Pathways to Ideology in American Politics:

the Operational-Symbolic "Paradox" Revisited

Christopher Ellis
Bucknell University
And
James A. Stimson
University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

Abstract

Scholars of American public opinion have noticed a long-standing paradox: the American public is *operationally* liberal, but ideologically and *symbolically* conservative. Americans in the norm prefer "conservative" to "liberal" self-identifications and symbols. But these same citizens in the norm prefer liberal to conservative policy preferences on the major dimensions of issue conflict. Resolving this long-known paradox is the motivation of this paper. In contrast to the singular way though which citizens can come to hold a "liberal" ideological self-identification—the result of a connection with liberal issue preferences—we posit three systematically different pathways that lead citizens to hold a conservative self-identification, two of which have little to do with the real implications of the label "conservative" for public policy. Using the American National Election Studies, we isolate different types of conservative identifiers and then test the pathways model by exploring the reasons behind the ideological self-identifications of the different types of self-identified "conservatives."

What do Americans want from their government? Do they prefer a government that intervenes in economic life to regulate the market and to confer benefits? Or would they prefer that government stay out? Do they want government to enforce traditional beliefs in social life, or would they prefer a government that took no position on moral controversies, leaving citizens to their own privacy? These are among the most basic questions about American public opinion; matters, it would seem, of simple description. Are Americans, in general, "liberal" or "conservative?" Anything so basic should long ago have found an answer. And indeed the question has been answered, many times over. The problem is that the answers conflict. Serious analysts claim that the answer is "liberal," and others, equally serious, claim "conservative."

The reason for ongoing controversy over what might seem a simple fact is a paradox, now long known (see Free and Cantril 1967, Cantril and Cantril 1999, Stimson 2004), that American public is, on average, *operationally* liberal and at the same time *symbolically* conservative. When asked about specific government programs and specific social goals, the American public generally wants the government to do more, spend more, and redistribute more. But at the same time, citizens are considerably more likely to identify themselves as conservatives than as liberals. The American public, in other words, generally wants more government-based solutions to social problems, but overwhelmingly identifies with the ideological label that rejects those solutions. At the individual level, this implies that a great many Americans hold conflicted beliefs, thinking of themselves as "conservative" while supporting predominantly liberal public policies.

This paradox presents an important puzzle for scholars of public opinion. While we know that citizens vary widely in their ability to interpret and use ideological terms (Knight 1985, Jacoby 1991) and that many people will choose ideological self-identifications for random or idiosyncratic reasons, this disconnect between operational and symbolic ideology suggests that many citizens identify as "conservatives" for reasons that are *systematically* different from those which reflect preferences on the underlying dimensions of ideological and issue conflict.

This "paradox" is our take-off point. We will discuss the reasons for and implications of it by exploring why so many citizens who hold predominantly liberal policy preferences on many different types of issues choose to think of themselves as conservatives. We argue that because of its non-political connotations and the ways in which it is used by political elites, the label "conservative" is both more popular and more multidimensional than the label "liberal." We suggest three general "pathways" through which individuals can approach the decision to identify as conservatives. Some self-identified conservatives identify as such as part of a sophisticated, constrained conservative political belief system. But we argue that others come to their self-identification from an understanding of the meaning of the term "conservative" in religious and lifestyle contexts, without connecting it to the broader political context or understanding its implications for political choices. And still others acquire from the dominant frames of elite political discourse a fondness for both conservative self-identification *and* liberal policy beliefs. This stands in contrast to the largely singular way in which self-identified "liberals" conceive of their ideological self-identification. Taken together, an understanding of the different ways in which self-identified conservatives can come to their ideological identification can explain both the reasons for the operational-symbolic "paradox" in American public opinion and shed light on its real political implications.

The Longitudinal Evidence

We begin by more formally defining the operational-symbolic disconnect that sets the stage for this paper. In the aggregate, Americans are always operationally liberal on average. They prefer policies through which the government does and spends more to solve social problems. And they are always symbolically conservative on average: they consistently prefer the conservative label to the liberal one.[1]

---

[1] This also holds true, to a very similar extent, to new labels that Democratic politicians have tried to use in place of the label "liberal"—e.g., "progressive."

To illustrate this, we display standard, commonly-used measures of both "operational" and "symbolic" beliefs on the same graph (see Figure 1). For a rough and basic measure of operational (issue) views, we choose *Public Policy Mood* (Stimson 1999), which essentially measures—through answers to over 1600 survey questions regarding specific issues and social programs—public opinion on issues related to the size and scope of the federal government for the period 1970 to 2005. The measurement scheme for Mood is such that items are scaled as the percentage of liberal responses divided by the percent that are liberal plus the percent that are conservative. Values above the neutral point of 50 thus indicate a predominance of liberal over conservative responses. The figure shows a clear preference for operational liberalism in every survey year: the dominance of liberal over conservative is the normal state of Mood. It varies within a relatively small range, never quite touching the neutral point even at its most extreme conservative moments. This is obviously not true for every single issue, all the time. But whether one employs this summary measure or looks more closely at preferences for the hundreds of different policies of which it is composed, the basic point is that Americans, in the norm, hold liberal preferences for public policy.

[Figure 1 Here]

The measure of symbolic ideology in this figure is composed of items, now thousands of them, that ask respondents some form of the "How do you think of yourself?" questions that allow liberal, moderate, or conservative self-designations. The pattern of ideological self-identification is also strikingly consistent: a preference for "conservative" over "liberal." Of those Americans who give a self designation, there are almost two conservatives for every liberal throughout this period. The public is thus always, on balance, operationally liberal, and symbolically conservative. There is an enduring 20 to 25 point gap between "operational" and "symbolic" preferences in the aggregate, a stunning gap.[2]

---

[2] For the data of Figure 1, the mean difference is 21.7 with a standard error of 0.64, t = 33.71.

The question now is simple: why? What, at the level of the individual citizen, lies beneath these aggregate tendencies, explaining the evident conflict between them? A potential explanation will have to explain both why Americans tend to like government solutions and why they tend to identify with a government-rejecting ideological label. It will also have to go beyond simple aggregates to a deeper understanding of the relationship between different types of issues (including issues that lie outside of the long-standing social welfare and "scope of government" divide), and self-identification among diverse groups of citizens.

The Cross-sectional Evidence

Cross-sectional analysis allows for a nuanced understanding of the relationship between certain issue types and ideological self-identification, and is thus useful in explaining the roots of this operational-symbolic paradox. Although in the aggregate and over time, most of explicable variance in macro-level public opinion falls on one dimension (see Stimson 1999), individual-level public opinion at any given time is usually multidimensional (Layman and Carsey 2002).[3]

[Table 1 Here]

We ask what broad organizing dimensions of policy preferences exist in the modern American electorate, answering that query with an exploratory principal components analysis using the 22 policy preference questions asked of all respondents in the 2000 American National Election Study (coding available upon request).[4] The goal is to capture the dimensionality of public opinion in a basic way, understanding what issues are most closely associated with each other without imposing any structure on the data.

Table 1 presents the results of this analysis, which returns two clearly interpretable factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1.0. The first, dominant, factor is defined by traditional "New-

---

[3] There is no logical disconnect here. At any given time, there can be one or two especially relevant "social," "racial" or other issues that do not clearly load on a single dimension. But these issues tend to be either transient (and thus not important to the long-term dynamics of public opinion) or gradually "usurped" into the standard scope of unidimensional conflict.

Deal" spending and redistribution issues along with issues of race and civil rights. Most of the explicable variance in mass opinion loads on this "social welfare" dimension. This dimension is strongly associated with the long-standing debate over the size and scope of government, and is the one on which much party elite discourse, and the vast majority of national policy outputs, is structured (e.g., Poole and Rosenthal 1997, Erikson et al. 2002).

The second dimension contains three issues that load strongly together—preferences for and against abortion, gays in the military, and the rights of gays to adopt children. These are all issues that relate directly to religious beliefs and religious commitment. Although people can obviously hold "liberal" or "conservative" preferences on these dimensions for reasons other than religion, these issues are the ones to which religious orthodoxy has a clear, logical relationship (Hunter 1991). Those who see a rise in "cultural" conflict in American politics point to these issues—and others very much like them—as the driving factors.

In sum, we find two prominent dimensions in public opinion, a broad "social welfare" dimension and a narrower "traditional moral" dimension (see also Carmines et al. 2006). We classify individuals as either operational "liberals" or "conservatives" on each of these using an additive scale of preferences for each dimension. Those who give more conservative than liberal responses are classified as operational conservatives on that dimension, and those who give more liberal than conservative responses are classified as operational liberals.

[Figures 2 and 3 Here]

Figure 2 shows the distribution of preferences on both issue domains. Results for the social welfare set confirm what we have long known: on this dominant dimension of conflict operational liberalism dominates. For the "moral" domain it is a closer call, with the numbers of liberals and conservatives roughly equal.

---

[4] We choose to employ the 2000 study because of the breadth and depth of its issue-related questions, although parallel analyses using the issue related content data from more recent (or more distant) NES years produce very similar results.

To look at the relationship between operational and symbolic preferences, we examine the distribution of operational preferences *within* the groups of ideological identifiers. In the top half of Figure 3 we observe operational preferences for citizens who identify as "liberals." This figure shows a high level of consistency between *identifying* as a liberal and holding views which are, in fact, liberal. A considerable majority (66%) of self-identified liberals are liberal on both issue dimensions. Thus to call oneself a liberal is, more or less, to be one.

For self-identified conservatives, the story is quite different. We present a parallel breakdown of issue preferences in the second half of Figure 3. Only about one in five self-identified conservatives holds consistently conservative issue positions: right of center positions on both dimensions. Put another way, *almost 80% of professed conservatives are not conservative on at least one of these dimensions.* A larger group (30%) of conservatives is operationally conservative *only* on the narrow set of issues related to traditional morality, not the broader social welfare dimension. The "economic conservatives," conservative on social welfare issues alone, are not very numerous (15%). But the largest group (34%) of self-identified conservatives rejects operationally conservative beliefs on *both the social welfare and the moral issue domains.* This stands in contrast to the less than 4% of self-identified liberals who hold no liberal issue views.

The larger pattern in the figures is clear. Liberals are a pretty homogeneous lot. Conservatives, by contrast, are heterogeneous, a loose coalition of people with differing political worldviews, many of which are not at all conservative. This analysis suggests that there are three large sized groups of self-identified conservatives with diverse sets of policy preferences, to which we attach labels. "Constrained conservatives" are those who combine conservative identification with consistently conservative policy views. "Moral conservatives" are conservative on the traditional morality issues but little else. And truly "conflicted conservatives" combine conservative identification with left-of-center views on both the economic *and* moral dimensions.

7

Symbolic Conservatism: Three Pathways to Conservative Self Identification

This examination of the relationship between conservatism and issue preferences on the relevant dimensions of conflict provides a baseline for understanding why so many citizens choose the conservative label despite holding few conservative issue preferences. In contrast to liberal identification, we argue that there are systematic reasons that citizens identify as "conservatives" for reasons other than policy preferences and political worldviews. More specifically, we suggest *three* general ways that people can approach the label "conservative." These three different pathways produce three distinct groups of conservatives, united by the ideological label but far different in demographics, in policy preferences, and in social worldviews.

Pathway 1: Ideological Constraint

We begin with the obvious group, and the obvious explanation. Some people identify as conservatives because they *are* conservatives. Scholars have long recognized that some people can use abstract ideology to organize a consistent, belief system (Campbell et al. 1960). For some, ideology represents an effective way to link together a system of beliefs on specific policy issues, integrate unfamiliar issue content into existing belief systems, and understand how their own policy attitudes correspond to those of political elites (Sharp and Lodge 1985, Jacoby 1991). These people understand the meaning of ideological terms and use them to structure their own political attitudes. The mechanism of self identification here is simple cognition. We shall call such people "constrained conservatives" reflecting the Converse (1964) usage.

Such citizens were falsely seen as typical before the advent of serious scholarship on mass opinion. But we now know this is not the case. Possession of a high level of ideological sophistication and the capacity for ideological thinking are conditioned to a large degree by factors such as education, political knowledge, and interest in politics (Stimson 1975, Knight 1985). Although "constrained" liberals and conservatives will obviously differ politically, socially, and demographically, constrained ideologues on both the liberal and conservative side will be disproportionately educated and knowledgeable, will hold strong, well-defined, and

relatively consistent beliefs on the dominant issue dimensions, and will possess the understanding of politics necessary to hold a constrained issue belief system.

But this "constrained" group is a minority—albeit a highly influential one—of all self-identified conservatives. We need to systematically explain the identifications of the rest. Unlike the left-right symmetry of the constrained ideologues, however, our additional two pathways lead only to conservative identifications—and therefore go to the heart of the operational-symbolic gap in American politics.

Pathway 2. Responsiveness to Elite Political Discourse

On many questions of politics there exist dominant frames, shared conceptions of politics and policy which define issues in the context of standard and widely believed stories (Gamson 1992). Such stories embed issues and controversies in a framework that emphasizes some aspects of the issues and downplays others. The dominant frames become answers to the questions of politics. The benefit of the frame to the citizen is context. Issues embedded in frames become more meaningful. The cost is objectivity; the frames tend to point to standard answers which are far from neutral. Choose a frame and you get a slant.

Dominant frames originate in the culture and find expression in the rhetoric of elites, reaching the general public through the mass media. We like to think that in an ideal polity everyone would be exposed to a balance of frames, a competition of ideas. But in real polities some messages dominate others. Thus we expect to see the public reflect such dominance in its own beliefs. What do the messages from American elites tell us about how symbolic ideology and specific social programs are framed for American citizens? What they tell us is that for both "symbolic" and "operational" messages, there exist dominant frames that shape how at least certain segments of the public view their own relationship to the political world.

On the symbolic side, the public is consistently exposed to frames which revere conservative symbols and slur liberal ones. The term "conservative" is held in far greater esteem than the term "liberal" (Jennings 1992, Schiffer 2000). Elite conservatives, as a result, talk a great

deal about the principles of a "conservative" approach to politics and the way in which this general value will affect one's approach to political problems, doing little to explain the concrete implications of this conservatism for policy. Conservatives boast about their conservatism, treating it as a badge of honor. Liberals, by contrast, attack conservative politicians, but usually not their conservatism. Because liberals know the public affection for "conservative," they will call their opponents fools or extremists, and go after their stands on specific issues. But they will not say "My opponent is a conservative" as a means of disparagement. Conservatives play up the positive implications of a "conservative" approach to politics, but "liberals" do not do the same.

When it comes to operational messages, the story is reversed. People prefer government action to meet specific social needs because they like the benefits that government action confers, especially for programs (to improve education, clean the environment, and the like) that benefit all groups of citizens. Liberal politicians thus usually frame their political appeals in terms of *specifics*, since government action, framed in a way that shows how it addresses a specific social need, generally leads to popular support (Sears and Citrin 1995). These polices are, in fact, liberal, but the use of the label "liberal," with its connotations of intrusiveness, recklessness, and more recently, elitism, is avoided. Conversely, conservatives may attack popular social programs at the margins, saying that they are inefficient, poorly administered, or the like, but rarely directly attack the worth of the specific social programs themselves (see Jacoby 2000). [5]

The dominant frames in American politics, the ways in which liberal and conservative elites describe and defend their own actions, thus conflict, but do so in ways that may not be apparent to large segments of the general public. When it comes to ideological symbols, "conservatism" dominates. But when it comes to specific social programs, spending and government action to solve specific social problems is lauded. If one asks the simple question,

---

[5] The importance of 'dominant frames' to the operational-symbolic disconnect is reinforced by the fact that citizens usually form ideological self-identification in response to broad, general messages and concepts (Conover and Feldman 1981), while opinions on issues are often formed in response to feelings about the worth of the specific social goal in question (Jacoby 1995).

"what do citizens hear?" the answer is that they hear dominant messages of operational liberalism *and* symbolic conservatism. It is, of course, the case that the real policy implications of these "conservative" and "liberal" messages conflict with one another. But since they deal with different things—liberal specifics, conservative symbols—and since neither is given much opposition in mainstream political discourse, the context necessary for citizens who are only vaguely involved in politics to reconcile their competing implications and choose between them is not apparent. As a result, people may internalize *both* types of messages, espousing ideological conservatism, while holding predominantly liberal issue beliefs on both relevant dimensions.

The story here is thus straightforward. Some citizens will identify as conservatives while simultaneously holding liberal issue opinions as a reflection of the conflicting political messages to which they are exposed. Converse (1964) and Zaller (1992) tell us who these citizens will be. They will not be sophisticates, interested and informed enough to sort through and resolve conflicting messages. But they will also not be those completely disengaged from politics, those not paying enough attention to pick up the dominant frames sent by political elites. Those in the "middle"—who receive competing cues, but lack the contextual knowledge to sort through their competing implications—are more likely to accept *both* dominant messages, holding attitudes that are both operationally liberal and symbolically conservative.

Pathway 3. From Theology to Politics

The term "conservative," of course, has meaning in contexts other than politics. One particular place that it has a relatively clear meaning—and potential implications for ideological self-identification—is in the context of religion. Religion is central to the lives of many Americans. And in a world where politics is central for few, religious values are perceived as more important than politics for the vast majority of church-going Americans. Thus if there is transfer of concepts between the domains of religion and politics, for most the dominant domain would be religion: it is likely that concepts originating in religion would find their way into politics, with transfer in the other direction less common (see Leege and Kellstedt 1993).

The term "conservative" has a rich connotation in religious practice and religious doctrine. Usually applied to Protestant Christians, there is a parallel movement also inside Roman Catholicism. Those who style themselves "conservative" in religious terms tend to believe in the literal word-for-word truth of the Bible, in Heaven and Hell as literal places, and the like (Kellstedt and Smidt 1991; Wald 2003). Against the backdrop of modernism—the increased tolerance for nontraditional sexual practices, sex outside of marriage and homosexuality, for example—doctrinally conservative Christians hew to the original view, that sex is permitted only in the context of (heterosexual) marriage blessed by the Church. They strongly oppose abortion—often also birth control—and homosexuality.

Do conservative Christians know that they are "conservative?" We think that they do—at least with respect to religion. In the obvious case, some churches include "conservative" in their name. But beyond that, regular church-goers are exposed to a level of theological education that vastly exceeds anything that happens in politics (e.g., Beatty and Walter 1989). Many Americans combine an interest in politics that only occurs at two-or four- year intervals with going to church (and often Sunday School as well) *every* Sunday. Thus, where confusion about the meaning of ideological labels is normal in politics, most conservative Christians know quite firmly that they are conservatives in the religious sense. It is for many a vital component of self identity.

So long as religion and politics remain separable domains, this usage of the same language has no consequences. But we postulate that millions of Americans who know that they are religious conservatives are simultaneously confused by what "conservative" means in politics. When asked to choose a political ideology, they draw upon the only connotation of "conservatism" with which they have a deep understanding, regardless of the term's implications for real political conflict. They thus translate their religious self-identification directly to their political self-identification, adopting at least the name of the political ideology associated with small government, low taxes, and freedom from economic regulation. Since moral traditionalism is associated with some aspects of modern political conservatism, that is not entirely wrong. But

since the 'moral' side of conservatism is only a small slice of the whole of modern policy conflict, it is mainly wrong. Thus people who may call for more regulation of business and support fundamental equality in the economic sphere end up identifying themselves as "conservative.[6]" Further, and just as importantly, because politics is so peripheral for so many, even many citizens who hold doctrinally "conservative" positions on issues such as abortion and sexual morality may be largely *unaware* that these positions also happen to be politically conservative—for them, the attitudes are religious, not political ones.[7]

We thus expect that a number of self-identified conservatives are actually religious conservatives who translate the doctrinal conservatism with which they identify into political conservatism regardless of their political opinions, and, in many cases, without an understanding that their morally conservative positions on issues that tie directly to religious orthodoxy are, in fact, politically conservative. This is not simply identifying as politically conservative because of one's positions on moral issues: it is the direct (mis)-application of the label that one attaches to his or her religious identity to political self-identification, without an understanding of its political consequences. This pathway to conservative identification has implications for the relationship between doctrinal conservatism, issues directly related to doctrinal conservatism, and ideological

---

[6] This is especially important given the heterogeneity of messages sent with respect to economic and social welfare issues by various types of "doctrinally conservative" churches. Some doctrinally conservative churches send (politically) conservative messages to parishioners on issues of social welfare and redistribution of wealth, others pay little attention to them, and still others (notably, some African-American congregations and Catholic churches) hold liberal preferences on these issues (Guth 1996, Cavendish 2000). Doctrinally liberal churches, by contrast, are generally politically liberal across the board (e.g., Green 2003), so the cross-contamination of ideological terms is far less-likely to be an issue for doctrinally liberal citizens. Doctrinally liberal citizens are by and large, also politically liberal.

[7] While we have emphasized religion as a source of extra-political definition of conservatism, the word also carries a cultural connotation, strongly associated for many with traditional religious notions of temperance and morality. Along with church on Sunday, imagine living by conventions—marriage, family, children, and work—and you have a lifestyle often called conservative. "Conservative" in this context means conventional behavior and appearance, playing by the established rules. And if the hundred million or so of such conventional Americans were largely conservative in their political issue beliefs, the picture would be complete. But for many, their lifestyle is conservative, but their political views are not.

self-identification. It also suggests that ideologically conservative citizens with conservative political preferences only on this narrow moral issue domain should be systematically different from other types of conservatives—and from citizens who share their issue preferences, but not the "conservative" label.

Who are the Constrained, Moral, and Conflicted Conservatives?

The general idea thus far is that there is one way to become a self-identified liberal and (at least) three different ways to become a conservative. Our data show us that we have three groups of conservatives of roughly equal size, each with a different combination of policy preferences to complement their conservative self-identification. Here, we ask the fundamental question, are these groups fundamentally different from one another, and is an explanation of who they are consistent with the "three pathways" idea? For an answer, we examine demographic, social, and political characteristics of the three groups of conservatives. For comparison, we also examine the same characteristics for constrained liberals, the only group of self-identified liberals large enough for meaningful analysis.

[Table 2 Here]

A comparison of the characteristics of the three groups of conservatives (see Table 2) reveals that the groups of self-identified conservatives are indeed substantively different from one another and that their characteristics are generally supportive of the "three pathways" idea. Constrained conservatives are, as would be expected, disproportionately educated, interested in politics, and politically knowledgeable. They are overwhelmingly attached to the party and political candidate of their ideological "side" and are likely to hold a personal worldview (e.g., a distaste for government, a preference for individualism over egalitarianism) that is consistent with more abstract understandings of conservatism.

The other types of conservatives look quite different from both the "constrained conservatives" and from each other. The difference between constrained and moral conservatives is especially interesting. Both groups are highly religious, and more likely than the others to

believe in the inerrancy of the Bible—a standard indicator of doctrinal conservatism (see

Kellstedt and Smidt 1991). This is to be expected from the two groups that hold conservative

positions on issues of traditional morality. But constrained conservatives are far more educated,

have higher incomes, and are more interested in politics than are moral conservatives. Moral

conservatives, by contrast, are less skeptical of the federal government and more receptive to the

abstract notion of economic "equality." Constrained and moral conservatives are similar with

respect to religious characteristics (and beliefs on the dimension of issues directly connected to

religious orthodoxy), but moral conservatives exhibit no other evidence of looking

(demographically) or thinking (operationally) like constrained conservatives.[8]

Of course, religiously conservative people of all kinds are obviously more likely to hold

conservative positions on issues of traditional morality, so it is not surprising that our constrained

and moral conservatives look similar on indicators of religious traditionalism, but different on

other matters. More importantly, then, there is evidence that the issue preferences on abortion and

homosexuality of our moral conservatives—in contrast to those for constrained conservatives—

are derived without an understanding of the *political* implications of these preferences.

Moral conservatives, for example, are as likely as constrained conservatives—and far

more likely than the general population—to profess that the issue of abortion is important to

them. This is expected given that these groups hold religious beliefs that stress the importance of

(preventing) abortion. But moral conservatives are considerably less likely than both constrained

conservatives and the general public to understand the *politics* of moral issues. Asked to classify

the 2000 presidential candidates by their abortion stances, only 44% of moral conservatives

correctly placed George Bush to the right of Al Gore on abortion, a percentage not much greater

---

[8]Perhaps the most striking difference between consistent and moral conservatives is that of race.
A plurality of African Americans are self-identified conservatives, even though only 11% are
operationally conservative on the "New Deal" dimension of conflict and only 8% are
Republicans. By far the largest group of ideologically conservative African-Americans are those
who hold conservative preferences only on "moral" issues. This does still more to imply that
some factors that are associated with citizens' liberal–conservative ideology are *not* directly
associated with either issue preferences or partisanship.

than the 33% that would be expected from chance. By contrast, 72% of constrained conservatives placed the candidates correctly. Moral conservatives, in other words, are largely unable to connect a religiously conservative position—even one to which they attach great importance—to its political implication. Opposition to abortion has meaning for both "doctrinal" and "political" conservatism. Constrained conservatives may hold anti-abortion views because of their religious beliefs, but they also largely understand the issue's implications for modern political conflict. Moral conservatives may come to an anti-abortion position through the same (religious) means. But the implications of this preference for parties and politics are not apparent to most, even those who profess to care a great deal about the issue. This suggests that moral conservatives are *not* "issue publics" on moral issues: they largely fail to see the political implications of their views, strong and deeply-held as they may be.

Truly "conflicted" conservatives look little like either constrained conservatives or moral conservatives. They are less committed to religious principles and practice. Not as secular as are constrained liberals, they nonetheless look more like liberals with respect to religion than they do either of the other groups of conservatives. They are educated at roughly the same rates as constrained conservatives, but score at or slightly below average in terms of political knowledge and interest. Demographically and socially, and with respect to many broad attitudes on the role of government and fundamental political values, they look much like constrained liberals, whose policy preferences they share. In terms of electoral behavior and partisan identification, they split almost evenly between Democrats and Republicans.

We see that the differences between types of conservatives are meaningful. The groups differ markedly with respect to knowledge, education, income, religious commitment, and other symbolic attitudes. Constrained conservatives are disproportionately educated, sophisticated, religiously orthodox, and skeptical of government intervention. Moral conservatives are religiously orthodox, but are more likely to be less educated, low-income, uninterested in politics,

and more supportive of governmental efforts to solve social problems. Conflicted conservatives resemble, in many ways, constrained liberals. But they are less politically knowledgeable.

Explaining the Pathways to Conservatism

Finally, we go beyond descriptive analysis to a more systematic look at why people with different combinations of policy preferences choose to identify as "conservative" and whether the "three pathways" idea helps explain the public's preference for the "conservative" label along with liberal issue preferences. If the three different types of conservatives are different groups of people, then it should be possible to use key social, and political variables to understand who the different groups of self-identified conservatives are and why they choose to identify as such. We use a variety of techniques to analyze the subgroups independently, in an effort to understand why people in each group identify as conservative.

Constrained Conservatives

The first type, the constrained conservatives, is the most straightforward. We expect that those who claim an ideology which matches their actual views to be mostly citizens with the education, sophistication, and beliefs necessary to conceptualize politics in ideological terms and incorporate ideology into a larger political belief system (Jacoby 1986). In this sense, and despite their other differences, constrained conservatives should look much like constrained liberals.

[Table 3 Here]

To get leverage on this idea, we create models that predict whether citizens hold consistent operational and ideological preferences. We estimate three logit models: the first, examining the likelihood of being a "constrained" ideologue in the population at large, and the second two asking the same question for citizens whose issue preferences are either consistently liberal or consistently conservative on both dimensions. This analysis (Table 3) is supportive of the descriptive evidence above. Among both operational liberals and conservatives, as well as in the public as a whole, indicators of education and political sophistication strongly predict whether someone holds operational and ideological beliefs in line with one another. Constrained

17

conservatives, much like constrained liberals, understand elite ideological discourse and structure their own attitudes accordingly.

This is to be expected. The first "pathway" to conservatism—constrained conservatives as politically sophisticated ideological conservatives—is consistent with what we have long known about the role of knowledge and sophistication in political belief systems. The other two types of policy preference conservatives are more novel. Explaining the conservative identification of these groups is important in understanding why there are so many self-identified conservatives in the population when operational policy sentiment tells us that there should not be.

"Conflicted" Conservatism

The ideal way to understand what "conflicted" and ""moral" conservatives mean when they call themselves as "conservative" would be, of course, to ask them. But there is little systematic data in recent election studies that document what self-identified conservatives mean when they say that they identify as "conservative." And self-reports of the meaning that respondents ascribe to ideological terms are likely to be difficult to interpret and non-generalizable in any case. Validating the two other pathways to conservatism is thus more difficult and the questions more subtle. In the absence of reliable self-reports, we look for indirect evidence that supports the case.

The next step is to understand why our "conflicted conservatives," people operationally conservative on neither major dimension of issue conflict who self-identify as "conservatives," hold conflicting beliefs. Our theory points to the dominant messages of political elites as explanation. There is ample evidence in the survey tradition that the bipolar conception of ideology of political elites—that liberal and conservative doctrines are in conflict and therefore accepting one necessarily implies rejecting the other—is not shared by major portions of the mass electorate. Many citizens feel free to pick and choose elements from both left and right without any sense of contradiction, the core condition necessary for the "conflicting considerations" model of opinion formation (Zaller 1992). But these dominant messages sent by political elites

themselves send a contradiction: a preference for operational liberalism and symbolic conservatism. A citizen who does not carefully sort through the conflict will end up with inconsistent views. The reception and acceptance of these elite messages is crucial in determining who is likely to hold conflicted preferences.

Although citizens learn about politics in a number of ways, most who obtain political information do so through the mainstream press. Paying regular attention to the news media is often thought of as one of the hallmarks of an informed and engaged citizen. But if one of the functions of the mass media is to transmit the competing messages of political elites, exposure to news may exacerbate the potential for operational-symbolic conflict. Those who pay more attention to the news will be more exposed to the conflicting dominant frames—they will receive a greater number of both symbolic appeals from conservatives and operational appeals from liberals. It is individuals who receive these messages and do not understand their conflicting implications who are good candidates to hold "conflicted" operational-symbolic preferences.

To test the conflicting frames hypothesis, we estimate logit models predicting "conflicted conservative" preferences as a function of contextual and demographic factors. The dependent variable is a simple "1" for individuals who are operationally liberal on both issue dimensions and identify as conservative (a "conflicted conservative") and 0 for otherwise. We expect that the likelihood of holding conflicted conservative preferences will be a function of education, knowledge and interest (as those with higher levels of all of these should be less likely to hold operational-symbolic conflict) and of news media exposure. It is impossible in the survey setting to tell how many political messages a person has received. But we do have a measure of the amount of exposure that citizens have to new content from television, radio, and print sources. This can measure, albeit imperfectly, the number of political cues to which one has been exposed.

Following the work of Zaller (1992), we expect that political knowledge will mediate the relationship between media exposure and micro-level conflict. Conflicted conservatives, rather than being people entirely "tuned out" of politics, should be those who are most likely to receive

"conflicting" dominant elite cues without the contextual information necessary to reconcile conflicting implications. Those with especially low levels of knowledge—even if they receive a great deal of mainstream news—will not pay attention to or process the political messages of elites. If they are reading or watching news, they are doing so for reasons other than politics. Conversely, those with high levels of knowledge will receive messages, but will also understand that the operational messages of elite liberals and the symbolic messages of elite conservatives actually do conflict and will process them accordingly. It is those with modest amounts of knowledge—those who receive and process political messages, but are not necessarily able to understand or resolve their conflicting implications—who are likely to internalize the messages of both operational liberalism and symbolic conservatism.

[Table 4 Here]

We explore the issue in Table 4. The first, baseline, model (column 1) tests the direct impact of each of the concepts of interest on the likelihood of holding conflicted preferences. As expected, higher levels of education and interest decrease the likelihood of operational-ideological conflict, as does the holding of relatively weak issue beliefs. [9]

The second model (column 2) analyzes the effects of exposure to the news media across three levels of political sophistication (operationalized by dividing the population into the top, middle, and lower "thirds" of knowledge based on responses to an 8-point battery of factual questions). The results show that exposure to elite cues increases the likelihood of "conflicted conservatism" *only for those in this middle tier* of sophistication. Only among these citizens is the effect of political news media significantly different from zero. The news media transmit

---

[9] Including a control for "strength of preference" on each dimension also serves as an implicit control for the fact that both measures of issue preferences are based on non-random samples of political issues, and that the categorization of respondents as operationally liberal or conservative was occasionally based on knife-edge coding decisions (e.g., a respondent who gave 7 conservative responses and 6 liberal responses was classified as conservative, while a respondent who gave 6 conservative responses and 7 liberal was considered a liberal). The inclusion of this control guards against the notion that measurement and classification error drives the results.

conflicting elite messages, in other words, in a way that increases the likelihood of operational-symbolic conflict among those unable to reconcile the conflicting implications of the cues.[10]

There are undoubtedly individual-level, idiosyncratic differences among self-identified conservatives that are ignored with this predictive analysis. But as a general explanation, it seems that these citizens hold "conflicted" beliefs largely because they have internalized and accepted the messages of both conservative and liberal political elites. They identify as conservative because they like the ideological label as it is used in elite discourse, but are unaware of how it relates to the larger political context. "Conflicted conservatives," in other words, are conservative in name only: they like (and are persuaded by) symbolically conservative messages, but show no evidence of operational conservatism.

Moral Conservatives

Our final task is to understand the moral conservatives, citizens who we argue identify as "conservative" largely because of the meaning of the term for religious orthodoxy. These citizens do hold some conservative positions, but we argue that these positions are often derived exclusively from religious beliefs—without an understanding of their implications for political conflict. For there to be evidence that *doctrinal* conservatism is being translated to *political* conservatism in a way that explains why a disproportionate number of citizens with conservative issue preferences only on the narrow dimension of "moral" conflict identify as conservatives, we must find at least indirect evidence that a) preferences on traditional moral issues are more strongly associated with ideological self-identification than would be expected given their role in purely political discourse, and b) that the segment of people we label "moral conservatives" are more likely to also be *doctrinal* conservatives than citizens who share their operational beliefs on

---

[10]It is possible this frame of reference is incorrect. We might instead focus on who, *among operational liberals*, chooses to identify as conservative or (conversely) who, *among self-identified conservatives*, is consistently operationally liberal. It is worth noting that in models estimated with either of these restricted samples, the effects of the variables of theoretical interest are similar to those in the "full population" model.

21

both traditional moral and social welfare issues, but reject the conservative ideological label in favor of a "moderate" or "liberal" self-identification.

We first explore the relationship between the two dimensions of policy preferences and ideological-self identification. Doctrinal orthodoxy—at least in the current religious context—has clear implications for political beliefs only on the traditional moral dimension, not for many issues on the dominant social welfare dimension. Although elite-structured political discourse takes place on both dimensions, the social welfare dimension comprises comparably more of the whole of elite policy discourse and federal-level policy outputs (see Erikson et al 2002). If the political connotations of "liberal" and "conservative" are all that matter to ideological self-identification, then the social welfare dimension should be more closely associated with ideology. But if "religious" conservatism is being translated to *political* conservatism, we should see that the issues connected to the religious liberal-conservative divide should have a disproportionate association with ideological self-identification, as many would be translating their religiously-driven beliefs directly to political ideology.

[Table 5, Figure 4 Here]

To examine this idea, in Table 5 we estimate a multinomial logistic regression predicting ideological self-identification in the electorate ("conservative (-1), "moderate (0), "liberal" (+1)) as a function of standardized additive measures of policy preferences on each of these two issue dimensions and some standard covariates of self-identification. Results are in the first two columns of Table 5. On average, preferences on "moral" issues are significantly more powerful in differentiating self-identified liberals and conservatives than are New Deal issues. The estimated weight in predicting self-identification is -0.71 for the moral issue domain as opposed to -0.44 for the New Deal issues (χ^2=4.17, p<.05). Figure 4 graphs the estimated impact of preferences on these two dimensions on self-identification, displaying the probability that an ideological identifier is "conservative" given his or her policy preferences on each dimension. Even though the "moral" dimension has only 3 (as opposed to 13) policy issues, the effect of holding strongly

22

"conservative" or "liberal" preferences relative to the population on this dimension is greater than the effect of holding similarly extreme preferences on the social welfare dimension.

The fact that the narrow dimension of issues with a direct relationship to doctrinal orthodoxy has a greater association with ideological self-identification than "New Deal" preferences is supportive of the idea that explicitly *political* liberalism and conservatism is not the only liberalism and conservatism that people associate with ideological terms. Of course, the issues on the moral dimension are also symbolic "easy" issues which on which citizens are more likely to understand the political implications (Carmines and Stimson 1980). In addition, these issues may have comparably higher salience in the electorate and thus will be more relevant to political choices and affiliations of all kinds. It could simply be the case, then, that the moral dimension is more closely related to self-identification because it is simply easier for all types of citizens to both understand and base decisions upon it.

It is thus important to note that while moral issues are disproportionately important in predicting *ideological* identification, they are far less effective in predicting *party* identification. Replicating the models with a trichotomous measure of party identification (Republican, Independent, Democrat) instead of ideological self-identification as the dependent variable yields results nearly opposite to those of the ideological-self identification model. Social welfare issues are far more relevant than are moral issues in distinguishing Democrats from Republicans (χ^2=7.62, p<.01: see columns 3 and 4 of Table 5). Moral issues matter disproportionately to ideological self-identification, but not to partisanship. The exceptionally strong relationship of moral preferences to conservative identification thus suggests that the "ideology" that citizens associate with moral issues has, at least for some citizens, an extra-political meaning.

The pathways idea also suggests that the large group of "moral conservatives" often misdefine "doctrinal conservative" to also mean "political conservative," and identify politically accordingly. We thus must understand whether the "moral conservatives" are identifying as conservative because of their adherence to conservative religious doctrine. One way to get

leverage on this idea is to examine the self-identifications of a broader group of "cross-pressured" citizens: those who are conservative on issues of traditional morality, but hold liberal preferences on economic issues. Our moral conservatives fall into this group, but so do many others who consider themselves non-ideological "moderates" and a smaller group that identifies as "liberal." While religious orthodoxy is obviously highly correlated with conservative opinions on moral issues, people can come to politically conservative positions on moral issues for reasons other than religious orthodoxy (e.g., Loftus 2001).

But if the idea that religious conservatism is being transferred to conservative identification is correct, then among people with this combination of preferences—liberal on social welfare issues, conservative on moral issues—it is the *doctrinally* conservative—those who have an overarching understanding of religious conservatism from which their moral issue preferences are derived—that should identify as *politically* conservative. Conversely, for those whose "conservative" positions on the moral dimension are not being shaped by a conception of religious commitment, but by other factors, there is no reason to think that they should be disproportionately conservative in self-identification. For these people, "moral" issues are simply political issues, much like any others, on which they happen to take conservative positions. We expect that among these citizens with these operational cross-pressures, doctrinal conservatism should have a clear and strong link to the probability of identifying as politically conservative.

We estimate multinomial logit models of ideological self-identification for people with liberal New Deal preferences, but conservative moral issue preferences. The sample here includes those classified as "moral conservatives" above, as well as those with the same combination of preferences who are self-identified "liberals" or "moderates." If the "pathways" theory is correct, then we should see a direct relationship between biblical conservatism and ideological self-identification among this group.

[Table 6 Here]

24

Results are reported in Table 6. Column one includes standard demographic and social predictors, as well as a standard measure of biblical orthodoxy: a three point scale asking respondents about the degree to which they believe the Bible to be literally true. This orthodoxy measure has powerful statistical and substantive effects on conservative identification. Among those who hold conservative positions on moral issues, it is the *religiously* conservative who are most likely to be *politically* conservative. It appears, in other words, that those whose conservative preferences on moral issues are more likely a reflection of doctrinally conservative beliefs do translate their religious beliefs into conservative identification. Those whose moral issue beliefs are driven by factors other than orthodoxy are more likely to be political "moderates" or "liberals."

It is also important to note that it is not other aspects of religious commitment or identity, but doctrinal conservatism explicitly that relates to political conservatism (see column 3). It is not church attendance, not guidance from God, not even a desire for morally traditional lifestyles that predicts conservative ideological self-identification among this group of citizens. Rather, it is only doctrinal conservatism itself that relates directly to ideological self-identification. In sum, we have evidence that, at least for some segments of the population, self-identified conservatism is related to the extra-political meaning of "conservative" grounded in religious orthodoxy. Issues directly related to religious orthodoxy are more strongly related to political ideology than are social welfare issues, even though the social welfare dimension encompasses most of what we think of as elite policy debate (and is by far the more important dimension in explaining mass partisanship). And among citizens who hold conservative positions on "moral" issues, biblical orthodoxy has a direct relationship to self identification.

This is, of course, a general point: We cannot claim that ideological identification of all "moral conservatives" comes directly from religious orthodoxy. But at least for many of citizens, the meanings of "liberalism" and "conservatism"—and the decision to identify as politically conservative—are contaminated by the use of the terms in the religious context. These citizens

may actually *be* conservative on some political issues, but the "conservatism" that is used to structure these beliefs is principally of a religious nature. For many, there is no contradiction between a conservative self-identification and holding liberal issue preferences on the dimension that structures most policy conflict, because that self-identification is not explicitly political.

Conclusions and implications

We have shown that there are three different "pathways" through which people can approach the decision to identify with the ideological term "conservative," pathways rooted in three different *meanings* of the term itself. Conover and Feldman (1981) argued that in the minds of the general public, "liberal" and "conservative" are not opposites, but are instead separate concepts, evaluated in light of feelings toward separate groups. This paper takes that argument a step further, arguing that the term "conservative" is itself multifaceted, as different groups of people bring substantively different ideas to its meaning and identify as conservative for systematically different reasons. This implies that ideological self-identification may be important for all types of conservatives, but the impact of self-identification on political choices—and the types of political appeals that "conservatives" are likely to respond to—can be quite different.

Most importantly, the idea of multiple "pathways" to conservatism also provides some insight into American electoral dynamics. We have long known that ideology is a source more of stability in electoral outcomes than of change (Campbell et al. 1960). Constrained ideologues, those who match a liberal or conservative identification to a consistent set of policy views, constitute the partisan and ideological bases of the two major parties. Because they loyally support their own side, they produce almost no longitudinal variation in electoral outcomes. Purely non-ideological moderates, on the other hand, do not respond to ideological appeals and thus are most susceptible to persuasion by popular or eloquent candidates or to the "nature of the times." But the two other groups of conservatives, those who either take consistently liberal positions or hold conservative positions only on issues where doctrinal conservatism is relevant, may be especially important to understanding the dynamics of mass electoral behavior.

For the citizens that we have labeled moral conservatives, the idea that doctrinal conservatism can be translated directly into political conservatism is not simply a curious artifact of the survey context, but can have real political implications. Candidates can occasionally gain electoral advantage by mobilizing religiously conservative voters around some manufactured social issue of the time (gay marriage, for example). But individual "social issues" generally have little staying power in American politics, and the number of religiously orthodox voters who will care a great deal about any given issue is likely to be quite small. Most religiously conservative citizens, for example, are likely to oppose gay marriage. But finding a large number of religiously conservative voters who care enough about gay marriage (or any other particular issue) to have the issue drive their vote choice (especially if they are working-class or operationally liberal on most other issues) is another matter.

But if politicians can connect religiously conservative positions on these individual issues to a broader message of "conservatism," then it is possible to mobilize a large group of religiously conservative voters not around transient political issues of limited import to most, but rather under the guise of protecting a "conservative" value system that voters both identify with and care deeply about. More closely tying the symbols of *political* conservatism to the value system implied by *religious* orthodoxy may be an effective way to generate long-term change in the behavior of religious conservatives.

Truly "conflicted" conservatives, with the capacity to be persuaded both by liberal issue positions and conservative symbols, represent an interesting and politically important swing group. When specific issues and social problems dominate political discourse, liberal candidates will generally earn the support of conflicted conservatives. When symbols and ideological rhetoric dominate, conservative candidates can expect to win. Because of this, the conflicted conservatives become the dynamic element in electoral politics, producing much of the cyclical change that is such a hallmark of the American polity.

REFERENCES:

Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes.1960. *The*

American Voter. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Cantril, Albert and Susan Davis Cantril. 1999. *Reading Mixed Signals: Ambivalence in Public*

Opinion about Government. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Press.

Cavendish, James. 2000. Church-Based Community Activism: A Comparison of White and

Black Catholic Congregations. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 39: 64-77.

Conover, Pamela J. and Stanley Feldman. 1980. The Origins and Meaning of Liberal-

Conservative Self Identifications. *American Journal of Political Science* 25(4): 617-645.

Converse, Philip E. 1964. The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics. In David Apter (ed.)

Ideology and Discontent. New York: The Free Press.

Erikson, Robert S., Michael B. MacKuen and James A. Stimson. 2002. *The Macro Polity*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Free, Lloyd A. and Hadley Cantril. 1967. *The Political Beliefs of Americans: A Study of Public*

Opinion. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Green, John C. 2003. A Liberal Dynamo: The Political Activism of the Unitarian-Universalist

Clergy. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42: 577-590.

Guth, James L. 1996. The Politics of the Christian Right. In John C. Green, James L. Guth,

Corwin E. Smidt, and Lyman A. Kellstedt (eds.) Reli*gion and the Culture Wars: Dispatches*

from the Front. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.

Hunter, James D. 1991. *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. New York: Basic Books.

Jacoby, William G. 1986. Levels of Conceptualization and Reliance on the Liberal-Conservative

Continuum. *Journal of Politics* 48(2): 423-432.

Jacoby, William G. 1991. Ideological Identification and Issue Attitudes. *American Journal of*

Political Science 35(1): 178-205.

Jacoby, William G .1995. The Structure of Ideological Thinking in the American Electorate. *American Journal of Political Science* 39(2): 314-335.

Jacoby, William G. 2000. Issue Framing and Public Opinion on Government Spending. *American Journal of Political Science* 44(4): 750-767.

Jennings, M. Kent. 1992. Ideological Thinking Among Mass Publics and Political Elites. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 56(2): 419-441.

Kellstedt, Lyman A., and Corwin Smidt. 1991. Measuring Fundamentalism: An Analysis of Different Operational Strategies. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30: 259-278.

Knight, Kathleen. 1985. Ideology in the 1980 Election: Ideological Sophistication Does Matter. *Journal of Politics* 47(4): 828-853.

Layman, Geoffrey C. and Thomas Carsey. 2002. Party Polarization and "Conflict Extension" in the American Electorate. *American Journal of Political Science* 46(4): 786-802.

Leege, David C. and Lyman A. Kellstedt (eds.). 1993. *Rediscovering the Religious Factor in American Politics*. London: M.E. Sharpe.

Loftus, Jeni. 2001. America's Liberalization in Attitudes toward Homosexuality, 1973 to 1998. *American Sociological* Review. 66: 762-782.

Poole, Keith T. and Howard Rosenthal. 1997. Congress: *A Political-Economic History of Roll Call Voting.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schiffer, Adam J. 2000. I'm Not That Liberal: Explaining Conservative Democratic Identification. *Political Behavior* 22(4): 293-310.

Sears, David O. and Jack Citrin. 1982. *Tax Revolt: Something for Nothing in California*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sharp, Carol and Milton Lodge. 1985. Partisan and Ideological Belief Systems: Do they Differ? *Political Behavior* 7(2): 147-166.

Stimson, James. 1975. Belief Systems, Constraint, Complexity, and the 1972 Election. *American Journal of Political Science* 19(2):393-418.

Stimson, James. 1999. *Public Opinion in America (2ⁿᵈ ed.).* Boulder, Co: Westview Press.

Stimson, James. 2004. *Tides of Consent*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wald, Kenneth D. 2003. *Religion and Politics in the United States*. New York: Rowman and
Littlefield.

Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion.* Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press.

Table 1. Exploratory Factor Analysis of Policy Preferences in the American Electorate, 2000.

	Dimension 1: "New Deal"	Dimension 2: "Moral"
Spending on Welfare	**.68**	.06
Spending on Foreign Aid	**.28**	.07
Spending on Food Stamps	**.66**	.03
Spending on the Poor	**.50**	-.00
Spending on Social Security	**.19**	-.06
Spending on the Environment	**.17**	.15
Spending on Education	**.16**	.13
Government's role in Helping Blacks	**.28**	.05
Spending on Child Care	**.25**	.15
Spending on Improving the Conditions of Blacks	**.47**	.03
English as the Official Language	**.18**	.13
Spending on AIDS research	**.19**	.18
School Integration	**.19**	.06
Death Penalty	**.19**	.06
Adoption of Children by Homosexuals	.11	**.61**
Abortion	.03	**.49**
Gays in the Military	-.01	**.51**
Spending to Improve Roads	-.03	-.08
School Choice	.00	.11
Spending on Reducing Crime	.00	-.10
Spending on Reducing Illegal Immigration	.10	.11

Notes: table entries are factor loadings (varimax rotation). Bold entries indicate that an issue was retained for use in forming additive scales for the designated factor. Factor scores correlate with the additive scales at .81 (dimension 1) and .95 (dimension 2).

Table 2. Selected Social, Demographic, and Political Attributes of Different "Types" of Conservatives.

	Constrained Conservatives	Moral Conservatives	Conflicted Conservatives	Constrained Liberals
Education/Sophistication				
% college degree or more	30%	23%	31%	43%
% HS degree or less	30%	54%	35%	22%
Mean score: 8-point political knowledge scale	4.58	3.12	3.71	4.22
% "very interested" in 2000 Presidential campaign	44%	27%	25%	34%
Demographics				
Female	40%	57%	62%	61%
Nonwhite	9%	31%	18%	22%
South	40%	45%	31%	29%
Religion				
% who believe that the bible is "the literal word of god, to be taken word for word"	51%	63%	28%	10%
% who attend church almost every week or every week	60%	57%	31%	20%
Political Attributes				
Bush % of vote, 2000	91%	65%	51%	9%
% Republican	81%	49%	48%	11%
% Democrat	13%	40%	41%	81%
% placing Republicans to the ideological right of Democrats	77%	55%	55%	72%
% placing Bush to the right of Gore on services/spending	72%	45%	46%	56%
% placing Bush to right of Gore on abortion	72%	44%	46 %	64%
% saying abortion issue is very or extremely important	65%	69%	51%	59%
Symbolic Attitudes				
% who feel government has gotten bigger because social problems have (as opposed to it meddling in things people should do for themselves)	24%	59%	54%	77%
% agreeing with statement "we'd have fewer problems if we treated people equally"	40%	58%	58%	65%

Note: exact estimates of significance vary, but as a rough guide, any between-group difference of roughly 10% or more can be considered statistically significant (p<.05, two-tailed).

Table 3. Effects on the Likelihood of Holding "Consistent" Operational-Symbolic Preferences.

	Among All Citizens	Among those with operationally conservative preferences	Among those with operationally liberal preferences
Education (Highest Degree earned)	.10 * (.12)	.06 (.16)	.23 * (.07)
Political Knowledge (8-point scale of factual questions)	.12* (.04)	.23 * (.14)	.03 (.06)
Political Interest (3-point scale)	.25 * (.10)	.61 * (.34)	.02 (.15)
Partisanship	.03 (.06)	.44 * (.13)	-.44 * (.07)
Strength of Partisanship	-.04 (.03)	-.29 (.21)	-.22 * (.11)
Nonwhite	-.58 * (.17)	-.16 (.78)	-.44 * (.23)
Female	-.01 (.13)	.44 (.47)	-.17 (.20)
South	-.23 * (.14)	.01 (.49)	-.05 (.21)
Northeast	-.12 (.17)	-.46 (.70)	-.24 (.25)
Strength of "New Deal" Preferences	.21 * (.03)	-.05 (.12)	.14 * (.04)
Strength of "Moral" Preferences	.61 * (.07)	.14 (.25)	.43 * (.11)
Constant	-3.53 * (.30)	-2.44 (.93)	-1.01 * (.48)
N	1551	211	593
Pseudo- R^2	.15	.24	.17
Log-Likelihood	-829.27	-70.66	-340.54

Notes: Entries are Logit Coefficients (standard errors in parentheses).   * $p<.05$ (two-tailed)

Table 4. Predicting "Conflicted Conservative" Preferences in the Electorate.

	(1)	(2)
Political Knowledge	.05 (.06)	
News Exposure	.31 * (.10)	
Highest 1/3 of knowledge (Dummy)		-.69 (-.47)
Middle 1/3 of Knowledge (Dummy)		-.71 * (.35)
High Knowledge * News Exposure		.25 (.19)
Medium Knowledge * News Exposure		.46 * (.14)
Low Knowledge * News Exposure		-.00 (.16)
Strength of New Deal Preferences	.13 * (.02)	.07 * (.03)
Strength of Moral Preferences	.47 * (.05)	.39 * (.05)
Partisanship	.34 * (.04)	.34 * (.04)
Political Interest	-.24 + (.13)	-.27 * (.13)
Education	-.09 (.05)	-.09 + (.05)
Log-Likelihood	-538.22	-535.47
Pseudo-R^2	.16	.17
N	1276	1276

Notes: Entries are Logit Coefficients (standard errors in parentheses) $+ p<.10$ $* p<.05$ (two-tailed)
Race, Gender, and Region (south and northeast) Controls are included in the model, but are non-significant $(p>.20)$ and not shown here.

Table 5. Predicting Ideological and Partisan Identification in the Electorate.

	Ideological Self-Identification Base Category: Liberal		Partisanship Base Category: Democrat	
	Pr(Conservative)	Pr(Moderate)	Pr (Republican)	Pr (Independent)
"New Deal" Preferences (Standardized)	-.44 * (.08)	-.37 * (.10)	-.63 * (.08)	-.35 * (.10)
"Moral" Preferences (Standardized)	-.71 * (.08)	-.30 * (.10)	-.29 * (.08)	-.12 (.10)
Nonwhite	.16 (.18)	.19 (.21)	-1.20 * (.19)	-.79 * (.22)
Female	.11 (.14)	.02 (.18)	-.04 (.15)	-.26 (.18)
Age	.009 * (.004)	.006 (.005)	-.020 * (.004)	-.021 * (.005)
Education (Highest Degree Obtained)	-.08 (.05)	-.22 * (.06)	.19 * (.05)	.11 (.06)
Political Knowledge	.05 (.04)	-.09 (.05)	-.01 (.04)	-.34 * (.05)
Partisanship	.48 * (.04)	.14 * (.05)		
Ideology			.69 * (.05)	.23 * (.07)
Constant	-1.07 * (.34)	-.16 (.41)	-3.04 * (.39)	-.39 (.46)
Log-Likelihood	-1174.70		-1257.96	
N	1551		1551	
Pseudo-R^2	.19		.23	
(Moral Preferences – New Deal Preferences)	.55	.11	.34	.23
χ^2 test that coefficients for Moral and New Deal preferences are different from one another	4.71 (p<.03)	0.25 ns	8.45 (p<.01)	2.19 ns

Notes: Entries are Multinomial Logit Coefficients (standard errors in parentheses).   * p<.05 (two-tailed).

Table 6. Predicting Ideological Conservatism among "Morally Conservative, "New-Deal Liberal" Citizens.

	(1)	(2)
Partisanship	.32 *	.31 *
	(.07)	(.07)
Nonwhite	-.21	-.22
	(.28)	(.28)
South	.09	.08
	(.28)	(.28)
Northeast	.11	.15
	(.37)	(.38)
Female	.15	.12
	(.27)	(.28)
Education	.01	.00
	(.09)	(.09)
Political Knowledge	.15	.15
	(.08)	(.08)
Political Interest	.13	.12
	(.18)	(.19)
Religious Orthodoxy	.63*	.60*
	(.28)	(.24)
Church Attendance		-.08
		(.09)
Guidance from God		.14
		(.14)
Moral Traditionalism		.23
		(.18)
Log-Likelihood	-194.45	-192.96
Pseudo-R^2	.09	.10
N	316	316

Notes: Entries are Logit Coefficients (standard errors in parentheses)
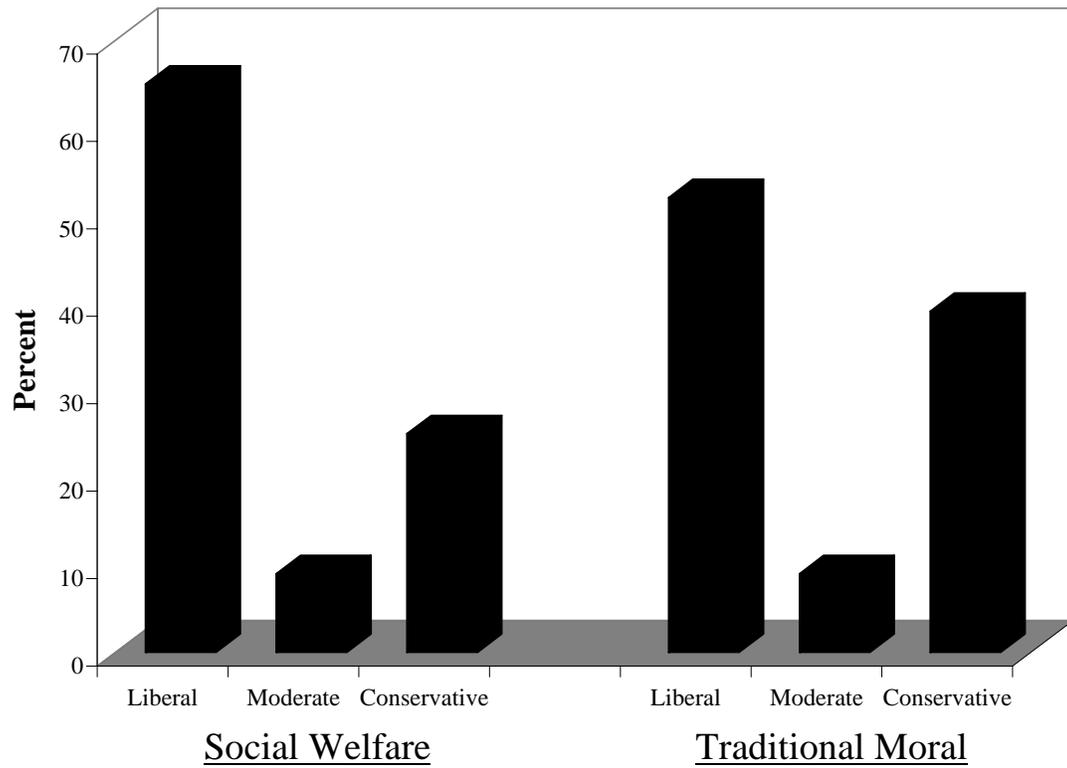* p<.05 (two-tailed)

**Figure 1. Operational and Symbolic Liberalism in the American Electorate.**
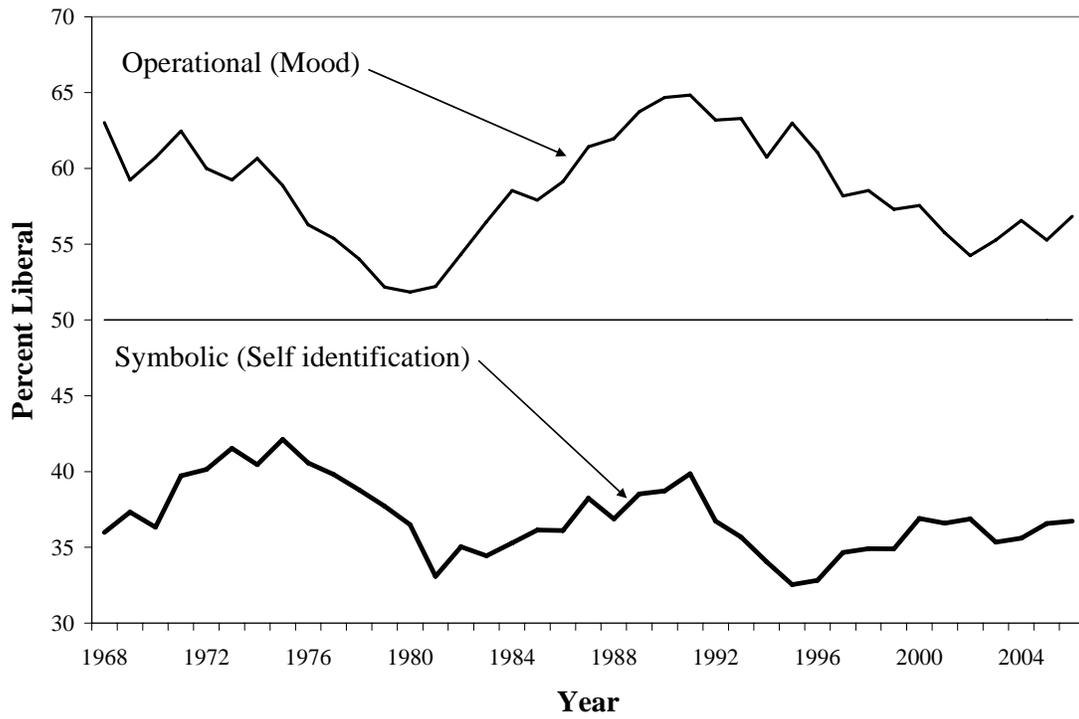
Sources: Public Policy Mood (Stimson 2004); Ideological Self-Identification (updated from Erikson et al. 2002).

Figure 2. Operational Preferences for Social Welfare and Moral Dimensions, 2000.

Source: American National Election Study, 2000.

Operational liberalism among self-identified "Liberals"

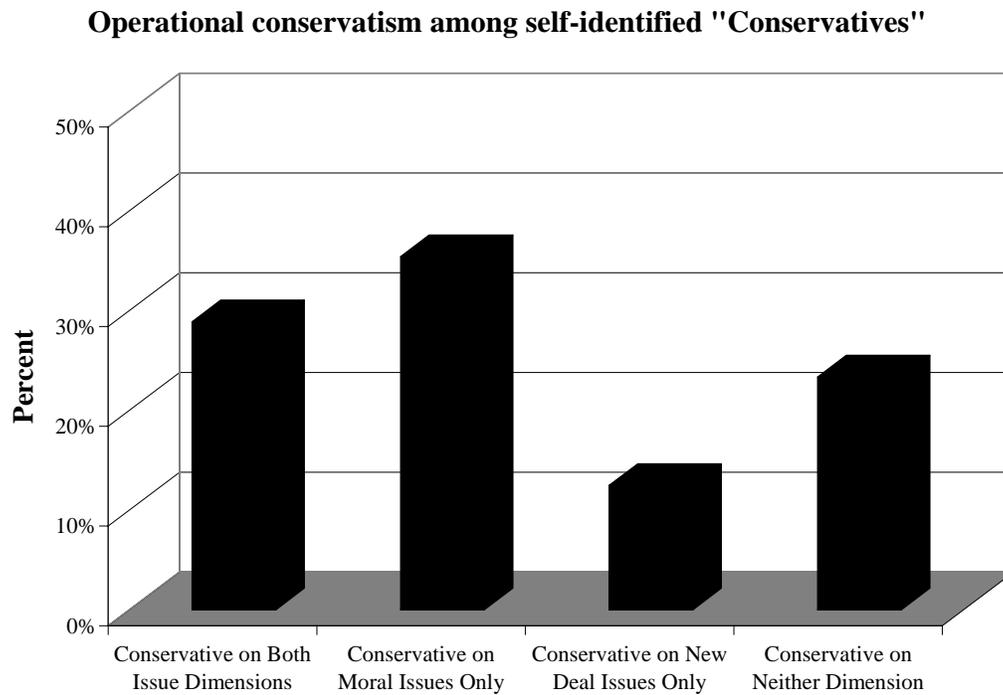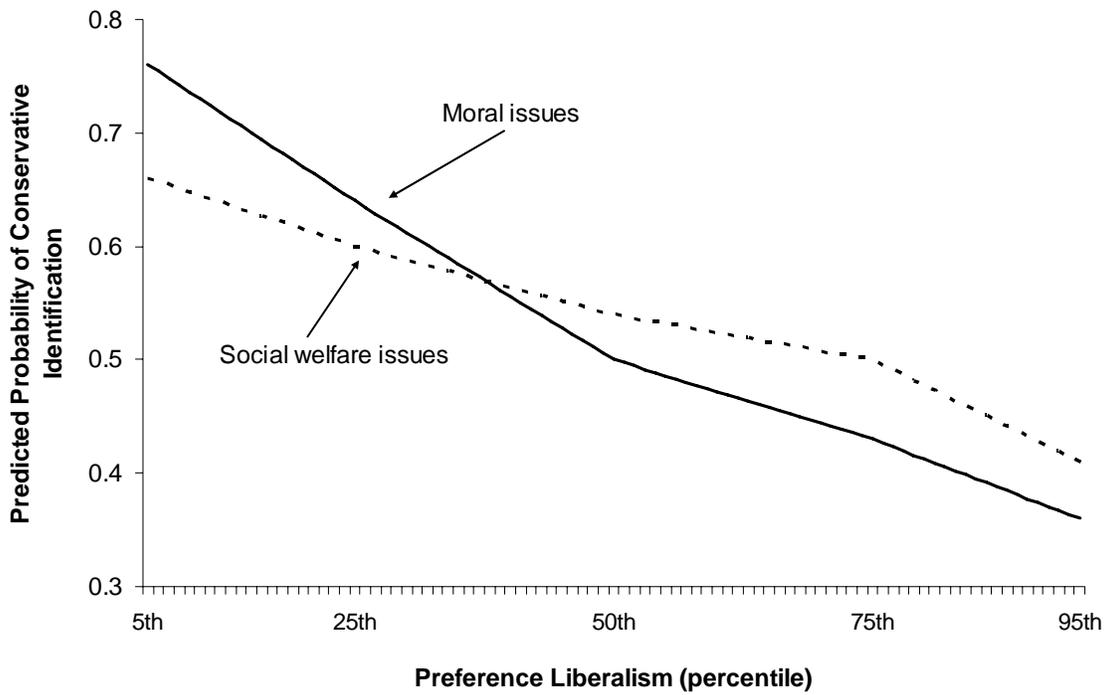**Operational conservatism among self-identified "Conservatives"**

Figure 4. Probabilities of Identifying as "Liberal" and "Conservative" as a function of policy preferences.

Note: Figure entries are predicted probabilities generated from multinomial logit estimates reported in Table 4. The lines represent the effects of the variables of interest while all other variables are held constant at their mean (or modal) values.