

The 2016 U.S. Presidential Election: The Lesson for Conservatism

Kenneth Janda

June, 2017

Revised paper originally delivered at the 2014 Annual Conference of Political Scientists, PfalzAkademie, Lambrecht, Germany

In the United States presidential election of November 8, 2016, Republican candidate Donald J. Trump defeated Democrat Hillary Clinton. The election produced several surprises: (1) Clinton handily won the popular vote but did not become president because she lost the electoral vote; (2) an historically large number—seven—of the Electoral College's 538 members did not vote for the candidate to whom they were pledged; and (3) Donald J. Trump, a businessman and television personality with no governmental experience and no perceptible political philosophy, was unexpectedly elected President of the United States of America. Does his election say anything about American government's ideological direction?

It was unusual that the candidate who won the popular vote did not win the electoral vote, but it was not unprecedented. That occurred five times over all 58 United States presidential elections from 1789 to 2016. Three occurrences came in the first 26 elections:

- In 1824, Andrew Jackson won 38,000 more popular votes than John Quincy Adams. Neither candidate—both Democratic-Republicans—won the required number of electoral votes (131) so the decision went to the House of Representatives, which chose Adams.
- In 1876, Democrat Samuel Tilden polled more than 250,000 votes than Republican Rutherford Hayes but 20 electoral votes from three southern states were disputed. Historians claim that the Democrats gave the disputed votes to Hayes in return for withdrawing federal troops from the South, giving whites control of the region.
- In 1888, Democrat Grover Cleveland won more than 90,000 votes than Republican Benjamin Harrison but lost the electoral vote 233 to 168.

For the next 112 years and 27 elections, every presidential candidate who won the popular vote also won the electoral vote. Then deviations occurred twice over just five elections:

- In 2000, Democrat Al Gore polled more than 500,000 votes than Republican George W. Bush. The electoral vote count depended on the outcome of a disputed popular vote count in Florida, which the Supreme Court decided in favor of Bush. With Florida's electoral votes, he had 271 to Gore's 266. Bush won the presidency with one more than the required majority of 270.
- In 2016, Democrat Hillary Clinton polled 2.9 million votes more than Republican Donald Trump. Needing only 270 electoral votes to win the presidency, Trump decisively won office, 304 to 227.

Trump's and Clinton's combined electoral vote of 531 fell 7 short of the total of 538, a number fixed mainly by the fifty states' representation in the United States Congress. The

number's major components are the 435 members of the House of Representatives and the 100 members of the Senate. To that sum of 535, add 3 electoral votes for the District of Columbia, whose residents are allowed to vote for president but who have no representation in either the House or Senate. In nearly every state (and the District of Columbia), the candidate who wins a plurality of the popular vote wins *all* its electoral votes. The two exceptions are Maine and Nebraska, both of which award votes for winning congressional districts.

In reality, voters in presidential elections do not choose the presidential candidates named on the ballots but choose unnamed party-designated slates of the 538 members of the Electoral College. In theory, the elected party slates of the Electoral College are pledged to vote for their parties' candidates. Donald Trump's slates won pluralities of the popular vote in 30 states and in one congressional district in Maine. Hillary Clinton's won vote pluralities in 20 states (including Maine) plus the District of Columbia. Seven members of the Electoral College in three different states failed to vote for the candidate to whom each was pledged:

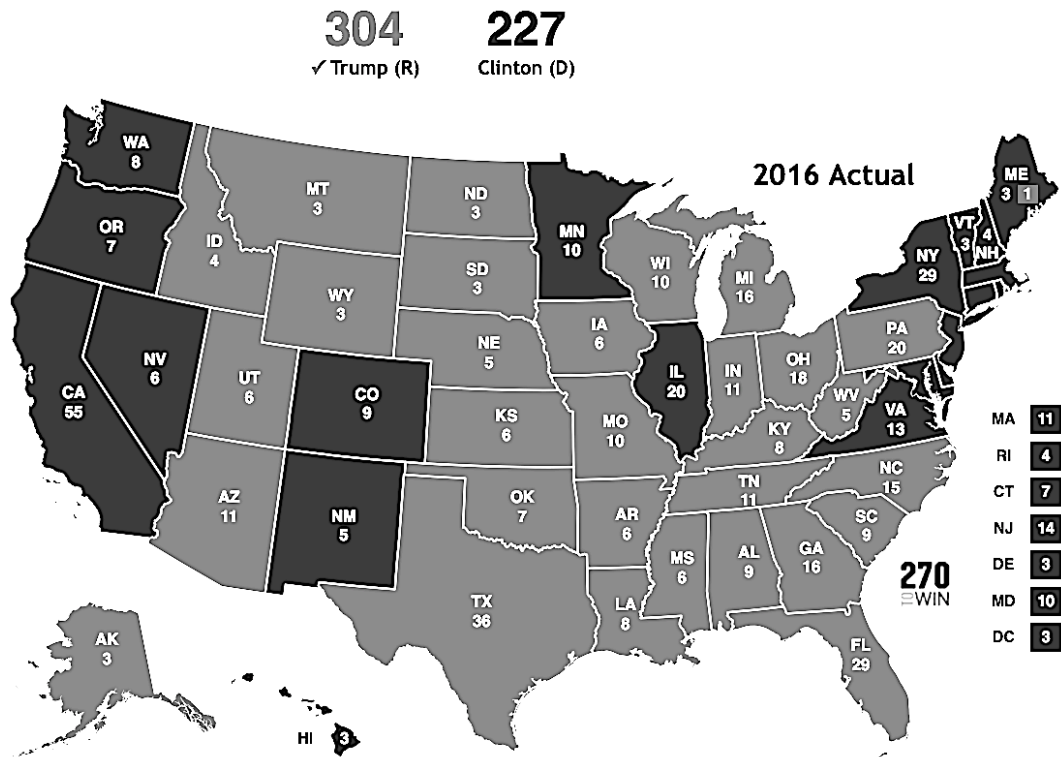
- One Democratic elector in Hawaii voted for Bernie Sanders instead of Hillary Clinton.
- Two Republican electors in Texas split their votes, one voting for Ron Paul and the other for John Kasich.
- Four Democratic electors in the state of Washington split their votes, three voting for Colin Powell and one for Faith Spotted Eagle.¹

Excepting the case in 1872, when candidate Horace Greeley died after the election but before the Electoral College voted, the seven electors in 2016 who voted differently from their pledges were the most ever to do so for living candidates.² Their decisions presumably reflected personal protests at the election outcome, knowing well that their votes would be unable to change it.

Which brings us to the biggest surprise of November 8, 2016: the election of Donald J. Trump as U.S. president. Donald Trump won a majority in the Electoral College despite losing the popular vote 45.8 percent to Clinton's 48.0 percent. That result occurred because of the allocation of electoral votes by states according to their representation in Congress, which is based partly on geography and partly on population. Based on geography, every state is entitled to two Senators, which gives each state two electoral votes. Thus Wyoming, which cast a total of 258,788 votes in the 2016 election, had two U.S. Senators—as did California, which cast 14,181,595 votes. California, however, had 53 Representatives in the House—which is based on population—compared with Wyoming's lone member. Although California had a combined total of 55 electoral votes to Wyoming's 3, the effect of allocating electoral votes by state is to increase the influence of less populous states in the Electoral College.

The electoral votes by states are displayed in Figure 1. Democratic candidate Clinton tended to win the few populous urban states on the west and east coast, while Republican candidate Trump tended to win the many rural states in the center and southern areas of the nation. He won the electoral vote by carrying rural states in the center of the country with smaller populations. According to "exit polls" of almost 25,000 voters taken immediately after they left their voting places, 62 percent in small cities or rural areas voted for Trump, while 59 percent in cities over 50,000 voted for Clinton. Suburban voters split 50-45 for Trump.³

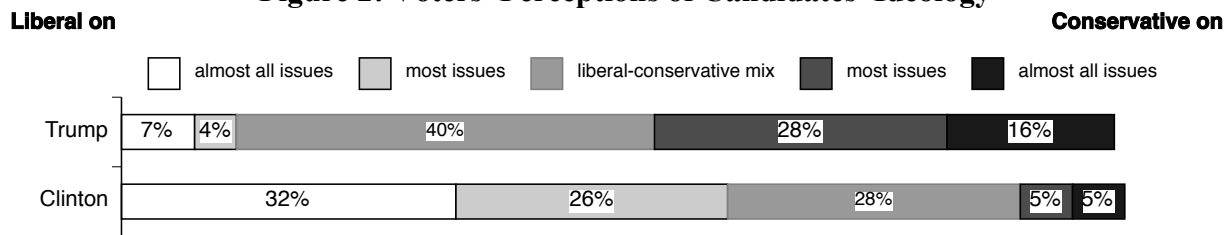
Figure 1: 2016 U.S. Presidential Electoral Votes Cast by States



Polls taken before the November 8 election found that voters viewed both candidates negatively. The Gallup Poll's final release reported that 61 percent of respondents scored Donald Trump "unfavorably"—which was the highest negative rating of a major presidential candidate since Gallup began the measurement in 1956. Gallup's second highest negative rating ever was Hillary Clinton's, at 52 percent.⁴ Many newspaper stories, academic articles, and books have attempted to explain why a politically inexperienced and widely disliked candidate won over a politically experienced and somewhat less disliked candidate who led in pre-election polls.⁵ Instead of trying to explain why Trump won, we will focus on his appeal to the Republican party's conservative base.

After Trump and Clinton had locked up their parties' presidential nominations in the summer of 2016, a Pew Research poll assessed voters' views of the candidates' ideology. The results are displayed in Figure 2.⁶ Voters saw Clinton as decidedly liberal and Trump as conservative, but they viewed Trump as less strongly conservative than Clinton was liberal.

Figure 2: Voters' Perceptions of Candidates' Ideology



Exit poll data following the 2016 election show a strong relationship between voters' self-classification as "liberal" or "conservative" and how they voted. Hillary Clinton was chosen by 84 percent of self-described liberals, who amounted to only 26 percent of the electorate. Of the 35 percent self-described conservatives, 81 percent voted for Donald Trump. (The 39 percent of voters claiming to be "moderate" split 52 to 40 percent for Clinton.)

In contrast to Clinton's solid connection to American-style liberal or "leftist" ideology, Donald Trump's conservative credentials, including his Republican Party affiliation, were questionable. To what extent did the 2016 election hinge on political ideology and was Trump's victory a triumph for conservatism?

Working Definitions of Political Ideology

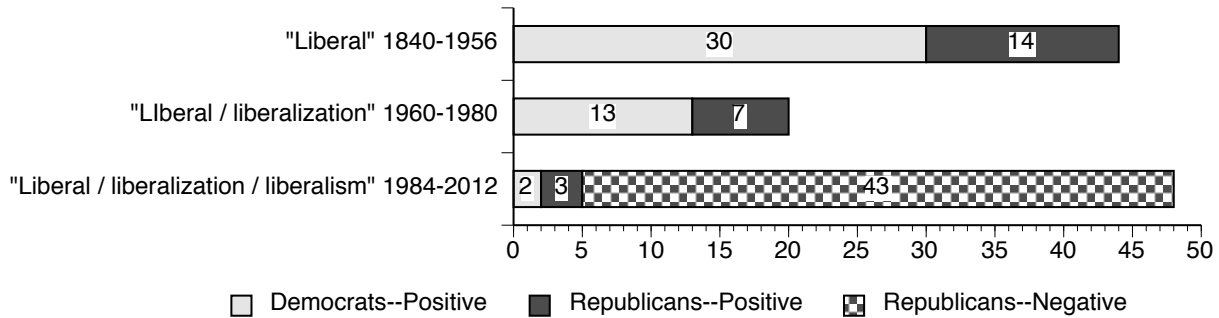
A political ideology can be defined as a coherent and consistent set of values and beliefs about the proper purpose and scope of government.⁷ "Coherent" means that the values and beliefs are organized and logically constrain one another. "Consistent" means a person's opinion of the proper role of government 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,⁸ Frances Lee's research finds that in contemporary political science research it "denotes interrelated political beliefs, values, and policy positions."⁹

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: 1840-2016:

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 2012.¹⁰ 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 3.

Figure 3: Mentions of "Liberal" in Democratic and Republican Platforms, 1840 to 2012



Things changed in 1984, when the Republican platform abruptly attacked Democratic opponents for being liberals.¹¹ 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.” Cowed by this onslaught, Democrats—who like Republicans had once proudly claimed the liberal label—avoided it almost entirely in 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 platforms. In 2016, as in 2012, the Democratic Party Platform failed to mention the term. In 2016, as in 2012, the Republican Party Platform mentioned it only twice. The word has carried no political punch in party platforms.

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.”¹²

This historical review of Democratic and Republican party platforms is that the terms “liberal” and “conservative” lacked partisan linkage prior to the 1950s. A similar history lies behind 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, polls did not ask about respondents’ political ideology.

"Liberal" and "Conservative" in Ideological Self-Placement, 1950-2016:

Before the 1970s, few polls asked people whether they considered themselves politically liberal or conservative. That comes from searching the 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.”¹³ 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.¹⁴

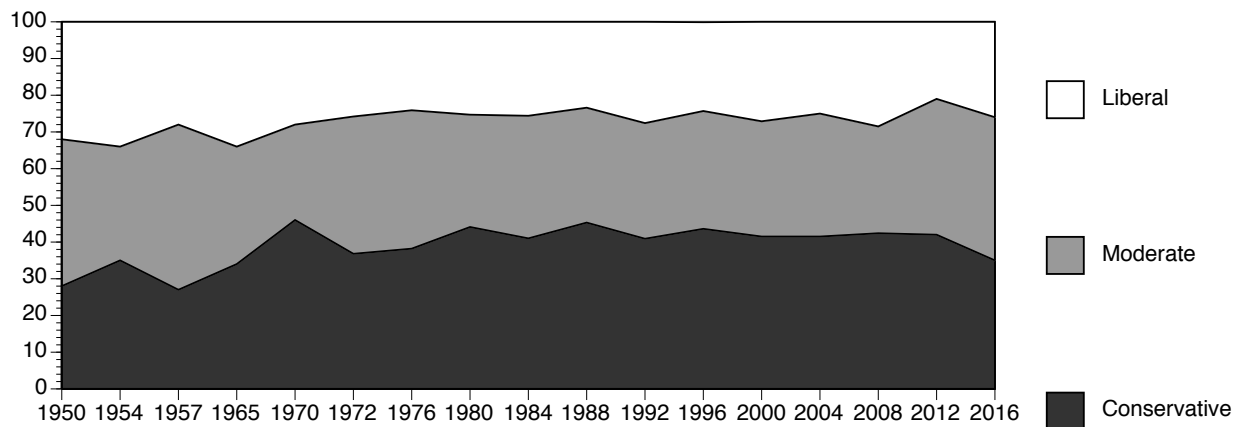
Of these questions from 1935 through 1969, only 16 asked people about their own ideological orientations. Because the questions differed in wording, polls from 1930 to 1970 are difficult to compare.¹⁵ Not until 1972 did a survey organization—the American National Election Studies—design an interview question that was used unchanged over an extended time period.¹⁶ 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).¹⁷ [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.” Apparently, 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 4 includes results from various surveys that asked reasonably suitable questions about liberal-conservative self-placement prior to 1972 along with later and more comparable data.¹⁸

Figure 4: Ideological Distribution, 1950-2016



Beginning in 1970, a plurality of Americans identified themselves as conservatives. Perhaps that reflected the Republicans' negative casting of "liberal"; perhaps "conservative" was by itself a more appealing term; perhaps respondents really were making philosophical choices. Given that about a third of respondents admit that they "haven't thought much" about these terms, we might wonder what the public thought about the ideological options and what they thought the terms meant.

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."¹⁹ 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."²⁰

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:²¹

"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 in American politics—often expressed in its press—is that liberals want "more government" and conservatives want "less government." But that view is too simplistic. Sometimes conservatives clamor for more government (e.g., restricting immigration), 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.²²

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.²³

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?

Figure 5: Two-Dimensional Classification of Political Ideology



According to the typology in Figure 5, 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. Based on the underlying values of freedom, order, and equality, this two-dimensional framework distinguishes between libertarians and conservatives in a way that is more analytically penetrating than classifying conservatives as "economic" v. "social."

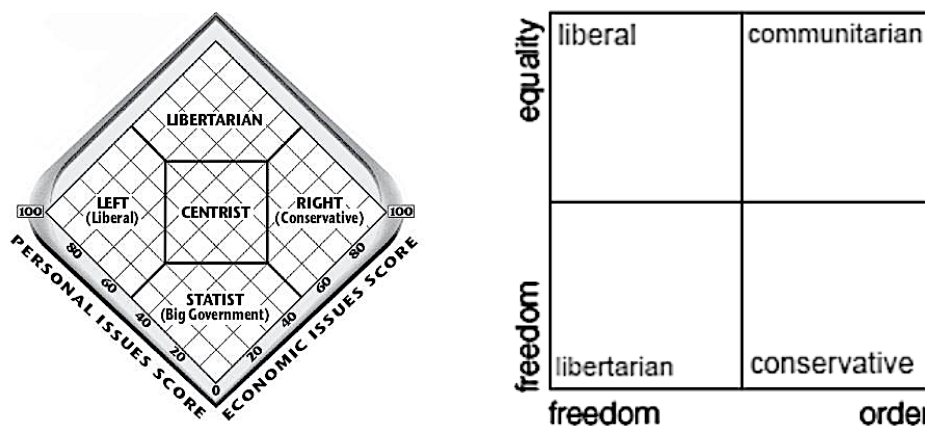
Efforts to rescue the familiar liberal-conservative continuum often distinguish "economic" conservatives (i.e., our *libertarians*) from "social" conservatives (i.e., our *conservatives*). But like using incense to disguise smoking, describing both types of ideological positions as "conservative" simply 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 the one-dimensional liberal-conservative continuum offers them no space to occupy, Libertarians reject it. Libertarians are not Liberals; they are not Conservatives; and they are definitely not moderates.

Libertarians and the Liberal-Conservative Continuum

When the two-dimensional ideological framework in Figure 5 was published in the first edition of *The Challenge of Democracy* (1987),²⁴ 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 created a computer program for "The World's Smallest Political Quiz (WSPQ)," whose original two-dimensional framework resembled that in Figure 5.²⁵ 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.²⁶ Both quizzes have been in use for more than 30 years and now as Internet applications. Their similarity is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: World's Smallest Political Quiz v. IDEALog^a



^a <https://www.libertarianism.com> 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.²⁷ 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.²⁸ They feel too strongly about politics to classify themselves as "moderate," and they 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."²⁹

What about Donald Trump? Over 80 percent of self-described conservatives voted for him in 2016. Was he not a conservative, or at least a libertarian, to attract that level of support? Many others have wondered about Trump's political philosophy. On January 26, 2015, which was six months before Trump won the Republican presidential nomination, the right-wing website, www.brietbart.com, addressed the question: "Is Donald Trump a Conservative?"

This week, Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) has bashed Trump for insufficient conservatism. He explained, "Donald's record does not match what he says as a candidate." Cruz isn't the only one. Last month, Rush Limbaugh said that Trump's attacks on Cruz reflected the fact that he was not a "genuine conservative." Mark Levin said in 2011, "Trump is NOT the real deal... He is not a conservative. He was happy to donate to Schumer, Weiner & Emanuel campaigns last year. He was pro-choice recently and now claims to be pro-life. He sounds more and more like Ross Perot." Andrew Breitbart said at the time, "Of course he's not a conservative. He was for Nancy Pelosi before he was against Nancy Pelosi."³⁰

The Brietbart author continued: "I don't believe Trump is a conservative either; I've said that repeatedly. . . . I've also said that Trump channels conservative anger against the establishment brilliantly, and that he has become a vessel for much-needed conversations on immigration." Where might Trump be placed in our two-dimensional ideological framework?

What Is Donald Trump's Political Philosophy?

The current edition of *The Challenge of Democracy* contends that trade-offs among the values of freedom, order, and equality "explain a great deal of the political conflict in the United

States. These value conflicts also underlie the ideologies that people use to structure their understanding of politics.³¹ Given that political ideology is a consistent set of values and beliefs about the proper purpose and scope of government and that freedom, order, and equality cannot be pursued simultaneously, we label an ideology as being Conservative, Liberal, Libertarian, or Communitarian if one value tends to dominate the other two. Let us begin by examining the government policies that candidate Donald Trump promised to pursue, viewing them in light of freedom, order, and equality.

Table 2: Trump's 2016 Election Campaign Themes

| FREEDOM | ORDER | EQUALITY |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Reduce business regulations | Cause firms to stay in U.S. | Reemploy factory workers |
| Reduce taxes on wealthy | Control borders/build wall | Reemploy miners |
| Reduce environment controls | Expel illegal immigrants | Build infrastructure, jobs |
| Allow religious discrimination | Demand more voter ID | Maintain social security |
| Loosen media standards | Back pro-life laws | Maintain Medicare |
| Promote school choice | Increase military spending | Improve veteran benefits |

Table 2 could be expanded to include other themes in Trump's campaign categorized by their underlying values, but accepting these examples, what do they say about his political ideology? Trump promised to grant more freedom, insure more order, and promote more equality. Because none of these values can be achieved without trading one against another, he cannot be easily classified under any of the labels—Conservative, Libertarian, Liberal or Communitarian.

Figure 5 diagrammed the relationship between the four prominent ideologies in American politics and the values of freedom, order, and equality. Conservatives value order the most; to be consistent they would sacrificing freedom and equality to achieve it. Liberals value equality most; to promote it, they would sacrifice freedom and order. Libertarians extol freedom, which they would not sacrifice for either order or equality. Communitarians value both order and equality over freedom.

Trump appears to plop into the middle of our two-dimensional ideological typology, espousing no clear ideology. In that regard, he resembles the public, whose responses formed the basis of the twenty survey questions asked in IDEALog.org, our Internet application for analyzing political values. Although Trump's campaign promises were inconsistent concerning the values of freedom, order, and equality, they resonated with an ideologically inconsistent electorate and one which understands and cares little about political philosophy.

Three months into Trump's presidency, an Op-Ed article by a professor at the Claremont Institute, a conservative California think tank, opened with the question, "What kind of conservative is President Trump?" and observed:

In his three major public speeches so far—his remarks at the Republican National Convention, his Inaugural Address and his speech to a joint session of Congress—Mr. Trump did not mention conservatism at all. . . .

Mr. Trump is not and never was a movement conservatism. . . . [H]e has displayed little or no patience for libertarianism, traditionalism, neoconservatism or the other endangered species that the movement has sought to conserve for so many decades."³²

Reporters in the more liberal mainstream press, like *The New York Times*, have described President Trump as "less driven by ideology than by instinct,"³³ and noted his "ideological flexibility."³⁴

President Trump's ideological flexibility concerned many in the Republican Party who feared that he would abandon the party's conservative and libertarian principles for pragmatic populism—policies that play to momentary popular opinion more than durable political philosophy. Republican Senator Jeff Flake of Arizona said, "There are some of us who will be pushing to get back to the roots of the party: limited government, economic freedom, individual responsibility, free trade. Those are things that the party has stood on for a long time."³⁵ In her *Wall Street Journal* column, "Trump Tries to Build a 'Different Party,'" longtime Republican speechwriter Peggy Noonan characterized him as saying in his inaugural address: "I am a populist independent, allied not with the two major parties but with the working men and women of America."³⁶

Other Republicans have voiced Peggy Noonan's concerns that Donald Trump's populism was undercutting their party's roots. The editor of the conservative website, Washington Beacon, said, "Populism has been an energy that has carried Republicans into office, but once in office very few of them stay populist."³⁷ The executive editor of the conservative *National Review* argued that Trump, by being aligned with Republican voters, was a step ahead of the party's congressional wing.³⁸ Republican cost-cutters in the House opposed Trump's initial proposals for replacing President Obama's health care law for failing to save enough money. In response, a *Wall Street Journal* editorial gave President Trump and House Speaker Paul Ryan credit for brokering a "compromise between the GOP's moderate and conservative wings" but rued the tendency of Congress for "fanning resentments, not governing. . . . This demonstration of GOP [Republican] dysfunction will make members more skittish about taking other difficult votes."³⁹

Summary and Conclusion

The 2016 presidential election in the United States carried few, if any, lessons for American *conservatism* as a philosophy or ideology. In part, that is because the victor, Donald J. Trump, showed little interest in governing according to any political ideology. All other presidents since 1950, most prominently Johnson on the left and Reagan on the right, had noticeable ideological leanings. Shared ideologies connect presidents to politically active organizations and voting groups, which support them despite momentary setbacks. To his credit, Trump won the Republican nomination and the general election without much help from traditional conservative or libertarian organizations, but he may lack their backing when he needs it. The public's opinion at any given moment has shallow roots.

Also in part, Americans have yet to appreciate the significance of having two quite different philosophies masquerading under a single label in the United States. In popular usage, the term "conservative"—often a prefix to "Republican"—does not distinguish between two

different factions operating in an uneasy alliance in American politics. According to the two-dimensional framework above, Conservatives (with a capital C) are those who would use government to limit immigration, stop abortions, restrict voting, end-same-sex marriages, tax imports, and fund religious schools. True Conservative Republicans are often opposed by their Libertarian Republican brethren, who oppose such uses of government power while favoring free trade, lower taxes, less spending, and gay rights.

These groups will continue to co-exist in the Republican Party until they find that Conservatives and Libertarians can no longer cooperate in government and win elections under the same party label. It remains to be seen whether Donald Trump's populistic presidency will expose the fault lines between these two frequently incompatible groups. Gerald F. Seib's essay in the *Wall Street Journal* described the challenge to the party:

The difficulty for the national GOP now will be figuring out what it stands for. What does a party that has long back unfettered trade and open markets do when it is taken over by a protectionist president who insist that free-trade agreements are a job-killing sham, backed by an army of supporters who see the financial markets as rigged against them?⁴⁰

If the Trump presidency does unravel the Republican Party, that would be a lesson learned.

ENDNOTES

¹ Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, *Statistics of the Presidential and Congressional Election, November 8, 2016* (Washington, DC: February 22, 2017).

² "Faithless Electors in the United States Presidential Election, 2016," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faithless_electors_in_the_United_States_presidential_election_2016.

³ "CNN 2016 Exit Polls," at <http://edition.cnn.com/election/results/exit-polls>.

⁴ Lydia Saad, "Trump and Clinton Finish with Historically Poor Images," *Gallup* (November 8, 2016), at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/197231/trump-clinton-finish-historically-poor-images.aspx>.

⁵ For example, William J. Crotty (ed.), *Winning the Presidency 2016* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

⁶ Pew Research Center, "Voters' Perceptions of the Candidates: Traits, Ideology and Impact on Issues," (July 14, 2016) at <http://www.people-press.org/2016/07/14/voters-perceptions-of-the-candidates-traits-ideology-and-impact-on-issues/>.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.

⁹ Frances E. Lee, *Beyond Ideology: Politics, Principles, and Partisanship in the U.S. Senate* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 27.

¹⁰ 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>.

¹¹ 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.

¹² Lee, *Beyond Ideology* pp. 31-32.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 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?"

¹⁶ *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.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ 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. Data for 2016 came from election exit polls. The 1950 Gallup poll was used to represent 1952.

¹⁹ Converse, 1964, p. 223.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 222. For example see: Red Cross USA

²¹ CBS News poll taken Feb 22-26, 2006.

²² Much of this discussion of liberals and conservatives is drawn from Kenneth Janda, Jeffrey Berry, Jerry Goldman, Deborah Schildkraut, and Paul Manna, *The Challenge of Democracy: American Government in Global Politics* (Boston: Cengage, 2017), pp. 21-23.

²³ 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.

²⁴ The book is now in its 1th edition. See Kenneth Janda, Jeffrey Berry, Jerry Goldman, and Deborah Schildkraut, *The Challenge of Democracy: American Government in Global Politics*. (Boston: Wadsworth, 2014).

²⁵ The quiz was inspired by a 1969 diagram called the Nolan Chart; see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nolan_Chart.

²⁶ IDEALog13 accompanies the current edition of *The Challenge of Democracy: American Government in Global Politics*. We thank Marshall Fritz and the Advocates for Self-Government for ideas and assistance in developing IDEALog.

²⁷ <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.

²⁸ <http://libertarianmajority.net/libertarian-polling>.

²⁹ Robert Draper, "Freedom Rocks," *The New York Times Magazine* (August 7, 2014), pp. 24-31, 38-39, at p. 27.

³⁰ Ben Shapiro, "Is Donald Trump a Conservative?" at <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2016/01/24/is-donald-trump-conservative-heres-the-rundown/>

³¹ Janda *et al.*, *The Challenge of Democracy*, p. 17.

³² Charles R. Kesler, "Trump's Republican History Lesson," *New York Times* (April 26, 2017), p. A22.

³³ Pater Baker, "Populist in Words, if Not in Actions," *New York Times*, (April 19, 2017), p. A18.

³⁴ Glenn Thrush and Maggie Haberman, "A Brave Front, But Regrets? He Has a Few," *New York Times* (March 24, 2017), p. 1.

³⁵ Quoted in Jonathan Martin, "Conservatives Worry As Populist Decree Challenges G.O.P. Identity," *New York Times* (January 22, 2017), p. A13.

³⁶ Peggy Noonan, "Trump Tries to Build a 'Different Party,'" *Wall Street Journal* (January 28, 2017), p. A11.

³⁷ Martin, "Conservatives Worry As Populist Decree Challenges G.O.P. Identity."

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Editorial, "The ObamaCare Republicans," *Wall Street Journal* (March 25, 2017), p. A12.

⁴⁰ Gerald F. Seib, "That's the Way the Party Crumbles," *Wall Street Journal* February 25, 2017, pp. C1-2.