

Constructs for Political Identity

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[T]he social world is not essentially structureless. It has a particular meaning and relevance structure for the human beings living, thinking, and acting therein. They have preselected and preinterpreted this world by a series of common-sense constructs of the reality of daily life, and it is these thought-objects which determine their behavior, define the goal of their action, the means available for attaining them—in brief, which help them find their bearings within the natural and socio-cultural environment and to come to terms with it.¹

ABSTRACT: This essay has three parts and an appendix. The first part is devoted to the roots of social constructivism in the work of Alfred Schutz, the teacher of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann and, beyond Schutz, Edmund Husserl. In passages from these figures it is described how pre-given things are logically formed and then ideal types or constructs with content are also constituted about things. Schutz begins in the egological perspective but goes beyond that to the intersubjective perspective to show how the world of everyday life has constructs received from predecessors as well as contemporaries and shared by in-groups. Something is said about how common-sense constructs are constituted like cultural-scientific ones are, motivation in everyday life is touched on, and the role of the ordinary vernacular in their transmission shown.

In the second part there is an analysis that goes beyond prior work and focused on how constructs have recently been received and/or reinforced by political election polling in the latest presidential election in the USA. A relatively simple set of polling results is appended as an example. These constructs involve results in percentages that can be understood qualitatively for Democrats and Republicans divided into gender groups, generations, races, regions, education, income or social class, and religion.

It is suggested in the third part how this account can be considered reflective, descriptive, and culture-appreciative and thus phenomenological. Similar constructing no doubt occurs in other industrialized countries and affects so-called common sense.

Deeper understanding than this analysis reaches is called for at the end of this essay.

INTRODUCTION

¹ Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers*, Vol. I, edited Maurice Natanson (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), p.6. Hereafter this source will be cited with embedded references as “CP I.”

In previous essays I have explored the some sociocultural dimensions of the USA, namely: ethnicity, generation, gender, nationality, and status. In those cases I analyzed what I call basic culture, which is to say how individual and collective selves, others, institutions, situations, and things have belief characteristics, values, and uses constituted subconceptually in habits and traditions of believing, valuing, and willing that are acquired from others as well as in personal efforts. To do that, I abstracted from the conceptual constructs that are additionally constituted in everyday thinking. In the present research, however, I will reverse that emphasis and focus on the origin and nature of a sort current common-sense constructs.

The first part of this essay will draw on Edmund Husserl as well as Alfred Schutz in order to sketch a textual foundation that is plausible for so-called “social constructionism.” The second part of this essay will describe how political identity can currently be constructed and interpreted in the USA by use of results of an opinion poll conducted after the recent national election. This type of polling is now ubiquitous and a major source of common-sense constructs about segments of the electorate and their political tendencies structuring presentations in television, radio, and the blogosphere. Colleagues in other industrialized countries probably encounter a similar situation.

COMMON-SENSE CONSTRUCTING AND GROUPS

Social Constructionism has its immediate origin in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967) by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, but their approach is derived from the work of Alfred Schutz (1899-1959) and, behind him,

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Prior to taking this approach to a concrete case, it can be introduced through a brief study of their thought.

In English translation, Husserl writes in §38 of his *Cartesianische Meditationen* [1931] as follows.

In active genesis the Ego functions as productively constitutive, by means of [mental] processes that are specifically acts of the Ego. Here belong all the works of *practical reason*, in a maximally broad sense. In this sense even logical reason is practical. The characteristic feature (in the case of the realm of logos) ... is that Ego-acts pooled in a sociality ..., become combined in a manifold, specifically active synthesis and, on the basis of things already given (in modes of consciousness that give beforehand), *constitute new things originally*. These then present themselves for consciousness as *products*. Thus, in collecting, the collection <is constituted>; in counting, the number; in dividing, the part; in predicating, the predicate and the predicational complex of affairs; in inferring, the inference; and so forth. ... On the Ego side there becomes constituted a consequent habituality of continuing acceptance, which thereupon is part of the constitution of the thing as simply existing for the Ego: a thing that can always be seized upon, be it in reiterated producings, with synthetic consciousness of the same objectivity as given again in “*categorial intuition*,” or be it in a synthetically appertinent vague consciousness. The ... constitution of such things (cultural things, for example), in relation to *intersubjective* activities, presupposes the antecedent constitution of a transcendental intersubjectivity.²

² Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), p.77. The antecedent constitution in transcendental intersubjectivity will not be pursued here.

A reflectively theoretical natural or, better, worldly attitude will suffice, i.e., what Schutz following Husserl repeatedly called “the constitutive phenomenology of the natural attitude.” In the above passage Husserl emphasizes the categorial forms discernable in propositions, but, as he makes especially clear in *Formale und transzendente Logik* (1929), these forms are also forms of states of affairs that can be thematized in what is then formal ontology rather than apophantics. Unless the form is nullified, all things thereafter have that same form bestowed upon them, producings of the form can be reactivated, and the form can be grasped in categorial intuition. This is because, as an after-effect of active constitution, there are habitualities and processes of secondary passivity in which objects pregiven with pertinent determinations are thereafter automatically formed in the pertinent way.

To complete a sketch of the phenomenological foundations of social constructivism, it is necessary to extend Husserl’s statements from form to content, to distinguish two types of cultural characteristics, and to move from the egological to the intersubjective perspective. In the next paragraph Husserl includes content when he describes how the naturalistic stratum of the concrete thing that is always already constituted in primarily passive encountering can be thematized by disregarding “all the ‘spiritual’ or ‘cultural’ characteristics that make it knowable as, for example, a hammer, a table, an aesthetic creation.” (It would have been convenient for the present exposition if Schutz had mentioned that individual and collective selves and others also originally have cultural characteristics that could be abstracted from, but he did not.)

Where cultural characteristics are concerned, one kind has been mentioned above that deserves the title “basic culture” and consists of the

belief characteristics, values, and uses constituted in subconceptual believing, valuing, and willing. The interest here, however, is in a second kind of cultural characteristics, which is composed of conceptual constructs and involves thinking, constructing, and concepts. Husserl's follower Alfred Schutz developed this aspect of his master's thought. Referring early on to the *Cartesianische Meditationen*, Schutz asserts that for Husserl "the 'cultural world' presupposed primordial and secondary constitution"³ and writes of how "the whole world of cultural objects . . . , [includes] everything from artifacts to institutions and conventional ways of doing things."⁴

Some years later, Schutz again writes that tools are "meaningful products" and goes on to say that,

In analyzing the first constructs of common-sense thinking in everyday life we proceeded, however, as if the world were my private world and as if we were entitled to disregard the fact that it is from the outset an intersubjective world of culture. . . . It is a world of culture because, from the outset, *the world of everyday life is a universe of significance to us, that is, a texture of meaning* which we have to interpret in order to find our bearings within it and come to terms with it. This texture of meaning, however—and this is what distinguishes the realm of culture from that of nature—originates and has been instituted by human actions, our own and our fellow-men's contemporaries and predecessors. All cultural objects—tools,

³Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers*, Vol. IV, ed. Helmut Wagner, George Psathas, and Fred Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), p. 164.

⁴Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, trans. George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1967), p. 182.

symbols, language systems, works of art, social institutions, etc.— point back by their very origin and meaning to the activities of human subjects.” (CP I 10, emphasis added)

He also writes that,

It is a world of culture because, from the outset, the life-world is a universe of significations [*Bedeutsamkeiten*] to us, i.e., a framework of meaning (*Sinnzusammenhang*) which we have to interpret, and of interrelations of meaning which we institute only through our action in this life-world. It is a world of culture also because we are always conscious of its historicity, which we encounter in tradition and habituality, and which is capable of being examined because the “already-given” refers back to one’s own activity or to the activity of Others, of which it is the sediment. (CP I 133)

In such passages it is clear that Schutz is referring no longer to things as constituted by the individual but to things as constituted by others as well. Thus he is engaged in intersubjective rather than egological phenomenology.⁵

In such passages Schutz furthermore uses the word “construct,” having previously referred to “ideal types.” When Aron Gurwitsch challenged this use of “construct,” Schutz explained that “in the social sciences there is the increasing tendency to replace the concept of type and

⁵ Cf. Lester Embree, “Dorion Cairns, Alfred Schutz, and the Egological Reduction,” *Alfred Schutz and his Intellectual Partners*, ed. NASU Hisashi, Lester Embree, George Psathas, and Ilja Srubar, Universitaetsverlag Konstanz, Konstanz, 2009, pp. 177-216.

ideal type by the concept of ‘construct.’”⁶ This is not the occasion to study how Schutz develops Max Weber’s concept of ideal type using the account of typicality in Husserl’s *Erfahrung und Urteil* (1939), but if only to show the continuity with Husserl, it deserves mention that Schutz holds that “what is experienced in the actual perception of an object is apperceptively translated to any similar object perceived merely as to its type.” (CP I 8)

In the passages just quoted, Schutz is again beyond the egological perspective, referring to intersubjectivity, and not only the constructing activity of the self but also of Others. With respect to how the world is not only cultural but also social, there is this general passage.

Only in reference to me does a certain kind of my relations with others obtain the specific meaning which I designate with the word "We"; only with reference to "Us," whose center I am, do others stand out as "You," and in reference to "You," who refer back to me, third parties stand out as "They." In the dimension of time there are with reference to me in my actual biographical moment "contemporaries," with whom a mutual interplay of action and reaction can be established; "predecessors," upon whom I cannot act, but whose past actions and their outcome are open to my interpretation and may influence my own actions; and "successors," of whom no experience is possible but toward whom I may orient my actions in a more or less empty anticipation. All these relations show the most manifold forms of intimacy and anonymity, of familiarity and strangeness, of intensity and extensity. (CP I 16)

⁶ Aron Gurwitsch and Alfred Schutz, *Philosophers in Exile: The Correspondence of Alfred Schutz and Aron Gurwitsch*, ed. Richard Grathoff, trans. J. Claude Evans (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 176.

The reference here is to individuals in various connections, but it is easy in Schutz's spirit to extend it to groups. He does not say as much about groups and group membership as he might have, but still there are relevant passages, e.g., "Each of us is a member of the group into which he was born or which he has joined and which continues to exist if some of its members die and others enter into it. Everywhere there will be systems of kinship, age groups and sex groups, differentiations according to occupation, and an organization of power and command which leads to the categories of social status and prestige." (CP I 330) And in "Equality and the Meaning Structure of the Social World" (1955) he describes the collectively held constructs of groups to which individuals do or do not belong, i.e., "in-groups" and "out-groups."

As for how constructs of individuals (and, implicitly, groups) are arrived at, his description of the procedure of the cultural scientist can also be taken to show what is involved in common-sense thinking. One begins by constructing typical "course-of-action" patterns that correspond to behavior that is observed. These patterns are then coordinated with "personal types" and also, although Schutz underemphasizes them as well, there are "product types."

Moreover, typical "in-order-to" and "because motives" corresponding to the course-of-action patterns are imputed:

Motives are never isolated elements but grouped in great and consistent systems of hierarchical order. Having grasped a sufficient number of elements of such a system, *I* have a fair chance of completing the empty positions of the system by correct conjectures. Basing my assumption on the inner logical structure of such a motive system, *I* am able to make, with great likelihood of proving right,

inferences concerning those parts which remain hidden. But, of course, all this presupposes interpretation from the subjective point of view, i.e., answering the question "What does all this mean for the actor?" (CP I 40-41)

One may wonder about the role of language in this account of common-sense constructs. In this respect, Schutz asserts that,

Only a very small part of my knowledge of the world originates within my personal experience. The greater part is socially derived, handed down to me by my friends, my parents, my teachers and the teachers of my teachers. I am taught not only how to define the environment ..., but also how typical constructs have to be formed in accordance with the system of relevance accepted from the anonymous unified point of view of the in-group. This includes ways of life, methods of coming to terms with the environment, efficient recipes for the use of typical means for bringing about typical ends in typical situations. The typifying medium *par excellence* by which socially derived knowledge is transmitted is the vocabulary and the syntax of everyday language. The vernacular of everyday life is primarily a language of named things and events, and any name includes typification and generalization referring to the relevance system prevailing in the linguistic in-group which found the named thing significant enough to provide a separate term for it. The pre-scientific vernacular can be interpreted as a treasure house of ready made pre-constituted types and characteristics, all socially derived and carrying along an open horizon of unexplored content. (CP I 14)

In sum and according to Schutz, who builds on foundations laid by Edmund Husserl, individuals and groups in everyday life always already have many constructs in common-sense with which to interpret themselves and others. And it follows that this general approach can be taken to various dimensions of the socio-cultural world. [2,231 words thus far]

SOME POLITICAL CONSTRUCTS IN THE USA TODAY

One could wish that Schutz had said more about the origins of common-sense constructs. Some sources are no doubt difficult to find and others impossible, but one source in the industrialized countries is social science and another is the derivative practice of opinion polling. This is the theme of the second part of this essay. Schutz does recognize the “secularization” of philosophical and religious ideas into common sense, but seems not to have studied how social-scientific results also come to play a role in everyday thinking. Public opinion polling employs social-scientific methods to understand and affect aspects of social life.

For people following the primary and general election campaigns for president of the USA in 2007-2008, a fairly elaborate set of constructs based on opinion polling was received through the media. A relatively simple summary of typical results of such polling is appended to the present essay. Quite a few categories are presented in it and make an exercise of constructing the political identities of others as well as oneself possible.

Opinion polls work, quite briefly, by telephoning upwards of 1,000 randomly selected citizens registered and intending to vote, artfully asking them a series of questions, and then analyzing the findings statistically in a descriptive way. The probabilistic validity of polls is shown in how highly the polling results converge with subsequent voting. They show how

segments of the citizenry at a given time think about candidates, issues, themselves, and others.

A few remarks for outsiders about political life in the USA. There is no legal obligation to vote but somewhat over half of citizens over 18 do so and do so in some elections more than others. It is a mistake to believe that all voters lean either to the left or the right, for besides as Democrats or Republicans roughly a third of the citizenry register as Independents. The last mentioned usually cannot vote in primary elections, which are elections within parties to determine candidates for the general election. Nevertheless, it is best to think of the electorate in the USA as composed of three roughly equal parts. It is often the Independents who decide the outcome, but there are also continua of progressive to conservative ideology within all three parts and small but sometimes decisive proportions within a given party vote for the other party's candidate.

Drawing now on the appended analysis by Juliana Horowitz of the Pew Research Center for People and the Press, who focuses on the two major parties, there were at the time of the polling six key policy issues. This list was no doubt itself determined by polling and that polling clearly took place before the current deep economic crisis emerged and jumped to the top of the list of issues. Horowitz contends that the ideologies of the parties as conservative, moderate, or liberal have not significantly changed (if one wonders if they done so after the economic crisis has begun, one can search for more recent polling results).

The issues in late November 2008 were (1) the tax cuts made by the Bush administration, (2) the use of military force in Iraq, (3) abortion, (4)

health care, (5) marriage between homosexuals, and (6) offshore drilling for oil. Sometimes liberals, moderates, and conservatives within and between the major parties are balanced on issues such as offshore drilling and at other times they disagree more or less strongly, e.g., on gay marriage.

The electorate is divided up in the polling industry's constructs in seven ways plus one of special interest in the recent presidential election.

(1) Interestingly, *male and female* Democrats are practically equal in percentages claiming to be conservative (25%), moderate (37%), and liberal (34%) and Republican men and women are also practically the same at 68% conservative, 25% moderate and 5% liberal. Within the two parties at least, the gender of the voter does not seem to have been especially important in this presidential election.

(2) Then there is the socio-cultural dimension of *generation*. This was important because it is often heard that Barack Obama won by mobilizing Generation Y. Horowitz and, so far as I have noticed, other pollsters distinguish four generations by age at the time of the election, i.e., 18-29, 30-49, 50-64, 65+. The first and last ages mark when one begins to be able to vote and when employees begin to retire in large numbers. These are the generation born before the end of World War II and often called "Traditionalists," then there are the "Baby Boomers," "Generation X," and now "Generation Y," also called the "Millennials." Among Democrats, the youngest generation is remarkably 42% liberal, while the older generations are 34 to 26% liberal, and even among Republicans Gen-Y is 29% liberal while older generations are 27, 23, and 22% liberal in ideology. Generation

is an especially important dimension and recognition of its importance in common-sense thinking has recently grown.

(3) *Race* is an interesting dimension. It is cast in Horowitz's account in terms of black and white, i.e., Euro- and African-Americans. Asian-, Native-, and Latino-Americans are not analyzed. The last mentioned are now some 13% of the population, i.e., 40 million, but many are not yet citizens or are disproportionately too young to vote, which signifies that their proportion of voters is climbing rapidly. Horowitz seems interestingly to have found too few Black Republications to count. But among all Democrats who are Black, 35% say they are conservative and 25% say they are liberal, while all White Democrats are somewhat the opposite with 37% liberal and 21% conservative.

(4) Another dimension of concern to national politics in the USA is *region*. Horowitz divides the USA into the East, the Midwest, the South, and the West, which are already common-sense constructs. Even for Democrats, the South is more conservative than other regions, while the West is considerably more liberal. Among Republicans, there are slightly more conservatives in the Midwest but almost as many (ca. 70%) in the other regions. Region does not seem to make for strong differences on the right.

(5) *Education* for Horowitz has three categories, (1) High School graduate or less, (2) some College, and (3) college graduate. The remarkable thing for Democrats is that 50% of college graduates are liberal, while those with some college are 36% liberal, but 34% of those with high school or less are conservative.

(6) *Income* also has three categories, presumably adjusted for families of four: (1) less than \$30,000, (2) \$30,000 to \$74,999, and (3) \$75,000 or more. This can be taken to be working class, lower middle class, and upper middle class, the wealthy like Black Republicans seemingly too few for a separate category and the poor seldom voting. For Democrats, the working class tends to be more conservative (31%), while the upper middle class tends to be rather liberal (44%) and the lower middle class falls in between. The Republican lower middle class is slightly more conservative than the upper middle class and the Republican working class actually slightly less conservative than its lower middle class. Income or class is thus rather important.

(7) Then there is *religion*. Atheists and agnostics make up some 16% of the population but are not counted by Horowitz. White mainline Protestants are the most liberal among Democrats at 37%, followed by White non-Hispanic Catholics at 28% liberal. White Evangelical Protestants are a remarkable 79% conservative among Republicans, while White non-Hispanic Catholics (66%) and White mainline Protestants (63%) are somewhat less conservative. Religion is a strong factor.

One can easily wish that some of these classifications and measures were combined. Horowitz does not do this for Republicans, but does combine age and race for the Democrats, whose candidate was of course African American. For them, there are only two and three percentage points of difference in ideology between Black Democrats under and over 50 years of age. But White Generation Y Democrats are 48% liberal, with moderates the largest group (40%) among the White Baby Boomers, and Traditionalist Whites are 34% conservative, 33% moderate, and 26% liberal in that party.

CAN THIS ACCOUNT BE CONSIDERED PHENOMENOLOGICAL?

Generally speaking, the role of constructs in how things are encountered is perhaps easiest recognized in how words and distinctions come to mind when one perceives things. This indicates how one has learned in everyday social life habitually to think in constructs that make up common sense. Constructs are then recognizable through reflection on thinking and things-as-thought-about, which is already noetico-noematic and thus phenomenological reflection.⁷ Beyond this, seven remarks occur to me.

To begin with, it deserves mention that common-sense constructs about political identity are frequently quantified in terms of percentages in polling results, something not mentioned by Alfred Schutz, although thinking in terms of percentages, graphs, pie charts, etc. is practically *qualitative* for many in my country today. That 79% of White Evangelical Protestant Republications consider themselves conservative is a fact worth pondering and immediately begins to explain Republican candidate behavior.

Secondly, it deserves emphasis that the common-sense tendency is to understand positions on issues and voting in terms of pre-given constructs already in so-called common sense. Such things would be grasped differently, for example, if radicals were regularly distinguished from

⁷ Cf. Lester Embree, *Análisis reflexivo. Una primera introducción a la Fenomenológica / Reflective Analysis. A First Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. into Castellano by Luis Ramón Rabanaque (Morelia: Editorial Jitanjáfora, 2003, 543 pp. Russian translation, *Лестер Эмбри Рефлексивный анализ. Первоначальное введение в феноменологию*, by Victor Moltchanov, Moscova: Triquadrata, 2005), 223 pp.; in the original English as *Reflective Analysis* (Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2006), 196 pp.; in Japanese as *Hanseiteki Bunseki* (2007); in Polish as *Analiza refleksyjna*; in Chinese as 现象学反思分析 (Taiwan, 2007) and also from Peking University Press in 2007; and in Romanian as *Analiza Reflexivă* (Cluj Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2007).

liberals on the left and reactionaries from conservatives on the right, which is currently not widely done in the USA.

Thirdly, it is difficult not to consider one's own positions on the main policy issues of the day, to thus locate oneself in the political situation, and thus to discern one's own political identity. Thus I want repeal of Bush's tax cuts for the rich, I want the USA out of Iraq, I want abortion easy to get, I want universal health care, I favor gay marriage, and I oppose offshore drilling. As for the dimensions of the socio-cultural world in Horowitz's analysis, I am a male of the traditionalist generation, White, a college graduate, and upper middle class at least by income. Religion and region are problematical for me. I was baptized Catholic, but have only been to church for weddings since, yet I seem to have an Irish-Catholic value system. Then again, I grew up in San Francisco, but have ended up in my early 50's in South Florida, which often seems more northern than southern because of all the retirees. But these categories are all sociocultural and thus shaping our outlooks from early on. Am I still a San Francisco liberal fifty years after leaving that city?

Fourthly, and where the encountering others is again concerned, I have the constructs from common sense expressed in my vernacular by which to distinguish other people politically, e.g., I greatly appreciate my highly liberal students in Generation Y, even if they are often difficult to understand!

Fifthly, I am always somewhat suspicious of what comes from the media, which is of course part and parcel of the corporate world and thus has economic interests by which it might be more inclined to distinguish radicals

from liberals and less inclined to distinguish reactionaries from conservatives because such an approach weakens the left and strengthens the right, which is in corporate self-interest.

Sixthly, the set of common-sense political constructs is highly historical, e.g., the list and order of key issues is constantly changing during campaigns and administrations, as is shown in the case of the economic crisis becoming focal since Horowitz wrote only two months before the time of writing of this essay. And one thing that politicians regularly try to do is modify our constructs, e.g., by renaming the inheritance tax the “death tax.” Fifty years ago, only professional politicians might have thought in terms not only of parties, liberal/moderate/conservative, and least gender, generation, race, and education, while region, class, and religion were already recognized in common-sense political thinking.

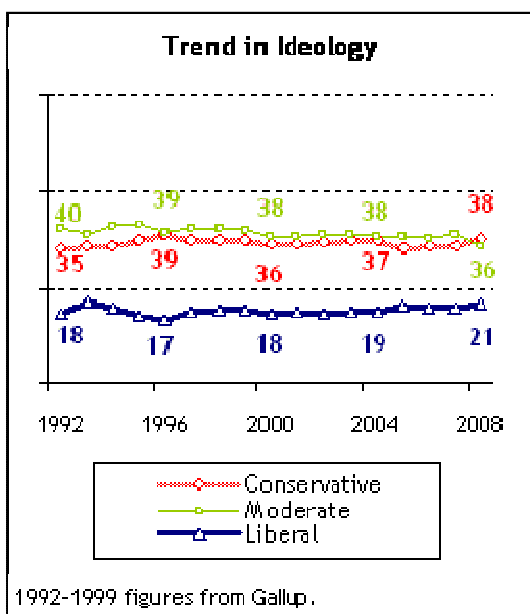
Seventh and finally, while I have these constructs as prominent parts of current common-sense about politics in my country, I am keenly aware that they are highly simplified and thus always in need of refinement. Above all, these constructs that have become part and parcel of common sense need to be related back to the basic culture from which they have been generalized. These constructs help articulate politics, but sometimes also make it possible to obscure important aspects. Concrete people and groups are far more complex and subtle politically even as their decisions regularly come down to voting for one or the other of two candidates.

APPENDIX

The following is the most concise set of polling results that I could find to show the use of political constructs that are now commonly communicated in the media.

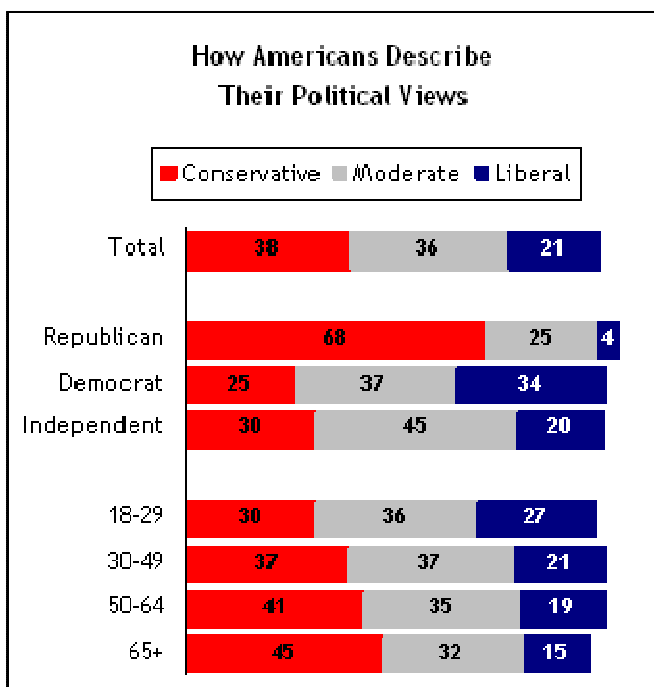
Winds of Political Change Haven't Shifted Public's Ideology Balance

by Juliana Horowitz, Research Associate, Pew Research Center for the People & the Press
November 25, 2008



The Democratic Party's advantage in party identification has widened over the past two decades, but the share of Americans who describe their political views as liberal, conservative or moderate has remained stable during the same period. Only about one-in-five Americans currently call themselves liberal (21%), while 38% say they are conservative and 36% describe themselves as moderate. This is virtually unchanged from recent years; when George W. Bush was first elected president, 18% of Americans said they were liberal, 36% were conservative and 38% considered themselves moderate.¹

Young people are considerably more likely than older Americans to describe their political views as liberal. About the same number of those younger than age 30 say they are liberal (27%) as say they are conservative (30%). The ideological gap is much wider among older Americans; 50 to 64 year-olds are more than twice as likely to describe themselves as conservative (41%) than as liberal (19%), and those age 65 and older are three times more likely to say they are conservative (45% vs. 15% liberal).

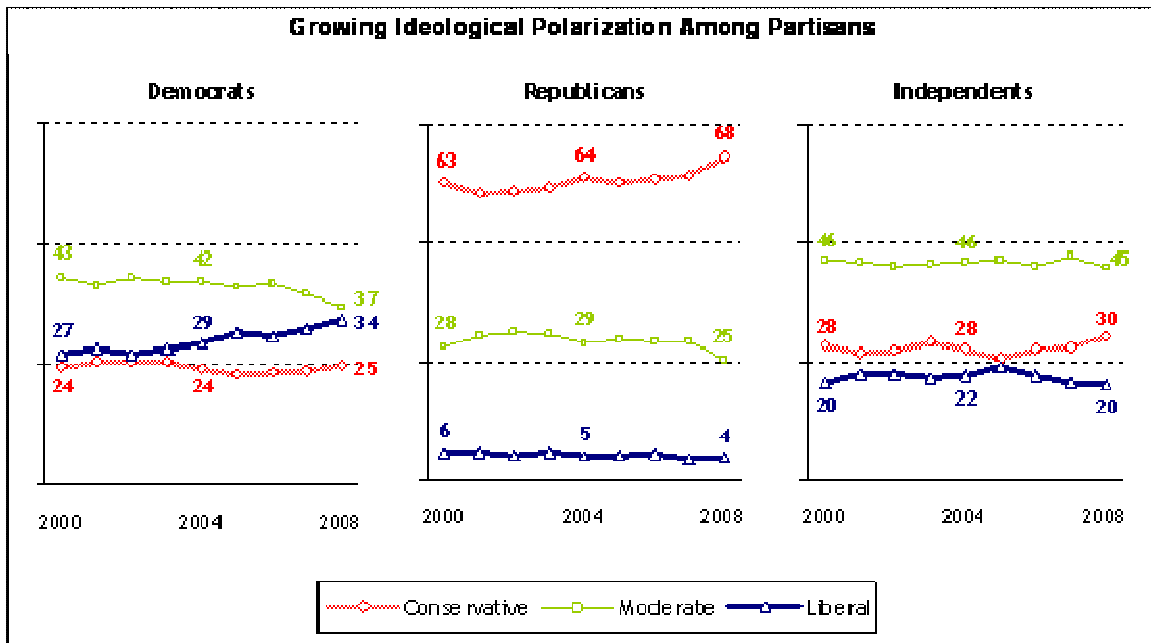


Ideological ratings also vary significantly by education. Four-in-ten Americans with graduate degrees say they are politically moderate, while about three-in-ten say they are either liberal or conservative (29% each). Among those with no more than a high school education, a third says they are moderate, 41% describe themselves as conservative and fewer than one-in-five call themselves liberal (18%).

Still, ideological labels do not always predict opinions about key policy issues. For example, about half of Americans who describe their political views as conservative say that all (24%) or some (27%) of the tax cuts passed under George W. Bush should be repealed. More than four-in-ten conservatives (43%) say that abortion should be legal in some or all cases. On the other hand, nearly half of self-described liberals (49%) favor more offshore drilling for oil and gas in U.S. waters.

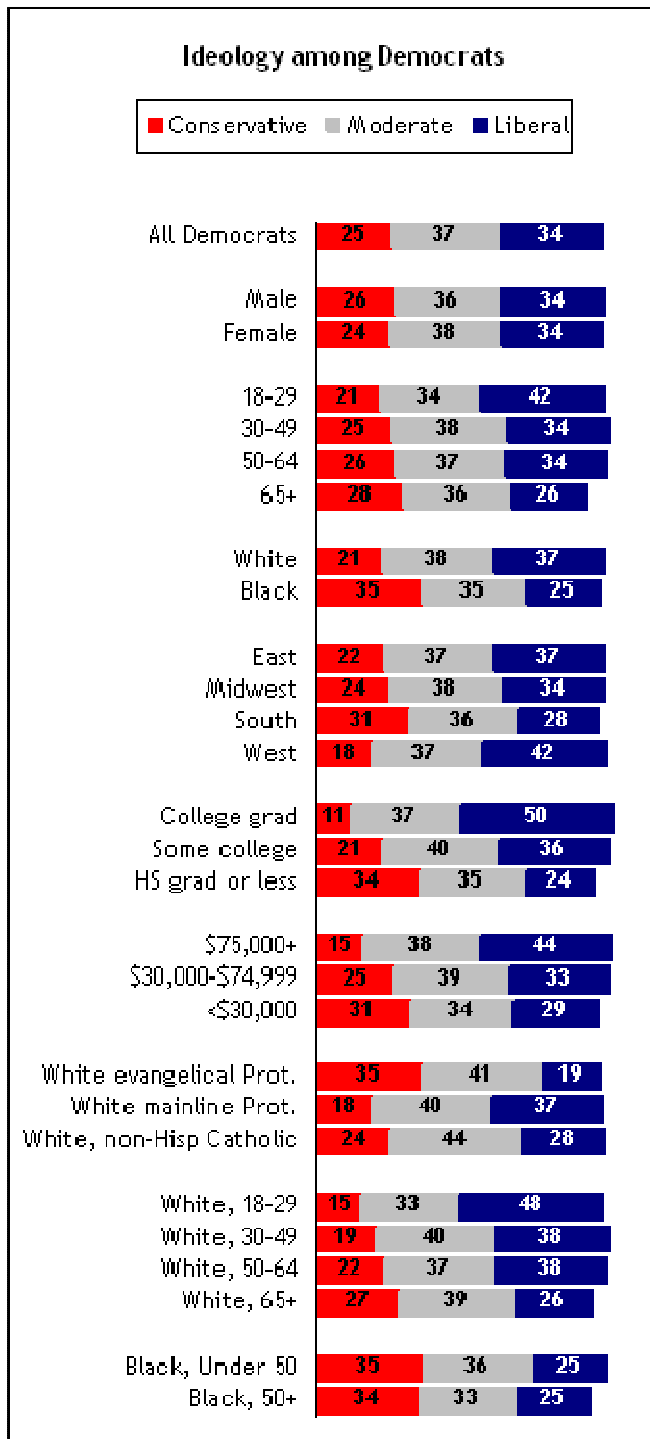
Ideology among Partisans

Democrats, on balance, describe themselves as either liberal (34%) or moderate (37%) and the proportion labelling themselves as liberal has risen in recent years. Republicans, on the other hand, are not only largely conservative (68%) but, as their share of the electorate has declined somewhat, a higher proportion now say they are conservative than in the past. The ideological balance has been more stable among independents.



About a third of Democrats label themselves as liberal (34%) and a quarter say they are conservative; in 2000, Democrats were about as likely to say they were liberal (27%) as they were to call themselves conservative (24%). Fewer Democrats now say they are moderate than did so in recent years.

While Democrats are divided in their ideological ratings, Republicans largely classify their political views as conservative; about two-thirds describe themselves that way (68%), compared with 64% in 2004 and 63% in 2000. A quarter say they are moderate, while virtually no Republican says the label "liberal" applies to them (4%).



Among independents, nearly half (45%) describe their views as moderate, 30% say they are conservative and 20% call themselves liberal. These figures are nearly identical to the way independents described their political views earlier in the decade. In 2000, 46% called themselves moderate, 28% said they were conservative and 20% described themselves as liberal. In 2005, however, independents were about as likely to say they were liberal (24%) as they were to label themselves conservative (26%).

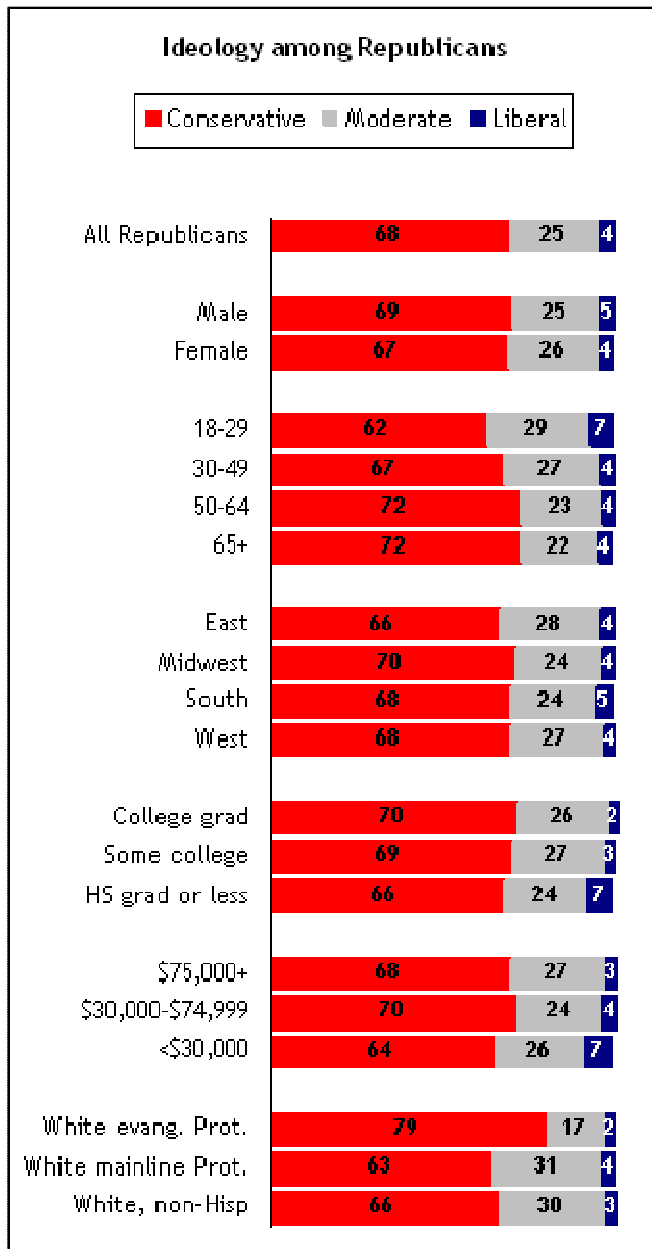
Who Are the Liberal Democrats?

Among Democrats, younger whites and college graduates are the most likely to say their political views are liberal. Fully half of Democratic college graduates describe themselves that way, as do 48% of white Democrats younger than 30. Just four years ago, Democrats in these demographic groups were about as likely to say they were moderate as they were to call themselves liberal (40% moderate and 42% liberal among younger whites and 42% moderate and 45% liberal among college graduates in 2004).

Conversely, white evangelical Protestants are the least likely among Democrats to define their views as liberal. Fewer than one-in-five say they are liberal (19%), compared with 41% who call themselves moderate and 35% who say they are conservative. The ideological ratings of white mainline Protestants and white, non-Hispanic Catholics are more in line with the overall rating for all Democrats.

Black Democrats also are less likely to say they are liberal (25%) than to say they are conservative (35%). Another 35% describe their views as moderate. Among white Democrats, however, 37% define themselves as liberal and about the same share says they are moderate (38%). Only about one-in-five white Democrats call themselves conservative (21%).

Republicans Largely Conservative



Solid majorities of Republicans across virtually all demographic groups say their political views are best described as conservative.

White evangelical Protestants are the most conservative Republicans: 79% describe their political views as conservative, compared with 17% who say they are moderate and just 2% who call themselves liberal. Republican white mainline Protestants and white non-Hispanic Catholics also are largely conservative (63% and 66%, respectively), but about three-in-ten in each group say their views are moderate (31% among white mainline Protestants and 30% among white Catholics).

Republicans younger than age 30 are less likely than older Republicans to classify their political views as conservative, but 62% in this age group says the label applies to them, while 29% say they are moderate and 7%

are liberal. In contrast, among those age 50 and older, nearly three-quarters call themselves conservative (72%), 22% say they are moderate and just 4% say they are liberal.

Ideology and Issue Positions

The ideological ratings Americans ascribe to their political views often reflect positions on key policy issues. For example, about seven-in-ten self-described conservatives oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally, while nearly the same percentage of self-described liberals favor it (68%).

Positions on Key Issues				
	Total	Cons	Mod	Lib
	%	%	%	%
<i>Bush tax cuts should be...*</i>				
Made permanent	25	38	22	10
Repealed for the wealthy	37	27	41	49
Repealed for all	25	24	27	30
<i>Military force in Iraq*</i>				
Right decision	40	59	37	14
Wrong decision	54	37	56	83
<i>U.S. should...*</i>				
Keep troops in Iraq	45	59	47	23
Bring troops home	51	39	50	73
<i>Abortion should be...*</i>				
Legal	57	43	65	77
Illegal	36	52	29	19
<i>Guaranteed health care**</i>				
Favor	63	50	69	79
Oppose	34	47	28	18
<i>Gay marriage**</i>				
Favor	39	22	45	68
Oppose	52	71	44	24
<i>Offshore drilling***</i>				
Favor	67	83	65	49
Oppose	28	15	29	48
* Figures from mid-October 2008.				
** Figures from August 2008.				
*** Figures from Mid-September 2008				

Yet, even within ideological groups there are disagreements over major issues. Liberals are divided in their views of offshore drilling -- 49% favor and 48% oppose allowing more oil and gas drilling in U.S. waters as a way to address America's energy needs.

Conservatives are about equally split when it comes to the U.S. government guaranteeing health insurance for all citizens. Half of those who describe their political views as conservative favor government-backed insurance even if it means raising taxes, while 47% oppose it. And while majorities of conservatives think the United States made the right decision in using military force against Iraq and favor troops remaining there until the situation has stabilized (59% each), sizable minorities say the war was the wrong decision (37%) and favor the troops coming home as soon as possible (39%).

Notes

¹ For a detailed analysis of the shifts in party identification see "[Democrats Post Gains in Affiliation Across Age Cohorts](#)," Oct. 31, 2008