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Alec Kwo

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The Ideology and Praxis of Political Moderates: More Liberal than Conservative? A Research Note

By

Alec Kwo¹

ABSTRACT: Who is a political moderate in the United States today? What are their stances on important national issues and who do they think should be the agents affecting structural change? In what is commonly perceived to be a polarized political climate in the United States, the middle ground often seems non-existent. However, if the United States is as polarized between right and left as some scholars say, then why do so many Americans self-identify as moderate and why do studies tend to neglect a prominently existing ideological group? In the 2014 Chicago Council Survey on American Public Opinion (n = 2108), moderates were more closely aligned with liberals on almost every foreign and domestic policy issue (excluding the size of the military and immigration policy) while their praxis was slightly more reflective of conservatives. Partisan sorting theory, an application of Blumer's symbolic interactionism in the political arena, did not fully capture the political moderates, whose ideology did not often match their praxis.

INTRODUCTION

The political landscape in the United States appears to be polarized between the liberal left and the conservative right. The current dichotomy is reflected prominently in our gridlocked Congress and contentious political rhetoric in the media, the means through which the average citizen consumes politics. However, in the midst of a political climate that is often portrayed as polarized, there exist those who are neither with one side nor the other. They are self-identified moderates, and they are rarely the focus in matters pertaining to American politics. Acknowledging, understanding, and identifying those with moderate political perspectives and their opinions on who should influence the government could shed light on the feelings of the large, even if seemingly non-existent American center. Moderates, who are often viewed as the swing vote (and thus able to influence national election results depending on their leanings), comprise an important, but overlooked, section of the political population in the United States.

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As the two professionals interviewed for this study reiterated time and time again, no one really pays attention to or studies them because they are less interesting than the extremes.

This study's two main goals were: first, to highlight and differentiate the opinions of the political middle from the conservative right and liberal left; second, to shed light on how different ideological groups' opinions on foreign and domestic policy matters influence their preferences for the influential agents of change in U.S. foreign policy. Preferences for who should influence the government were defined as their *political praxis*; the preferences represent the practical modes and institutions through which conservatives, moderates, and liberals believe change should come about.

A more thorough understanding of people's ideologies may be uncovered by distinguishing ideological groups on their opinions about foreign and domestic policy matters and identifying how those opinions influenced their political praxis. A more nuanced understanding of each group's ideology and praxis (and particularly the ideologies and praxes of those we disagree with) may enable civil discussions and debates regarding social, economic, or foreign policy issues. In turn, this could initiate a depolarization of the American political climate by highlighting moderates' voices instead of only the often heard conservatives or liberals. Moreover, moderates' opinions could offer a third option or a consensual middle ground of compromise between left and right views in our everyday interactions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of extant literature on political polarization and the political middle was conducted in order to contextualize the relevance and complexity of moderates. For a variety of reasons, there has been limited research on the hidden, but subtly thriving, political middle. Political polarization is a particularly complicated phenomenon; it has been measured on vastly different dimensions like identity and issue positions as well as at varying levels of society ranging from political elites to the general public.

Political Polarization

Political polarization, when addressed, is a hotly debated topic amongst scholars. For one, the extent to which it permeates the political climate in the United States is disputed (Baldassarri and Bearman 2007). The points of contention in the conversations lie in the levels (elite vs. general public) at which they posit polarization to exist. Some scholars focused their efforts in observing how party polarization among political elites (i.e. members of Congress and other elected officials) exists and, in fact, has increased over the last forty years on a number of issues (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008; Baldassarri and Goldberg 2014; Levendusky 2008). Using an elite polarization theory framework, these scholars argued that as political elites have become more polarized in their issue stances, so too, has the general public. Elites are often the sources or direct informers of political knowledge among the general citizens. As elites take public stances on issues and implement policy, they send voters clear cues on how the public should vote or feel about certain issues; in turn the public often conforms to the polarized views of elites (Levendusky 2008).

On the other hand, scholars like Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope claimed that polarization in the country is strictly an elite phenomenon (2005). In their book, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, they argued that Americans are moderate, tolerant, and ambivalent in their

political attitudes, and that, “we divide evenly in elections or sit them out entirely because we instinctively seek the center while the parties and candidates hang out on the extremes (Fiorina et al. 2005: ix).

However, yet another set of experts were not convinced by Fiorina et al.’s work and countered with new claims that polarization in the electorate is as great or even greater than polarization amongst political elites. For example, Abramowitz and Saunders (2005) used ANES data from 1972 to 2004 to document the growing gaps between self-identified Democratic and Republicans. During the three decades between 1972 and 2004, the two party identifiers were increasingly different on issues such as jobs, living standards, health insurance, and presidential approval. Another key finding from Abramowitz and Saunders was that secularism and religiosity separated Democrats from Republicans respectively, citing it as one of the main axes of difference between red state voters and blue state voters.

In turn, Fiorina (and colleagues Abrams and Pope), in a separate article (2008) defended the original finding and countered Abramowitz and Saunders’ critiques of the 2005 work on methodological and empirical grounds. Fiorina et al. argued that the polarization Abramowitz and Saunders found was only after they did only after extensive recoding and aggregation of data. Additionally, they (Abramowitz and Saunders) overstated geographic polarization citing contrary election evidence; many states that vote Democrat in the presidential election elect Republican governors and vice-versa. Moreover, Fiorina et al. also referred to a 2006 study by Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder Jr. that characterized most Americans as ideological moderates on both economic and moral issues.

One finding from Abramowitz and Saunders’ 2005 study that was not refuted by Fiorina et al. was that more people identified as Republicans or Democrats in 2004 than did in 1972, revealing some semblance of a polarization dynamic. However, it is not clear whether increased partisanship on certain political issues subsequently spills over to polarization in the general American public. For example, while Baldassarri and Gelman found partisanship and alignment on various issues to be positively correlated, the relationship was weak. They concluded, “since the parties are now more clearly divided on a broader set of issues – it is easier for people to split accordingly, without changing their own views” (2008: 37). Their study harked back to the idea of elite polarization (in a sense) more uniformly locating the voting public to the left or the right. Yet, the opinions held by the general public on a wide range of issues had not concurrently changed along party lines, indicating that more polarized identification did not coincide with corresponding partisan opinions. Furthermore, a more recent study by Wood and Oliver (2012) questioned if there existed any meaningful relationship between people’s ideological self-identification and their political attitudes or behavior. Ideological self-identification was found to be temporally unstable and did not directly correspond consistently on issue stances. On balance, Wood and Oliver concluded that the general public was less polarized than some posit.

Political Sorting

Political sorting has been another theme in the scholarship on politics. According to the political sorting model, political partisan identities have converged with ideological, religious, and movement-based politics (Mason 2012). For example, Republicans have sorted themselves into categories like conservative, religious, pro-life, and racially not black while Democrats are generally considered to be liberal, secular, pro-choice, and more often black. As these identities have converged more consistently, individual identities and political parties have converged

creating a more salient identity for, let's say, a Republican. The result of the more sharply defined identities is more in-group bias, more active defending of one's own party, and anger towards the other party (Mason 2012). Mason's political sorting complemented Baldassari and Bearman's self-segregation into ideologically homogenous groups in which all people within the group shared the same political opinions (2007). Even though public opinion was generally heterogeneous (and thus less polarized than the homogenous groups would suggest), Mason acknowledged that in-group bias, anger towards the other party, and opinion-homogeneous groups, among other factors, contributed to social polarization but not issue polarization (2015).

Multiple Determinants of Ideology

Mason's (2012) political sorting concept intimated salient factors that have contributed to semblances of polarization in the general public along conservative versus liberal ideologies. More recent scholars specified some of the factors and life experiences that shape political ideology. Bond and Solomon's 2015 Facebook survey of 78,000 Facebook users found age, marital status, and gender to be important. Some examples: the older people got the more conservative they became; married people tended to be more conservative than the not married; and women tended to be more liberal than men.

Similarly, Baldassarri and Goldberg identified socioeconomic factors (education and income) that contributed to people's political ideologies (2014). In their study they identified three distinct groups: ideologues, alternatives, and agnostics, each of who had their own belief system based on their level of education and income. The alternative group was a particular point of interest because they were comparable to moderates. The more economically affluent and better-educated in the alternate group were more conservative on economic issues but were more liberal on social and moral issues. Not only were there multiple factors that contributed to the alternative group's ideology, there were also multiple layers within it, adding further complexity to the concept of ideology in sharp contrast to a singular self-identification. Additional, even if less salient, components in political ideologies were egalitarianism and political sophistication; Feldman and Johnston found that egalitarianism and less religiosity predicted economic and social liberalism (2010). Approaching the determinants of political ideology from more than just a demographic standpoint offers insight to citizens' worldviews, which were also proven to influence their political ideologies.

The Forgotten Middle

As evident in the scholarship reviewed above, the political middle has been largely forgotten. A notable exception is a recent 2014 study conducted by the Pew Research Center (PRC) where the political middle was the focus. The political middle in the Pew research Center study was comparable to the alternatives and agnostic groups in Baldassarri and Goldberg's work. But, the PRC political middle straddled a demographically diverse landscape. Some specifics illustrate the diversity in the political middle. The political middle was comprised of three distinct groups: Young Outsiders, who leaned Republican and were affluent and well-educated, wary of big government but liberal on social issues; the Hard-pressed Skeptics, who leaned Democratic, were poorly educated, economically disenfranchised, and were the most distrustful of the government; the Next Generation Left, who leaned Democratic and were well-educated and affluent, liberal on social issues but hesitant about the social safety net and sympathetic toward Wall Street; It was noteworthy that a larger portion of the less partisan middle the PRC data leaned toward the Democratic party (Pew Research Center 2014).

A second recent study jointly by Esquire and NBC News in 2012 demarcated the “American Center” but also highlighted the diversity within it. They too identified sub-groups in the political center that were similar to most of PRC groupings. For example, the Whateverman, young voters in the Northeast and West who were politically apathetic were comparable to PRC’s Hard-Pressed Skeptics. The Pick-up Populists, who were mostly white, low-income voters in the South and Midwest who worried the economy is unfair and that government is wasteful were also comparable to the Hard-Pressed Skeptics. The MBA Middle, mostly white, well-educated and affluent voters who were fiscally conservative but socially liberal were much like PRC’s Young Outsiders. Only the Minivan Moderates, mostly white suburban mothers in the Midwest and South with pro-choice/anti-gun tendencies and a distrust of government, were not comparable to any of the PRC groupings. In short, the very existence of distinct political groups and divisions within them indicates that a person’s political ideology is not unidimensional, let alone being classified as conservative, moderate, or liberal.

Summary and Moving Forward

It is quite clear that the elites in the United States are polarized. It is also clear that elite polarization has contributed to sorting the general public along party lines, but not their opinions. Political sorting has occurred along party identities and ideologies (i.e. Republican and Democrat) as well as other salient socio-demographic characteristics like religiosity, and race. However, even as Americans become more frequently sorted into distinct partisan poles, the political middle is alive and richly diverse demographically and in its attitudes towards government. For example, people’s political self-identifications often conflict with their opinions (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008). Besides, Americans in general are ideologically moderate in their issue positions and opinions (Fiorina et al. 2005, 2007 & Ansolabehere et al. 2006).

Yet, this less partisan group, which comprises a sizable percentage of the general American population, has rarely been the focus of much research. Even though data on the political moderates do exist, a more nuanced analysis has been lacking. The research presented in this paper squarely focused on the forgotten middle.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The limited research that exists on moderates has categorized them as monolithic, more economically conservative and generally more conservative across the board (Baldassarri and Goldberg 2008 & Pew Research Center 2005). In order to test these singular claims about political moderates, the middle or moderates were contrasted against conservatives and liberals on the following dimensions: their identities, opinions on various foreign and domestic policy issues and suggested praxis ideas. Also largely unknown is how issue positions and opinions shaped who the American people believe should be influencing policy decisions. That is, not much is known about how people arrive at their political praxes, the practical means and agents through which Americans want to see change enacted. The specific change agents considered in this analysis were the American people, elected officials, civil institutions, religious leaders, and military leaders.

In this vein, two sets of formal research questions were posed: To what extent were identity symbols, opinions of political moderates on issues and related praxis distinctive from or

reflective of conservatives and liberals? (2) Which, if any, of the three axes, identity symbols and/or issue/praxis opinions, uniquely identify moderates?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Extending Political Sorting Beyond Symbolic Referents

According to the partisan sorting theory self-identifications have converged along ideological, religious, racial, and gendered lines. These facets of partisan and ideological identities represent symbolic referents that people attach significance to in order to differentiate themselves from other groups. At the root of sorting theory is symbolic interactionism, which has three basic premises according to the theorist, Herbert Blumer: First, “human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.” Second, “the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows.” Third, these meanings are “handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing the things he encounters” (Blumer 1969:2). The “things” that Blumer referred to can be anything sociological such as social position, social roles, cultural prescriptions, norms and values, and group affiliation to name a few (Blumer 1969:3).

Where do moderates fit on the political sorting spectrum? If, as previous researchers have suggested, partisan sorting in the American political arena takes place along partisan and ideological salient identity symbols (such as religiosity, race, education, and income), it was predicted that salient identities markers would be the primary axes along which moderates were separated from the two other groups at opposite ends of the ideological spectrum. On the other hand, a case can be made that the political sorting has occurred along opinions on issues that are generally less sorted and less polarized than salient identity factors. Further, if it is issue opinions, an overlooked, symbolically meaningful referents, that differentiate the three ideological groups it was predicted that moderates will reflect the opinions and praxes of both conservatives and liberals, with a slight tendency to lean to the left both on the ideological-praxis spectrum’ praxes from one another. In other words, moderates, who supposedly carry a mix of conservative and liberal views as the term implies have not been sorted (Pew Research Center 2014).

METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

The explanatory sequential mixed methods design used in this study was structured as follows: Analysis of secondary quantitative data provided a statistical overview of the positions of moderates, liberals, and conservatives on a variety of national issues and salient identity markers. These profiles were then supplemented, post-quantitative analysis, by narrative interview insights from experts in the field of political science. The findings from the two approaches were compiled into a singular portrait of the political moderates in the U.S.

Secondary Survey Data

The quantitative survey data used in this study were drawn from 2014 The Chicago Council Survey of American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy. The Gfk Group (Gfk, formerly Knowledge Networks) conducted the survey on behalf of The Chicago Council of Global Affairs. GfK sampled households from its KnowledgePanel, a probability-based web panel designed to

be representative of the United States; there were 3,146 people surveyed with a response rate of 61% (Smeltz, Kafura, Daalder, Page, Holyk, Busby, Monten, and Tama 2014)².

One necessary clarification pertaining to the quantitative data must be disclosed. Because many of the opinion questions had response rates of 50% or less, multiple imputations were used to analyze missing data based on respondents' answers to other questions with higher response rates. In essence, around half of the responses to public opinion questions have been determined through missing data analysis and represent more complete estimates of respondents' answers.

Qualitative Interviews

Two interviews were conducted with experts in the field of political science. Interviewee #1 has eleven years of experience in the field, specializing in voting behavior, political psychology, and the news media. Interviewee #2 has four years of experience with a keen interest in political psychology and people's ideologies at the end of their lives. Their professional perspectives were used to expand on the survey findings. Refer to Appendix A for Consent Form and Interview Protocol.

DATA ANALYSES

In the following sections, salient identities, issue opinions, and praxis ideas of political moderates were compared to liberals and conservatives. The analyses offered a comparative descriptive portrait of identity markers, issue and praxis positions of the three groups. Gamma correlations tests, which measured differences in opinions between two ideological groups, at a time, were used to sort out the three groups. $\Gamma < .30$ was treated as a marker of opinion convergence while $\Gamma > .30$ was treated as opinion polarization.

Profiles of Moderates

Univariate analyses were used to profile moderates, liberals, and conservatives along salient identity markers and political ideologies. Two dimensions of ideologies were used; issue opinions and praxis recommendations.

Political Ideology

The sample population was more conservative (36.3%) than liberal (28.1%). But moderates, at 35.6%, made up a comparably sizeable portion of the respondents (Table 1.A). Respondents in the survey self-identified their political identification.

² The original collector of the data, or ICPSR, or the relevant funding agencies bear no responsibility for use of the data or for the interpretations or inferences based on such uses.

Table 1.A Self-Identified Political Ideology

| Indicator | Values and Responses | Statistics (n = 2067) |
|--|---|-----------------------|
| Q1005. In general, do you think of yourself as extremely liberal, liberal, slightly liberal, moderate, slightly conservative, conservative, or extremely conservative? | 1 = Conservative 2 = Moderate 3 = Liberal | 36.3% 35.6 28.1 |

Salient Identity Markers

On average, conservatives made the most money and were the most highly educated, followed by liberals and moderates respectively (Table 2). The modal liberal (36.1%) and conservative (34.9%) had at least a college degree; in contrast the average moderate was a high school graduate (37.8%).

Table 2. Sociodemographic Identity Markers

| Indicators | Values and Responses | Statistics ¹ | | | | | |
|--|--|--|---------------|---|--------------|---|---------------|
| | | Con. (n=750) | CM r=Δ | Mod. (n=736) | ML r=Δ | Lib. (n=581) | CL r=Δ |
| PPINCIMP: Household Income ² | Mean (SD) Min-Max | 12.47 (4.23) 1-19 | -.13** | 11.28 (4.78) 1-19 | .06* | 11.84 (4.64) 1-19 | -.07** |
| PPEDUCAT: Highest Degree Received | 1 = Less than HS 2 = High school 3 = Some college 4 = Bachelors degree or higher | 10.1% 29.6 25.3 34.9 | -.11** | 12.2% 37.8 25.5 24.5 | .09** | 15.0% 24.4 24.4 36.1 | ∅ |
| PPAGECAT4: Age | 1 = 18-29 2 = 30-44 3 = 45-59 4 = 60+ | 14.5% 22.3 27.5 35.7 | -.09** | 17.7% 26.0 30.6 25.8 | ∅ | 17.9% 27.4 27.0 27.7 | -.09** |
| Gender | 0 = Male 1 = Female | 56.4% 43.6 | .11** | 45.9% 54.1 | ∅ | 49.6% 50.4 | .07* |
| Living Setting | 1 = Rural 2 = Suburban 3 = Urban | 29.7% 51.5 18.3 | ∅ | 29.5% 47.7 22.8 | .14** | 19.7% 47.1 33.2 | .17** |
| Q.1075 Apart from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services? | 1 = More than once a week 2 = Once a week 3 = Once/twice a month 4 = Several times a year 5 = Hardly ever 6 = Never | 14.9% 30.4 7.4 13.3 20.0 14.0 | .20** | 7.4% 18.9 9.1 11.5 31.8 21.3 | ∅ | 6.2% 16.4 8.3 13.8 29.0 26.4 | .25** |
| What is your race? | 0 = White Non-Hispanic 1 = Not White | 75.2% 24.8 | .19** | 57.5% 42.5 | ∅ | 52.5% 47.5 | .24** |

** p < .01, * p < .05, or ∅ non-significant levels.

Conservatives were the oldest group by almost 4 years on average (51.39) followed by moderates (47.67) and then liberals (47.12). Conservatives were also the only male-dominated group (56.4%) while liberals and moderates were majority women; moderates being the most female-dominated group (54.6%).

The majority of conservatives (51.9%) and the plurality of moderates and liberals (47.7% and 47.1% respectively) lived in the suburbs, but conservatives and moderates were more likely to be from rural areas while liberals were most likely to live in urban areas. Additionally, conservatives were by far the most religious group; 52.6% conservatives attended monthly religious services at the very least while 53.1% of moderates and 55.4% of liberals attended religious services hardly ever or never.

Thus, moderates, while they had a unique sociodemographic identity, can be sorted as leaning towards liberals in their sociodemographic make-up. They were slightly younger than conservatives, more likely to be women, being less religious, and not being white.

Issue Opinions

A variety of issues of national and global importance were covered in the analyses. They ranged from past and present military matters, to immigration policy, climate change and the United States' energy production strategies, diplomatic relationships with foreign governments and leaders, and domestic government spending. In the analyses to follow, conservative, moderate, and liberal groups were disaggregated so that their opinions on issues could be ascertained. The ultimate goal was to see whether moderates were closer to conservatives or liberals in both their stances on different issues.

Opinions on Military Issues

Military matters carry great weight in the overall standing of the United States. Public opinion about the role of the military is an important measure of political ideology in the U.S. Opinions about important military issues covered the size of the military as well as past/present military decisions by the American military.

As seen in Table 3.A, to moderates, like their conservatives counterparts, maintaining military superiority worldwide was very important. At the same time moderates, like liberals wanted reduced military presence in Afghanistan and were convectively against the two wars on terror. In other words, moderates wished to protect the perception that the U.S. is able to defend itself, but only if absolutely necessary.

Some specifics from Table 3.A. are useful to elaborate on these broad patterns. The majority of moderates (53.7%) and conservatives (62.7%) believed that maintaining military superiority worldwide was very important while the plurality of liberals (45.4%) believed so. Even though moderates were more partial in prioritizing the size of the military, they remained closer to liberals on military issues, advocating (like liberals) that troops be brought home from Afghanistan on time or sooner and giving strong consensus with liberals that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were not worth it. While all three groups agreed that the two wars on terror were ultimately not worth it, moderates still leaned slightly towards liberals' side in their dissent towards the wars (CM $\Gamma = .30^{**}$, ML $\Gamma = .21^{**}$ and CM $\Gamma = .17^{**}$, ML $\Gamma = .07^{**}$).

Table 3.A. Public Opinion on Military Issues

| Indicators | Values and Responses | Statistics ¹ | | | | | |
|---|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| | | Con. (n=721- 750) | CM $\Gamma = \Delta$ | Mod. (n=722- 736) | ML $\Gamma = \Delta$ | Lib. (n=571- 581) | CL $\Gamma = \Delta$ |
| Q7. ² | | | | | | | |
| 04 Maintaining military superiority worldwide | 1 = Not important at all | 7.5% | | 8.3% | | 11.2% | |
| | 2 = Somewhat important | 29.9 | \emptyset | 38.0 | \emptyset | 43.4 | .30** |
| | 3 = Very important | 62.7 | | 53.7 | | 45.4 | |
| Q270. ³ | 1 = Withdraw all troops from Afghanistan before the end of 2014 | 20.8% | | 29.6% | | 32.2% | |
| | 2 = Bring all troops home as scheduled by the end of 2014 | 36.1 | .24** | 40.8 | .07 | 42.2 | .30** |
| | 3 = Leave some troops in Afghanistan beyond 2014 | 43.1 | | 29.6 | | 25.6 | |
| Q227 ⁴ | 0 = Not worth it | 37.8% | | 24.5% | | 17.6% | |
| | 1 = Worth it | 62.2 | .30** | 75.5 | .21** | 82.4 | .48** |
| Q271 ⁵ | 0 = Not worth it | 32.1% | | 25.4% | | 22.8% | |
| | 1 = Worth it | 67.9 | .17** | 74.6% | .07** | 77.2 | .23** |
| Index of Public Opinion on Military Issues ⁶ | Mean (SD) | 4.53 (1.60) | .22** | 5.05 (1.46) 2-8 | .13** | 5.32 (1.42) | .34** |
| | Min-Max | 2-8 | | | | 2-8 | |

¹ CM $\Gamma = \Delta$, ML $\Gamma = \Delta$, CL $\Gamma = \Delta$ represents the difference of opinion between conservatives and moderates, moderates and liberals, and conservatives and liberals respectively; ** p < .01, * p < .05, or \emptyset non-significant levels.

² Below is a list of possible foreign policy goals that the United States might have. For each one please select whether you think that it should be a very important foreign policy goal of the United States, a somewhat important policy goal, or not an important goal at all:

³ Currently the U.S. is scheduled to withdraw combat forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. Do you think that the U.S. should: Withdraw all troops from Afghanistan before the end of 2014, bring all troops home as scheduled by the end of 2014, or leave some troops in Afghanistan beyond 2014 for training, anti-insurgency and counter terrorism activities?

⁴ All in all, considering the costs to the United States versus the benefits to the United, do you think the war in Iraq was worth fighting, or not?

⁵ And what about the war in Afghanistan? All in all, considering the costs to the United States versus the benefits to the United States, do you think the war in Afghanistan has been worth fighting, or not?

⁶ Index of Pub. Op. on Military Issues = Q7_04 + Q270 + Q227 + Q271.

Immigration Policy

Immigration policy was a second vector along which the three ideological groups were compared. In recent times, illegal immigration at the U.S.-Mexico border and the admittance of Syrian refugees has sparked contentious debates regarding the strictness with which the United States should enforce in its immigration policy. As a hot button issue in today's political landscape, opinions on questions about large numbers of immigrants coming to the United States and illegal immigration were investigated.

Another rare area in which moderates were more closely aligned with conservatives was immigration policy (Table 3.B.). Even though the plurality of moderates and liberals believed that

large numbers of immigrants coming to the United States was an important but not critical threat, more moderates (35.1%) saw the influx of immigrants as a critical threat than as not an important threat at all (23.6%). In contrast, liberals were more likely (37.7%) to think that immigration was not an important threat; only a fifth (22.5%) said it was a critical threat.

Table 3.B. Public Opinion on Immigration Policy

| Indicators | Values / Responses | Statistics ¹ | | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| | | Con, (n=750) | CM $\Gamma = \Delta$ | Mod. (n=736) | ML $\Gamma = \Delta$ | Lib. (n=581) | CL $\Gamma = \Delta$ |
| Q5 ² | | | | | | | |
| Q8 Large numbers of immigrants coming to the United States | 1 = Critical threat | 45.6% | | 35.1% | | 22.5% | |
| | 2 = Important but not critical threat | 33.3 | .15*** | 41.3 | .28*** | 39.8 | .40*** |
| | 3 = Not an important threat | 21.1 | | 23.6 | | 37.7 | |
| Q7 ³ | | | | | | | |
| Q8 Controlling and reducing illegal immigration | 1 = Very important | 57.1% | | 48.2% | | 34.1% | |
| | 2 = Somewhat important | 36.5 | .17** | 42.7 | .27** | 49.9 | .42*** |
| | 3 = Not important at all | 6.4 | | 9.1 | | 16.0 | |
| Index of Public Opinion on Immigration Policy ⁴ | | | | | | | |
| | Mean | 3.25 | | 3.49 | | 3.97 | |
| | (SD) | (1.28) | .15** | (1.26) | .27** | (1.28) | .39** |
| | Min-Max | 2-6 | | 2-6 | | 2-6 | |

¹ CM $\Gamma = \Delta$, ML $\Gamma = \Delta$, CL $\Gamma = \Delta$ represents the difference of opinion between conservatives and moderates, moderates and liberals, and conservatives and liberals respectively; ** p < .01, * p < .05, or \emptyset non-significant levels.

² Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all:

³ Below is a list of possible foreign policy goals that the United States might have. For each one please select whether you think that it should be a very important foreign policy goal of the United States, a somewhat important policy goal, or not an important goal at all.

⁴ Index of Public Opinion on Immigration Policy: Q5_08 + Q7_03.

In short, moderates and liberals were further apart in their immigration policy opinions than they were from conservatives (ML $\Gamma = .28^{**}$, CM $\Gamma = .15^{**}$). In fact, the majority of conservatives (57.1%) and the plurality of moderates (48.2%) viewed controlling and reducing illegal immigration as a very important foreign policy goal of the United States, while the plurality of liberals (49.9%) believed it was only a somewhat important goal. The closer alignment between conservatives and moderates (CM $\Gamma = .15^{**}$) on immigration matters than between moderates and liberals (ML $\Gamma = .27^{**}$) was evident in the overall immigration opinion index; opinions of moderates on immigration policy were more reflective of conservatives than liberals.

Environmental Issues.

A third issue that has grabbed national and even global attention is the environment. While there is consensus within the scientific community that climate change is real and that humans are contributing to global warming, polarized political rhetoric divides conservatives and liberals on the subject; conservatives are often labeled as climate deniers while liberals are more commonly viewed as the bastions of the environmental movement. Therefore, this is a critical area in which to examine where moderates fall (Table 3.C).

Table 3.C. Public Opinion on Environmental Issues

| Indicators | Values / Responses | Statistics ¹ | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|
| | | Con. (n = 750) | CM Γ=Δ | Mod. (n = 736) | ML Γ=Δ | Lib. (n = 581) | CL Γ=Δ |
| Q5_09 ² | 1 = Not an important threat | 38.8% | | 18.3% | | 12.4% | |
| Climate Change | 2 = Important but not critical threat | 33.9 | .36*** | 39.1 | .23*** | 32.0 | .53*** |
| | 3 = Critical threat | 27.3 | | 42.5 | | 55.6 | |
| | Q310 ³ | 1 = Too much | 39.1% | | 8.7% | | 6.7% |
| Q320_1-6 ⁴ | 2 = About the right amount | 35.2 | .58*** | 36.5 | .35*** | 19.7 | .74*** |
| | 3 = Not enough | 25.7 | | 54.8 | | 73.6 | |
| | Q320_1 ⁵ | 1 = Strongly oppose | 14.0% | | 5.2% | | 4.0% |
| Q320_2 ⁶ | 2 = Somewhat oppose | 20.3 | | 16.9 | | 10.7 | |
| | 3 = Somewhat favor | 37.0 | ∅ | 38.0 | ∅ | 26.9 | .48*** |
| | 4 = Strongly favor | 28.7 | | 38.9 | | 58.4 | |
| | 1 = Strongly favor | 34.2% | | 18.5% | | 14.6% | |
| Q320_3 ⁷ | 2 = Somewhat favor | 39.3 | .30* | 40.6 | .22* | 29.9 | .48*** |
| | 3 = Somewhat oppose | 19.1 | | 27.1 | | 31.2 | |
| | 4 = Strongly oppose | 7.3 | | 13.8 | | 24.3 | |
| | 1 = Strongly favor | 46.3% | | 25.4% | | 18.5% | |
| Q320_4 ⁸ | 2 = Somewhat favor | 34.2 | ∅ | 42.8 | ∅ | 32.6 | .54*** |
| | 3 = Somewhat oppose | 14.7 | | 21.9 | | 24.7 | |
| | 4 = Strongly oppose | 4.8 | | 9.9 | | 24.2 | |
| | 1 = Strongly oppose | 12.8% | | 7.2% | | 4.0% | |
| Q320_5 ⁹ | 2 = Somewhat oppose | 27.4 | ∅ | 21.0 | ∅ | 12.6 | .48*** |
| | 3 = Somewhat favor | 39.6 | | 42.3 | | 38.2 | |
| | 4 = Strongly favor | 20.2 | | 29.5 | | 45.2 | |
| | 1 = Strongly favor | 29.9% | | 15.4% | | 13.0% | |
| Q320_6 ¹⁰ | 2 = Somewhat favor | 39.6 | ∅ | 44.1 | ∅ | 30.6 | .46*** |
| | 3 = Somewhat oppose | 24.7 | | 29.2 | | 31.1 | |
| | 4 = Strongly oppose | 5.7 | | 11.4 | | 25.3 | |
| | 1 = Strongly favor | 39.7% | | 26.7% | | 30.8% | |
| Q320_7 | 2 = Somewhat favor | 44.6 | .23** | 50.8 | -.06 | 47.7 | .17** |
| | 3 = Somewhat oppose | 11.3 | | 18.7 | | 16.5 | |
| | 4 = Strongly oppose | 4.4 | | 3.9 | | 4.9 | |
| | 1 = Strongly oppose | 37.9% | | 21.4% | | 13.5% | |
| Index of Environmental Issues ¹² | 2 = Somewhat oppose | 38.0 | .27* | 45.3 | .35* | 32.4 | .53*** |
| | 3 = Somewhat favor | 18.8 | | 25.2 | | 30.1 | |
| | 4 = Strongly favor | 15.3 | | 8.1 | | 24.0 | |
| | Mean | 18.75 | | 21.84 | | 24.24 | |
| (SD) | (4.53) | .42* | (3.58) | .34* | (4.29) | .64*** | |
| Min-Max | 9-33 | | 9-34 | | 9-34 | | |

¹ CM Γ = Δ, ML Γ = Δ, CL Γ = Δ represent difference of opinion between conservatives and moderates, moderates and liberals, and conservatives and liberals respectively; * p < .01, ** p < .05, or ∅ non-significant.

² Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all:

³ To deal with the problem of climate change, do you think your govt. is doing:

⁴ Thinking about how to address America's dependence on foreign energy sources, please indicate whether you favor or oppose each of the following:

⁵ Increasing tax incentives to encourage the development and use of alternative energy sources;

⁶ Increase the use of hydraulic fracturing to extract oil and natural gas from underground rock formations;

⁷ Opening up land owned by the federal government for oil exploration;

⁸ Requiring auto-makers to increase fuel efficiency, even if the car price would go up;

⁹ Increasing the mining and use of coal for generating electricity;

¹⁰ Maintaining existing nuclear power plants to reduce reliance on oil and coal;

¹¹ Raising taxes on fuels such as coal and oil to encourage individuals and businesses to use less.

¹² Index of Pub. Op. on environmental issues = Q5_09 + Q310 Q320_01 + Q320_02 + Q320_03 + Q320_04 + Q320_05 + Q320_06 + Q320_07.

Moderates and liberals agreed that climate change was a real problem (Table 3.C.). And moderates more often than not aligned with liberals' views on how to reduce our dependence on foreign oil. The plurality of moderates (42.5%) and majority of liberals (55.6%) believed climate change was a critical threat while the plurality of conservatives (38.8%) believed it was not an important threat. The majority of moderates (54.8%) and liberals (73.6%) thought that the government was not doing enough to deal with climate change while the plurality of conservatives (39.1%) thought the government was doing too much. And more often than not moderates aligned with liberals' views on strategies that would reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

On possible actions that the government should take to reduce our dependence on foreign oil, moderates were more likely to be closer to liberals than they were to conservatives. As for possible actions that the government can take to reduce the nation's dependence on foreign oil, moderates aligned more closely with liberals than with conservatives. Some examples: moderates and liberals both strongly favored the development and use of alternative energy sources through tax incentives (38.9% and 58.4% respectively) while conservatives (37.0%) showed less supportive of this strategy. Even though conservatives and moderates (pluralities) favored (somewhat) fracking to extract oil and natural gas with liberals opposing this strategy, moderates were further apart from conservatives (CM $\Gamma = .30^{**}$) than from liberals (ML $\Gamma = .22^{**}$).

Opinion ambiguities were also found on strategies ranging from opening up federal land for exploration, to requiring automakers to make more fuel-efficient cars, and increasing coal mining for electricity use; moderates were effectively in between both conservatives and liberals with no leaning to either side, standing alone in their middle of the road opinions. When it came to maintaining nuclear power plants, conservatives stood alone in favoring their upkeep the most while moderates and liberals shared slightly less favorable views on the strategy though it is notable that the differences in opinion were weak (CM $\Gamma = .23^{**}$, CL $\Gamma = .17^{**}$, ML Γ not significant). Moderates did reflect conservatives more on raising taxes on coal and oil (CM $\Gamma = .27^*$, ML $\Gamma = .35^*$), as both groups opposed the idea while liberals were generally in favor of the strategy.

Overall, moderates were slightly closer to liberals than conservatives on environmental issues, as evidenced by the index of environmental issues (CM $\Gamma = .42^*$, ML $\Gamma = .34^*$); the index also revealed wider differences in opinion between all three groups than on any other topical issue. The large difference in opinion between conservatives and liberals on environmental issues ($\Gamma = .64^{**}$) proved environmental issues to be the most polarized area of opinion amongst all that were observed.

Foreign Relations

Economic and diplomatic foreign relations represent non-military approaches to dealing with the leadership of various countries and organizations. The extent to which each ideological group wanted to engage in diplomacy with foreign leaders before resorting to military issues was viewed as another axis along which the three ideological groups might differ. Questions pertaining to foreign relations addressed people's perceptions of foreign economic and national security threats and attitudes towards controversial foreign leaders and organizations, as well as the historic Iran nuclear deal (Table 3.D).

Table 3.D. Public Opinion on Foreign Relations

| Indicators | Values/Responses | Statistics ¹ | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| | | Con. (n = 750) | CM $\Gamma = \Delta$ | Mod. (n = 736) | ML $\Gamma = \Delta$ | Lib. (n = 581) | CL $\Gamma = \Delta$ |
| Q5. ² | 1 = Critical threat | 57.3% | | 46.2% | | 41.0% | |
| 02 U.S. debt to China | 2 = Important but not critical | 35.5 | .20* | 44.0 | .12* | 44.6 | .31*** |
| | 3 = Not important | 7.2 | | 9.8 | | 14.5 | |
| 04 Islamic fundamentalism | 1 = Critical threat | 49.6% | | 37.8% | | 34.6% | |
| | 2 = Important but not critical threat | 39.7 | .20* | 48.8 | .11* | 45.4 | .29** |
| | 3 = Not important | 10.7 | | 13.5 | | 20.0 | |
| Q175. ³ | | | | | | | |
| 01 Taliban | 0 = Should not be | 58.9% | .26*** | 45.9% | .05 | 43.6% | .30*** |
| | 1 = Should be | 41.1 | | 54.1 | | 56.4 | |
| 02 Iran | 0 = Should not be | 40.7% | ∅ | 29.8% | ∅ | 22.3% | .41*** |
| | 1 = Should be | 59.3 | | 70.2 | | 77.7 | |
| 03 Hamas | 0 = Should not be | 59.3% | .28** | 45.0% | .16** | 37.0% | .42*** |
| | 1 = Should be | 40.7 | | 55.0 | | 63.0 | |
| 04 North Korea | 0 = Should not be | 43.8% | .20* | 34.4% | .10* | 29.8% | .30*** |
| | 1 = Should be | 56.2 | | 65.6 | | 70.2 | |
| 05 Cuba | 0 = Should not be | 31.4% | ∅ | 22.5% | ∅ | 16.7% | .39*** |
| | 1 = Should be | 68.6 | | 77.5 | | 83.3 | |
| 06 Hezbollah | 0 = Should not be | 59.0% | ∅ | 46.0% | ∅ | 36.5% | .43*** |
| | 1 = Should be | 41.0 | | 54.0 | | 63.5 | |
| Q239. ⁴ | 0 = Oppose | 48.3% | ∅ | 34.3% | ∅ | 25.0% | .47*** |
| | 1 = Favor | 51.7 | | 65.7 | | 75.0 | |
| Q240. ⁵ | 1 = Strongly oppose | 61.5% | | 44.6% | | 47.2% | |
| 01 Not pressure Iran to stop enriching uranium | 2 = Somewhat oppose | 22.1 | .27** | 30.6 | -.05 | 30.1 | .23*** |
| | 3 = Somewhat support | 10.2 | | 17.4 | | 15.8 | |
| | 4 = Strongly support | 6.2 | | 7.4 | | 6.9 | |
| 02 Continue diplomatic efforts to get Iran to stop enriching uranium | 1 = Strongly oppose | 13.4% | | 6.5% | | 5.4% | |
| | 2 = Somewhat oppose | 12.6 | ∅ | 12.2 | ∅ | 8.7 | .24*** |
| | 3 = Somewhat support | 32.8 | | 36.5 | | 33.0 | |
| | 4 = Strongly support | 41.2 | | 44.8 | | 52.8 | |
| 03 Impose tighter economic sanctions on Iran | 1 = Strongly support | 66.1% | | 53.4% | | 57.0% | |
| | 2 = Somewhat support | 22.9 | .21** | 33.0 | -.06 | 29.8 | ∅ |
| | 3 = Somewhat oppose | 6.3 | | 9.3 | | 8.5 | |
| | 4 = Strongly oppose | 4.7 | | 4.2 | | 4.8 | |
| 04 Authorize a military strike against Iran's nuclear energy facilities | 1 = Strongly support | 36.9% | | 26.0% | | 21.2% | |
| | 2 = Somewhat support | 34.8 | ∅ | 37.8 | ∅ | 30.2 | .35*** |
| | 3 = Somewhat oppose | 20.2 | | 24.3 | | 27.4 | |
| | 4 = Strongly oppose | 8.1 | | 11.9 | | 21.2 | |
| Index of Public Opinion on foreign relations ⁶ | Mean | 15.61 | | 17.56 | | 18.58 | |
| | (SD) | (4.16) | .29** | (3.56) | .17** | (3.36) | .44*** |
| | Min-Max | 6-27 | | 6-27 | | 6-28 | |

¹ CM $\Gamma = \Delta$, ML $\Gamma = \Delta$, CL $\Gamma = \Delta$ represents the difference of opinion between conservatives and moderates, moderates and liberals, and conservatives and liberals respectively; **p < .01, *p < .05, or ∅ non-significant.

² Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all:

³ As you may know there is currently a debate about whether U.S. government leaders should be ready to meet and talk with leaders of countries and groups whom the U.S. has hostile or unfriendly relations. Do you think the U.S. leaders should or should not be ready to meet and talk with the leaders of:

⁴ As you may know, the U.S. and other countries have reached an interim deal with Iran that eases some of the international economic sanctions against Iran. In exchange, the deal requires that Iran accept some restrictions on its nuclear program - but not end it completely - and submit to greater international inspections of its nuclear facilities. Do you favor or oppose this interim agreement?

⁵ If Iran commits a major violation of this agreement, would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the UN Security Council taking each of the following actions:

⁶ Index of Pub. Op. on foreign relations = Q5_02 + Q5_04 + Q175_01 + Q175_02 + Q175_03 + Q175_04 + Q175_05 + Q175_06 + Q239 + Q240_01 + Q240_02 + Q240_03 + Q240_04.

On matters pertaining to foreign relations, moderates either reflected liberal views or stood alone separate from both other groups (Table 3.D). For example, moderates and liberals were more convergent in their beliefs that our debt to China and Islamic fundamentalism were not as a critical of threats as conservatives believed (Debt: ML $\Gamma = .12^*$, CM $\Gamma = .20^*$, Islam: ML $\Gamma = .11^*$, CM $\Gamma = .20^*$). Additionally, moderates and liberals were most likely to believe that our government leaders should be willing to meet and talk with the leaders of the Taliban, Iran, Hamas, North Korea, Cuba, and Hezbollah over conservatives, who were outright in their opposition to the idea of meeting with terrorist groups (the Taliban, Hamas, and Hezbollah); the exception was the majority of conservatives did believe that U.S. leaders should be meeting with the governments of Iran, North Korea, and Cuba.

There were similar alignments in the opinions on the Iran nuclear deal. Moderates and liberals were most in favor of the deal while conservatives displayed haphazard support. In regards to what measures should be taken if Iran breaks any part of the nuclear deal, moderates either tended to directly reflect liberals or be effectively between conservatives and liberals. While the three groups tended to show opinion convergence with respect to the U.S. response toward violations, conservatives favored the harshest measures in response to any violations that may occur, including their strong support for authorizing a military strike against Iran's energy facilities. Overall, the index of public opinion on foreign relations confirmed that moderates were more reflective of liberals than conservatives (CM $\Gamma = .29^{**}$, ML $\Gamma = .17^{**}$).

Government Spending

While government spending mostly addressed domestic policy (excluding defense spending), uncovering the opinions of the three groups on aspects of government that more directly affect the American people was treated as an important area of ideological distinctions (Table 3.E).

It was noteworthy that there was a general consensus among the three groups on the actions regarding three out of the five areas of government spending (education spending, defense spending, and Social Security spending). At the same time, opinions on government spending revealed a distinct separation of conservatives from moderates and liberals across most fiscal issues. Moderates (74.5%) and liberals (78.5%) most wanted to expand education spending with conservatives slightly lagging behind in their support. Moderates found themselves effectively in between the other two groups when it came to defense spending. Liberals (39.6%) were most in favor of cutting back on defense spending as opposed to conservatives (32.0%) who were most in favor of expanding it. The majority of moderates (57.3%) and liberals (61.1%) were in favor of expanding Social Security as opposed to only the plurality of conservatives (45.2%) who wanted to expand it. Stark differences emerged on healthcare spending and welfare spending. The majority of moderates (59.1%) and liberals (67.6%) expressed favoritism toward government healthcare in wanting to expand healthcare spending; conversely, the majority of conservatives (64.0%) wanted it kept the same or cut back. On welfare and unemployment programs the majority of conservatives (59.9%) and the plurality of moderates (37.6%) wanted to cut back on these programs contrary to the plurality of liberals (37.5%) who wanted the programs expanded. However, moderates' opinions on welfare and unemployment programs were more closely aligned with liberals than they were with conservatives (CM $\Gamma = .35^{**}$, ML $\Gamma = .24^{**}$). Moreover, the differences in mean scores confirmed that moderates were more reflective of liberals' views on government spending than were of conservatives' views (CM $\Gamma = .32^{**}$, ML $\Gamma = .20^{**}$).

Table 3.E. Public Opinion on Government Spending

| Indicators | Values and Responses | Statistics ¹ | | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| | | Con. (n = 750) | CM $\Gamma = \Delta$ | Mod. (n = 736) | ML $\Gamma = \Delta$ | Lib. (n = 581) | CL $\Gamma = \Delta$ |
| Q25. ² | | | | | | | |
| 01 Education | 1 = Cut back | 13.7% | | 6.0% | | 4.8% | |
| | 2 = Kept about the same | 24.5 | .29*** | 19.5 | .11*** | 16.7 | .38*** |
| | 3 = Expanded | 61.7 | | 74.5 | | 78.5 | |
| 02 Defense Spending | 1 = Expanded | 32.0% | \emptyset | 25.5% | \emptyset | 18.8% | .32*** |
| | 2 = Kept about the same | 44.4 | | 44.7 | | 41.7 | |
| | 3 = Cut back | 23.6 | | 29.8 | | 39.6 | |
| 03 Social Security | 1 = Cut back | 11.1% | | 5.7% | | 5.7% | |
| | 2 = Kept about the same | 43.7 | .24** | 37.0 | .07 | 33.2 | .30** |
| | 3 = Expanded | 45.2 | | 57.3 | | 61.1 | |
| 06 Healthcare | 1 = Cut back | 36.3% | | 16.6% | | 13.6% | |
| | 2 = Kept about the same | 27.7 | .41*** | 24.3 | .16*** | 18.8 | .53*** |
| | 3 = Expanded | 36.0 | | 59.1 | | 67.6 | |
| 10 Welfare and unemployment programs at home | 1 = Cut back | 59.9% | | 37.6% | | 25.1% | |
| | 2 = Kept about the same | 23.7 | .35** | 36.1 | .24** | 37.3 | .54** |
| | 3 = Expanded | 16.4 | | 26.2 | | 37.5 | |
| Index of Public Opinion on Government Spending ³ | Mean | 10.30 | | 11.55 | | 12.16 | |
| | (SD) | (2.52) | | (2.17) | | (2.20) | |
| | Min-Max | 5-15 | .32*** | 5-15 | .20*** | 5-15 | .47*** |

¹ CM $\Gamma = \Delta$, ML $\Gamma = \Delta$, CL $\Gamma = \Delta$ represents the difference of opinion between conservatives and moderates, moderates and liberals, and conservatives and liberals respectively at the **p < .01, *p < .05, or \emptyset non-significant levels.

² Below is a list of present federal government programs. For each, please select whether you feel it should be expanded, cut back or kept about the same:

³ Index of Pub. Op. on government spending = Q25.01 + Q25.02 + Q25.03 + Q25.06 Q25.10.

In summary, all three ideological groups wanted to expand education spending with moderates and liberals in greatest support for the expansion. Conservatives and moderates wanted defense spending to be either kept the same or expanded while liberals wanted it kept the same or cut back. Moderates and liberals aligned in their desire to either maintain or expand Social Security, healthcare, and welfare and unemployment program spending. Moderates were generally more reflective of liberals in their views on the allocation of government funds. Whether or not domestic policy issues affected the praxes of conservatives, moderates, and liberals on foreign policy remained to be seen.

Political Praxis or Preferred Agents of Influence

A third dimension along which the political sorting hypotheses were tested was the preferred agents of change or influence. Agents of change were grouped into categories based on the role that each group occupies in American society. The American People stood alone in their own category while Congress and the President were placed into an Elected Official category. U.S. interest groups, large corporations, and universities and think tanks were defined as civil society (non-governmental organizations and institutions that manifest the will and interests of citizens); religious leaders and military leaders also stood alone in their own categories.

Overall, conservatives, moderates, and liberals tended to agree about the amount of influence that the American people and elected officials should have the most influence on foreign policy (Table 4). While there was a difference between conservatives and liberals on how much influence elected officials should have, the relationship was weak ($\Gamma = .11^{**}$).

Table 4 Preferred Agents of Influence

| Indicators | Values and Responses | Statistics ¹ | | | | | |
|--|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| | | Con. | CM $\Gamma = \Delta$ | Mod. | ML $\Gamma = \Delta$ | Lib. | CL $\Gamma = \Delta$ |
| Q125. ² | | | | | | | |
| 01 The American People | Mean (SD) | 8.00 (2.23) | ∅ | 7.99 (2.26) | ∅ | 8.09 (2.16) | ∅ |
| 02 Congress | Mean (SD) | 6.86 (2.58) | | 6.67 (2.65) | | 6.77 (2.52) | |
| 03 The President | Mean (SD) | 7.02 (2.71) | | 7.7 (2.42) | | 8.11 (2.11) | |
| Index of Elected Officials ³ | Mean (SD) Min-Max | 13.93 (4.68) 0-20 | ∅ | 14.41 (4.42) 0-20 | ∅ | 14.88 (3.83) 0-20 | .11** |
| 04 U.S. interest groups | Mean (SD) | 3.83 (2.82) | | 4.48 (2.84) | | 4.38 (2.94) | |
| 05 Large corporations | Mean (SD) | 3.68 (2.72) | | 3.99 (2.81) | | 3.70 (2.91) | |
| 06 The media | Mean (SD) | 2.94 (2.89) | | 3.93 (2.97) | | 4.11 (3.05) | |
| 08 Universities and Think Tanks | Mean (SD) | 4.08 (2.86) | | 5.00 (2.79) | | 5.46 (2.80) | |
| Index of Civil Institutions ⁴ | Mean (SD) Min-Max | 14.93 (9.46) 0-40 | .18** | 17.68 (9.54) 0-40 | ∅ | 17.89 (9.17) 0-40 | .19*** |
| 07 Religious leaders | Mean (SD) | 4.64 (3.05) | ∅ | 4.21 (2.97) | -.16*** | 3.51 (3.07) | -.21*** |
| 09 Military Leaders | Mean (SD) | 6.60 (2.57) | -.07* | 6.35 (2.61) | -.16*** | 5.74 (2.63) | -.23*** |

¹ CM $r = \Delta$, ML $r = \Delta$, CL $r = \Delta$ represents the difference of opinion between conservatives and moderates, moderates and liberals, and conservatives and liberals respectively; ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, or ∅ non-significant levels.

² How much influence do you think the following SHOULD have on U.S. foreign policy. 0 means they should not at all be influential and 10 means they should be extremely influential.

³ Index of Elected Officials = Q125.02 + Q125.03.

⁴ Index of Civil Institutions = Q125.04 + Q125.05 + Q125.06 + Q125.07 + Q125.08.

However, differences did emerge between the three groups on how much influence civil institutions, religious leaders, and military leaders should have; here contrary to moderates' left leanings in most issues, moderates tended to side with conservatives instead of liberals. Conservatives and moderates thought religious and military leaders should have more influence than liberals. While liberals and moderates believed civil institutions should have more influence than conservatives. In summary, there were small differences between the three ideological

groups in how much influence the various agents should have. But, moderates actually were more aligned with conservatives in their preferred agents of change.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Empirical Implications

Differences emerged between conservatives and liberals on almost every sociodemographic identity marker, issue, and aspect of praxis, indicative of a clear difference between the two partisan ideological groups. But, moderates, as expected, were a much more complex group and effectively inconsistent with either conservative or liberal identity markers, issue opinions, or praxes.

When it came to identity markers, moderates were more similar to liberals. Unlike conservatives, moderates were young, female, less religious and less likely to be whites. But moderates were more like conservatives in their tendency to live in rural/suburban areas instead of urban/suburban areas, and stood alone in their lower average levels of income and education. Interviewees #1 and #2 found the sociodemographic markers in this study to be consistent with how conservatives and liberals are generally perceived and were not surprised by moderates' general identity makeup.

While moderates' identity markers were especially complex, their issue positions more clearly converged to reflect liberals overall. In four out of five issue areas (military action, environmental issues, foreign relations, and government spending) moderates leaned to the left, leaving only the area of immigration policy as a clear reflection of their more conservative views. Essentially, moderates (like liberals) wanted to maintain a large military in case of necessary intervention. They believed in climate change and cautiously supported alternative sources of energy while still considering existing American energy sector jobs. They thought the country should be engaging in diplomatic relations with foreign governments and even terrorist leaders and be ready to step in against Iran if they violate the current nuclear deal. And finally, moderates (like conservatives) displayed anti-immigrant sentiments and strongly desired to control and reduce illegal immigration. Interviewee #2 posited that the negative connotation that certain people ascribe to the term, *liberal*, as careless or reckless in ideology, may have led liberally opinionated people to self-identify as moderate. On balance, issue positions revealed the clearest differences between all three ideological groups and showed the clear leanings of moderates to liberals.

Group political praxes however, were less distinguishable than both issue positions and identity markers. In other words, conservatives, moderates, and liberals, generally shared a similar idea of who should be influencing foreign policy. When small differences did arise, moderates had leanings towards both conservatives and liberals. For example, moderates agreed with liberals that civil institutions should have more influence than conservatives thought but agreed with conservatives that religious leaders and military leaders should have more influence than liberals thought. The mixed bag of praxis and identity markers that moderates turned out to have made these two factors effectively impossible to sort moderates along.

Theoretical Implications

By examining identity markers as political sorting measures (as has been done in previous research) and of hitherto unexamined measures such as issue positions and praxis, this research has added layers to the complexity at which political sorting takes place in American society. In this study, it was issue positions along which pronounced differences emerged among all three groups, followed by identity markers and then praxis. Furthermore, issue positions revealed a level at which moderates may be sorted slightly to the left while still maintaining less convictive views than either ideological pole. So while identity markers may still be a legitimate indicator of political sorting, issue positions (though not always polarized), represented a clearer set of differences between conservatives, moderates, and liberals.

Interestingly enough, praxis was an especially agreeable axis for all three groups. In other words, political sorting had limited applicability when it came to political praxis. However, the general convergence in opinions on who should be influencing foreign policy represents hope that we, as a nation, are not as divided along ideological lines as we can appear to be.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite offering a more nuanced portrayal of the forgotten middle, moderates, the study was not without its limitations, both methodological and substantive. On the methodological side, response rates were too low on many of the questions, so missing data analysis was employed, thus providing the most accurate approximations of potential answers, but it is unknown how exact the imputed responses were. Further, attempting to identify political moderates, a diverse and complicated ideological group, with but a single self-identification on a seven-point scale, was rather limiting. Similar limitations hampered measurement of issue and praxis positions. Future research should investigate more specifically what agents of change ideological groups want to be at the forefront of various issues, such as the ones examined in this research.

And finally, research should also attempt to combine the Pew Research Center's typology of the political middle with uncovering groups' praxes as a way to better understand the locus of change that the American people think is ideal. Linking issue positions with praxis ideas might offer a clearer portrayal of political moderates.

Appendix A
Consent From and Interview Protocol

Consent Form

Dear _____:

I am a Sociology Senior working on my Research Capstone Paper under the direction of Professor Marilyn Fernandez in the Department of Sociology at Santa Clara University. I am conducting my research on self-identified political moderates and their ideology and praxis as compared to conservatives and liberals.

You were selected for this interview, because of your knowledge of and experience working in the area of Political Science.

I am requesting your participation, which will involve responding to questions about the formation of people's political ideologies and the factors that contribute to people's political ideologies and will last about 20 minutes. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose to not participate or to withdraw from the interview at any time. The results of the research study may be presented at SCU's Annual Anthropology/Sociology Undergraduate Research Conference and published (in a Sociology department publication). Pseudonyms will be used in lieu of your name and the name of your organization in the written paper. You will also not be asked (nor recorded) questions about your specific characteristics, such as age, race, sex, religion.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call/email me at akwo@scu.edu or (317) 292-2250 or Dr. Fernandez at (408) -554-4432 mfernandez@scu.edu

Sincerely,
Alec Kwo

By signing below you are giving consent to participate in the above study. (If the interviewee was contacted by email or phone, request an electronic message denoting consent).

Signature

Printed Name

Date

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, through Office of Research Compliance and Integrity at (408) 554-5591.

Interview Protocol

1. What is the organization/institution where you learned about political ideology?
2. What is your position in this organization?
3. How long have you been in this position and in this organization?
4. Based on what you know about partisanship and ideological leanings on public opinion, where do political moderates stand in relation to conservatives and liberals?
5. Are moderates generally left out of political discourse?
6. Do you know of certain factors that contribute to people being conservative, moderate, or liberal?
7. Have you ever heard of moderates leaning left on most issues?

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- Interviewee #1. November 20, 2015. Assistant Professor of Political Science.

Interviewee #2. February 24, 2016. Lecturer of Political Science.

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