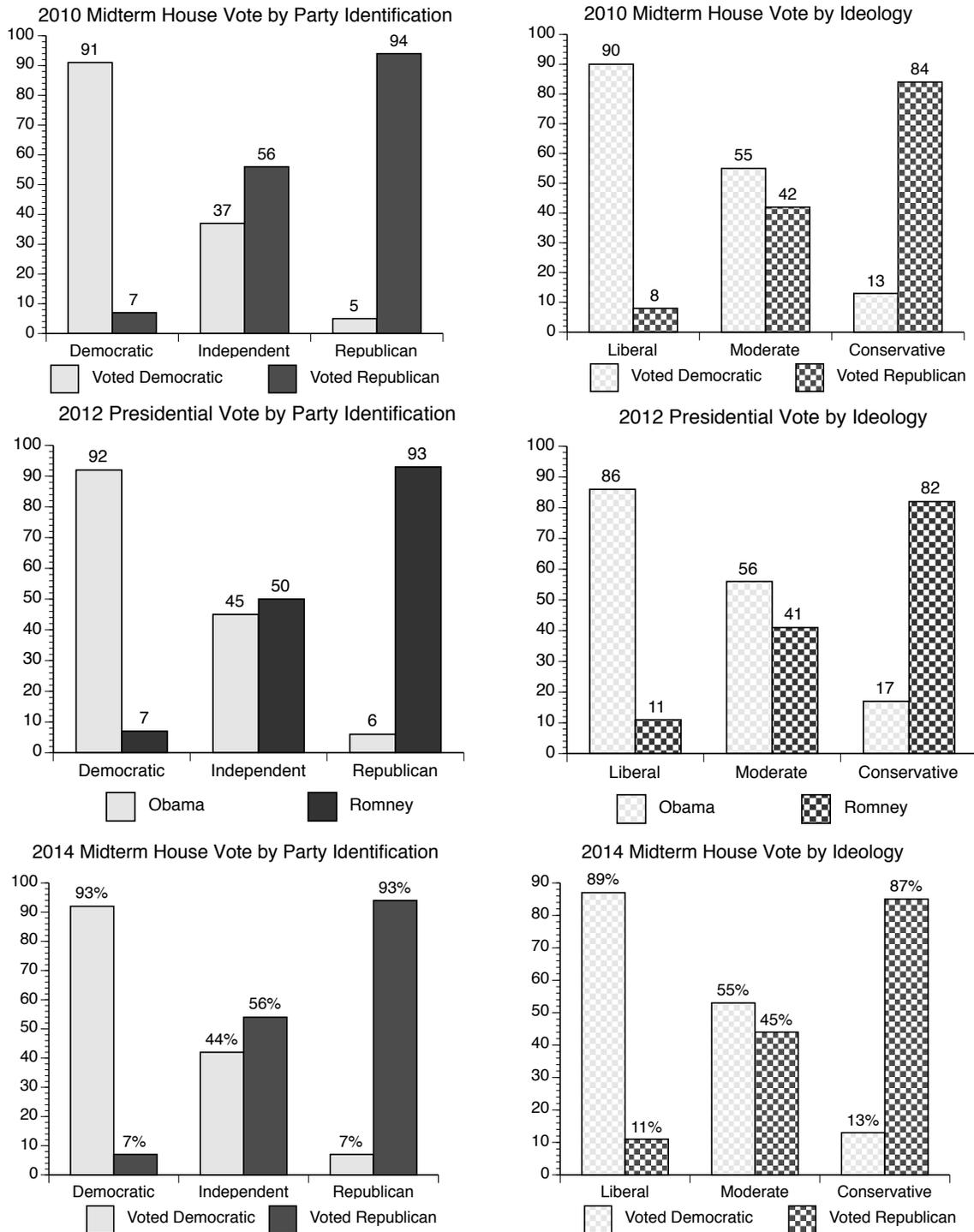
Instead, midterm and presidential elections are more likely to differ by their ideological composition. As shown in Figure 3, the 2010 and 2014 midterm elections differed more from the 2012 presidential election in the disparity between self-identified conservative and liberal voters. Only 20 percent of 2010 midterm voters described themselves as liberal, versus 42 percent who said they were conservative, producing a difference of 22 percentage points. The disparity decreased to 14 points in the 2014 midterm election, but that was still greater than the 10-point differential in the 2012 presidential election.

Figure 3: Ideological Self-Description in Presidential and Midterm election



Party identification links more directly to voting choice than does ideology. Figure 4, illustrates the impact of party identification and ideological self-classification on voting for House candidates in the 2010 and 2014 midterm elections and in the 2012 presidential election.

Figure 4: Effects of Party Identification and Ideology on Voting in Midterm and Presidential Elections



Concerning this paper, two things are notable in Figure 3. First, the effects of party identification on voting choice were consistently stronger than the effects of ideology in all three elections. Second, by percentage point differences of 6, 4, and 2 respectively in the 2010, 2012,

and 2014 elections, liberal ideology had a slight but consistently stronger effect on voting choice than conservative ideology. Why that might occur is considered below.

Although party identification had a stronger effect for predicting *choices* of individual voters, ideology can have more effect on predicting election *outcomes* when a considerable imbalance occurs between liberals and conservatives in the electorate. That appears to have been the case in the 2010 midterm election, when conservatives had a 22 percentage point advantage over liberals in political ideology while Democrats enjoyed only a 6 percentage point advantage in party identification. Republicans' overwhelming advantage in conservative voters was accompanied by their winning 56 percent of the 435 seats in the House of Representatives. Republicans increased that to 57 percent in the 2014 midterm election.

In the 2012 presidential electorate, conservatives exceeded liberals by only 10 percentage points. Nevertheless, Republicans still won control of the House while losing the presidency. Moreover, Republicans won the House by defying the mathematical "cube law." The "law" (which usually works) predicts that the party that wins a plurality of votes in legislative elections will win an even a larger plurality of legislative seats. Although Democrats won 48 percent of all House votes to the Republicans' 47 percent, the Republicans actually won 54 percent of the seats. Clearly, something the Republicans had something else going for them in House elections besides an advantage in the ideological composition of the electorate.

Political scientists and pundits both know that Democratic party identifiers and liberal voters draw huge majorities in population centers. In contrast, Republican party identifiers and conservatives win with smaller majorities more widely across the nation. The concentrated distributions of Democratic voters often generate large margins of victories for their victorious candidates in presidential and congressional elections. Meanwhile, smaller margins of victory return a greater number of Republican candidates to the House.²

So entering the cold 2014 midterm election, Republicans had two systemic factors in their favor: an advantageous distribution of Republican voters across 435 congressional districts, and an ideologically conservative electorate. In "Cry of G.O.P. In Campaign: All Is Dismal," the *New York Times* described how Republican candidates played to conservatives:

With four weeks to go before the midterm election, Republicans have made questions of how safe we are—from disease, terrorism, or something unspoken and perhaps more ominous—central in their attacks against Democrats.³

To explain why this campaign theme lies at the core of conservative ideology and to explain why self-identified conservatives may not vote as reliably for Republican candidates as self-identified liberals vote for Democrats, we need first to examine the nature and history of conservative and liberal thinking in American politics.

Working Definitions of Political Ideology

A political ideology can be defined as a coherent and consistent set of values and beliefs about the proper purpose and scope of government.⁴ "Coherent" means that the values and beliefs are organized and logically constrain one another. "Consistent" means a person's opinion

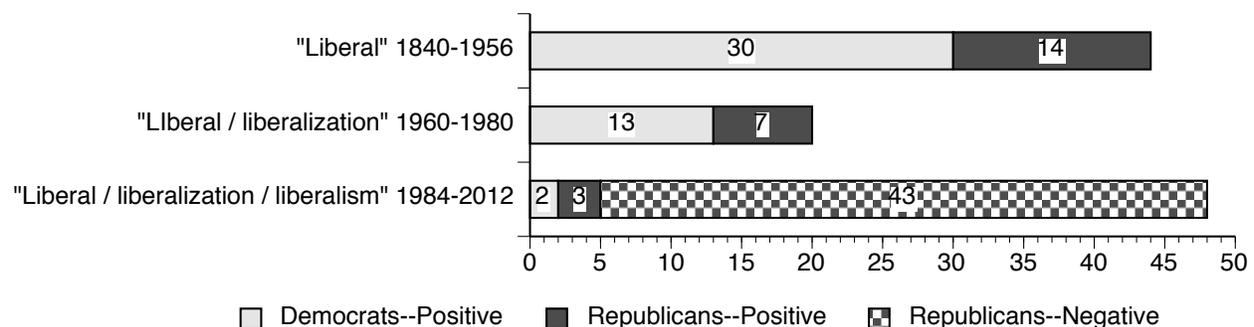
of the proper role of government on one issue matches the person’s opinion on a different but similar issue. Although the term ideology has been used historically in other ways,⁵ Frances Lee’s research finds that in contemporary political science research it “denotes interrelated political beliefs, values, and policy positions.”⁶

In opinion polls, the complex concept of political ideology is usually reduced to asking whether people regard themselves as “liberal” or “conservative,” and classifying them accordingly. Those who reply, “it depends,” “undecided,” or “don’t know,” are typically placed in the intermediate category, “moderate.” These three categories are then arrayed on a continuum ranging from left (liberal) to right (conservative). Classifying voters and politicians as liberals and conservatives is relatively new in American party politics—since about 1970. Today, politicians are routinely painted as spendthrift liberals or backward conservatives. In the past, the words “liberal” and “conservative” were not so negatively colored, as shown in the history of Democratic and Republican party platforms.

"Liberal" and "Conservative" in American Party Platforms: 1840-2012:

Consider how "liberal" and "conservative" were used in 44 Democratic Party platforms from 1840 to 2012 and in all 40 Republican Party platforms from 1854 to 2012.⁷ Let's take "liberal" first. During the 116 years between 1840 and 1956, the Democrats mentioned “liberal” 30 times in their party platforms. During the 100 years from 1856 to 1956, the Republicans used the term just 14 times. Throughout these years, both parties virtually always used liberal in a positive way—in the sense of “free in giving; generous; open-minded”—as defined in the 1937 *Oxford University English Dictionary*. Then for two decades (1960 to 1980), both parties shifted to talking about “liberalization” instead of liberal. Whereas liberalization had previously appeared only once in 56 platforms of both parties up to 1956, during the twenty years from 1960 to 1980 Democratic platforms mentioned liberalization thirteen times and Republicans seven. Following the Republican Party’s practice earlier, not *once* during 1960 to 1980 did a Republican platform use liberal in a negative way. The pattern is graphed in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Mentions of "Liberal" and Its Forms in Democratic and Republican Party Platforms Respectively Since 1840 and 1856



Things changed in 1984, when the Republican platform abruptly attacked Democratic opponents for being liberals.⁸ Republican platforms since then used the term negatively 43 times to deride Democrats. Examples include referring in 1984 to “liberal experimenters” who “destroyed the sense of community”; in 1988 to “liberal attacks on everything the American

people cherished”; in 1992 to “the liberal philosophy” that “assaulted the family”; in 1996 to “the liberal agenda of litigious lawyers”; in 2000 to “the collapse in failure” of “the old left-liberal order of social policy”; and in 2012 to “an outdated liberalism, the latest attempt to impose upon Americans a eurostyle bureaucracy to manage all aspects of their lives.”

Since 1984, Republican platforms used liberal in a positive way only three times. Cowed by this onslaught, Democrats—who like Republicans had once proudly claimed the liberal label—avoided it almost entirely in their party platforms, using it only twice after 1980.

Now let's consider the term “conservative.” Surprisingly, neither party mentioned it either frequently or prominently in any of their platforms. Whereas both parties’ platforms together alluded to “liberal” in some form a total of 124 times from 1854 to 2012, both used “conservative” only 14 times over all 84 party platforms. The term, conservative, has carried no political punch in party platforms. End of story.

These findings from historical research into party platforms are corroborated by Frances Lee’s study of congressional politics. Lee counted references to ideology and to closely related terms—liberal and conservative—in professional journals and in the *New York Times* from 1900 to 2003. “Prior to the 1950s,” she wrote, “scholars generally spoke only of particular liberal or conservative coalitions or legislators;” not until the 1960s were the terms commonly applied to “individual legislators’ policy orientations.”⁹

What emerges from this historical review of the usage of liberal-conservative in Democratic and Republican party platforms is that the terms lacked partisan linkage prior to the 1950s. A similar history lies behind the place of the liberal-conservative continuum in public opinion research. Today, political commentators are well informed about the voting preferences of liberals and conservatives in the electorate. Sixty years ago, no one knew much about citizens’ political ideology from public opinion polls.

"Liberal" and "Conservative" in Ideological Self-Placement, 1950-2012:

Few polls prior to the 1970s asked people whether they considered themselves politically liberal or conservative. Proof of that comes from searching the extensive archives of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut, which—according to its web site—“holds data from the 1930s, when survey research was in its infancy, to the present.”¹⁰ A search for “liberal” and “conservative” found all Roper’s poll questions that asked people whether they considered themselves liberals or conservatives. Only 52 polls out of 1,195 U.S. national surveys from the 1930s through the 1960s even mentioned the keywords “liberal” and “conservative,” and most of the 52 used the terms in ways that did not ask respondents to classify themselves.¹¹

Of the 240 questions about liberal and conservative in these surveys from 1935 through 1969, only 16 asked people about their own ideological orientations. Because the questions differed in wording, moreover, poll results from 1930 to 1970 are difficult to compare.¹² (See Appendix A for the text of all 16 questions.) Not until 1972 did a survey organization—the

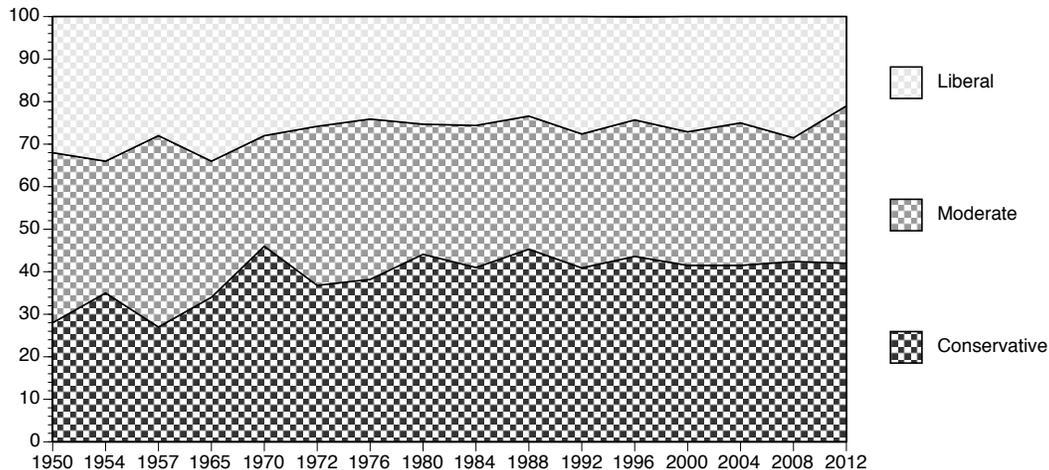
American National Election Studies—design an interview question that was used unchanged over an extended time period.¹³ Here is the ANES interview instrument in full:

We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. I'm going to show you a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? (7-point scale shown to R).¹⁴ [Note that the last portion of the question asks, "or haven't you thought much about this?"]

Consistently since 1972, from 25 to 35 percent of respondents said that they “haven’t thought much about it.” This important finding indicates that many citizens do not think much about politics generally and certainly not about political ideology in particular. Lacking the chance to admit that they “haven’t thought much about it,” many respondents may choose the safe “moderate” category instead of either “liberal” or “conservative.” Assuming that is true, many citizens opted for “moderate” when they did not quite understand their ideological choices.

Although the ANES question allowed respondents to distribute across seven positions from “extremely liberal” to “extremely conservative,” most research collapses their responses to the three categories of “liberal,” “moderate,” and “conservative”—which correspond to the ideological options in polls prior to 1972. Figure 6 reports the results of various surveys that asked reasonably suitable questions about liberal-conservative self-placement prior to 1972.¹⁵

Figure 6: Ideological Distribution, 1950-2012



According to surveys available prior to 1972 and to more comparable ANES surveys since, the percentages of self-identified conservatives have grown while liberals have dwindled over time. Recalling that approximately a third of respondents admits that they “haven’t thought much” about these terms, we might wonder who does think about the ideological options and what they think the terms mean.

In his searching analysis of respondents’ verbatim responses to political questions in the 1950s, Philip Converse concluded that only about 17 percent of the public then understood the liberal-conservative dimension in a way “that captures much of its breadth.”¹⁶ Most of the “best”

responses indicated “that the Democratic Party was liberal because it spent public money freely and that the Republican Party was more conservative because it stood for economy in government or pinched pennies.”¹⁷

More than a decade later, Gallup in 1970 asked this pair of questions: (a) “*What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of someone who is a liberal?*” and (b) “*What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of someone who is a conservative?*” About 35 percent of the sample offered what Gallup classified as 12 different answers to “liberal,” and about 33 percent offered 8 different views of “conservative.” The “top five” types of replies to each question are reported in Table 1.

Table 1: 1970 Gallup Poll on Meaning of "Liberal" and "Conservative"

Top Five Answers: Ranked by Number of Replies When Asked:

What Is the First Thing That Comes to Your Mind

. . . . When you think of someone who is a liberal?

- 182 free thinker, open-minded, fair, lenient: "a person who; is a free thinker", "listens to both sides", "fair in making; decisions", "someone who can look at and see all sides to a problem"
- 126 gives things away, spends money: "giving away a lot of; things", "determination to spend other people's money", "urges gov't spending", "someone who is eager to spend money"
- 110 names specific person: "Hubert Humphrey", "Eugene McCarthy", "Roosevelt", "Rockefeller" [Democratic political notables at the time]
- 102 mentions general political position, political party: "like an independent", "neither conservative nor reactionary", "little left of center", "not middle of road", "middle of road", "a political party", "Democratic Party"
- 93 free, kind, generous, good-hearted, giving, "somebody freer"; "be free", "kind and good - free hearted", "someone concerned about people in general", "person who is generous; or giving"

. . . . When you think of someone who is a conservative?

- 265 saves, doesn't throw things away, doesn't spend money: "someone who doesn't throw things away", "want to conserve the money of the public", "keep things", "penny pincher", "tight money", "someone who is stingy", "not wasteful", "a person who plans and saves"
 - 186 do not change, does not take a chance: "people who are not so broad minded or go along with the young people with these new changes", "one who is more satisfied with allowing things to be as they are", "stick to the old beaten path and don't like to change too much", "doesn't like to change too much"
 - 161 cautious, careful, sensible, reserved: "a more reserved person", "level headed people", "sensible people", "a person who thinks and considers every aspect", "thinks more before deciding"
 - 132 close minded, strict, square, intolerant, self- centered: (general negative responses) "someone who is not open to new things", "straight or square", "one point of view", "of one opinion", "very self-centered"
 - 88 Nixon, Republican, current administration: "President Nixon's policy", "the ones in the White House now", "Nixon is a conservative".
-

The public's responses in 1970 to the meaning of liberal and conservative range rather widely over a range of thoughts with few relating to the role of government. Common themes are that liberals are generous and free-thinkers, while conservatives are savers who don't like change.

Three decades later, a 2006 CBS News poll asked a related question:¹⁸

"We hear a lot of talk these days about people being liberals, moderates, or conservatives, and we'd like to know what those terms mean to you. What do you think is the biggest difference between liberal views and conservative views?"

The modal response (32 percent) was that "liberal" and "conservative" referred to "personal characteristics and traits." Only 7 percent replied that the terms referred to "general attitude toward money and economics," and a paltry 4 percent suggested that they reflected a "general attitude toward government." However, 8 percent said that liberals and conservatives differed on "values," often mentioning "abortion." Once again, 38 percent didn't know or gave no answer.

So what can we draw from this inquiry into the public's understanding of liberal" and "conservative" over six decades?

1. Roughly 35 percent of the public—then and now—"hadn't thought much" about these terms.
2. Respondents who attempt to define the terms offer wide-ranging definitions, mostly unrelated to politics or economics.
3. A small but substantial minority of citizens (around 15 percent) draws politically relevant differences between liberals and conservatives.

From One to Two Dimensions: Reconceptualizing Liberal and Conservative

Notwithstanding the public's uncertainty about the meaning of "liberal" and "conservative," the popular view—often expressed in the press—is that liberals want "more government" and conservatives want "less government." But that view is too simplistic. Sometimes conservatives clamor for more government, while liberals urge less. The critical difference between liberals and conservatives stems from their attitudes toward the purpose of government. Interpreting the purposes of government in terms of the core political values of *freedom, order, and equality*, we analyze political ideology in a two-dimensional framework. The framework using core values is more satisfying than the simple liberal-conservative continuum.¹⁹

Governments at any level require citizens to surrender some degree of freedom. Although some governments minimize their infringements on personal freedom, no government has as a goal the maximization of personal freedom. Governments exist to control; to govern means "to control." People surrender their freedom to obtain the benefits of government. Throughout history, government has served two major purposes: maintaining order (preserving life and protecting property) and providing public goods. More recently, some governments have pursued a third purpose, promoting equality, which is more controversial—having gained prominence only in the twentieth century, in the aftermath of industrialization and urbanization.

Of the three purposes—maintaining order, providing public goods, and promoting equality—providing public goods generates the least disruptive political conflicts. People often disagree about how far government ought to go in using its power to tax to provide public goods and services—roads, waste collection, parks, swimming pools—and how much of that realm should be handled by private business for profit, but these disagreements usually can be resolved through compromise. The liberal-conservative continuum can accommodate such conflicts. But it does not accommodate conflicts among citizens concerning trade-offs between the core values of freedom and order and between the core values of freedom and equality.

To classify liberal and conservative ideologies more accurately, we incorporate the values of freedom, order, and equality into the analysis. We do so using the two-dimensional classification in Figure 5 on the next page. It aligns conflicts between freedom and order and between freedom and equality along two separate dimensions, each anchored in maximum freedom at the lower left. One dimension extends horizontally from maximum freedom on the left to maximum order on the right. The other extends vertically from maximum freedom at the bottom to maximum equality at the top. Each box represents a different ideological type: libertarians, liberals, conservatives, and communitarians.

Libertarians value freedom more than order or equality. In practical terms, libertarians want minimal government intervention in both the economic and the social spheres. For example, they oppose affirmative action and laws that restrict transmission of sexually explicit material.

Liberals value freedom more than order but not more than equality. They oppose laws that ban sexually explicit publications but support affirmative action.

Conservatives value freedom more than equality but would restrict freedom to preserve social order. Conservatives oppose affirmative action but favor laws that restrict pornography.

Communitarians support both affirmative action and laws that restrict pornography. We will call this new group communitarians.²⁰

By analyzing political ideologies on two dimensions rather than one, we can explain why people can seem to be liberal on one issue and conservative on another. The answer hinges on the purpose of a given government action: Which value does it promote: order or equality?

According to our typology portrayed in Figure 7, only libertarians and communitarians are consistent in their attitude toward the scope of government activity, whatever its purpose. Libertarians value freedom so highly that they oppose most government efforts to enforce either order or equality. Communitarians are inclined to trade freedom for both order and equality. Liberals and conservatives, on the other hand, favor or oppose government activity depending on its purpose.

Figure 7: Two-Dimensional Classification of Political Ideology



I submit that this two-dimensional framework is more serviceable than the one-dimensional liberal-conservative continuum. Because it is based on the underlying values of freedom, order, and equality, it is more analytically penetrating than simply separating libertarians and conservatives into "economic conservatives" and "social conservatives."

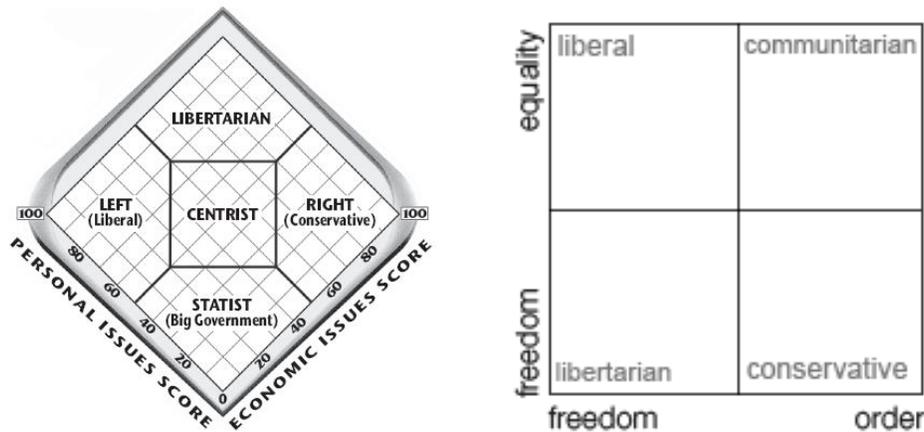
Libertarians and the Liberal-Conservative Continuum

Efforts to rescue the familiar liberal-conservative continuum, commentators often talk about "economic" conservatives (i.e., our *libertarians*) versus "social" conservatives (i.e., our *conservatives*). But like using perfume to disguise an odor, describing both types of ideological positions as "conservative" simply covers up their different views about government. Libertarians oppose virtually all government action as an infringement on freedom; conservatives favor government action when it maintains social order. Because it offers them no space to occupy, libertarians reject the one-dimensional liberal-conservative continuum. They are not liberals; they are not conservatives; and they are definitely not moderates.

When the two-dimensional ideological framework in Figure 7 was published in the first edition of *The Challenge of Democracy* (1987),²¹ it attracted the attention of David Bergland, the 1984 presidential candidate of the Libertarian Party. Bergland then arranged for the second edition (1989) to be sold at the party's 1989 national convention in Philadelphia. The reason: it gave the party a position to occupy in a political typology.

Indeed, libertarian activists had independently created a computer program for "The World's Smallest Political Quiz (WSPQ)," whose two-dimensional framework resembled that in Figure 7.²² WSPQ posed 5 hypothetical questions on "personal issues" and 5 on "economic" issues. Working with its creators in 1989, Jerry Goldman and I devised IDEALog, a computer quiz based on twenty questions from actual surveys: ten about the trade-off between freedom and order, and ten between freedom and equality.²³ Both quizzes have been in use for more than 25 years, existing now as Internet applications. Their similarity is shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: World's Smallest Political Quiz v. IDEALog^a



^a <http://www.theadvocates.org/quiz/quiz.php> and <https://www.idealogue.org>

The World's Smallest Political Quiz and IDEALog differ in their objectives. WSPQ advances the libertarian cause; IDEALog teaches students about dimensions of political ideology.²⁴ In WSPQ, the "Libertarian" category ranks at the top, and the "Statist" category (originally "Totalitarian") at the bottom. In IDEALog, we chose the more neutral term,

"Communitarian." But both computer applications carve out a unique case for libertarian ideology instead of treating it as an aspect of conservatism.

People who regard themselves as liberals or conservatives have no special problem placing themselves on a liberal-conservative scale. The scale offers options that fit their self-identifications. It also presents no special obstacle for those who do not oppose government actions to promote order and equality—the communitarians in our model—many of whom may not think deeply about politics. Being liberal on some matters and conservative on others, they find "moderate" a comfortable choice.

Libertarians, however, face a quandary when asked where to place themselves on a liberal-conservative scale. Neither option suits them, nor do they like the moderate category. Compared with other voting age citizens, libertarians tend to be under 30 years of age, male, prosperous (over \$75,000 annually), and overwhelmingly white.²⁵ They feel too strongly about politics to classify themselves as "moderate" and shun the "liberal" label. Choosing "conservative" is the best among three bad choices. But as Nick Gillespie, editor of the libertarian monthly, *Reason*, told an interviewer, "I was never a conservative."²⁶

The likelihood that surveys of self-reported conservatives harbor significant numbers of liberals may explain the finding in Figure 3 that liberal ideology had a stronger effect on voting choice than conservative ideology. A significant portion of those who classify themselves as conservatives are really libertarians, and they may not vote for Republican candidates who are socially conservative. Because Republicans—especially since 1984—have succeeded in branding "liberal" as a negative term in American politics, voters who confess that they are liberal are more likely to deliver in voting for Democratic candidates.

Conservatism in the 2014 Midterm Election

We return to the *New York Times* article, "Cry of G.O.P. In Campaign: All Is Dismal."²⁷ It said, "Republicans believe that they have found the sentiment that will tie congressional races together with a single national theme." They "have made questions of how safe we are—from disease, terrorism, or something unspoken and perhaps more ominous—central in their attacks against Democrats." Warning of potential death and disorder under Democratic government, Republicans present themselves as capable of restoring and maintaining order. The campaign theme, which is more Thomas Hobbes than Karl Rove, expresses conservative, not libertarian, ideology.

Hobbes envisioned protecting citizens through the creation of an all-powerful government, a "Leviathan." No Republican would call for such a government, but stronger government is inherent in the party's campaign to protect Americans against Islamic extremists, against immigrants flooding across our southern border, or even against the spread of the Ebola virus. For example, Texas Republican Senator Ted Cruz and Governor Rick Perry, both hoping to be their party's presidential nominee in 2016, proposed that government combat the spread of the Ebola virus by banning commercial flights into the United States from specific African countries—against advice from health care professionals.²⁸

The difference between conservative and libertarian thinking emerges most starkly in the politics of foreign policy and military spending. "Freedom Rocks," a lengthy article by Robert Draper in *The New York Times Magazine* addresses the libertarian ideology especially as expressed by Republican Senator Rand Paul, son of Ron Paul, 1988 presidential candidate of the Libertarian Party.²⁹ Ron Paul was elected to the House of Representatives as a Republican and later unsuccessfully sought the Republican nomination for president in 2008 and 2012. Senator Paul inherited his father's leadership of the libertarian wing of the Republican Party.

Discussing Rand Paul's views and those of libertarians in general, Draper says, "Foreign policy is the easiest place to start. With rare exceptions, libertarian leaders have recently advocated staying out of Libya, Syria, Iran, Iraq and Nigeria." That contrasts with "the hawkishness that still predominates within the Republican Party."

[Former Vice-President under George W. Bush] Dick Cheney dusted off the word "isolationism"—which, in foreign-policy speak, is essentially a synonymy for "wild-eyed extremism"—in describing Paul's aversion to a renewed military presence in Iraq. Rick Perry made a similar charge in a Washington Post op-ed titled, "Why Rand Paul Is Wrong on Iraq." [Republican] Senator John McCain has been particularly caustic, saying that a Rand Paul foreign policy would constitute a dangerous retreat into a "Fortress America."

Draper understandably says, "The relationship between the libertarian movement and the Republican Party is a fraught one."

The G.O.P's traditional "three-legged stool" is propped up by not only libertarian advocates for free markets but also by hawks, who believe in a well-financed and forward-leaning military, and by social conservatives, who believe that the government should play a role in preserving family values. Neither of the other legs feels supported by libertarians, and with cause.

Two questions arise: What proportion of Republican party identifiers are libertarian, and what proportion of conservatives are libertarians? According to a 2014 Pew survey, only 57 percent of a national sample knew that libertarian refers to "someone whose political views emphasize individual freedom by limiting the role of government."³⁰ (For comparison, 60 percent in a 2014 survey knew that Ukraine was formerly part of the Soviet Union.³¹) Asked separately, 14 percent said that the term "libertarian" described them well. Of those who knew the meaning of the term, however, only 11 percent defined themselves as libertarian.

For ease of discussion, let us say that 12 percent of the voters in 2014 were libertarians. Let us assume (at the extreme) that they all resided within the categories of Republicans (36 percent) and conservatives (37 percent) in the 2014 exit polls. Then a maximum of one-third each of Republicans and conservatives are libertarians. Because some (perhaps many) libertarians classify themselves as political independents and ideological moderates, the extreme assumptions above no doubt inflates their proportions among Republicans and conservatives. My guess, and it is only a guess, is that genuine libertarians comprise a small but potentially important minority (under 20 percent) within the Republican party and among conservatives.

One indication of the limited political appeal of libertarianism can be drawn from examining the electoral fortunes of the Libertarian Party. It was founded as a national party in

1971, ran its first presidential candidate in 1972, and ran candidates in all ten subsequent presidential elections including 2012. Only once (in 1980) did it receive more than 1 percent of the vote (1.06%). The Libertarian Party ran candidates for the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives in all 22 elections from 1972 to 2014 (122 House candidates in 2014), never elected one, and never received above 2 percent of the popular vote cast for those offices—although individual candidates sometimes won as much as 5 percent in the races that they lost.³² The Libertarian Party faces many systemic barriers in the U.S. political system to its electoral success, but the point is clear that its message—maximize freedom and minimize order—has not resonated with the public. For the most part, Republican conservatism is indeed conservative, not libertarian.

Summary and Conclusion

The 2014 midterm elections carried few, if any, lessons for *conservatism* as a philosophy or ideology. However, political *conservatives* have been busy drawing lessons for the next election. Viewing the results of the 2014, conservative Republicans have concluded that voters favor traditionally conservative candidates. In the strongly Republican state of Kansas, both the very conservative Governor Sam Brownback and the very conservative Senator Pat Roberts, who early in the campaign were at risk of losing to Democratic candidates, won surprisingly easily by stressing their conservative credentials.³³ The Internet site Crowdpac, which matches voters to candidates, found that voters replaced retiring Republican incumbents with more conservative Republicans in 12 of 20 cases.³⁴ In state after state—including the Democratic strongholds of Massachusetts, Illinois, and Maryland—conservative Republicans defeated liberal Democratic governors.

The conservative Republican sweep of national and state offices across the nation in the cold midterm election of 2014 reinforces the long-standing argument of Republican conservatives. Republicans can win if they campaign as conservatives on a wide range of political issues, governing against abortion, against same-sex marriage, against undocumented immigrants, and against immigration in general. They should govern to promote religious principles in education, ban textbooks that teach evolution, require the use of English, and strengthen the powers of local police. And they should certainly support greater spending for the military and a more muscular foreign policy.

Despite the lessons drawn by Republican victors, it not clear that they won because they campaigned as conservatives as much as that Democrats lost due to Obama's failings, to international political reversals, to economic dissatisfaction of the middle class, to the usual decline in fortunes for lame-duck presidents, or to other political events and issues that led to low voter turnout and high Republican voting. What is clear is that there will be another election in two years with a very different electorate that will test the Republicans' reliance on their conservative policies.

In 2016, the Summer Olympics will be held in Brazil. The temperature in Rio de Janeiro in August averages only 22° C (71°F), but the forecast for the November 8, 2016 presidential election in the United States is hot, hot, hot with a thunderstorm of voters.

Appendix A:

Poll Questions on Respondents' Ideology, 1935-1969

- If there were only two political parties in this country--Conservative and Liberal--which would you join?* Gallup Poll; May 11, 1936 - May 16, 1936
- In politics, do you regard yourself as a liberal or conservative* Gallup Poll (AIPO); Jan 20, 1938 - Jan 25, 1938
- Do you regard yourself as a conservative, or a liberal, or somewhere in between?* Roper/Fortune Survey; Aug 1, 1944 - Aug 14, 1944
- In politics, do you regard yourself as a liberal or conservative?* NORC Post-Election Survey 1944; Nov 26, 1944 - Dec 3, 1944
- Do you consider yourself to be a conservative or a liberal in your political views?* Gallup Poll; Mar 19, 1948 - Mar 24, 1948
- When it comes to national issues, do you regard yourself, in general, as a liberal, as a conservative, or as something else?* Foreign Affairs Survey; Jan 27, 1949 - Feb 6, 1949
- Do you consider yourself to be a conservative or a liberal in your political views?* Gallup Poll (AIPO); Mar 26, 1950 - Mar 31, 1950
- Taking everything into account, do you consider yourself, in general, as a liberal or as a conservative?* Gallup Poll; Feb 25, 1954 - Mar 2, 1954
- Taking everything into account, would you say that, in general, you think of yourself as a liberal--or as a conservative?* Gallup Poll (AIPO); Dec 31, 1954 - Jan 5, 1955
- Taking everything into account would you say that you, yourself, are more of a liberal or more of a conservative in politics* Gallup Poll (AIPO); May 12, 1955 - May 17, 1955
- Taking everything into account would you say that you, yourself, are more of a liberal or more of a conservative in politics?* Gallup Poll (AIPO); Jan 17, 1957 - Jan 22, 1957
- Which of these probably comes closest to your position in politics?... Conservative Republican, liberal Republican, Independent who leans Republican, Independent without party preference, Independent who leans Democratic, conservative Democrat, liberal Democrat* National Labor Issues Survey; Dec, 1961 - Dec, 1961
- In politics, would you say you are a liberal or a conservative?* Survey Research Service Amalgam; Jun, 1965 - Jun, 1965
- What do you consider yourself in your political point of view--a conservative, a liberal or middle of the road?* Harris Survey; Jun, 1967 - Jun, 1967
- What do you consider yourself--conservative, middle of the road, liberal or radical?* Harris Survey; Sep, 1967 - Sep, 1967
- How would you describe your political beliefs--as conservative, moderately conservative, moderately liberal or liberal?* Gallup Poll (AIPO); Jul 10, 1969 - Jul 15, 1969

ENDNOTES

¹ Michael P. McDonald, "November General Election Turnout" for 2010, 2012, and 2014, *United States Elections Project*, <http://www.electproject.org/2014g>.

² Nate Cohen, "Why Democrats Cant Win," *New York Times*, September 6, 2014, p. SR1.

³ Jeremy W. Peters, "Cry of G.O.P. In Campaign: All Is Dismal," *New York Times* (October 10, 2014), p. 1.

⁴ Philip E. Converse thoroughly explores the importance of coherence to ideology in "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in David E. Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent* (New York: Free Press, 1964), pp. 206-261.

⁵ Kathleen Knight traces the history of the term in "Transformations of the Concept of Ideology in the Twentieth Century," *American Political Science Review*, 100 (November, 2006), 619-626. Also see Terence Ball and Richard Dagger, "Ideologies, Political," in George Thomas Kurian, *The Encyclopedia of Political Science, Volume 3* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press), pp. 759-762.

⁶ Frances E. Lee, *Beyond Ideology: Politics, Principles, and Partisanship in the U.S. Senate* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 27.

⁷ See Kenneth Janda, "1984: When Liberal Became a Dirty Word," a detailed analysis of the usage of "liberal" and "conservative" in Democratic and Republican party platforms since 1840, available at the link below. This research was facilitated by the collected data on party platforms and the dedicated search engine at <http://janda.org/politxts/PartyPlatforms/listing.html>.

⁸ The observed shift to attack mode in Republican Platform rhetoric in 1984 is consistent with the analysis of Walter J. Stone, Ronald B. Rapoport, and Alan I. Abramowitz, "The Reagan Revolution and Party Polarization in the 1980s," in L. Sandy Maisel (ed.), *The Parties Respond: Changes in the American Party System* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), pp. 67-93.

⁹ Lee, *Beyond Ideology* pp. 31-32.

¹⁰ The Roper Center web site is at http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/about_roper.html. Roper's iPoll search engine finds words in past survey questions. Terminating a search term with "%" in iPoll allows for truncated searching, which finds liberal, liberals, liberalism, liberalize, and so on. Both "liberal%" and "conserve%" were used as search terms.

¹¹ For example, a November 6, 1936 Gallup Poll asked, "Should President Roosevelt's second Administration be more liberal, more conservative, or about the same as his first?" A series of questions in an August 1938 *Fortune* survey named eleven different people (e.g., Henry Ford) and then asked whether respondents would describe each "as—reactionary, conservative, liberal or radical?" In April 1944 an Office of Public Opinion Research Survey asked, "How important do you think it is that the next President be liberal/conservative? . . . Very important, moderately important." None of these questions asked about the respondent's ideology.

¹² Consider the question in a 1936 Gallup Poll (the earliest question turned up in the iPoll search), "If there were only two political parties in this country--Conservative and Liberal--which would you join?" Two years later, Gallup asked, "In politics, do you regard yourself as a liberal or conservative?" Six years later, a 1944 Gallup Poll asked something close, but slightly different, "Do you regard yourself as a conservative, or a liberal, or somewhere in between?" As late as 1967, a Harris poll threw "radical" into the options by asking, "What do you consider yourself--conservative, middle of the road, liberal or radical?"

¹³ *The American Voter* (New York John Wiley, 1960) by Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes was the landmark book on voting behavior. It was based primarily on the 1952 and 1956 national election surveys conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan, where they taught. On page 193, the authors write: "Perhaps no abstraction . . . has been used more frequently in the past century for political analysis than the concept of a liberal-conservative continuum—the 'right' and the 'left' of a political spectrum." Indeed, the authors analyzed open-ended questions to probe respondents' understanding of ideology, finding that "Some people clearly perceived a fundamental liberal-conservative continuum." (p. 227) However, they asked no question in either 1952 or 1956 whether respondents thought of themselves as liberals or conservatives. Despite the fact that ideology was a central concept in their analysis of public opinion and voting behavior, they failed to ask that question in subsequent national surveys in 1960, 1964, and 1968.

¹⁴ When Philip Converse was asked via email, "Why did ANES not ask the ideological self-placement question prior to 1972?" He replied: "I am in my mid-80s and getting very forgetful, so I have no real answer whatever! Nonetheless, it occurs to me that possibly such a way of grading people was more or less unknown until 1972, and we helped give it some publicity that since has taken off!" And take off it did.

¹⁵ No polls taken in presidential years from 1952 to 1968 asked suitable questions or furnished creditable results to include in Figure 4. Three Gallup Polls taken March 28-31, 1950; February 25-March 2, 1954; and January 17-22,

1957 were used for 1952, 1956, and 1960 respectively. They came from the Roper Center holdings. A June, 1965 poll by the National Opinion Research Center was used for 1964, and another Gallup Poll taken March 18-25, 1970 represented 1968. The data from 1972 through 2008 came from the American National Election Studies, and the 2012 data came from a Pew Research Center survey in January 2012. The 1950 Gallup poll was used to represent 1952.

¹⁶ Converse, 1964, p. 223.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 222.

¹⁸ CBS News poll taken Feb 22-26, 2006.

¹⁹ Much of this discussion of liberals and conservatives is drawn from Kenneth Janda, Jeffrey Berry, Jerry Goldman, and Deborah Schildkraut, *The Challenge of Democracy: American Government in Global Politics* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2014), pp. 23-26.

²⁰ The term is used narrowly in contemporary politics for the philosophy of the Communitarian Network, a political movement founded by sociologist Amitai Etzioni. This movement rejects both the liberal-conservative classification and the libertarian argument that "individuals should be left on their own to pursue their choices, rights, and self-interests." Like liberals, Etzioni's communitarians believe that there is a role for government in helping the disadvantaged. Like conservatives, they believe that government should be used to promote moral values—preserving the family through more stringent divorce laws, protecting against AIDS through testing programs, and limiting the dissemination of pornography, for example.

²¹ The book is now in its 11th edition. See Kenneth Janda, Jeffrey Berry, Jerry Goldman, and Deborah Schildkraut, *The Challenge of Democracy: American Government in Global Politics*. (Boston: Wadsworth, 2014).

²² The quiz was inspired by a 1969 diagram called the Nolan Chart; see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nolan_Chart.

²³ IDEALog12 accompanies the twelfth edition of *The Challenge of Democracy: American Government in Global Politics*, a college textbook written by Kenneth Janda, Jeffrey Berry, Jerry Goldman and Deborah Schildkraut (Boston: Wadsworth, 2014). We thank Marshall Fritz and the Advocates for Self-Government for ideas and assistance in developing IDEALog.

²⁴ <http://uspolitics.org/instructors/InstructorHomePage/IDEALog10%20scores.pdf>. Over 500 instructors in American government classes have registered their classes on the IDEALog.org website, where over 15,000 students have answered all twenty quiz questions during the past academic year. The program provides instructors with data for their classes—not for individuals—for the purposes of class discussion.

²⁵ <http://libertarianmajority.net/libertarian-polling>.

²⁶ Robert Draper, "Freedom Rocks," *The New York Times Magazine* (August 7, 2014), pp. 24-31, 38-39, at p. 27.

²⁷ Jeremy W. Peters, *New York Times* (October 10, 2014), p. 1

²⁸ Susan Jones, "Cruz: 'Biggest Mistake' Is Continuing to Allow Commercial Flights From Ebola Countries," *cnsnews.com* (October 20, 2014); JC Sevcik, "Rick Perry: ban air travel from countries affected by Ebola," *upi.com* (Oct. 17, 2014)

²⁹ Robert Draper, "Freedom Rocks," *The New York Times Magazine* (August 7, 2014), pp. 24-31, 38-39.

³⁰ <http://www.people-press.org/2014/08/25/libertarians-topline/>

³¹ <http://www.people-press.org/2014/10/02/from-isis-to-unemployment-what-do-americans-know/>

³² See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libertarian_Party_\(United_States\)#Presidential_candidate_performance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libertarian_Party_(United_States)#Presidential_candidate_performance).

³³ John Eligon, "Kansas' Advice to Republicans: Stay to the Right," *New York Times* (November 6, 2014), p. P3.

³⁴ Derek Willis, "New House Will Tilt to the Right, and Left," *New York Times* (November 6, 2012), p. P3.