

THE LIBERAL PARADOX

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Political Science.

Chapel Hill
2013

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ABSTRACT

K. ELIZABETH COGGINS: *The Liberal Paradox*.
(Under the direction of James Stimson)

How can liberal policy programs remain widely supported and liberal politicians continue to win elections when the liberal identity itself is out-favored by the conservative identity at a margin of nearly two-to-one? This dissertation attempts to provide novel insight to explain this central paradox of American politics. I begin by building a theory of ideological identification formation at the micro level, drawing from recent findings in psychology, and also considering the powerful agency of the environment in which individuals form attachments. In the second empirical chapter, I return to the 1960s, using content analysis to recount the most dramatic shift in ideological identification in history. This endeavor uncovers the birth of the core symbolic meaning of “liberal” that still lives on today, and highlights the central role of the media in shaping individuals’ affects for liberals. Likewise, on the heels of these new connotations, liberal elites abandoned the label as a definition for themselves and their policies, despite clear ideological connections. Finally, in the third empirical chapter, I trace the media’s presentation of “liberal” to the mass public as a function of moral symbols and rhetoric. My findings suggest that the liberal label, once vacant of meaning, gained substantial substance in the 1960s, and that bundle of images, groups, and characteristics have become evermore central to the label. Furthermore, I demonstrate that the moral language with which elites and the media color the liberal identity has been typically less appealing to self-identified liberals and those predisposed to identify as liberals. These findings offer new insight for understanding the persistence of the unpopularity of liberal in name, yet broad acceptance in substance.

For my mother, and hers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is self-evident that dissertations do not write themselves. It is far less acknowledged, however, that they are rarely the product of *one* person's thinking. This dissertation is no exception. It begins and ends with Jim Stimson, simply the finest advisor and mentor in the practice. Our relationship began on my first day at Carolina, and I expect it will continue for the rest of our lives.

On that first day during our chance meeting, Jim proposed to me a research project that he had in mind, a project that eventually became the centerpiece of my own research. And nearly five years later, we are still working together. Jim is the epitome of what political scientists, and scholars in general, aspire to be. Like his students before me, I begin my career with the singular goal of one day being compared to my mentor and friend, Jim Stimson. That would be the ultimate accomplishment.

Along the way in writing this dissertation, Jim suggested I ask for the advice of someone he admired, and someone I would come to adore: Pam Conover. She lit a new spark in my research and also, in my work ethic. Indeed, she is a spark herself, and I am deeply in her debt. Pam took me on as her own student and has spent many, many hours working with me and providing feedback that has not only contributed to the quality of my work, but also to my understanding of what it means to be a scholar. I could not be more grateful to Pam, and I feel lucky to be a part of her circle.

My debts do not end here, of course. Frank Baumgartner afforded me an incredible opportunity as the graduate assistant on an NSF project that has produced truly enjoyable collaboration, a few European conferences, and a deep level of respect for him. Frank has a unique ability to very quickly see the bigger picture of any project and help his students situate their arguments and contributions. Getting to know Frank and work with

him has been a real highlight in my graduate career. I am indebted to Kevin McGuire for his thoughtful feedback along the way. His judicial politics class has shaped the way I've thought about many issues more central to my research, especially theoretically. Kevin's knack for intuitive explanation (and, of course, quick wit) set him apart among the very best of teachers. And finally, in my first year at Carolina, I had the great fortune of meeting John Aldrich, who I am grateful has been open to working with me from the other side of Tobacco Road. His involvement has made me a better writer and thinker.

On a more personal level, my debts are threefold. First, my dear Alice. She has seen this project evolve from day one, and has miraculously remained positive and excited about it day-in and day-out. This is an exceptional contribution, for it has given me the daily ability to sit back down at my desk and write another paragraph. I'm proud of what we have built together.

Second, there is the obvious truth that I would never have made it to Carolina without Jim Elsey, my stepfather. When I was ten years old, before he asked my mother to marry him, we made a pact to be a team. No one has been a more consistent supporter of my academic endeavors—or just of me—than Jim. He educated me. And he demanded only that I choose the path that most enthralled me. I hope I have made him proud.

And finally, for my mother and best friend, there are hardly worthy words. Our unique relationship is a constant source of laughter and stability for me. Yet, our bond is so ethereal. Suffice it to say that she is at once elegant and tenacious: a remarkable woman who is very clearly my most emphatic supporter.

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1 INTRODUCTION

“Liberal,” in the 21st Century America is an unpopular term. It has been unpopular for decades. Liberal candidates diligently avoid the label. And their opponents diligently tag them with it. To be called as a liberal, everyone understands, is to be called out as one.

This dissertation endeavors to understand why. If liberalism itself—the set of public policies and proposals for policies—were equally unpopular, the story would be easy. But ordinary Americans are consistent and insistent supporters of liberalism *as policy*.¹ Social Security, Medicare, unemployment insurance, regulation of the workplace, progressive income taxes, minimum wages, and a litany of other welfare state programs which have made life better for ordinary working people all enjoy massive support. Mostly they go unchallenged because conservative opponents understand that they are off limits. Since the symbol is unpopular while its substance is revered, it is obvious that the two have become divorced, that “liberal” as symbol has come to mean something different from its policy achievements.

To make sense of that divorce, I believe it is necessary to understand how particular symbols rise or fall as associations with ideological labels in the public mind. This process begins at the individual level, specifically individual-level ideological identification development—how images, experiences, and symbols get tied to terms like “liberal” and “conservative”—shaping the meaning that individuals bring to them. This conception illuminates the long-lasting impact that historical events can have on ideological identification. A detailed theoretical account of the process by which individuals fill a political symbol

¹The term “liberalism” is used to describe the policies that liberals themselves have traditionally ascribed to. As such, “liberal” and “liberalism” are used congruently here.

with meaning is offered in the first empirical chapter. It brings together a diverse set of ideas offered by political scientists (Conover and Feldman 1981), psychologists (Jost and Sulloway 2003), and moral psychologists (Graham, Haidt and Nosek 2009). In particular, I suggest that identities are manifestations of citizens' inherent psychological predispositions and the environments they encounter. Personality and moral sensibilities drive individuals to be attracted to certain symbols, and their affects for the symbols of "liberal" and "conservative" inform their ideological attachments. The environment, however, determines the salience—the availability and accessibility—of symbols for citizens to evaluate.

Central to the findings of the first empirical chapter is that the symbols of liberal, at least in the modern era, are symbols of change (consistent with the findings of Conover and Feldman (1981) and Zschornt (2011)), most notably those linked with marginalized groups in society. For many Americans, "liberal" is unpopular in part because of the company it keeps.

But the theory of ideological identification formation also suggests that the environment in which these identities are forged plays a critical role. That is, predispositions do not work alone in ideological identification formation. Environmental forces such as the media, political elites, and political rhetoric heavily influence these attachments because they dictate what symbols are available and how they get framed for public consumption. Framing—how individuals organize and perceive symbols—plays a central role in determining ideological identifications.

This final component, framing, lends a crucial piece: it helps explain how and why changes in ideological identification may occur, especially swift and dramatic ones. Thus, framing is a critical piece of my theoretical framework: it links the micro level story of ideological identification formation to the macro level story of ideological identification change. Without this link, two disparate stories exist: in one, we can explain how identities are formed (as the product of symbols and predispositions); in the other, we observe macro

level changes and develop logical, yet employ time-sensitive explanations for such change. But, weaving in the story of framing creates an avenue for pulling the stories together, employing individual level theory to understand how and why macro level changes occur.

In the second empirical chapter, I return to the 1960s, using a newly developed ideological identification series (Ellis and Stimson 2012) to pinpoint the most critical shift in ideological identification in U.S. history. Content analysis of *The New York Times* and *Newsweek* provides compelling evidence that the media's presentation of the race riots, and crime and race more generally, became inextricably linked to the liberal identity—a message that the public received loud and clear. This racialization is strongly supported by ANES correlational analyses. At the same time, liberal elites ceased to identify with the label or characterize their policies as “liberal.” More broadly, the message of the second chapter is that media's framing of the liberal label left an indelible mark on the liberal identity.

Lastly, in the final empirical chapter, I consider a more complete series of ideological identification, linking the 1960s with modern times. I collect every front page story of *The New York Times* from 1960-2000 that mentions “liberal,” and analyze the overtime presentation of the liberal label to the American people. By tracing the use of moral foundations rhetoric and symbols alongside “liberal”—the first analysis to consider the *overtime* significance of moral foundations—I discover that the packaging of the liberal label is rarely appealing to liberals themselves. In fact, in only *one year* for the entire 40 year series does “appealing” rhetoric surrounding liberal supersede less appealing language. This finding is pivotal to understanding the persistent unpopularity of “liberal” in name.

Taken together, the chief contributions of this dissertation are this: (1) a novel structuring of existing pieces for a more complete framework for ideological identification formation and maintenance, (2) evidence that the persistent symbols of “liberal” are symbols of

race, marginalized groups, and change, (3) an explanation for the largest shift in ideological identification in history, (4) a demonstration that the symbols of “liberal” were largely born in the 1960s, (5) affirmation of the capacity of the media in shaping what symbols are salient in the minds of citizens, and finally (6) that the framing of those symbols is a powerful contributor to how citizens ultimately identify ideologically.

2 ON THE ORIGINS AND MAINTENANCE OF IDEOLOGICAL IDENTIFICATIONS AT THE MICRO LEVEL

This project is motivated by a simple observation: the modern-day dearth of liberal identifiers in the United States. In 2012, more than a dozen polling agencies, including well-respected institutions like Gallup, *The New York Times*/CBS, American National Election Studies, NBC/Associated Press, and Pew Research Center found that conservative identifiers outweigh liberal identifiers nearly two to one.¹ The puzzle, thus, is straightforward: why, given the popularity of many liberal policies, is the conservative identity nearly twice as popular as the liberal identity? In this chapter, I lay the foundation for understanding this puzzle, beginning by developing a theory of the derivation of ideological identifications at the individual level. These identities, I suggest, are borne from psychological characteristics inherent among individuals and environmental factors that individuals encounter in their lifetimes. This individual level theory sets the stage for explaining macro level changes in ideological identification, the central focus of the second empirical chapter, which hones in on the 1960s when ideological identification experienced its largest shift in history. In the final chapter, I merge the 1960s with present day by tracing elite rhetoric and media coverage, demonstrating the detrimental presentation of the liberal label to the American public.

Building a Theory of Ideological Identification Change

This chapter builds an individual level theory of ideological identification development, and in turn, a theory of how and why these identities may change among individuals. To do so, I rely on the work of others—political psychologists, moral psychologists, and political

¹Data archived at the Roper Center <http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu>.

scientists. The result is a piecing together of the central components from these literatures, along with my own theoretical offerings, that produces a comprehensive understanding of the origins and maintenance of ideological identifications. These primary components—the origins—are critical to developing a theory of how and why identities can and do change.

In their seminal study of ideological identification, Conover and Feldman (1981) brought evidence to bear on the then growing suspicion that ideological labels had sparse cognitive meaning to individuals (Converse 1964; Erikson, Luttbeg and Tedin 1980; Levitin and Miller 1979). That is, evidence suggests that the source of ideological identifications was rarely issue-based or even policy-oriented. Conover and Feldman look to schema theory, arguing that ideological identifications are borne from evaluations of the labels “liberal” and “conservative” such that individuals’ identities are associated with positive evaluations of his or her chosen label. Schemata can be thought of as cognitive structures, bundles of images and symbols that individuals link to concepts or groups based on past experiences (e.g., Fiske and Linville 1980). These frameworks help individuals organize their thinking about groups and concepts.

Furthermore, Conover and Feldman suggest—and find ample evidence to support—that the dynamics underlying the formation of liberal and conservative ideological self-identifications differ significantly from one another. In other words, liberals identify as liberals for different reasons than conservatives identify as conservatives. The key to this finding lies in the “critical referents,” the cognitive and symbolic sources of ideological self-identification that guide individuals in their choices. Different referents are pivotal in determining positive evaluations of liberals and conservatives. Imagine, for example, a self-identifying liberal, who has a strong affinity for the symbol of equality, which he or she associates with the liberal label. This affinity for the symbol, coupled with its link to “liberal” generates a positive evaluation of liberals. A conservative, on the other hand, does not necessarily feel aversion for the symbol of equality (ergo negatively evaluating

the liberal label). He or she may simply place himself or herself into the category of conservative because of an affinity for the symbol of patriotism, which he or she associates with conservatives.

To be clear, there are three moving parts of Conover and Feldman's theory. First is ideological identification itself. These identifications are informed by evaluations of ideological labels. And these evaluations, moving part number two, mediate almost all of the impact which issues and symbols, moving part number three, have on identifications.

Conover and Feldman consider the unique contributions of two types of sources to ideological identification: cognitive, or issue-based sources, and symbolic sources. Cognitive sources are captured by considering respondents' views on a myriad of economic, racial, and social issues, including health insurance, guaranteed jobs, busing school desegregation, marijuana use, the ERA, and sex roles. To consider symbolic sources, Conover and Feldman evaluate numerous feeling thermometers, collapsing them into six symbolic meaning scales, including Status Quo, Radical Left, Capitalism, Reformist Left, Disadvantaged, and Social Control.

Recalling that cognitive and symbolic sources influence ideological identification via evaluations of the terms "liberal" and "conservative", Conover and Feldman find that symbolic factors were the clear front-runner in contribution, heavily outweighing the impact of cognitive sources. Positive attitudes toward liberals are a function of positive affect for the Radical and Reformist Left, while positive evaluations of conservatives are a function primarily of positive affect toward the symbol of Capitalism.

Furthermore, in an analysis of open-ended survey items asking respondents what the terms "liberal" and "conservative" mean, self-identified liberals and conservatives varied widely in their emphases. Namely, liberals stuck to a broad message of change, including recent social issues (e.g., abortion, ERA) and equality. Conservatives displayed a clear economic focus, stressing fiscal policies and capitalism. As Conover and Feldman put it,

“liberals and conservatives view the political world not from different sides of the same coin, but...from the perspective of entirely different currencies” (Conover and Feldman 1981, 624).

In his update to Conover and Feldman, Zschirnt (2011) largely confirms the key components of their theory and findings, specifically that symbolic sources dominate evaluations of ideological terms. He likewise follows up on a prediction made by Conover and Feldman, who found that the impact of liberal evaluations outweighed the impact of conservative evaluations in predicting ideological identification in general. They suggested that this result was potentially time-sensitive—conservatives may identify as such partly due to a negative reaction to liberals and the symbols of liberalism in the New Deal Era. Liberals, on the other hand, did not seem to derive their ideological identifications from a distaste for conservatives. Conover and Feldman suggested that with the ensuing shifting of the bases, this phenomenon may likewise shift directions. Their words were prescient, as Zschirnt demonstrates exactly this: ideological identification in the modern era is increasingly informed by evaluations of conservatives. The growing hostility toward conservatism and its associated symbols of big business, Christian fundamentalists, and the military has become an ever important source of liberal self-identifications in the more modern era.

Both studies present compelling evidence that the dominant symbols of the political agenda play a significant role in informing the ideological identifications of citizens. While neither study directly takes on the tangential, but related, question of the origins of the symbols themselves, both make multiple allusions to elite rhetoric shaping the symbolic meaning of ideological labels for Americans. As such, both studies take as fact the agenda-setting power of the elites, and further, the media as the channel by which citizens absorb elite rhetoric. What elites say, and importantly, how they frame their words, is a core component of news in the American media (McCombs and Shaw 1972; Iyengar and Kinder 1987). As such, the dominant symbols of American politics are largely controlled by the

media and the elite rhetoric that drives its coverage. The larger, more central message is that prominence, power, and the agenda of that power matters when it comes to understanding macro level ideological identification.

The story of ideological identification in the United States is one of constancy and change. Both consistency and change are linked to symbolic substance: this message emerges clearly from the findings of Conover and Feldman (1981) and Zschirnt (2011) who offer compelling evidence to support the notion that when the defining symbols of ideological groups change, so too do citizens' evaluations of these groups. Salience, then, matters for understanding ideological identifications, especially *changes* in those identifications at both the micro and macro level. At the micro level, the critical referents that individuals use to inform their identities shift along with the changing tide of the political environment.² And those shifts are observable at the macro level when changes in salience are dramatic enough to move a large constituency of individuals.

How individuals feel about the groups, values, and symbols they associate with the labels liberal and conservative dictates the identity they choose. Ultimately, to identify with an ideological label, one must feel connected to the related group. And, of crucial importance in this formation of affinities and aversions, I am suggesting, is the political environment in which these attachments are forged. The extent to which elites are able to garner power and control the agenda can have a significant impact on what symbols matter to individuals, and thus, what referents they consider when forming their ideological identifications.

Putting together these two elements together—how ideological identities are formed and the importance of symbol salience and agenda control—leads to an important message: most simply, ideological identifications can change. And they may do so when individuals

²In a related example, Green, Palmquist and Schickler (2002) found that party identification is best explained by positive feelings toward the constellation of groups associated with a political party. As such, changes in party identification are driven mostly by changing social images of the parties.

alter their critical referents either on their own (e.g., personal, individual level events) or by the force of the political environment (e.g., cultural wars, elite rhetoric, media coverage). Salience of symbols is largely dictated by political elites, and citizens come to understand those symbols by way of the media.

The Psychology of Ideological Identification

Environment is not the only agency that influences individuals' attachment to an ideological label. Psychological forces—those stable, dispositional factors unique to individuals— influence attitudes, too, and play a decisive role in determining ideological identities. The field of psychology has long acknowledged the hefty contribution of “motivational differences” in explaining variation in ideological identifications among citizens (Jost and Sulloway 2003; Jost 2006; Jost and Gosling 2008). Where political science has considered psychological factors like citizen involvement, sophistication, and political expertise, psychology has factored in the predispositions of citizens, repeatedly concluding that ideological differences among citizens have psychological roots. Ideological identifications are adopted, at least in part, because they satisfy psychological needs, and thus, have a strong motivational basis.

Probably the most compelling finding in those endeavors has been the much-supported conclusion that the structure of liberalism and conservatism rests on two main aspects: (1) advocating versus resisting change and (2) rejecting versus accepting inequality (Jost and Sulloway 2003). Change, in its very nature, involves at least some sense of uncertainty, but individuals view this uncertainty in different fashions. Some experience threat and anxiety in the face of uncertainty, and, as such, are resistant to change. These individuals typically demonstrate a dispositional need for order and structure, preferring stability and accepting hierarchy, which in turn, makes them more accepting of inequality (Jost, et al. 2007). Others, however, are far less sensitive to uncertainty, and, as such, tend to advocate change (Wilson 1973). Ideological identifications, then, stem partly from basic

social-psychological orientations concerning uncertainty and threat (Jost, et al. 2007). In particular, conservatives, on average, possess a situational and dispositional need to manage uncertainty and threat, which motivates their tendency to resist change and accept inequality (Jost and Sulloway 2003). The psychology of the conservative identifier compels him or her to find the status quo particularly appealing, which, by definition, preserves the familiar and rejects the uncertain. Liberals, on the other hand, are not similarly motivated, and thus are more open to change and less accepting of inequality. Indeed, the hallmark of the liberal label is one of change (Conover and Feldman 1981).

Jost and Sulloway (2003) suggest that situational factors also influence the experience and expression of conservative identification. That is, powerful environmental forces that heighten psychological needs to reduce uncertainty and threat can drive up conservative identification among citizens. It need not be solely an individual-difference variable—citizens can be moved by the force of an event. Social movements advocating change, for example, or a marked rise in crime would be particularly unsettling to conservatives (or those individuals with inherent inclinations to resist change and accept inequality) because uncertainty and potential threat are introduced. Thus, conservative identification in the population as a whole can be increased by the introduction of threatening circumstances or instability in the political system—or, critically, even by the *pretense* of such conditions (Jost and Sulloway 2003). This is a powerful message, one that complements the earlier theory that symbol salience, elite rhetoric, and media coverage contributes significantly to understanding shifts in ideological identification in the U.S. It means, in brief, that the influence of elites and the media, and how these actors frame events, should not be overlooked.

What this also helps uncover is that there is perhaps a slight variation to the theme of conservative identifiers. Dispositional factors, the stable psyches of individuals, and situational factors, the short-term salient events in the political world that relate to uncertainty

avoidance and threat reduction, should affect ideological preferences at the macro level. Simply who we are matters a great deal in predicting ideological identifications, but, so too does the changing environment to which we are exposed. In a larger sense, when threat and uncertainty are heightened, either by an event, movement, or rhetoric, the appeal of the conservative label increases considerably.

Social Identity Theory

It is useful to take a step back to understand in a deeper sense what ideological identities mean to citizens psychologically. Social identity theory recognizes that all individuals are members of numerous social groups—and that these memberships contribute to the image, positive or negative, we have of ourselves (Tajfel 1974). Our social identities, how we think of ourselves, come from these group memberships—whether they be national, religious, racial, political, or of another type—and they create and define our place in society (Tajfel and Turner 2004). Inherent in Tajfel’s concept of a social identity are two basic aspects: that people perceive themselves to belong to a group and that the membership(s) have emotional significance. Understood in this framework, social identities have certain consequences. In particular, individuals tend to sustain those identities which contribute positively to their self-concept, serving to maintain or boost self-esteem. Positive social identity is largely created by favorable comparisons between the in-group to which the individual belongs and some relevant out-groups (Tajfel and Turner 2004). Absent a positive contribution, individuals will seek exit, unless leaving the group is deemed impossible for “objective” reasons or exit “conflicts with important values which are themselves a part of his [or her] acceptable social identity” (Tajfel 1974, p. 69).

Objectively, a black citizen cannot abandon membership with the group “black.” Similarly, but related more to the value tie, a devout Catholic may find it impossible to renounce his or her strong religious ties even in the wake of embarrassing sexual abuse accusations waged at high-ranking religious leaders of the Catholic Church. While these accusations

may have blackened the contribution this group membership made to the individual's social identity—and the conflict of values remains—the association with Catholicism is powerful enough to prevent exit.

In such conditions, these immovable individuals have a couple of options. They may engage in social creativity, reinterpreting the group's image or comparing one's group on alternative or irrelevant dimensions to boost one's image (Jost and Burgess 2000). The devout Catholic may ignore the legal problems of the church altogether, instead choosing to focus on the good the church does for the needy. Entrenched members may also simply “own” the new characteristics assigned to them, attempting to reframe the values associated with the characteristics (Tajfel 1974), such as with the classic example of “black is beautiful” where the salient dimension of skin color remains, but the prevailing value system is rejected and reversed (Tajfel and Turner 2004).

But when exit is facile, individuals are free to engage in social mobility, the movement from one social group to a higher status group that more positively contributes to the individual's self-concept. Such shifts occur regularly when ties to groups are looser and sufficient social flexibility exists. Such shifts likewise weaken the cohesiveness of the abandoned group, lowering morale, and often setting in motion a degenerative path for the subordinate group (Tajfel and Turner 2004).

A conflict of values *within* a group can likewise often be intense enough to destroy the positive contributions it makes to some of its members' social identities (Tajfel 1974). Confronted with a new issue or relevant problem, social groups often disagree on the proper approach, such as was the case of the leading pro-gay groups during the Amendment One debate and vote in North Carolina 2012.³ While many supporters advocated attacking the amendment head-on, with a message of “love is love” by promoting long-standing gay

³Amendment One proposed to amend the North Carolina Constitution to say, among other things, that “marriage between one man and one woman is the only legal domestic union that shall be valid or recognized.”

relationships and families (and thus, sending the message that an amendment that prohibits civil unions and gay marriage is unjust), the major organizers of the pro-gay movement in North Carolina effectively “closeted” gay citizens, instead focusing on the amendment’s potential to harm children and jeopardize victims of domestic violence. The incongruous views on strategy are known to have caused serious discord among the various pro-gay group members (Kreiss and Meadows 2013). Advocates’ ties to the pro-gay identity were also likely weakened by the alienation they experienced.

Often in situations where values become more evident, able members will seek membership in the opposing group whose values, they now realize, are more in line with their own. While a switch from a pro-gay group to an anti-gay group is far-fetched, the example does make clear that often citizens identify with groups that evolve, or approach issues in ways the citizen was not expecting. Situational circumstances can highlight these values and shifts, and thus, have the ability to alter individual group memberships, and consequently identities, perhaps on a large scale if the circumstances are widely known or observed. We shall observe such a situation in the case of liberal identification in the next chapter.

In particular, Huddy (2001) suggests that rhetoric—the words and actions of political leaders—can manipulate political identities, even those sorts of identities that are considered quite stable over time (e.g., partisan identity). Evaluating what she considers critical factors that give group memberships meaning to individuals, Huddy places considerable importance on group “prototypes,” or the types of members that exemplify group membership and give the group meaning (Huddy 2001, p. 144). For example, if shaven head braless disruptive women protestors represent the contemporary feminist, it would not be surprising to find that white working-class males in the South distance themselves from a feminist group membership. But, if NRA-supporting, Nascar-loving, white southern males characterize the modern conservative, it would be less surprising to find that those same

working-class males in the South are eager to identify as conservative. And, as Huddy notes, “the news media are an especially good place to begin the search for the characteristics of prototypes that exemplify social and political groups, given the narrow range of people who appear in the news” (Huddy 2001, p. 144).

Social identity theory, then, provides important insight into why ideological identities may change—and may *need* to change from the individual’s perspective. When citizens identify with an ideological group, they give it psychological significance—it becomes who they think they are. It is positively charged. But, what happens when the environment changes, bringing out intragroup value conflicts? Or, when the classic prototype of liberals or conservatives shifts? And finally, what happens when liberals discover that their group has become stigmatized?

The short answer is that instability ensues. The longer answers will take center stage in the next chapter. The psychological and historical components of the story of ideological identification in the U.S. are coming together.

Moral Foundations

A final component to the psychological forces of ideological identification is that of moral foundations, those guiding principles to which individuals refer back to when evaluating groups and symbols. These foundations work like “taste receptors” in the moral sense, contributing to the ways individuals interpret the actions and agents they encounter in their everyday lives (Haidt, Graham and Joseph 2009). In his compelling work, detailed in his book *The Righteous Mind*, Haidt (2012) demonstrates that the moral foundations of liberals and conservatives are fundamentally different. Of the five foundations outlined—harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, in-group/loyalty, authority/respect and purity/sanctity—Haidt and Graham (2007) find that liberals show greater endorsement and use of the harm/care and fairness/reciprocity foundations, those that emphasize rights and welfare of individuals, compared to the other three. Conservatives, on the other hand, bring a more balanced

plate to their decision-making processes, drawing from all five moral foundations, but especially from the last three: in-group/loyalty, authority/respect and purity/sanctity, those that emphasize group-binding loyalty, duty, self-control, and wholesomeness (Graham, Haidt and Nosek 2009).

But, moral foundations should not be considered simply another set of personality variables that correlate with political preferences like ideological identification. Rather, these foundations are the under layer, an explanatory framework of why such preferences exist. They can be thought of as “characteristic adaptations” (McAdams 1995), or mid-level personality traits that encompass the goals and values individuals hold that guide decisions and preferences. Characteristic adaptations are casually subsequent to actual core personality traits, but are informed by both personality and contextual factors like the environment. Political attitudes and behaviors, for example, are characteristic adaptations: they are products of both core personality traits and life experiences (McCrae and Costa 1996). Importantly, while many characteristic adaptations are relatively stable over individuals’ lifetimes, events, experiences, and changing contexts may cause these attitudes to shift (Gerber, Huber, Doherty, Dowling and Ha 2010).

In one of their original studies, Haidt and Joseph (2007) asked respondents to rate the relevance of 15 concerns related to their moral judgments, all 15 corresponding to one of the five moral foundations. Beginning with the stem, “When you decide whether something is right or wrong, to what extent are the following considerations relevant to your thinking?”, respondents were then offered the 15 considerations, such as “Whether or not someone was harmed (harm/care); whether or not someone acted fairly (fairness/reciprocity); whether or not someone betrayed his or her group (ingroup/loyalty); whether or not the people involved were of the same rank (authority/respect); whether or not someone did something disgusting (purity/sanctity).” Liberals rated the first two foundations—harm and care and fairness and reciprocity—both at about 5.5 on a scale of 1 (not relevant at all) to 6 (always

relevant) in their decision-making processes, while conservatives rated all five between 4 and 5 on this same scale.⁴ In general, these results demonstrate that the morality of conservatives is built upon all five foundations, and thus, that conservatives tend to “moralize” more types of behavior than do liberals—whose morality is built firmly, indeed mostly, upon foundations of harm and fairness.

Liberals and conservatives, then, are weighing different values when they evaluate groups, policies, behaviors, and symbols. In a larger sense, these findings help explain why it is so difficult for liberals and conservatives to understand each other—because they base their arguments and evaluations on different combinations of the five moral foundations.

All Together Now

Putting these pieces together, moral foundations (Haidt 2012), symbolic importance and the evaluative process (Conover and Feldman 1981), motivated social cognition (Jost and Sulloway 2003), and social identity theory (Tajfel 1974; Tajfel and Turner 2004), suggests a new theoretical framework for thinking about ideological identification formation, and importantly, how and why those identities may change. Figure 2.1 maps out the causal process I have described thus far. Dispositions (personality and moral foundations), along with environmental forces influence the manner in which individuals perceive symbols and issues. These perceptions influence evaluative process—in the present case, of “liberal” and “conservative,” and these evaluations help determine ideological identifications.

This new framework merges micro and macro-level thinking. Individuals’ evaluations of symbols and images in the political world are motivated by their inherent moral foundations. An individual’s social identity and moral foundations shepherd the way he or she evaluates the changing symbols and images in the political world, and thus his or her group attachments.

⁴Liberals rated the remaining three at an average of 3.5.

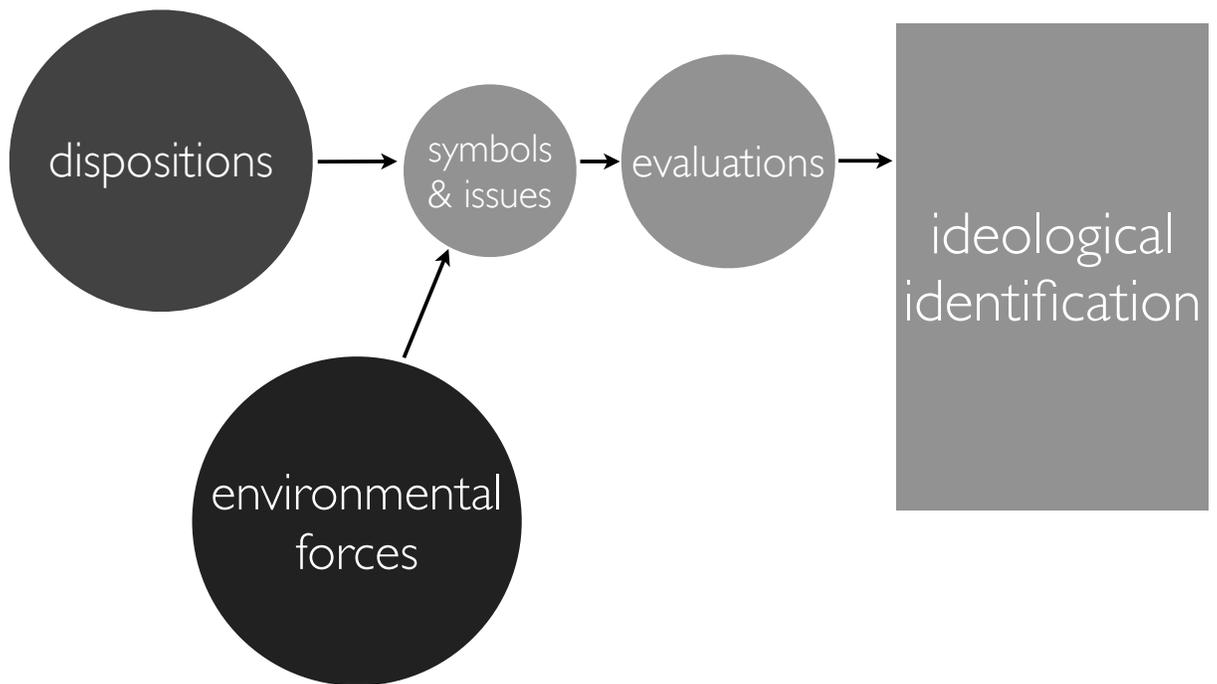


Figure 2.1: Model of Identity Formation

Each of these theories hint at one other critical component: the environment, the context in which citizens form and maintain attachments. The evaluative process for symbols and groups (Conover and Feldman 1981) is premised on the importance of context: citizens can only evaluate the stimuli to which they are exposed, and exposure is largely dependent upon outside sources like news media and elite rhetoric. Especially important in this environment calculation is the way in which these symbols and groups are framed by various sources. Social identities carry significant psychological importance (Tajfel 1974), and thus, individuals strive to maintain positively charged identifications. When groups shift in meaning, by the force of political events or media framing, these attachments may dissolve or change, making it difficult for individuals to maintain positive identities. Likewise, the environment affects motivated social cognition. Psychological needs, such as managing uncertainty and threat, vary among citizens (Jost and Sulloway 2003), and may also vary situationally as powerful events and fluctuating environments can heighten them. Finally, the moral foundations framework suggests that the context of exposure to stimuli can influence evaluations of those stimuli if certain dimensions are specifically (or purposefully) primed. Applied to the political environment, the moral foundations theory suggests that when fairness and harm are primed or salient in the political arena, the appeal of the liberal label increases. True conservative identifiers are not as affected by this shift in focus because all five moral foundations appeal to them. However, when the tone shifts back, and one of the other three dimensions (mostly irrelevant to liberals) is primed or salient, the conservative identity becomes more appealing. In these times, only true liberals “stay put.” This asymmetry in the political world, the waxing and waning of value emphasis, is a key contributor to changing ideological identifications. Thus, I suggest that shifts in ideological identification—large scale or modest—occur partly as a function of oscillating symbols, frames, and value foci within the environment.

These implications lend new theoretical and predictive leverage. We can be more theoretically driven when explaining what steers evaluations of liberals and conservatives, and what drives ideological identifications. Likewise, we can provide clearer predictions of how individuals, and thus, the larger public, will respond to changing saliency in the political world. Social identity theory, moral foundations, and the shifting evaluations of symbols in a fluctuating environment together elucidate the process by which ideological identifications are formed, and most importantly, the process by which macro level shifts—whether they be small movements or large-scale changes—are generated. Thinking about these micro-level theories alongside the macro level force of framing links the micro and macro stories of ideological identification. This thinking is applied in the next chapters first to understand the most dramatic shift in ideological identification to date, the sharp decline in liberal identification from 1965-1967, and then to evaluate overtime shifts for the entire time series of ideological identification in the U.S context.

What Do We Know?

It is worthwhile at this point to shift gears and turn to the actual data which show what we know empirically about ideological identification in the U.S. today. While social psychology (e.g., Jost and Sulloway 2003; Tajfel 1974) and moral psychology (e.g., Haidt and Graham 2007) supplied the building blocks in my construction of a more comprehensive theory of ideological identification formation and change, they are not the centerpieces of my empirical research.

Instead, my empirical investigation focuses on the symbols and images tied to the labels of liberal and conservative, which has been done most recently by Zschrirt (2011). As such, my task here mostly one fine tuning and reinterpretation. But it is an important task, for it sets the stage for what is missing, what more we need to know to develop a clearer image of ideological identification in the U.S. in the modern context. With the guidance of the theoretical framework outlined above, what's missing becomes clearer, as do ideas for

new questions.

The baseline questions are simple: who supports liberals? What symbols do identifiers and supporters link to the liberal label? This investigation will be enlightening, but limited in its approach. It will leave us curious. It will beg for straightforward survey items that directly link ideological identities to non-political symbols and psychological factors. In particular, it will not satisfy the questions that the theory of ideological identity formation presented above would suggest.

Future research should seek to make these connections between a larger array of symbols and groups to ideological identities, looking closely at symbolic and psychological meanings of identities. I attempt to satisfy this curiosity with newly author-designed survey items currently being tested in the field. In particular, these new items directly link ideological identification to psychological forces and an extended list of societal groups and images (see Tables 2.9 and 2.8 in the conclusion).

The proceeding analyses represent a modern-day snapshot of the contours of ideological identification, though they lack a direct connection to environmental forces, a key component to the theory of ideological identification. In the second empirical chapter, I evaluate the influence of such environmental factors, by taking into consideration a portion of the full time series.

To motivate the analysis to follow, I begin with an observation: conservatives outweigh liberals nearly two to one in the modern day. The most recent Associated Press poll asking citizens to place themselves on the ideological scale reports 40% of citizens choose conservative, while just 21% select liberal.⁵ As such, the analysis will focus heavily on liberals and what citizens believe about liberals as a group.

⁵Source: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, USAP.120512G.RD02).

Feeling Thermometer Analysis

Probably the most exploited method for analyzing ideological identification has been feeling thermometers. These survey items ask respondents to rate various groups and figures on a scale from 0—100: the higher the number the warmer they feel, with the typical reading suggesting that scores under 50 are “cool,” scores of 50 are neutral, and scores above 50 are “warm.” In a nutshell, it allows us to observe citizens’ affects for policies, groups, and members of the political world. However, such analyses are limited to available survey items, which are typically politically charged, restricting their utility. The terms “liberal” and “conservative” mean much more than politics to ordinary people (Conover and Feldman 1981). Indeed, they are richer in context. Nonetheless, feeling thermometers are a widely available and useful source for organizing an initial read on the ideological map of identification in the U.S.

Like most survey tools, feeling thermometers are not perfect measures. In particular, they are subject to positivity bias—the proclivity of respondents to respond favorably to a wide range of political figures and groups (Miller and Gurin 1978; Sniderman and Tannenbaum 1982; Knight 1984). As a result, all feeling thermometer responses should be viewed as relative, each rating relative to the mean score of the individual. For example, an individual giving one group a rating of 55 while giving most other groups a rating in the 70s is registering “cool” on the former, even though a typical reading of 55 would be slightly “warm.” Individuals use the feeling thermometer scales differently, and to properly utilize feeling thermometers, this reality must be heeded.

Given the lack of perfect validity and reliability, Green and Krasno (1988) and Wilcox, Sigelman and Cook (1989) have warned against the use of feeling thermometers without controlling for random and non-random errors inherent in measurement response. Weisberg (1980) found that warmness toward Democrats was statistically unrelated to coolness toward Republicans, and Conover and Feldman (1981) found that having a negative affect

for liberals was unrelated to a warm affect for conservatives—both unexpected findings. A central characteristic of partisanship and ideological identification is affective attachment toward one’s “home” group, or in-group, coupled with a distaste for one’s home team opponent, or out-group. Likewise, research suggests that even though individuals may not understand the content of ideological “talk”, they can still hold strong beliefs about liberals and conservatives as social groups (e.g., Levitin and Miller 1979). So, why do these analyses not find evidence of bipolarity in evaluations of liberals and conservatives, and Republicans and Democrats? According to Green, taken together, these findings suggest an uneducated and indifferent public, perhaps largely conforming to Converse’s (1964) early findings and lending credence to Kinder and Sears’s (1985) characterization of the mass public as “innocent of ideology.”

In her analysis of positivity bias in feeling thermometer ratings for Republicans and Democrats and liberals and conservatives, Knight (1984) created a mean feeling thermometer score for each individual in the sample. The average of those means is the sample mean which represents the overall average feeling thermometer score given in the survey. She then subtracted each individual’s mean feeling thermometer score from his or her score for each of the four groups of interest (Knight studied feeling thermometers for Republicans, Democrats, Conservatives, and Democrats), creating an “adjusted score.” Averaging across all respondents in the four categories resulted in “adjusted mean” feeling thermometer scores for each group.⁶

Fortunately, by following Knight (1984), checking for positivity bias is straightforward: generate a mean feeling thermometer score for each respondent and observe the mean of the sample. If the mean is higher than 50, positivity bias exists in the sample.⁷

⁶Knight used these four adjusted scores for a different purpose than stated here, however. Specifically, she correlated the means to test the unidimensionality of Liberal and Conservative and Republican and Democrat.

⁷Controlling for positivity bias in this way assumes that the feeling thermometers whose mean is the basis for correction are representative of all the groups that might have been posed. While I cannot be certain about the true μ , I am making the assumption that the groups observed are representative.

In Table 2.1, “Feeling Thermometer Average” represents the mean of all respondents’ average group-based feeling thermometer scores in the 2008 American National Election Study.⁸ The sample average of 61.17 is well above the traditional middle-marker of 50, indicating positivity bias in this sample of responses to feeling thermometers. The first row represents the mean for the sample of respondents who provided answers to all 25 group-based feeling thermometer prompts presented by the ANES. The second row shows the mean for all respondents in the sample, regardless of how many feeling thermometer questions actually answered. Both hover around 61, clearly well above a neutral 50, indicating positivity bias no matter how the data are analyzed.

Table 2.1: Mean Feeling Thermometer Scores for Full Sample and Partial Sample (Respondents Answering all 25 Feeling Thermometer Prompts)

	N	Responses	Mean	s.d.	Min/Max
Feeling Thermometer Average	1615	25	61.17	10.89	29.84/93.16
Felling Thermometer Average	2312	varies	61.04	11.63	7.67/97

Two central points underscore this analysis: first, like most other studies with feeling thermometers, this sample is biased by respondent’s tendency toward positivity when asked to rate other groups and individuals; second, any averages considered in analysis should be considered alongside its “corrected” mean.

We can answer how different these means are by observing, for each individual, how much each feeling thermometer score deviates from the average feeling thermometer scores. This adjustment to the biased mean will return the “true” feeling thermometer scores. In all further analyses, these adjustments will be made, often highlighting significant differences within groups that are imperceptible without consideration for positivity bias.

⁸Excluded are the person-specific feeling thermometers, e.g., Hilary Clinton, Republican Party Presidential Candidate. Items included are: Catholics, Jews, Whites, Blacks, Southerners, Big Business, Labor Unions, Liberals, Conservatives, Military, Chicanos/Hispanics, Democratic Party, Middle Class People, People on Welfare, Poor People, Republican Party, Asian-americans, Congress, Environmentalists, Federal Government, Gays and Lesbians, Illegal Aliens, Christian Fundamentalists, Feminists, and Both Major Parties.

Having confirmed the presence of positivity bias (see Table 2.1) and controlled for it using the method suggested by Knight (1984), I turn in earnest to analytics.

The Dimensionality of the Liberal-Conservative Continuum

A central underlying theme runs through the theoretical framework I suggest for understanding liberal and conservative identity. While liberals and conservatives often find it impossible to understand the other's position, this is not necessarily because they disagree on the same points of a political issue. Instead, it is largely because they talk past each other, beyond each other (Haidt and Graham 2007). On gay marriage, for example, liberals tend to understand the issue as one of fairness—two members of the same sex who love each other and are committed should be able to marry. Conservatives, however, see the issue as one of respect for authority and sanctity—long-standing institutions should be given the benefit of the doubt, and gay marriage would challenge an ancient and well-functioning institution.

This understanding of liberals and conservatives suggests that perfect unidimensionality of the liberal-conservative continuum is unlikely. It also lends credence to what Conover and Feldman (1981) found so many years ago: liberals identify as liberals for wholly different reasons than conservatives identify as conservatives. It likewise speaks to the underpinnings of Haidt's moral foundations argument: quite simply, that the foundations differ between liberals and conservatives. An ideological identity is rarely chosen as a rebuttal to the "opposing" group. The motivations behind the two identifications are simply not the same.

But let us put the test to the public: are "liberal" and "conservative" the poles of the singular concept of ideological identification in the minds of Americans? Knight's analysis is nearly 30 years old, and the political atmosphere of the U.S. has become decidedly more polarized over the years. What effect has the changed political environment had on citizens' views on liberals and conservatives?

I replicate Knight’s analysis here with data from the 2008 ANES, showing both results without the positivity bias control and with the control. Because Knight demonstrates variations by political knowledge, I also include correlations by level of education.⁹ If individuals view liberal and conservative as the opposite ends of one concept, ideology, we shall find highly negative correlations between the feeling thermometer scores for liberal and conservative.

Table 2.2: Correlations of Feeling Thermometer Ratings of Liberals and Conservatives, With and Without Control for Positivity Bias

	Liberals with Conservatives
No Control	-.085
Controlling for Positivity Bias	-.379

The positivity bias control makes a significant difference in the correlation between liberal and conservative feeling thermometers, pushing the correlation from an unimpressive $r = -.085$ to a more healthy $r = -.379$. While stronger, it is only moderate evidence that Americans view liberal and conservative as the poles of a unidimensional construct. Given the prominence of these ideological terms in political talk and everyday rhetoric, a stronger relationship was reasonably expected. Polarization, by any measure, has grown considerably over the years. In a series of exhaustive analyses, Poole has demonstrated that polarization in the House and Senate is presently at the highest level since the end of reconstruction.¹⁰ Yet, these signals, as measured by affects for liberals and conservatives, evidently do not permeate public thought.

It may also be that *some* Americans, perhaps the highly educated, do view ideology this way. Knight used the “level of conceptualization” groups suggested by Campbell et al.

⁹Knight replicated the Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes (1960) “level of conceptualization” of four tiers of respondents based on responses to open-ended questions: Ideologues, Group Benefit, Nature of the Times, No Issue Content. I use level of education as stand-in for this analysis.

¹⁰Data, including figures and papers, available at <http://voteview.com>.

(1960) to demonstrate that those with the most political knowledge were more likely to see liberal and conservative as opposites. I use education as a stand-in for her more intricate measure, and find similar, but less compelling results. As the level of education increases, so does the correlation, suggesting that among those Americans with the most education, many view ideology as lying on a single dimension.

Table 2.3: Correlations of Feeling Thermometer Ratings of Liberals and Conservatives by Level of Education, Controlling for Positivity Bias

	Pearson's <i>r</i>	N
Grade School or less	-.146	59
High School	-.223	808
Some College, no degree	-.417	633
College or advanced degree	-.556	443

Nonetheless, the general lack of compelling evidence for unidimensionality suggests that ideological terms are simply not opposites for most citizens. Liberal is not the opposite of conservative. Instead, each group has distinct symbolic meaning to individuals. Understanding these distinctions, I believe, is critical to explaining the heavy advantage that conservative identification enjoys among Americans. This premise guides the interpretation of proceeding analyses and those surveys presently in the field.

Affects for Liberals & Conservatives

Moving forward, I present a straightforward feeling thermometer rating: how respondents in the 2008 American National Election Study (ANES) “feel” about liberals and conservatives.

The results of this calculation in Table 2.4 seems to indicate that respondents feel warm, on average, toward both liberals and conservatives, as both ratings register above the recognized neutral point of 50. There is likewise a healthy range of affect for both groups as indicated by a minimum rating of zero and a maximum of 97 for both groups. However, respondents feel statistically significantly warmer toward conservatives ($t = 4.08, p < .001$),

Table 2.4: Mean Feeling Thermometer Scores for Liberals and Conservatives

	N	Mean	s.d.	Min/Max
Feeling Thermometer for Liberals	1615	56.8	21.1	0/100
Feeling Thermometer for Conservatives	1615	59.9	19.7	0/100
Difference of Means		3.1		

$t = 4.08, p < .001$

a mostly unsurprising finding given that the conservative identification is more popular than the liberal identity. But does the public feel warm toward either group comparatively—that is, when we consider how warm they felt on average toward all groups? The feeling thermometer sample average of $\mu=61.17$ indicates that respondents actually feel cooler toward *both* liberals and conservatives than they do toward other groups.

Given that positivity bias plays an important role in feeling thermometers, we can go a few more steps to observe the unbiased results of affects for liberals and conservatives. Using the adjusted means created in the prior section, a deviation score representing the difference between the average feeling thermometer score and the score for liberals (and conservatives) is generated. These deviations are then subtracted from the average feeling thermometer scores for liberals and conservatives, giving an unbiased look at how respondents *feel* about these groups. Adjusted, unbiased means are presented in Table 2.5.

Table 2.5: Adjusted Mean Feeling Thermometer Scores for Liberals and Conservatives

	N	Mean	Deviation	Adjusted Mean
Feeling Thermometer for Liberals	1615	56.8	-4.3	52.5
Feeling Thermometer for Conservatives	1615	59.6	-1.5	58.1

$t = 3.75, p < .001$

What was significant in the preceding analysis of unadjusted feeling thermometers for liberals and conservatives is further underlined by the adjusted analysis in Table 2.5. The difference between affects for liberals and conservatives becomes more pronounced, and

statistically so ($t = 3.75$), with liberals dropping even farther away from the mean thermometer score ($\mu = 61.17$), plainly out of the good graces of the American people.

In the next section, I shift to a decidedly more “liberal” focus. Given the popularity of the conservative label, the analytical conundrum, as I see it, is explaining the dearth of liberal identifiers. And, the first step to understanding that puzzle is coming to terms with what liberal means to the American public. As such, I replicate the procedure of many former scholars to set the stage, determining the main correlates of liberalism: what groups are also supported among those who currently support liberals? Critically, however, I also evaluate how do these correlations change when positivity bias is considered.

Correlational Analysis Between Feeling Thermometer Ratings

While many scholars have studied ideological identification by exploiting feeling thermometers (e.g., Conover and Feldman 1981; Jacoby 2006; Ellis and Stimson 2012), few have considered the effects of positivity bias in correlational analyses. Such a bias is particularly important when it comes to studying ideological identification. Taken together, the findings in Tables 2.1 and 2.5 demonstrate not only the presence of positivity bias, but also that citizens’ affects for ideological groups are significantly lower than for other groups. This merits a closer look at correlational analyses.

Using data from the 2008 ANES, Table 2.6 reports the correlations between feeling thermometers liberals’ unadjusted feeling thermometers and the adjusted feeling thermometers.

A predictable handful of correlates of liberal register above a robust $r > .30$ in the second column (unadjusted r). Three racial minority groups, blacks, Hispanics, and Asians, are associated with support for liberals, as is support for illegal aliens. Other arguably marginalized groups—environmentalists, gays and lesbians, feminists, and people on welfare—also associate strongly with affect for liberals. Unsurprisingly, those with warm affects for the Democratic Party also feel warmly toward liberals.

Table 2.6: Correlations Between Feeling Thermometer Scores for Liberal and Feeling Thermometers for Various Other Groups and Correlations Between Variations from the Mean

Liberals with...	Pearson's r	Adjusted r
<i>Religious Groups</i>		
Jews	.27	-.08
Catholics	.22	-.16
Christian Fundamentalists	.05	-.29
<i>Racial & Regional, & Demographic Groups</i>		
Illegal Aliens	.32	.07
Blacks	.35	-.03
Asians	.32	-.04
Chicanos/Hispanics	.32	-.06
Whites	.24	-.14
Southerners	.14	-.22
<i>Economic Groups</i>		
Big Business	.12	-.19
Labor Unions	.44	-.21
<i>Sociodemographic Groups</i>		
People on Welfare	.31	.03
Middle Class	.24	-.09
Poor	.26	-.11
<i>Marginalized Groups</i>		
Gays & Lesbians	.37	.21
Feminists	.46	.23
Environmentalists	.47	.25
<i>Governmental Groups</i>		
Congress	.38	.08
Democratic Party	.45	.31
Federal Government	.28	-.04
Both Major Parties	.18	-.08
Military	.01	-.25
Republican Party	-.25	-.35
Conservatives	-.08	-.38

Yet, many of these connections fall apart when moving to the next column, the *Adjusted r*, which correlates adjusted affect for liberals with the average movement away from the mean feeling thermometer reading for each group. Where once there was an association between support for liberals and support for racial minority groups, for example, the connection vanishes when positivity bias is considered. Positive affect for labor unions also flips when considering how respondents placed themselves on the feeling thermometer barometer compared to all other groups. Support for the Democratic Party, feminists, environmentalists, and gays and lesbians remains intact—all is not lost.

It is a slight overstatement to say that support found in the first set of correlations *vanishes* when we consider the adjusted estimates. It is more accurate to say that the association, or symbiosis, between the two groups declines relative to other associations. A different way of translating the deviation measures is to consider them a read on the “real support” a respondent has for that group, based on the average level of support he or she is willing to give. In particular, those who support liberals also support blacks, but when we control for positivity bias, that association breaks down. Finally, hypothesis tests confirm that the *Pearson’s r* is significantly different from the *Adjusted r* in each case at the $p < .001$ level.

The only mathematical truth needed to signal correlation is movement in the same direction. When positivity bias is considered in respondent’s feeling thermometer scores, the typical areas of correlations between warmth for liberals and warmth for other groups often changes. Liberal’s common correlates no longer move with it.

Equally important in determining the correlates of affect for liberals are those symbols and groups *not* associated with positive affect for liberals. Chief among these associations is the Republican Party, whose strong negative correlation with liberals only strengthens from the traditional correlation column to the adjusted version. Affect for conservatives

predictably does not associate with affect for liberals, and neither does the military—switching from no real association to a stronger $r = -.25$ when positivity bias is considered. The apparent affection for Congress and the Federal Government felt by liberal supporters falls by the wayside. Finally, a new group, Christian Fundamentalists, emerge on the scene as particularly unpopular among those with strong affect for liberals.

Those holding a warm affect for liberals hold little regard and cool affects for a handful of prized groups in American politics, including the military, Christian Fundamentalists, and southerners. On the other hand, liberal's supporters have positive regard for some traditionally underrepresented or marginalized subsets of Americans: environmentalists, feminists, and gays and lesbians in particular. The portrait of the liberal identity now has its broad strokes.

Variations by Affect for Liberals

Another stroke in building the portrait of the liberal label is understanding how citizens feel about liberals in comparison to how they feel about conservatives. Earlier evidence (Table 2.4) demonstrated that, taken as a whole, respondents in the 2008 ANES felt warmer toward conservatives than liberals. Dividing the sample by affect for liberals gives a closer look at understanding this difference.

Using feeling thermometer scores for liberals, I generate a categorical variable that breaks respondents into three distinct groups: those rating liberals below his or her own average feeling thermometer score, *Low Affect*, those rating liberals at the neutral point of 50, *Neutral Affect*,¹¹ and finally those who rate liberals above his or her own feeling thermometer average, *High Affect*. Then, I utilize the deviation measure created earlier to gain new insight. As a reminder, this measure represents by how much and in what direction the respondent's feeling thermometer score for *Group X* varies from his or her

¹¹The ANES instructs respondents to rate a group at 50 degrees if the respondent does not feel “particularly warm or cold” toward that group. See Codebook at link <http://www.electionstudies.org/studypages/2008prepost/2008prepost.htm>.

mean feeling thermometer score (which includes all groups measured, N=25). From these deviations, a grand mean, including the deviation for each respondent for each groups (*Low Affect*, *Neutral Affect*, *High Affect*) is created.

Table 2.7: Deviations from Mean Feeling Thermometer Scores for Liberals & Conservatives, Categorized by Respondent’s Affect for Liberals

Group	Low Affect	Neutral Affect	High Affect
Liberals	-18.43	-6.62	12.91
Conservatives	5.95	-2.01	-9.18

These constructions allow observation of how respondents vary, on average, in their feelings for other groups (compared to their mean feeling thermometer score) when broken into groupings of their affect for liberals. The primary comparison group of interest is conservatives—how affects for conservatives compare to affects for liberals, based on affect for liberals. The results in Table 2.7 show that those who feel cool toward liberals (*Low Affect*) rate liberals, on average, 18.43 points lower than all other groups. Respondents with a neutral affect for liberals register liberals nearly 7 points lower than other groups they are asked to rate. And finally, in the (*High Affect*) group, liberals get a near 13 point bump over other groups, on average.

Looking at how respondents deviate from their mean scores when asked to rate conservatives, we find that those in the *Low Affect* for liberals group rate conservatives about 6 points higher than their average rating. *Neutral Affect* and *High Affect* rate conservatives lower than their average feeling thermometer rating, about 2 points and 9 points respectively.

An unmistakable message emerges from this analysis: individuals with low affect for liberals express an uniquely strong distaste for liberals, rating them more than 18 points below their mean feeling thermometer score. Comparatively, those with a strong affect for liberals are half as harsh on conservatives, rating them about 9 points below their mean

feeling thermometer scores. The lesson here is that the coolness felt toward liberals far exceeds the coolness felt for conservatives. A new tidbit of evidence has been collected.

What's Missing?

While the ANES provides quality information for understanding some political meaning individuals tie to liberals and conservatives, it does not provide much else. Most notably, it does not provide an opportunity to consider alternative symbols and referents that may well make up the bulk of what these terms mean to ordinary citizens. If we can get a hold on those common, everyday symbols, familiar to a wide range of citizens, we may have a better chance at understanding the dearth of modern-day liberal identifiers. The ANES likewise lacks the ability to make direct connections between ideological terms and symbolic referents: correlations of feeling thermometers are a limited source.

Psychologists have been making considerable contributions to the study of ideological identification, yet high quality political science survey data lags behind these advances.

A New Direction

Survey items designed specifically to speak to these two primary gaps are currently being administered. These items add considerable depth to what is ascertainable from feeling thermometers alone. In particular, they attempt to pick up on the non-political tenor of the ideological labels, while also including politically-charged groups for important comparison purposes. The items were also designed to tap into how citizens *themselves* view members of the ideological groups liberal and conservative.

In the first set of survey items, respondents are presented with a list of groups common in society and asked to identify them as associated with the term “liberal”, “conservative”, “both”, or “neither” in matrix form. Thus, these allow for direct access to the groups and symbols individuals link to ideological terms. They likewise provide high quality evidence in the quest to explain the lowly ranks of the liberal label and the thriving popularity of the conservative identity. Table 2.8 lists the *Group Items* in full.

Table 2.8: Groups in Society Item List

Democrats	Republicans	Illegal Aliens
Feminists	Environmentalists	Political Protestors
Veterans	Criminals	Tea Partiers
Pro-Life Activists	Pro-Choice Activists	Real Americans
Pro-America People	Judges	Middle Class
Poor People	People on Welfare	Wealthy People
People with Retirement Accounts	Born-Again Christians	
Vegetarians	Hunters	Intellectuals
College Students	Churchgoers	Savers
Spenders	Married People	Single People
Professors	Small Business Owners	Farmers
Wall Street Executives	Bureaucrats	southerners
Urbanites	Blacks	Whites
Hispanics	Gays & Lesbians	Men
Women	Immigrants	The Medically Uninsured

*Order of groups randomized

Should results indicate that conservative associations are significantly more popular, celebrated, mainstream, accepted, and generally positive than those tied to the liberal label—which turn out to be associated with unpopular, irresponsible, and marginalized groups—we will have gained serious ground in the quest to making sense of liberal’s deficiency. These connections, if found, are also more robust than those uncovered using correlational analysis of feeling thermometers from the ANES.

In addition to the groups battery of items, I also designed a similar set of prompts that focuses more directly on traits and characteristics associated with the groups liberals and conservatives. For these items, each respondent is given two separate batteries, one asking whether they agree strongly, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly that the terms describe “liberals” as a group and the other, with the same items, asking if they agree strongly, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly that the terms describe “conservatives as a group. These personality items are listed in full in Table 2.9.

Table 2.9: Traits & Characteristics Item List

Extraverted	Reserved
Compassionate	Polite
Critical	Conscientious
Anxious	Calm
Open to New Experiences	Flexible
Traditional	Cautious
Emotional	Dirty
Honest	Immoral
Disrespectful	Hard-working
Fair	Intolerant
Obedient	Sexist
Racist	Dependent
Unreliable	Broadminded

*Order of groups randomized

Similar to the *Group Associations*, the *Traits & Characteristics Associations* asks respondents to make direct links between the ideological labels and traits. Both batteries are designed to satisfy the theoretical implications of ideological identification formation outlined in this chapter. The first component, psychological dispositions, includes both inherent personality characteristics and moral foundations. While these survey items do not test the particular psyche of individuals, they do attempt to understand what characteristics citizens tie to the ideological terms. In some ways, this approach is more useful. Firstly, psychology studies have done a fine job peering into the psyches of individuals, linking inherent personality traits to identities. But, we know considerably less about how individuals themselves make these connections. These survey items attempt to illuminate these connections wherever they may exist.

Together, these two survey batteries, *Group Associations* and *Personality Associations* significantly enhance the study of ideological identification, particularly for providing new insight into the continued unpopularity of the liberal label.

Despite these advances, the study design lacks the ability to uncover dynamics: how

these associations may change over time by the force of events, media coverage, and rhetoric. In the next chapter, I make this connection clearer, zeroing in on the 1960s, when the liberal identification underwent a dramatic reframing, and as a result, suffered a mass exodus in membership.

3 ON THE 1960S: THE REFRAMING AND REMAKING OF THE LIBERAL IDENTITY

It is a widely-observed paradox that liberal policy programs—Social Security, Medicare, unemployment insurance, regulation of the workplace, minimum wages, and many others—enjoy majority support among American citizens, but identifying as “liberal” is widely unpopular. Explaining the origin of that divorce is the focus of this chapter. The problem, I suggest, is to understand how particular symbols rise or fall as associations with ideological labels in the public mind.

In this chapter, I explore the most critical shift in ideological identification in U.S. history: the dramatic drop in liberal identification in the 1960s. In particular, I demonstrate how the reframing of liberals left an indelible mark on liberal identification, one still observable today.

Ideological Identity at the Micro Level

Empirical studies of mass behavior have long borrowed an idea from elite behavior, namely that ideology would consist of attaching concrete policy preference to underlying abstract principles. Elite actors in politics combine generally consistent policy preferences with descriptive labels like “liberal” and “conservative” which serve to summarize them. So, we typically expect an imperfect and less developed variation of this phenomenon in the mass electorate, but with always frustrating results.

What we’ve learned over fifty years, beginning with the classics, Campbell et al. (1960) and Converse (1964), is that the neat connection of policy symbols to substance found among elite actors is largely absent in the mass electorate. It would have been expected that

amateurs would have fewer and weaker connections between symbols and policy preferences than professionals in politics. But what we have found is stranger than that. Conover and Feldman (1981) tell us that “liberal” and “conservative” are typically not seen as opposites, as endpoints of a singular continuum.¹ And the Zaller (1992) conception of conflicting considerations has most Americans simultaneously holding on to core beliefs that tilt in both the left and right directions.

If liberal and conservative are not always opposites in the public mind, then the elite-based assumptions about ideological identification structure quickly fall apart. Liberal and conservative cannot, for example, be the poles of a common dimension. And the whole idea of a deductive structure that connects symbols to specific beliefs and preferences becomes untenable.

Chapter One spent a considerable amount of time developing an individual theory of ideological identification formation, pointing to both innate psychological factors and environmental forces. The basic notion can be summarized with a schematic model like the framework used by Conover and Feldman (1981): that ordinary ideas about the terms liberal and conservative and the symbols tied to them are collections of images and experiences that start with early life experiences and build over the lifetime, not necessarily with orderly deductive architecture. Schemata are, in brief, structured bunches of preconceived ideas that help to organize knowledge and assumptions about a particular concept or term (Fiske and Linville 1980). Some of the components of schemata for “liberal” and “conservative” are unique to the individual. We can understand the content they accumulate by knowing the particular psychology and experiences of that individual. Those experiences are systematic in some ways—major historical events are widely experienced—but also have large stochastic elements. No two paths are identical due to the random shocks along the way.

¹In his update to Conover and Feldman, Zschirnt (2011) reaffirms this finding with more recent data.

While it is impossible to know such a summary of an individual's life experiences, it is certainly possible to know what experiences were common to most Americans, what elite messages were prevalent, and what the media covered. Absent a singular deductive process that brings order to beliefs, we turn to collective experiences of politics to understand why some images become attached to "liberal" and "conservative" while others do not. Critically, we come to understand what images citizens associate with ideological symbols by knowing what image connecting events they have been exposed to.

It is also quite clear that the images that get connected to ideological symbols might arise from quite far beyond the normal boundaries of electoral politics. An unshaved and ill dressed counterculture adolescent advocating the legalization of pot, for example, is far removed from the politics of elections, Democrats, and Republicans. But a citizen who connects that image of protest to the schemata "liberal" will see that image as part of what the word stands for all the same. Or an evangelical Christian who thinks that the word-for-word literal truth of the Christian Bible is a "conservative" belief will not stop to ask if the connotation is sufficiently political.

Research Design

The task of this chapter is to understand where the images associated with the symbol "liberal" came from, especially those uncovered in the first empirical chapter that seem to explain why "liberal" might be less popular than "conservative." To answer this question requires knowing what images the American mass electorate has been exposed to and the degree to which those images became connected to the symbol in question. This is a tall order.

Two sorts of evidence might be brought to bear. One of these is the actual connotations of the word by American citizens, considered at length in the first empirical chapter by observing what other images are associated with citizen responses to "liberal" and also what groups and qualities citizens link with ideological terms. Longitudinal data of this

sort would allow observation of how those correlations and associations were affected by events.

This would be terrific evidence. It would show a process. First some image creating event occurred. Then that image got connected to an ideological symbol. And then that connection worked: the image became strongly connected to the symbol. There is some such evidence. But not a great deal. Some important images are never measured. Others are measured, but only decades after the presumed causal events occurred.

A particular limitation of such data is that political surveys tend to measure largely explicitly political images and ideas. Other, more distant, phenomena which might ultimately contribute their meaning to political symbols are excluded because they are outside the bounds of normal electoral politics.

A second sort of evidence, not quite as tight as the first, is a study of the sorts of images that citizens were exposed to, explored via content analyses of press treatment of events and images related to them. And where possible I will also study the evidence that images got connected to the symbol in question, liberal. Evidence of this sort can tell us whether, for example, Americans were *exposed* to the idea that liberals were soft on crime. But it cannot tell us if the exposure mattered, if “soft on crime” did indeed become attached to the symbol, “liberal.” That is where I shall proceed, interweaving the two kinds of evidence as the data permit.

The Historical Series of Ideological Identification

Before explaining the evolution of the images of “liberal,” first comes the facts in need of explanation. In their recent book, Ellis and Stimson (2012) build an annual time series of self-identification. It answers the question, “How to Americans think of themselves?” For the last 40 years, that task is quite easy. Survey organizations, both academic and commercial, have been asking national samples of Americans how they see themselves in ideological terms with reliability, frequency, and regularity.

But, before 1968 is a different story entirely. Surveys that asked about ideological self-identification were rarer, and question formats were far less comparable among the surveys that did exist. Thus, the exhaustive data search, collection, and dynamic dimensional extraction technique used by Ellis and Stimson (2012) to generate a series of ideological identification is an invaluable resource for my research. It allows me to begin my endeavors with a valid and reliable measure, whose data are the universe of survey research questions on self-identified ideology from 1937 to 2012. These are 2228 individual reports of national percentage marginal results forming 20 separate question series.

The result is seen in Figure 3.1, where the estimated series of self-identification from the 1930s into the 21st Century is presented. The growth of conservatism and the decline of liberal identification are both widely assumed in popular commentary. There is some support for that story, especially when considering the broad sweep of 20th century history. But there is no support for its extreme version, that liberals were once a ruling majority. The decline of liberal self-identification is an obvious impression of Figure 3.1, but it is important to note that it is a decline from minority status, averaging around 44% of those who declared themselves either liberal or conservative, to a smaller minority status, about 34% in recent years.²

While a more historically-focused explanation is the centerpiece of this chapter, a few generic points on ideological identification are relevant here. The first is that the conservative identification has, *ceteris paribus*, more widespread appeal (Ellis and Stimson 2012; Haidt 2012). In a non-political sense, conservative is associated with caution, tradition, and modesty. Individuals likewise have a natural preference for hierarchy (Zitek

²These figures are based on the series estimated using Stimson's Dyad Ratios Algorithm (Stimson 1991, 1999), which uses dozens of survey items to estimate one series of ideological identification. For mathematical reasons, the algorithm only considers "liberal" and "conservative" responses (and their ancillaries like "very liberal" and "somewhat conservative"), so that the "liberal" percentage can be thought of as "the percentage of liberals among those identifying as liberals or conservatives."

and Tiedens 2011), a core component of the conservative agenda. From the Moral Foundations perspective, conservatives, on average, endorse all five moral foundations (harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity), while liberals rely most heavily on the first two. The conservative palate is, thus, more balanced. “Liberal,” on the other hand, has an innately limited appeal. It connotes indulgence, leniency, and openness. Change and equality, the bedrock of the political liberal label, simply draws a smaller contingency. So, at least part of the story of liberal’s unpopularity is explained by the broader appeal that the conservative identity offers.

And, in a more historically relevant sense, and a bit of foreshadowing: uncertainty and threat, as outlined in the first empirical chapter, drive up the appeal of conservatism. Thus, under these environmental conditions, the appeal of conservatism will increase. The hallmark of the 1960s was change. That change was certainly seen by some as positive and necessary, but for many citizens, change was indicative of instability and threatening circumstances. Environment—how this change was framed—is a central piece to understanding the shifting tide of ideological identification in the U.S.

A Closer Look at the 1960s

This preview of the problem to come is closed out with a look at an especially important period of changing liberal and conservative identification in the United States. Figure 3.2 is exactly the data already seen in Figure 3.1 except that here the view is zoomed in, focusing only on the years 1960–1970, where the most crucial action occurs. Figure 3.2 does not suggest what happened to ideological identification in the 1960s, but it does indicate precisely when. By far the biggest movement in the history of the identification series occurs in a mere two years, 1965 to 1967, as 13 percent of those who once described themselves as “liberal” ceased to do so. (Or 16 percent for the four year span 1963 to 1967.) These would be noteworthy movements if they had been temporary. But Figure 3.1 demonstrates that the departed liberals did not return. That fact needs explanation. We know the “when.”

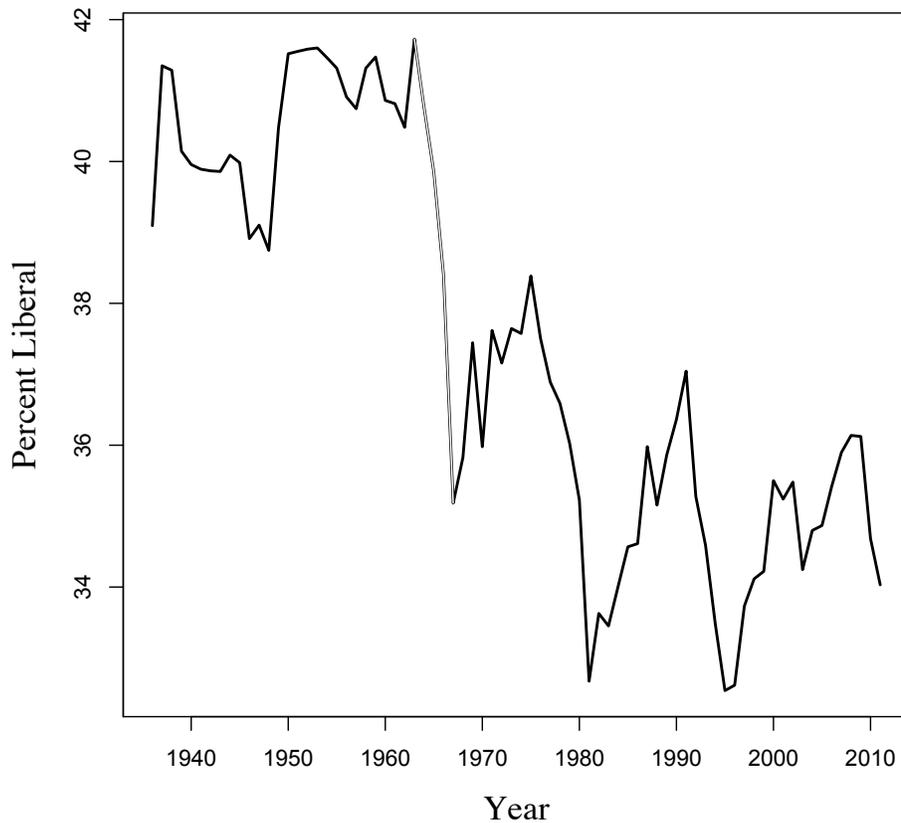


Figure 3.1: A Longitudinal Series of Ideological Self-Identification, 1937 to 2012, Gray Portion Highlighting 1965-1967 (Source: Data collected by the author and estimated using Stimson’s (1999) Dyad Ratios Algorithm.)

Now we need to know the “why?”

Two crucial pieces of data help begin the story. In 1964, when the ANES first posed a “liberals” and “conservatives” feeling thermometer to a national cross-section, the majority response for both was a single number on the 0–100 scale, 50. In 1964, 1966, and 1968, the ANES coded responses of “don’t know” and “didn’t know much” with a score of 50.³ That suggests that a majority of Americans then knew so little about the meaning of the ideological terms that it could not say whether they were good or bad things. That would

³Source: American National Election Studies Cumulative Data File.
<http://www.electionstudies.org/studypages/cdf/cdf.htm>

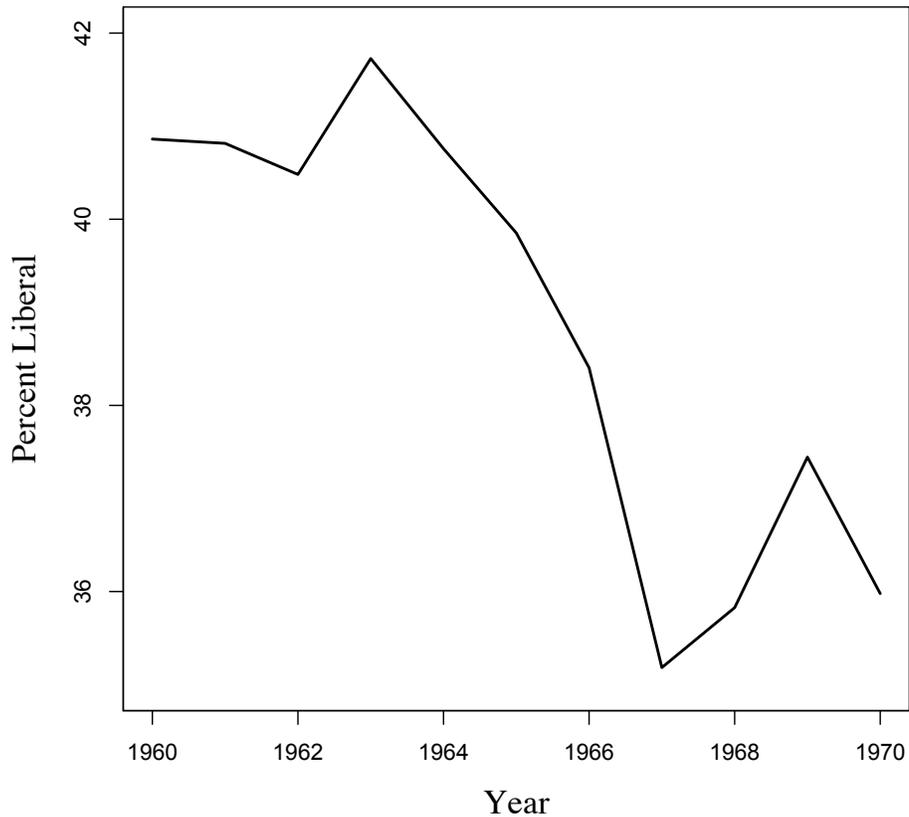


Figure 3.2: A Zoomed Look at some Data from Figure 3.1: Liberal Identification for 1960 to 1970 (Source: Data collected by the authors and estimated using Stimson’s (1999) Dyad Ratios Algorithm.)

change.

Explaining Change in Self-Identification

Explaining why self-identification moved at a particular time is a twofold problem. It is a macro and historical issue: how did the events of the time connect to attitudes? It is an issue also for micro and psychological understanding. It requires addressing what self-identification means and what it is. Together these two pieces of the puzzle shed light on what happened and then how that series of events affected the development of mass identifications.

The causal story comes to life through a series of seemingly tangential events. At first blush, it may seem unlikely that the first link is causally related to the last, yet the movement from one point to the next is clear.

Central to the story, of course, is the very word “liberal.” While loaded with definitive images and connotations to the modern reader, this was hardly the case in the early 1960s when politicians of both parties often deemed themselves liberal, more often to be sure the Democrats. But self-declared liberals existed in the Republican Party and were in some places a dominant force. Similarly, there was no overwhelming connotation chasing liberal. It is this lack of particularity, evidenced by the feeling thermometer data for liberals in 1964, that motivates the story. “Liberal” did not experience a fall from grace in this story. Instead, its largely empty connotation became filled with novel content.

For evidence of the limited connotation of “liberals” in the 1960s we have the number of respondents in 1964, 1966, and 1968 who gave meaningful response to the “liberals” and “conservatives” feeling thermometer. The earlier version of the ANES feeling thermometers instructed respondents to assign a score of 50 to groups they did not know. So, I delete the “50” scores, along with the usual non-response categories, giving us in Table 3.1 the percents who gave a non-neutral response each year.⁴

The table tells two things of note. One is that despite mainly liberal regimes since 1932 American voters were slightly, but significantly ($p < .04$), less confident assigning an evaluation to liberals than to conservatives, whose day in the sun was yet to come. The other is that the vacuum in evaluation of “liberals” soon began to be filled. Supplementing this with the actual feeling thermometer scores for liberals and conservatives—the average affect of the 50 or so percent who did give a response—reveals how different the paths were for the two groups in the 1960s.

⁴The handling of missing responses changed thereafter, making any comparison hazardous due to different treatment. Had the feeling thermometers been handled in a comparable fashion, they would constitute prima facie evidence of the declining sentiment for “liberals.” With the changing procedures and question orders from study to study, all we can be sure of is that changes in question administration can produce big effects.

Table 3.1: Percent Meaningful Responses to Liberals and Conservatives Feeling Thermometers, 1964–1968
(Entries are percents giving zero through 49 or 51 through 100 responses)

Year	Liberals	Conservatives
1964	47.3	52.6
1966	49.8	53.0
1968	53.0	54.6
1964-1968 Gain*	5.7	2.0

* $p < .04$

Table 3.2: Average Feeling Thermometer Scores for Liberals and Conservatives, 1964–1968

Year	Liberals	Conservatives
1964	57.3	62.9
1966	50.9	61.2
1968	52.1	62.4
1964-1968 Change*	-5.2	-0.5

* $p < .01$

Table 3.2 contains these “affects,” as measured by feeling thermometer scores on the ANES.⁵ Besides the considerable difference between the general feeling for liberals and conservatives—more than 10 points in the mid and late-1960s—the table reveals something else. Indeed, it documents the degeneration in how citizens felt about liberals, while affect for conservatives stayed largely consistent—and significantly higher ($p < .01$) than affect for liberals.

To put this even further into perspective, consider the feeling thermometer sample mean for each year (1964, 1966, 1968), a measure of the general affect respondents feel across all 13 groups evaluated.⁶ A sample mean is calculated by first generating an average feeling thermometer score for each individual in the ANES study—this mean tells us how warm

⁵Feeling thermometer averages corrected for positivity bias.

⁶These groups include: Democrats, Republicans, Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Blacks, Whites, Southerners, Big Business, Labor Unions, Liberals, Conservatives, and the Military.

(or cool) each respondent is *overall* toward the target groups. Then, for each year, another mean is generated, representing the entire respondent pool. Other scholars have shown that, in general, respondents tend to be quite generous in their assignment of feeling thermometer scores (Knight 1984), even when a healthy variety of groups are being measured, as with these 13 stimuli.

The story is hardly different here. Respondents demonstrated considerable enthusiasm for the groups considered in 1964, 1966, and 1968, with sample means of 72.4, 71.6, and 70.8 respectively. Thus, liberals—and conservatives for that matter—are not nearly as affectionately viewed by respondents as the average group throughout the 1960s. But, critically, this is unusually true for liberals, who, by the mid-1960s are a full 20 points below average—well outside the good graces of the American people.

Setting the Stage for the 1960s

Prior to the mid-1960s, liberal was synonymous with Social Security, unemployment compensation, and minimum wage (Stimson 1991). The liberal identity, like liberalism itself, was rooted in workplace protection and equality. It was the liberal of the common man, what Stimson has referred to as “lunch pail” liberalism because it conjures images of middle-age, working-class, white men going to work in factories and mines with their lunch pails. This definition of liberal appealed to a majority of voters because it spoke directly to their self interests. FDR solidified the connection, often calling himself and his supporters “liberal,” and in the 1930s at the height of his popularity, almost 50 percent of citizens also deemed themselves liberals (Ellis and Stimson 2012).

But with Lyndon Johnson and The Great Society, a decidedly more ambitious program than its predecessor, the meaning of liberal shifted. It took on the responsibility for far more citizens, most notably the urban poor, and even more specifically, the urban black poor. Along with some of its popular programs, like Medicare, came some unpopular ideas like the Poverty Program. As Johnson’s view expanded from common workers to the urban

underclass, a subtle value conflict was created between individualism and egalitarianism (Kellstedt 2003), for a defining characteristic of the underclass is that it did not work. At a time of general prosperity, those who were not in the workforce drew little sympathy from those who were. And with the new focus on underclass, the racial composition of the newly defined “poor” became black.

Because “black” and “poor” are correlated images in the minds of most Americans—as they were in the media coverage of the War on Poverty (Gilens 2000)—it is very hard to pull apart negative reactions that are due to belief in the work ethic from those that are simple racism. Almost certainly the general reaction has to be understood as some of both. Americans *do* believe in hard work, independent of racial considerations. And race is an omnipresent part of American political attitudes (Kellstedt 2003).

When workers—widely mislabeled as “middle class” in political rhetoric—were FDR’s liberals, for many Americans that was “us,” not “them,” benefitting from government programs. As focus shifted from workers to underclass and as the racial composition of the “poor” became—in the public mind, if not in reality—blacker, for large numbers of Americans the beneficiaries of LBJ’s liberals were “them.”

Where the New Deal brand was solidly based in self-interest—programs that most Americans benefitted from or expected to benefit from—LBJ’s brand asked most to sacrifice for the benefit of the poor.

Potential Explanations for Liberal’s Declining Popularity

The 1960s did not suffer from a shortage of monumental events. Indeed, it one of the most widely studied eras of American history, and as such, the potential explanations for a dramatic change in ideological identification is not necessarily obvious. I explore some of the leading contenders.

The landslide victories of the liberal Democratic party in the mid 1960s may have produced enough push-back from the American people that they simply grew disenchanted

with liberal politics and policies—and swung to the conservative camp. Wlezien’s “thermostatic” response concept would help explain such movements: when the public perceives the government as doing too much, it responds by moving to the right, or in the conservative direction (Wlezien 1995; Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson 2002). Similarly, when government output shrinks (or the public perceives a reduction of government), the public responds by moving back to the left. Indeed, as the symbol of liberal was changing throughout the 1960s, liberal identification experienced small drops of one to two percent in the early years.

But the abrupt shock—from which there was no coming back—to liberal identification from 1965-1967 is far from fully explained by the introduction of *some* unpopular programs of The Great Society and by thermostatic response. Probably the most controversial part of the Great Society, the initiatives tied to The War on Poverty, were also supported by a majority of Americans in early 1967, *after* the critical drop.⁷ Thus, both the drawn out nature of the Great Society and its relative popularity even *after* the dramatic drop in liberal identification preclude it from explaining the swift decline in liberals.

There have been a handful of other potential explanations for this major decline, but most modern day macroideology research, which cannot observe the period in question, simply accepts the low ranks of liberal self-identification found later (e.g. Box-Steffensmeier, Knight and Sigelman 1998). Probably the most compelling explanations ties liberal’s depleted ranks to the Vietnam War, clearly a central theme throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s. While the war was certainly garnering much attention in the 1960s, a late 1965 Gallup poll found that fewer than one quarter of Americans thought sending troops to Vietnam was a mistake,⁸ and by 1968, still less than half of Americans believed our involvement in the war itself was a mistake.⁹ Further, the counterculture movement associated with the

⁷Harris Poll, March 1967 finds 60% of Americans believing the War on Poverty should be expanded or kept at its current levels. Source: Roper iPoll, USHARRIS.040367.R2J

⁸Source: Roper iPoll, August 1965, USGALLUP.716.Q05

⁹Source: Roper iPoll, December 1967, USGALLUP.755.Q14

war, including anti-war protests, came about *after* liberal identification's significant drop.

Given the busy nature of the 1960s, it is worthwhile to consider a more global sense of the country's temperament, instead of simply working through potential explanations one by one. Stimson's Policy Mood (Stimson 1991) provides exactly this type of measure. It relies on hundreds of survey items administered more than 8,000 times to the American public, all asking respondents whether they prefer more or less government action or involvement in numerous policy areas (including those central to the War on Poverty in the 1960s). If it demonstrates distinct movements of any kind in the mid-1960s, we would know that the *overall* mood of the country played a potentially important role in redefining the liberal identity.

Figure 3.3 plots policy mood in the U.S. from 1952-2012, with upward shifts meaning more liberal, and downward shifts indicating more conservative preferences. The numbers from the 1960s leave the hopeful unfulfilled: in general, the mood of the country from 1965-1967, highlighted in grey in Figure 3.3, is quite liberal, hovering in the mid 60 range. And, in the three critical years, mood bounces down slightly in 1966, and then right back up in 1967, higher than it began.

What is left powerful enough to explain the disappearance of such a large contingency of liberal identifiers? Happening all the while in the 1960s was the civil rights movement, at first quietly and peacefully, drawing the support of a majority of Americans, and indeed, the majority of Congress. A full 95% of Americans supported Congress's passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965.¹⁰ But after the successes against *de jure* segregation and discrimination, mainly in the South, attention shifted to the urban North, where the issues became focused on the tangle of race and class and quiet dignity was replaced by rage. The symbol of liberal was about to change.

¹⁰Source: Roper iPoll, December 1965, USHARRIS.010966.R2A

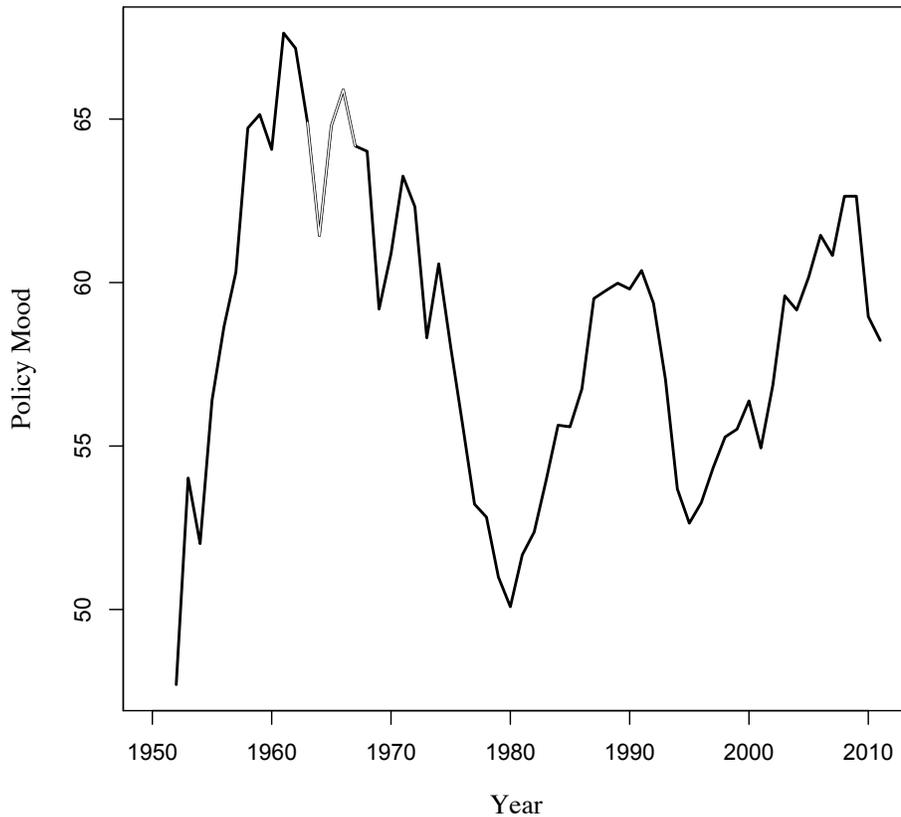


Figure 3.3: Policy Mood in the U.S. 1952-2012, Gray Portion Highlighting 1965-1967

The Race Riots

Harlem, 1964, was the beginning of several years of long, hot summers. In mid-July, a 15-year old black male was shot by a police officer. Riots erupted. Six days later, the riots spread to Rochester, NY and continued for three days. More than 1,000 people were arrested and the National Guard was called in. The next summer in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, nearly 35,000 African Americans rioted. Thirty-four people were killed, 4,000 arrested, and the estimated damage was about \$100 million. In 1967, a multi-city outbreak of rioting, reaching more than 100 cities, resulted in the bloodiest summer of all, with two of the most egregious in Newark and Detroit. Racial tensions between the

black community and the nearly all-white police force led to riots in Newark where 26 died and 1,100 were wounded. Damage estimates hovered around \$10 million. After police in Detroit raided an illegal drinking establishment and attempted to arrest patrons, 43 people were killed, 1,200 injured, and 7,000 arrested in the resulting rioting. The estimated damage was around \$45 million.¹¹

America was stunned. Images from these events and the many more like them appeared daily on the front page of newspapers, and perhaps more devastatingly, nightly on the television screen. The scenes portrayed ugly human behavior, flagrant violence, and, more shocking to an orderly America, complete disorder. Were rioters the clientele of liberals? The stage was ripe for change.

Defining Liberal

Were riots criminal acts or civil protests? Point of view made all the difference and set in motion a new connotation of “liberal.” Liberal political elites and liberal public intellectuals, deeply committed to civil rights and to the cause of Black America, interpreted the riots as protests of the down-and-out against the terrible conditions of their lives (Flamm 2005). They honored the rioters’ behavior with the respect of the term “unconventional political activity” and called for programs to improve the conditions of inner city blacks.¹² The riots were a protest against poverty. For liberal political elites and liberal intellectuals the solution to rioting was to eliminate poverty (Flamm 2005, p. 46). In the hotbed cities of rioting like Detroit, black men were unemployed at nearly double the rate as white men.¹³ And in general, African Americans were deeply dissatisfied with social conditions like housing affordability and education disparities, but became especially incensed by the

¹¹For a detailed description of the race riots and elite reactions, see Flamm (2005).

¹²This term was used more colloquially among liberal elites, a nod to the belief among them that urban unrest was simply an attempt to engage in the political system. Violence was a political act when it came to urban rioting, a central finding of the Kerner Commission Report (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders) established by President Johnson in 1967 in response to the race riots. <http://www.eisenhowerfoundation.org/docs/kerner.pdf>

¹³U.S. Census data collected by the author.

slowness of progress in the mid-1960s (Fine 2007).

Many citizens, however believed that rioters were simply criminals. In fact, in 1966 nearly 70% of individuals claimed they would strongly support a candidate for Congress who deemed participating in a race riot a federal offense.¹⁴ The acts rioters performed—burning buildings and automobiles, looting retail stores, violent measures directed at police and outsiders—were well-defined criminal acts. And this is not merely an attitude, rioting *was* criminal. For most citizens, the riots were truly terrible events, with an emotional force of huge magnitude. The solution to many, probably including many self-professed liberals, was to treat rioters as criminals and put them in jail. The dividing line was a matter of perspective, a perspective heavily dependent upon the media's presentation. Ordinary liberal-identifying citizens were thus presented with competing frames. On one side, liberal intellectuals and liberal political elites were publicly calling for a focus on poverty to curb rioting. On the other, the linkage between riots and crime was becoming stronger and stronger. This dynamic process surely instigated intragroup conflict: one portion of liberal citizens buying into the poverty frame, while others could not help but make the link between their ideological identity and unspoken acceptance of crime.

Simultaneously, in the late 1960s, the dignified, religious, nonviolent civil rights movement morphed into “Black Power,” with angry faces and a fondness for violent images and language. It is not that the movement changed. What happened was that having achieved considerable success, it became a less compelling and newsworthy story, gradually losing the remarkable centrality of the earlier 1960s (Kellstedt 2003). It was old news. Looking for a new story, the media found one in riots and Black Power (Knight 2007), a movement of young people mainly in the North. The new movement was anarchic, unplanned, and often driven by people seeking media attention. Violent and angry expression became the keys to media access, though the media largely ignored the actual perspective of the rioters

¹⁴Source: Roper iPoll, October 1966, USHARRIS.101166.R1B

in its coverage (Knight 2007). Where the civil rights movement had appealed to the shared values of white America and linked itself with positive symbols, the message of Black Power frightened white America—and intended to.

Along with the continual flow of gruesome images of the race riots came a change in perspective, a change of frame. Even though the civil rights movement itself remained a peaceful one, the lawless explosion of race riots demanded attention. Without leadership or spokespeople, and certainly without the support of the civil rights movement, the rioters carried on. They continued to burn cities and steal from local establishments. Their frequency climbed significantly throughout the 1960s (see Figure 3.4). Rioters' actions undermined the frame of the peaceful civil rights movement (Rustin 2003). What citizens saw, in short hand, was that civil rights led to rioting. The political group which maintained—loudly and consistently—its support for civil rights was supporting an increasingly unpopular cause. The symbols of liberal identity became burdened with symbols of race, rioting, protest, and disorder. Thus, a liberal identification came to mean tacit acceptance of disorder and support for those behind it. These were not values and symbols that Americans revered.

From a psychological perspective, this shift in the meaning of liberal posed a significant problem for self-identified liberals. Social identities have psychological significance: the groups with which individuals identify contribute to their self-images. Thus, if one of these groups—like liberals—becomes negatively charged, individuals must act to protect their self-image from the group—either by disassociating or by altering the image of the group in their own minds (e.g., social creativity) (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Festinger 1954). For those without a strong attachment, exit (social mobility) makes particular sense. In terms of attachment to the liberal label in the 1960s, exit made sense for those whose values and moral foundations were more centered on the dimensions of in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity (Haidt 2012)—which were key framing devices used

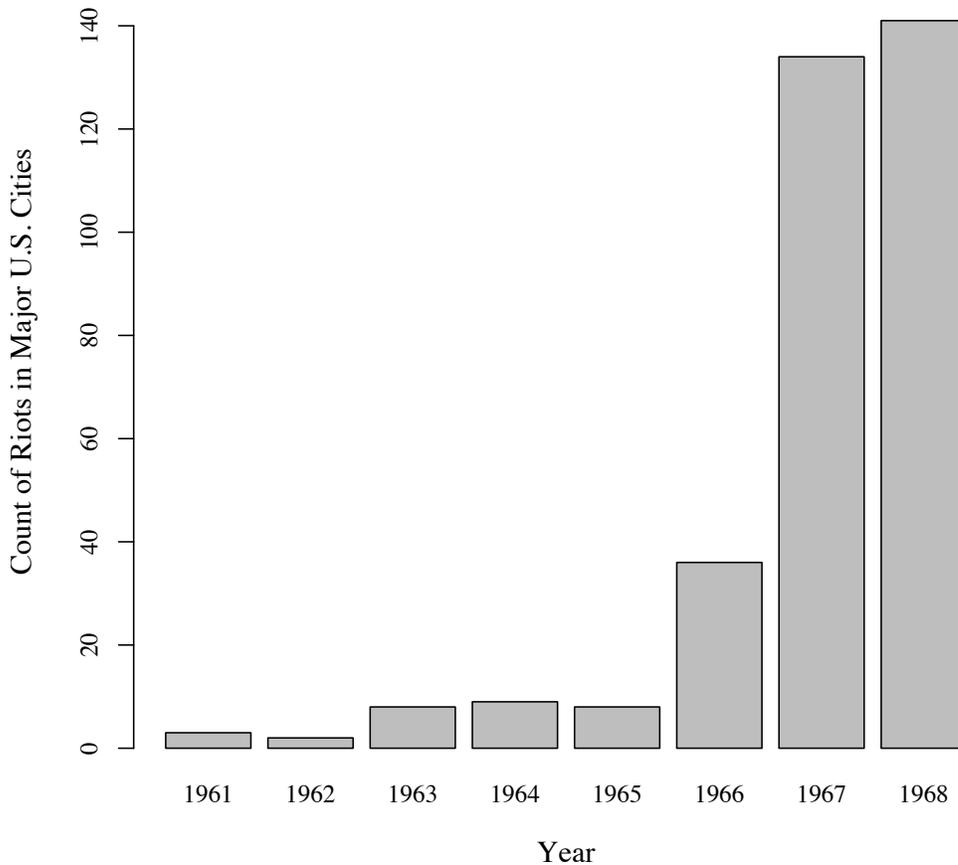


Figure 3.4: Riot Frequency across 410 U.S. Cities, 1961-1968 (Source: Data drawn from Myers (1997))

by conservative elites. These individuals tend prefer tradition, legitimate authority, and loyalty to one’s own family and nation. The liberal framing of the race riots certainly did not appeal to these foundations. More centered on the other two moral foundations of harm/care and fairness/reciprocity, liberals wanted to protect the activists and work for the justice they deserved. These features of the liberal identity were the features stressed by its leaders. And, these distinctions between the meanings of “liberal” and “conservative” were made with incredible clarity by the competing framing of the race riots.

The media, in its coverage of race riots, primed these differences rather clearly for Americans. A new story emerged: the story of crime and its perpetrators.¹⁵

Critical Moment

Crime was of little political importance in the United States prior to the 1960s. This, of course, was not for a lack of crime, but a mere lack of focus, especially from the political arena. Crime problems were mainly local and state problems. Crime did not receive much national attention before the 1960s.¹⁶

That would change in the mid-1960s, when crime moved to the front page of newspapers and the lead stories in nightly television news. Beginning in 1963, the coverage of crime on the front page of *The New York Times* jumped dramatically, and remained high through the decade (see ahead to Figure 3.5). It became the centerpiece of another agenda as well: the conservative agenda.¹⁷ Understanding that Americans put a premium on their own security, conservative elites lured liberal citizens into their camp by consistently pointing out the inability of the liberal agenda (e.g., social programs, The Great Society) to ensure personal security (Flamm 2005).

The “critical moment” (Carmines and Stimson 1989) that sparked the sharp decline in liberal identification was set into motion when crime entered the scene. As conservatives exploited public fear of crime (and thus, priming the conservative moral foundations of loyalty, authority, and sanctity), liberals maintained their support for black rights (Wattenberg 1967). But crime was on the rise, and there was no mistaking the perpetrators. This new issue partially reframed civil rights. Crime became a buzzword, an entry point to say certain things about race without explicitly mentioning race.

¹⁵Even the Kerner Report, certainly not hailed by the Johnson Administration, conceded that the media had a “cumulative effect” on the riots, partly by overplaying the race angle. <http://www.eisenhowerfoundation.org/docs/kerner.pdf>

¹⁶Proceeding author designed content analysis provides tangible evidence of this.

¹⁷This is not necessarily a media influence story. It is clear from the stories that what *The Times* was doing was reporting that conservatives were making effective use of the issue.

I argue that liberal identification became unpopular because it was associated with softness on crime via the race riots, *not* because support for civil rights declined. Most conservative elites did not publicly denounce civil rights, and they certainly did not mock liberals for doing so. They merely ignored the complexity of the issue of civil rights, zeroing in on one easily understandable issue that heightened the fears of ordinary citizens. They called attention to rising crime rates, and were not shy about what types of crime they meant: looting, arson, and any other implicit connection to race riots. Rioting and urban unrest had obvious perpetrators, and more defaming for liberal identification, clear supporters.

The riots changed the image of the civil rights movement, though neither the clientele nor the mechanism of the two overlapped. Civil rights activists did not morph into Black Power adherents, nor did civil rights philosophy ever support forceful and violent means for achieving its goals—a key symbol of the Black Power movement (Rustin 2003). Even more, the goals themselves were quite different: the civil rights movement asked for voting rights and public accommodations, which it largely won. The rioters, fueled by the successes of the civil rights movement, demanded instant economic progress. It was a revolution of rising expectations. Too much success, too soon, caused expectations to rise out of line with reality.

With civil rights goals largely realized by 1964 and 1965, media attention shifted, as it does, to the next big story. A main story of 1965-1967 was the race riots: the images on television and the newspapers shifted from peaceful protests to violent scenes of looting, arson, and disorder. And in this quiet shift, the rioters took over the image of civil rights, black Americans, crime, and the liberal identity—now, a connected bundle of images.

Equally important to the story is the response of liberal elites to this reframing. In a word, the response was “nothing” (Baker 1969). If anything, liberal elites and liberal intellectuals continued to support the rioters, but louder and more fervently. Liberal elites were passionately committed to the cause of racial equality. “Unconventional political

activity” was rooted in poverty and unemployment. The solution was social programs that addressed these underlying issues (Flamm 2005). To everyone else, and with a nod to the issue framing of the conservatives, rioting was just crime.

The Politicization of Crime

Before the 1960s, crime was an apolitical topic. There was no overt association between crime and liberal or crime and conservative. Media coverage of crime typically referred to organized crime (and before that, juvenile delinquency), and even that coverage was spotty. Both of these facts changed in the 1960s. Both the coverage of crime and the rise in violent crime increased in the 1960s, demonstrated in Figure 3.5.¹⁸

The solid line in Figure 3.5 is a simple count of front page stories, by year, that mention crime. The dotted line is the violent crime rate, as measured by the FBI.

The mere fact of coverage does not necessarily leave an imprint on the public mind. But we know more. We know that the public was concerned about crime. The Gallup organization regularly surveys Americans, asking them what they believe to be the most important problem facing the nation. Although “Vietnam” was the leading response in the 1960s, the percentage of people who responded “crime” dramatically increased in the 1960s, from about 2% in 1960 to 20% by 1968, demonstrated in Figure 3.6.¹⁹

In this busiest of all decades, the time of civil rights, the Vietnam War, political assassinations, and riots, it is impressive that an issue such as crime could be seen as the most important problem by numerous Americans, rising to 20% in 1968. And since that same year is the high point of race riots, there is little question that “crime” had become something more than ordinary street crime at that time. The riots effectively erased the distinction that liberal elites worked so hard to draw: the line separating race and crime (Flamm 2005).

¹⁸Source: Crime statistics from FBI Uniform Crime Reports; *The New York Times* data compiled by the author.

¹⁹Source: Policy Agendas Project Most Important Problem Data, responses coded into Major Topic 12: Law, Crime, and Family.

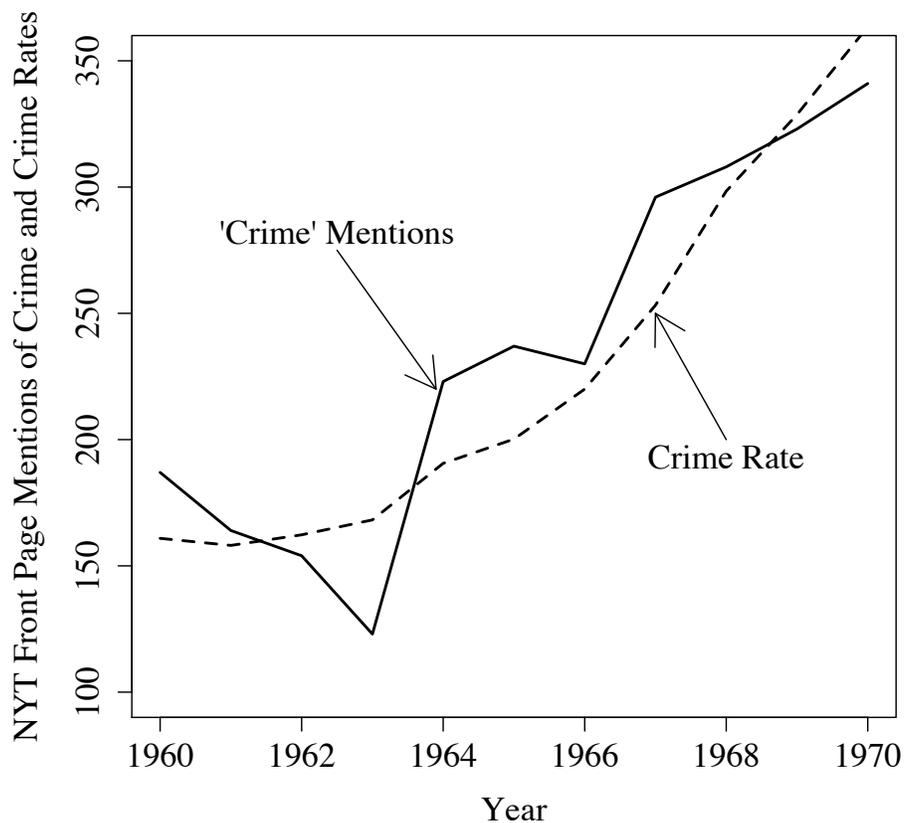


Figure 3.5: The Crime Rate and *The New York Times* Front Page Coverage of Crime (Source: Crime rate data collected by the authors from FBI Uniform Crime Reports; Media data compiled by the author from *The New York Times* via ProQuest Historical Newspapers database.)

Crime No Longer Neutral

A rise in front page coverage of crime and a rise in the actual crime rate, no matter how dramatic both were, is not surprising. We would expect that *The New York Times* would cover crime more if crime rates increased. But “crime” did not remain politically neutral. Softness on crime came to be associated with the liberal label. It was the liberal politician who blamed rioting on social ills. It was a liberal Supreme Court, a point given more attention later, that protected the rights of the accused—or coddled criminals, a matter of perspective.

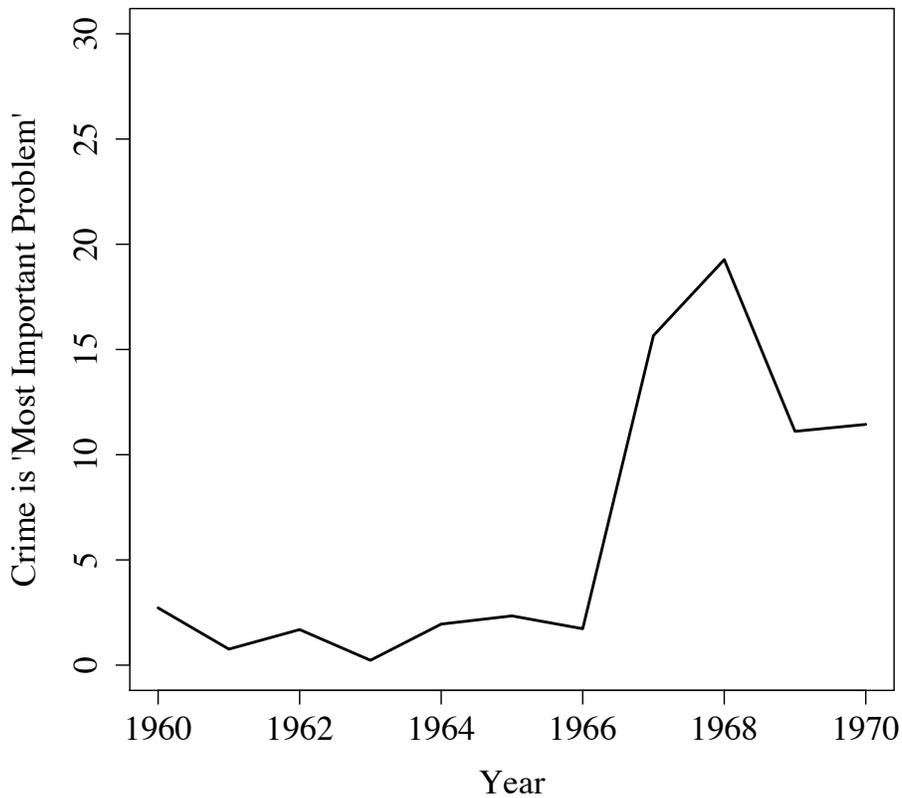


Figure 3.6: Proportion of Respondents citing “Crime” as America’s Most Important Problem in Gallup Poll (Source: Policy Agendas Project “Most Important Problem Data.”)

It takes more than an argument to connect a charge like “soft on crime” to the images that ordinary people connect to an ideological symbol, such as liberal. Such ideological zingers are a normal part of political rhetoric. Most do not leave a trace. In this case, there was more, a sustained association of the symbols “crime” and “liberal” in public dialogue. For evidence of that I have searched for an association the public might have seen in the daily press, using *The New York Times* as my primary source. While most Americans did not personally experience criminal acts or participate in riots themselves, these events were certainly widely covered in the news, making actual media coverage a reasonable proxy for the events (Kellstedt 2000; Krosnick 1990). The way in which media portrayed the riots

and protests is relative and important—and indeed, our best (and often employed) strategy for understanding opinion change of a bygone era (Krosnick 1990, e.g.)²⁰

I count the number of times that the topic crime is associated with the word liberal in front page news stories. Figure 3.7 plots the count of front page articles mentioning both for the period 1960 to 1970.²¹

The figure shows a baseline level of association in the early 1960s of ten or so such stories per year. Beginning in 1965 that number rises dramatically and steadily to an ultimate level of about 60 at the end of the decade. And if one can find a growing association between crime and liberal in the friendly *New York Times*, it could evidently be found anywhere.

The connection is there to be seen. For instance, on August 3, 1967, *The New York Times* quoted Vice President Humphrey as saying “liberals have not faced certain problems because they were protecting the good name of the poor” and by June of 1968, *The New York Times* reported that while the liberal candidate in Texas had been favored for the governorship, “he faltered...after [the conservative] proposed new state laws to crack down on ‘crime in the streets,’ including stiffer penalties for looting and street crime.” By early August, *The Times* noted that the shifting connotation of civil rights pushed the Republican Party to the right on the issue of law and order as it levied a militant crusade against crime—“because the right to be free from domestic violence has become the forgotten civil right.” The images of liberal, race, and crime were becoming a tighter bundle.

In his study of the mass media and racial attitudes, Kellstedt (2003) demonstrates a

²⁰Without doubt, television news became a central outlet for many Americans in the 1960s, surpassing newspapers as the primary source of news (Source: Gallup). However, the two assumptions made by the proceeding style of analysis are that newspapers, in particular, the print news leader, *The New York Times*, was covering much of the same news as television news, especially in such highly salient conditions as the race riots. And, secondly, that *The New York Times* is a powerful agenda setter in the media—a source indicative of the national news agenda, both in print news and television news. Finally, archival data for television news dates back only to 1968 (Vanderbilt Television News Archive), and thus, misses the critical time period being studied in this dissertation.

²¹Data compiled by the author from *New York Times* via ProQuest Historical Newspapers database.

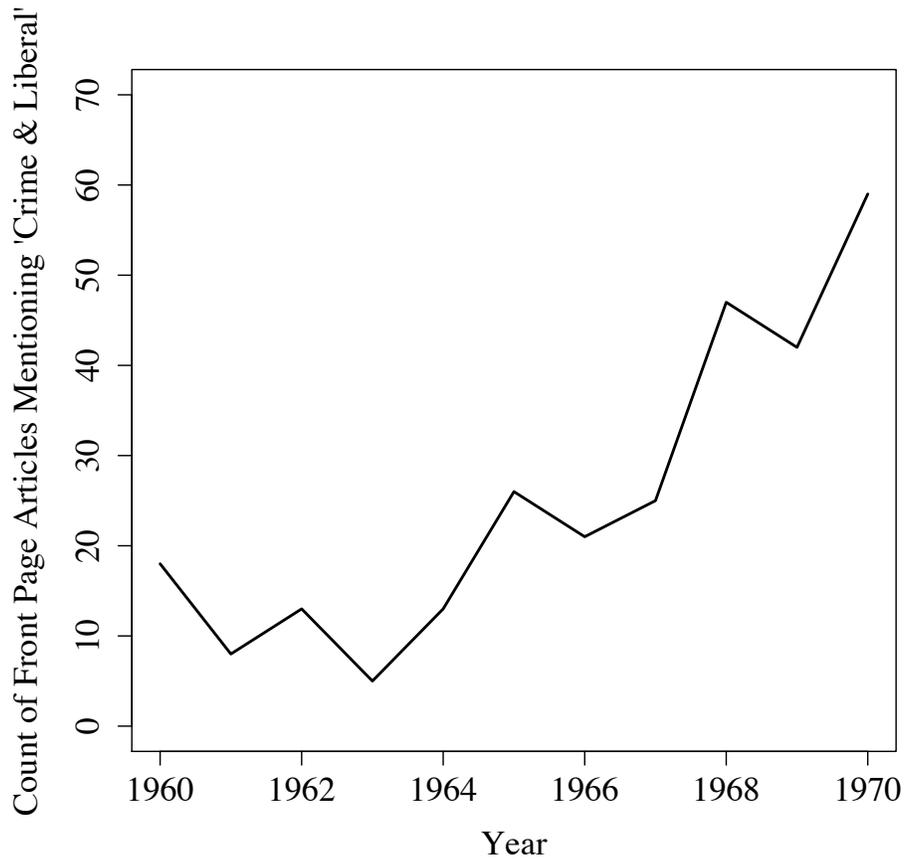


Figure 3.7: Count of *New York Times* Page Stories mentioning “Crime” and “Liberal” (Source: Data compiled by the author from *New York Times* via ProQuest Historical Newspapers database.)

related, and complementary, phenomenon. Through careful content analysis of *Newsweek*, Kellstadt shows that media coverage of racial issues in the U.S. can be largely understood through the lens of two competing frames: egalitarianism and individualism. And, the public’s response—support for racially related policies—is closely tied to this framing. When the media uses egalitarian cues to deliver its story, support for racial equality (in many forms), increases. However, when individualism cues dominate the framing, racial equality mood declines.

Egalitarian cues reached their historical maximum (of the years studied, 1950-1995) in

1963, with an average of roughly nine cues per week throughout that year (Kellstedt 2003, p. 37). By 1964, the egalitarianism frame saw a slight decline, but still boasted a level that trumps any proceeding year. But 1965 through 1966 was a different story entirely. Egalitarianism cues dropped abruptly: from their height in 1963 (482 cues), to a new low point by 1966 (150), at a magnitude of nearly 70% in just two years.

Kellstedt's study lends two sorts of valuable evidence: first, that the media plays a dominant role in shaping public opinion; and second, that the tenor of the media's coverage of race changed in important—and dramatic—ways in the 1960s.

And the Impact

Returning to the analysis at hand, perhaps most telling is Figure 3.8 which traces conservative identification (or 100 - liberal identification) with the dotted line (anchored by the right y-axis) alongside the growth in stories including both “liberal” and “crime,” the black line. The correlation between the two measures is 0.80: strong evidence of a connection between the decline of liberal identification and the emergence of crime, and issues bundled in with it. As liberals became progressively bundled with race and crime, they became less appealing.

The Warren Court

The media were not the only institutions paying increasing attention to crime in the 1960s. Indeed, as crime rates grew, so did the number of court cases addressing the rights of accused criminals. Chief Justice Earl Warren led the U.S. Supreme Court throughout the early 1950s and 1960s, and quickly made his mark with the landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, ending school segregation. In the years following *Brown*, Warren managed to keep the Court unanimous in all decisions addressing segregation. These decisions set the liberal tone for the Warren Court, and by the early 1960s, the High Court began addressing the right of privacy, due process, and rights of criminal defendants. Although many of the decisions now seem to be core instruments of modern American democracy,

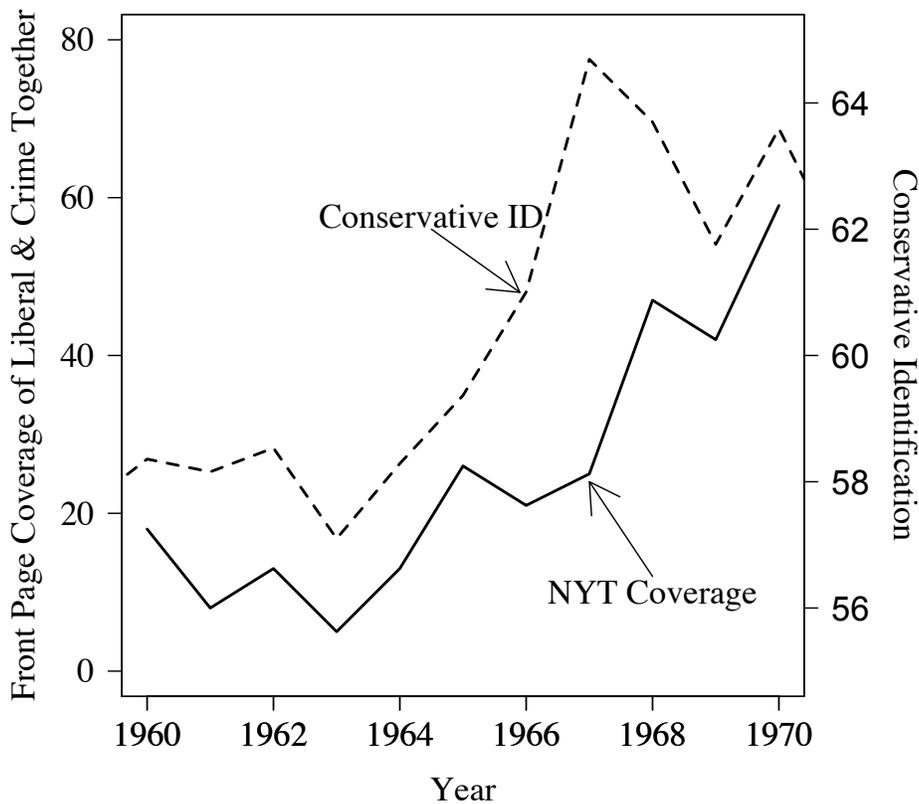


Figure 3.8: Front Page *The New York Times* Stories Mentioning “Crime” and “Liberal” Together and Rise in Conservative Identification (Source: Ideological Identification data collected by the author and estimated using Stimson’s (1999) Dyad Ratios Algorithm; Media data compiled by the authors from *The New York Times* via ProQuest Historical Newspapers database.)

the Warren Court issued a handful of controversial decisions in the 1960s that dramatically changed the landscape of criminal law: *Mapp v. Ohio* (1961) prevented prosecutors from using evidence found in illegal searches, *Gideon v. Wainwright* (1963) provided counsel to indigent defendants, and *Miranda v. Arizona* (1968) required the clear citing of defendant’s rights to those in police custody.

The newly established rights were based upon principles that many—and maybe even most—Americans could support. But the pattern of the decisions, showing concern for the

rights of accused criminals at the time of rising crime, was politically dangerous. There is no reason to think that clarifying the rights of the accused had anything to do with the rising crime rate. But the connection was easy to draw, and it was drawn repeatedly.

Crime and the courts are easy to connect. But we need evidence for one more connection, the Court and the symbol of liberal. Figures 3.9 and 3.10 lend credence to the idea that the U.S. Supreme Court was viewed in an increasingly liberal manner during Warren's tenure.²² Figure 3.9 provides a simple count of front page stories in *The New York Times* that mention "liberal" alongside "U.S. Supreme Court," a figure that grew significantly—from about 1500 to nearly 3500—under Chief Justice Warren's time on the Court, and falling considerably after his departure in 1969.

Looking specifically at Warren's time in office, Figure 3.10 shows that the percentage of front page stories mentioning liberal and the U.S. Supreme Court grew noticeably in the mid-to-late 1960s, the time frame when liberal identification dropped so significantly. In his later years on the Court, nearly 15 percent of the stories mentioning the Supreme Court also referred to "liberal", a near three-fold increase from Warren's earlier years.²³

All the while, violent crime rates rose to record highs throughout the U.S., especially in big cities, fueling the concern that crime was a major national dilemma that must be addressed.

Context Matters

More is needed, particularly the context of the association between the stories mentioning "crime" and "liberal" before the story is fully realized. Using content analysis, every front page story that mentioned the two terms was read and analyzed for tone. Stories with neutral or no association between the terms were coded 0. Stories with positive associations (e.g., liberals have done much to curb the crime problem in America), of which there are

²²Source: Compiled by the authors with Historical *The New York Times* data.

²³This percentage is calculated as the total number of front page stories mentioning "liberal" and the U.S. Supreme Court divided by the total number of front page stories mentioning U.S. Supreme Court.

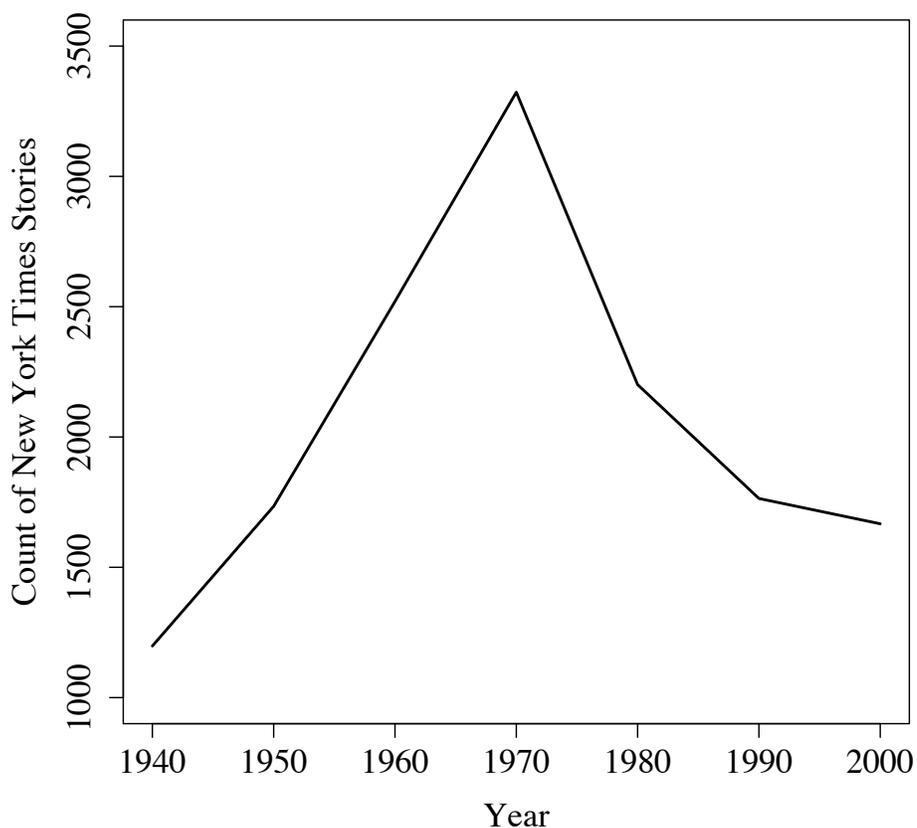


Figure 3.9: Count of Front Page *The New York Times* Stories Mentioning ‘Liberal’ and the U.S. Supreme Court (Source: Data compiled by the author from *The New York Times* via ProQuest Historical Newspapers database.)

few, are coded 1. Finally, stories with a negative association (“The conservative candidate charged that ‘the more liberal federal government has attempted to legislate morality, the more it actually has incited hatred and violence’ ” (NYT, 9/11/64)) are coded -1. From this coding, a yearly measure of *Negativity* is generated that captures the context of the association between “liberal” and “crime.”²⁴ Figure 3.11 puts it all together, plotting both *Liberal Identification* (black line) and *Negativity* (dotted line). The correlation over the 10 year span is -0.89, evidence that the decline of liberal identification and the image of crime

²⁴In particular, *Negativity* is the number of articles coded -1 divided by the total number of articles that mention both “crime” and “liberal.”

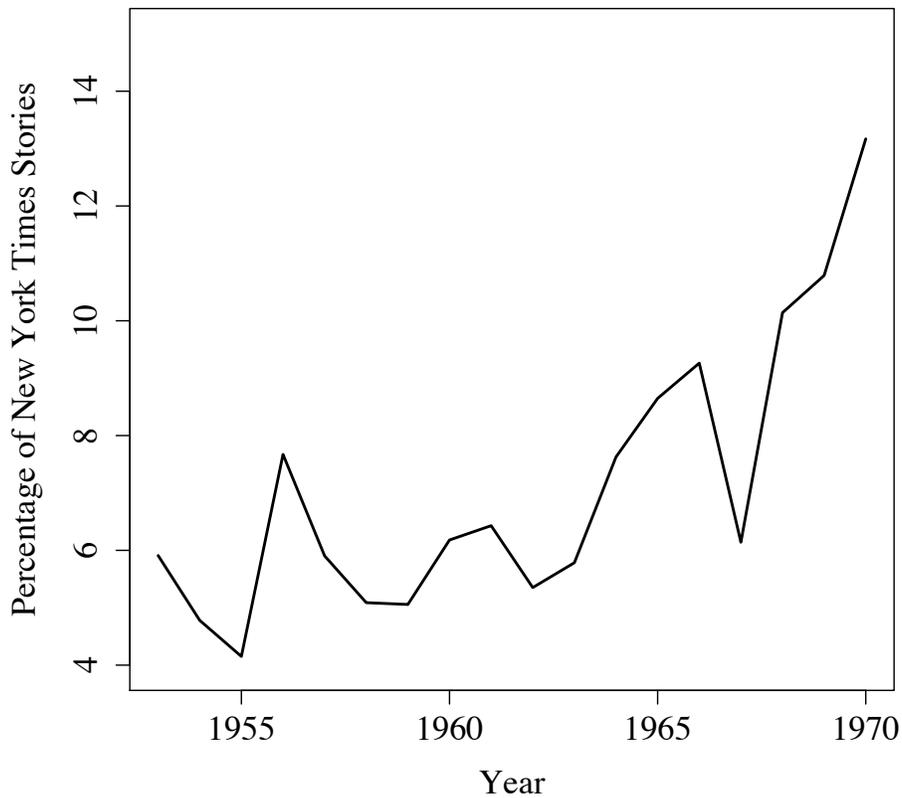


Figure 3.10: Percentage of Front Page *The New York Times* Stories Mentioning ‘Liberal’ Alongside the ‘Warren Court’ (Source: Data compiled by the author from *The New York Times* via ProQuest Historical Newspapers database.)

are linked.

After the Riots

The race riots of the mid 1960s set into motion the frame that underscores “liberal” identification today. After the streets were cleared and burned businesses rebuilt, liberal remained scarred with the image and symbol of crime and tacit support for those racial minorities who made citizens fear for their own safety. From that point on, “liberal” continued on its negative path. Perhaps the millions of working class whites who considered themselves liberals because they connected the term to labor unions and the Democratic

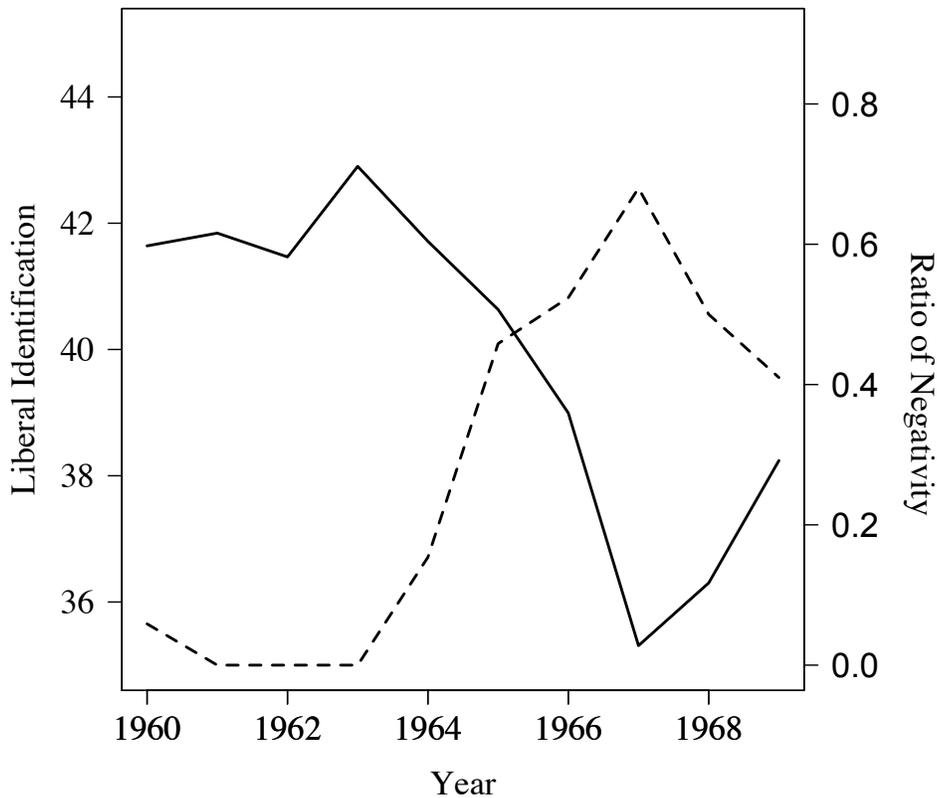


Figure 3.11: The Growth of Negative Associations between “Liberal” and “Crime” in *The New York Times* Front Page Stories Mentioning “Liberal” and “Crime” and the Decline of Liberal Identification (Source: Ideological Identification data collected by the author and estimated using Stimson’s (1999) Dyad Ratios Algorithm; Media data compiled by the author from *The New York Times* via ProQuest Historical Newspapers database.)

party abandoned the liberal identity in an “us against them” reaction to genuine fear of crime. Figure 3.11 provides some evidence of this—as the association between crime and liberal grows, the percentage of individuals identifying as liberal declines. Perhaps the salience of the conservative moral foundations of loyalty, authority, and sanctity was too overwhelming to outweigh the more liberal foundations of care and fairness.

Enter Richard Nixon. His was the first presidential campaign with a “law and order” theme, focusing his message in 1968 on attacking street crime and racial protest, promising

that his “tough on crime” measures would solve disorder. Once a conventional Republican moderate on racial issues, Nixon’s new approach, coupled with a strong Southern strategy, gave his candidacy a new character—and perpetuated the declining image of a liberal identity.

Figure 3.12 illustrates this critical linkage between blacks and crime as told to the American people by the highly circulated magazine *Newsweek*. In particular the figure shows the annual frequency of mentions of “crime” in racially charged stories, those that mention either “black,” “negro,” or “African American.” While a simple presentation of the data, the message is nonetheless powerful: the themes of race and crime became increasingly linked throughout the 1960s. Given the strong connection between crime and liberals, it was inevitable that race would become a part of the liberal bundle. When crime rates dropped and the riots subsided, crime itself became a less compelling symbol. But the racial element of the liberal identity became an ever-present part of what liberal means in American politics.

If the only explanation needed was why so many liberals disappeared during the late 1960s, these two explanations, the race riots and the politicalization of crime, may suffice. But the riots and crime could not last as central preoccupations of citizens. For the “liberal” brand to remain deeply unpopular—and often among people who were themselves liberal in their political outlook—these violent, but fleeting, images needed to be replaced. And they were. “Burn baby, burn” was replaced by “Hell no, we won’t go” as self-described liberals later united against the Vietnam War. To the image “soft on crime” the 1970s added “unpatriotic” to the collective image of a liberal. Young men and women of privilege at elite universities endeared themselves to working class America by referring to the police who opposed them as “pigs.” And then pot and the counterculture added to the mix. All in all, the images of the strait-laced defenders of working America of the times of FDR through JFK were thoroughly replaced by a modern image of largely pejorative elements. Their justifications were mostly anchored by the liberal foundations of fairness and justice.

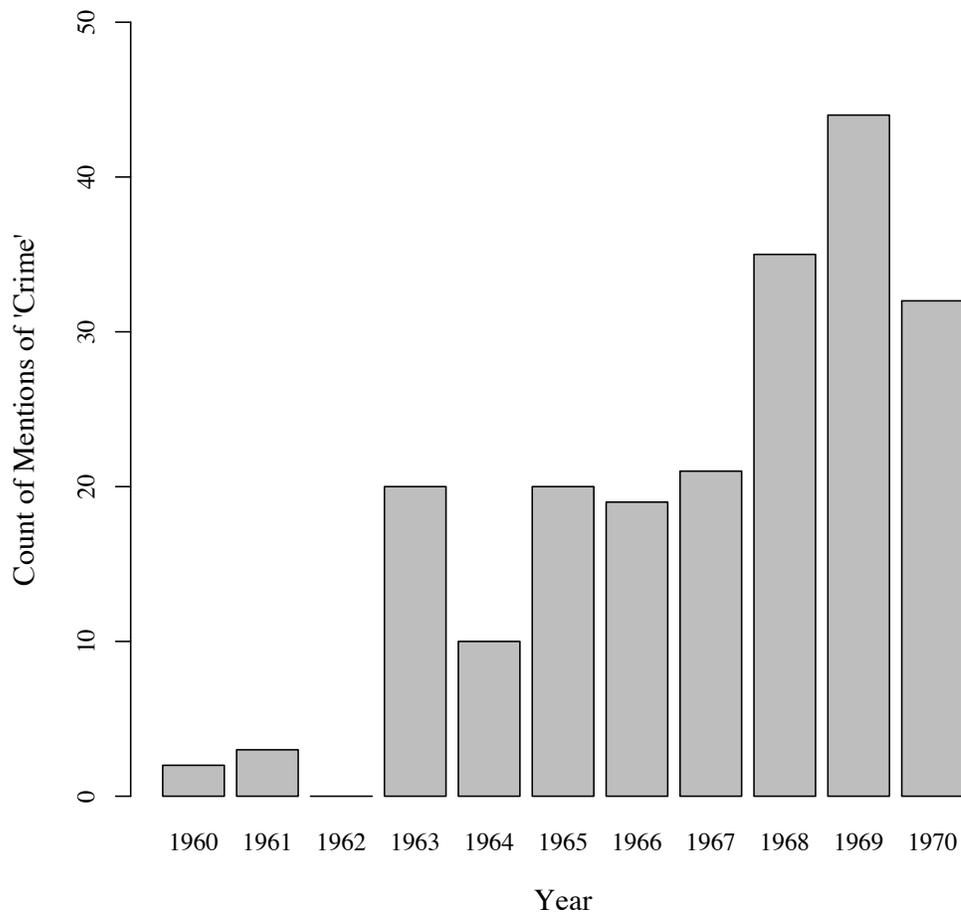


Figure 3.12: Frequency of Mentions of “Crime” in Racially Charged Stories in *Newsweek* 1960-1970. (Source: *Newsweek* raw data provided by Paul Kellstedt)

Democrats, all the while, continued to be popular and continued to win elections. But they did so in part by disassociating themselves from the now unpopular label “liberal.” Elected politicians after all didn’t riot, (mostly) didn’t march against the War, and didn’t adopt the styles and attitudes of the counterculture. So they could escape association with the marred image of liberal. But by disassociating themselves, they added to the illegitimate connotations of the word. If liberalism was not about defending Social Security, increasing the minimum wage, standing up for the right to bargain collectively, what was it? The task

of adding to the definition was largely left to the opponents of liberalism. And they took to it with gusto. This element of the story of ideological identification is explored at length in the third chapter of the dissertation.

The evidence accumulated to this point sustains the message that citizens attending to media coverage might have begun to connect the symbol “liberal” to racial and soft on crime connotations. Now, turning to another sort of evidence: observing the degree to which response to the political group “liberals” becomes associated with these other images.

Evidence for the Changing Connotation

If the interpretation of the crucial events of the late 1960s is true, it should be the case that there is evidence in the changing connotation of “liberal.” There are stark limits to what we can observe because for this “end of ideology” period in American political life neither liberalism or the things that are associated with a liberal identity it are well or often measured. The best we can do is the National Election Study feeling thermometer for “liberals.” That begins in 1964. But most of the possible associations suggested so far do not have measures in the ANES series until 1970 or after. So we can observe the growth of new associations over about a decade and a half beginning in 1964. But most cannot be observed both before and after, as would be crucial evidence, but only after.

The first glimpse (see Figure 3.13) at 1964—already “after” for most of the important civil rights movement events—shows quite modest correlations between response to “liberals” and response to “blacks” (0.19) and to “labor unions” (0.19). From that point, where half of the respondents did not supply a non-neutral rating, the picture is simple: connotation grows over time. Correlation with everything grows over the period. The least impressive of these are with traditional Democratic images, labor unions and poor people, which grow only slightly. Most obvious is the clear racialization of images of liberals, with striking increases in correlations for “civil rights leaders” (to 0.52), “black militants” (to

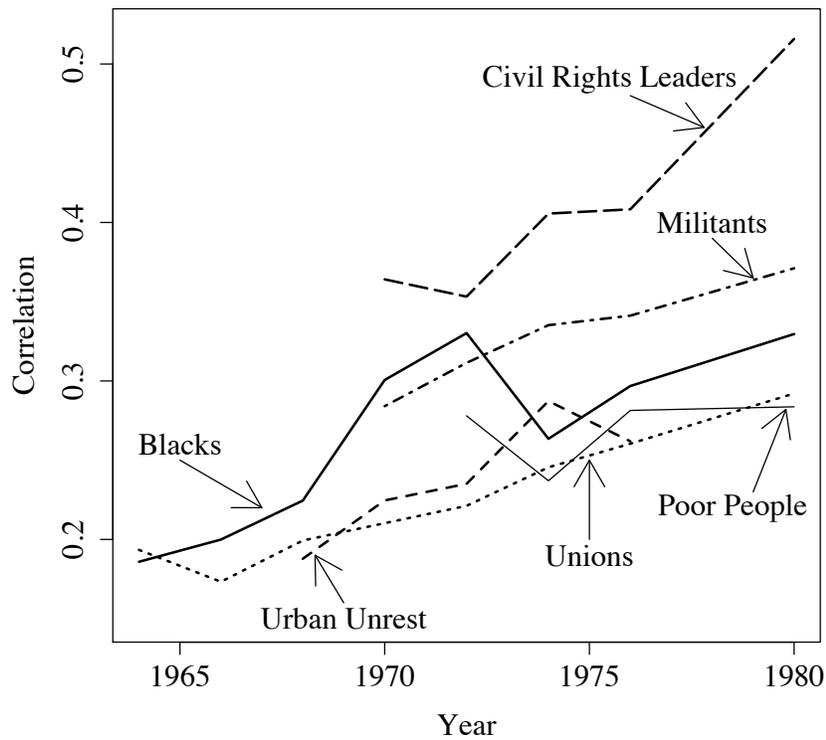


Figure 3.13: Correlations of the “Liberals” Feeling Thermometer with Other Feeling Thermometers and Preference Indicators, 1964–1980 (Source: American National Election Studies)

0.37), and generic “blacks” (to 0.33).²⁵

The ANES seven point scale on urban unrest²⁶ is added to thermometer images. The expected association emerges. Those who don’t like rioters don’t like liberals either. The question is not posed for the first time until 1968, and so there is no evidence on what

²⁵We have argued that the traditional civil rights leaders should have had a quite different reception from the black militants who replaced them in the late 1960s limelight. We do not see that in the correlations. But it is hard to know what respondents had in mind for “civil rights leaders” because the question was not posed for the first time until the traditional nonviolent leaders had already been pushed aside for public attention by the black power advocates (and Martin Luther King was already dead). Probably “civil rights leader” took in both sorts of image.

²⁶Question wording: “There is much discussion about the best way to deal with the problem of urban unrest and rioting. Some say it is more important to use all available force to maintain law and order – no matter what results. Others say it is more important to correct the problems of poverty and unemployment that give rise to the disturbances. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven’t you thought very much about this?”

association such an item might have had before the riots.

Thus, what has been posited about the race riots bears out in the data in unmistakable fashion: the liberal “bundle” includes not just images of crime, but it is also lined with images of civil rights, black militants, urban unrest, and more generally, blacks. It is the convergence of crime and blacks, and the resulting racialization of crime that has allowed “crime” itself to serve as a stand-in for race, an implicit symbol that has never been erased from the liberal label.

And, the argument has now come full circle. It started with the fact of declining liberal self-identification, a pattern that started at an easily observable time. And now there is an explanation, that the public images of liberals became associated for many citizens with pejorative images associated with race, crime, protest, and counter culture. What we know for now is that many Americans who remain committed to the policies we call liberal cannot bring themselves to attach the label to their own identities. What the images and symbols attached to liberal came to be after the 1960s, particularly the framing of the liberal label, is explored in depth in the next chapter, which attempts to build a complete historical portrait of liberalism in the U.S.

Concluding Reflections

It is an accepted fact of modern American politics that “liberal,” the word and the symbols it stands for, are unpopular. Democrats, who are in fact liberal by any reasonable reading of the evidence, avoid public association with the term (Lukacs 2004). But it is never lost from usage because Republicans and conservatives are eager to apply it to their opponents (Craig 1996). “Conservative,” in contrast, is embraced and celebrated. Both agree that “liberal” is scarred, a label designed to illicit negative images.

If it were simply the case that “liberal” is unpopular because liberalism is unpopular, then the story would be a simple one. But the governing philosophy we call liberalism, old age pensions, health care for all, support for workers, regulation of business practices,

a safety net for the unfortunate, and government measures to create greater equality of opportunity is in fact widely and regularly approved by American voters. So the story is not simple at all. The evidence plainly indicates that the electorate on balance dislikes the symbol, “liberal.” And it plainly indicates that the same electorate likes the substance of liberalism.²⁷

Somehow the symbol of liberalism has been discredited while the substance, represented by programs like Social Security and Medicare, has never been more popular. The historical portrait of how the symbol got separated from the substance has been the motivating problem of this chapter. To unravel that puzzle, evidence of self-identification over a long span of time was examined, and one particular period in the 1960s was studied. In that look the decline of self-identified liberals was observed, not gradually and glacially, as often thought, but all at one period, most of it occurring in only three years. Before the mid 1960s about 45% of those choosing either a liberal or conservative self-identification choose liberal. In that period about one fourth all of self-identified liberals disappeared and never returned, leaving us with the present pattern in which the liberal label is an embarrassment to many liberal politicians. The power of elites and the media to control the environment and thus, the symbols that individuals tie to the ideological terms, was made clear by this analysis. Liberal’s fall from grace generated an historical question, “what happened?,” of the first magnitude. An answer has been supplied.

²⁷The conflict between symbolic conservatism of the American electorate and its operational liberalism has been documented as long ago as Free and Cantril (1967) and is the major theme of Ellis and Stimson (2012).

4 ON THE LONGITUDINAL PRESENTATION OF “LIBERAL”

The central focus of the second empirical chapter was determining what symbols, issues, groups, and images became associated with the liberal label in the 1960s. The answer—softness on crime, race, and support for the rioters—explained how the liberal identity could become so unpalatable so quickly.

But the story of the 1960s is not the story of today. The symbols of liberal today are symbols of change, colored by support for marginalized and unpopular groups in American society. But, we know little empirically about the path from then to now. The years must be connected if we are to fully understand the longitudinal series of the liberal identity in the United States. And that is the purpose of this chapter.

I have suggested that the environment, the context, in which citizens form and maintain their attachments to ideological identities is the second cardinal element to understanding the condition of the liberal identity in the modern era. So, that is where we shall begin: developing a longitudinal understanding of the environment. This endeavor will uncover how the liberal label has been framed, with special attention given to the changing value foci associated with the liberal identity in American politics.

Framing theory, in other words, carries the heavy load in this chapter. It links the micro and macro stories of ideological identification. That citizens can alter attachments is clear. It is up to us to determine how framing has defined the nature of these shifts.

Since the 1960s

Before turning in earnest to *how* the liberal label has been framed since the 1960s, we need justification that meaning has actually been added to the liberal definition in the minds of the mass public. This notion was given some attention in the previous chapter: a brief

analysis demonstrated more than 50% of Americans did not register an affect for liberals on the American National Election Study feeling thermometer in the 1960s.

But, there is more work to be done. An additional piece of evidence would provide further confirmation that the symbols born in the 1960s filled what was once an empty label: a “before and after” look at feeling thermometer scores, but with a focus on a rarely studied group, the unsure.

Theoretically, if we saw a big decline in “don’t know” responses after the large decline in liberal identification, we would know that part of this decline is because liberal took on new meaning, and an unlucky one at that. Its meaning moved from largely vacancy to considerable substance. But it would also tell us that something stuck in the 1960s. And if that level of “don’t know” responses remains low for many years to come, say, until today, then we have good reason to believe that we know what stuck: the images and symbols tied to the liberal identity in the 1960s.

Figure 4.1 plots the “don’t know” response percentage from 1964 (the first year data are available) to the present. In 1964, a full 50.1% of Americans did not feel strongly enough one way or another to place liberals on the feeling thermometer scale. Throughout the Sixties, that number declined to 48.5% in 1966 and then down a few more notches to 43.7% in 1968—evidence of growing meaning that we’ve seen before. But in 1970, a decided majority of Americans had a feeling for liberals, with only 10.8% of respondents falling in the don’t know category. That figure—the percentage of Americans without an affect for liberals—has hovered below 15%, and sometimes much lower, ever since.¹

Plotting that same line, the percentage of don’t know responses, alongside liberal identification in the U.S. yields yet another telling relationship. Figure 4.2 is exactly the same

¹The ANES changed its “don’t know” category from a response of “50” meaning “don’t know” to a simply “don’t know” category. While respondents were clearly instructed to use “50” when they had no real affect for the target group in 1964, 1966, and 1968, the fact that “50” was also a number on the scale may have influenced its use. As such, some part of the change in “don’t know” responses is probably due to question comparability, but surely not all.

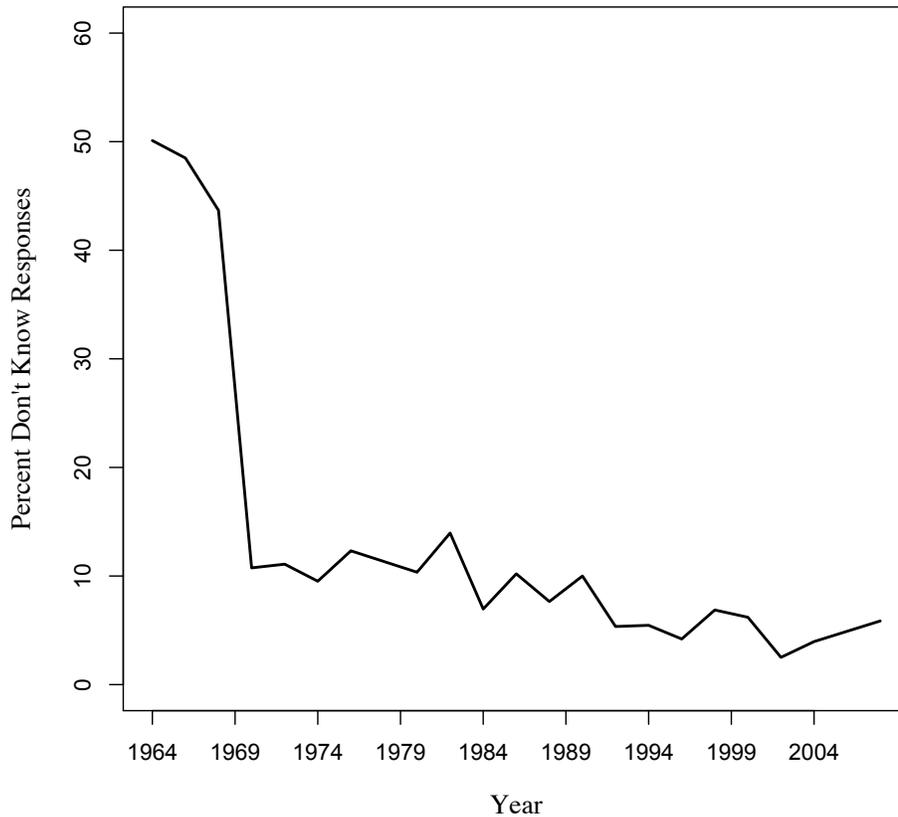


Figure 4.1: Percentage of “Don’t Know” Responses to the Liberal Feeling Thermometer Prompt, 1964–2008

figure as Figure 4.1, but with liberal identification built in (dotted line) and anchored by the right y-axis. While the correlation is not perfect, there is correspondence in the movements of liberal identification and “don’t know responses.” Indeed, a correlation of $p = .66$ confirms what the eye can observe. The first mini series to compare is 1964 to 1966, when both liberal identification and the percentage of citizens with no real affect for liberals drops—slightly, but the movement is there. The downward shift for both series continues, until liberal identity reaches a new low of about 35% in 1970, and don’t know responses hits its local minimum of 10.75% in that same year. As citizens become more and more confident

about how they feel about liberals, that clarity proves more and more deleterious for liberal identification.

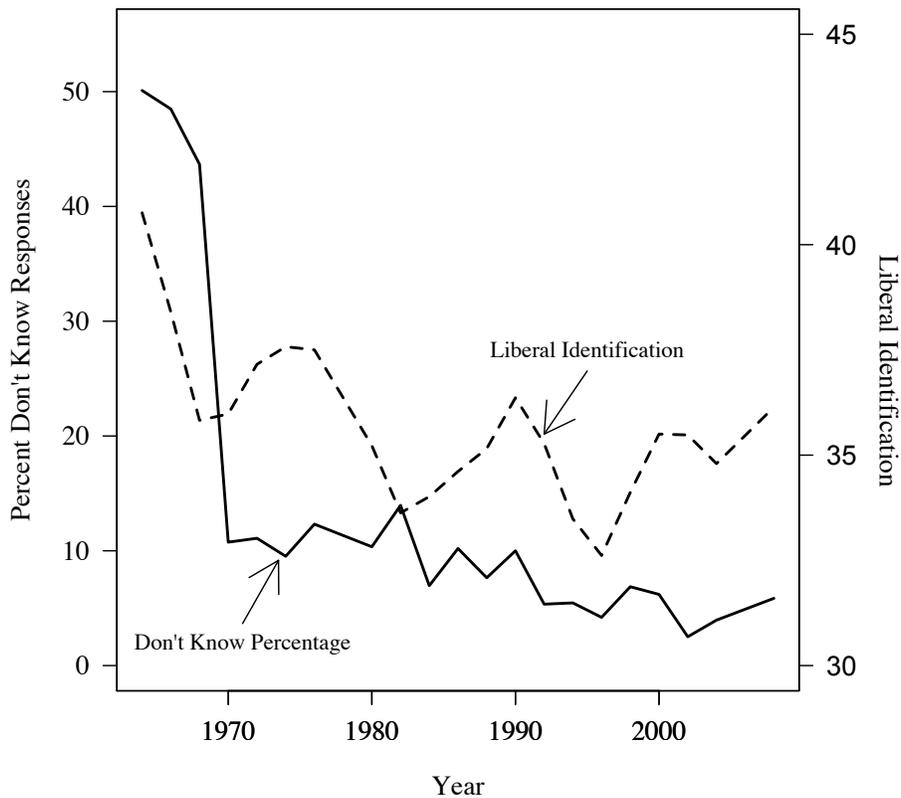


Figure 4.2: Percentage of “Don’t Know” Responses to the Liberal Feeling Thermometer Prompt & Liberal Identification, 1964–2008

Moving onto the next dip in liberal identification, the early 1980s, there is a similar drop in “don’t know” responses for liberal feeling thermometers. From 1982 to 1984, this percentage dropped by half, from about 14% to about 7%. Meanwhile, liberal identification dipped slightly, but meaningfully in these same years. And then again in the early to mid 1990s, both series fall off, “don’t know” responses again by half, from about 10% of respondents to about 5% of respondents. Liberal identification falls in step, losing about 11%

of its adherents in those same years. These contemporaneous shifts lend critical insight: the more citizens know about liberals, they less likely they are to identify with them.

The Authority of Frames

That “liberal” has taken on meaning is now evident. But what is the nature of this new meaning? This can be answered by considering how the liberal label has been *framed* for the public in a longitudinal sense.

Framing has appeared under other guises for decades within the political science literature. In an important subset of work, Riker (1980, 1986, 1988, 1996) demonstrated that political outcomes can be significantly altered if attention can be focused on one aspect of a debate, for example, rather than another. Carmines and Stimson (1986) likewise demonstrated how changing perceptions of political parties come about, usually centered around “critical moments” in which the mass electorate both perceives a difference in an issue position the parties are taking and cares deeply about the issue (i.e., the issue invokes a strong emotional response).

Likewise consider the rhetoric of virtually any recent presidential campaign or issue debate. Candidates work to shape the public’s image of their opponents—in 2008, McCain’s attack ads painted Obama as an elitist professorial type, out of touch with how things work in Washington. And more recently, Obama consistently portrayed Romney as indecisive, and far more conservative than the public realized. In each case, the chosen strategy is just that: strategic. These are all cases of framing, the defining of an issue, group, or figure along a particular dimension *instead of another dimension*—a natural part of the political process (e.g., Chong and Druckman 2007).

Issues, people, and groups in society can be viewed from a variety of perspectives, each giving prominence to a different angle or stressing a different characteristic. Framing theory rests on the assumption—the widely validated assumption—that these angles matter. They change the underlying considerations used in individuals’ evaluations of the

target group, person, or issue (Chong and Druckman 2007). Thus, political elites tend to spend a great deal of time trying to get people to think about their policies along particular dimensions.

Psychologically, framing can work in three ways: (1) by making new beliefs available (e.g., introducing a new way of thinking about a particular issue); (2) by making certain beliefs more accessible (e.g., repeating the frame); and, (3) by making beliefs applicable or “strong” in citizens’ evaluations (e.g., encouraging deeper processing of an issue) (Chong and Druckman 2007). Surprisingly, however, extant literature reveals very little about what qualifies as a strong or especially effective frame, operating under a “we know it when we see it” system. What is known, however, is that symbols make particularly strong frames, most likely because they resonate with preexisting beliefs or knowledge that citizens have (Chong and Druckman 2007). Take, for example, the symbol of crime that became tightly associated with the liberal label in the 1960s. Crime was not a foreign concept to citizens, not an abstract policy proposal. It was, and remains, a visceral and mighty symbol. In the 1960s, its linkage to the liberal label brought about the largest change in ideological identification in history.

But the frame could not carry everyone in its tide. Frames have a limit—individual predispositions like deep-seated values often stand in their way (Chong and Druckman 2007). In the 1960s, tried and true liberals, whose liberal identity was animated by moral foundations of harm and care and fairness and reciprocity (rather than giving equal weight to all five foundations) could not envision themselves as conservatives, I believe. The 1960s was a defining era for liberal identification. While the symbols of 50 years ago may not explicitly remain today, the lines for what liberal *could* come to mean in future eras were drawn.

To understand the magnitude of those framing effects in the 1960s, however, requires

an over-time analysis as proposed here. Most studies measuring framing focus on immediate impacts or effects at singular time points (e.g., Valentino, Hutchins and White 2002; Aaroe 2011; Arceneaux 2012). Yet, understanding the durability of effects is more appropriate when building a longitudinal understanding of a series like ideological identification. Such an investigation uncovers when effects endure, fade, or get outweighed (Chong and Druckman 2010).

Rarely does the framing (or reframing) of an issue, a group, or a candidate completely overhaul the target. But there are noteworthy exceptions. The reframing of the death penalty in the United States over the past decade is a strong candidate. By shifting the frame to one of innocence—that a policy carried out by bureaucrats is prone to waste, inefficiency, and error—opponents of the death penalty have shifted the tide of public opinion dramatically (Baumgartner, DeBoef and Boydston 2008). While Americans still support capital punishment in theory, citizens are increasingly concerned that the system does not work very well in practice. Indeed, aggregate support for the death penalty has dropped nearly ten percentage points in the past decade (Baumgartner, et al. 2008). This is serious movement.

There is much to be learned from this particular case—its lessons are generalizable. Most basically, it suggests that by understanding how information is presented to citizens over time, we can make sense of changing tides of public opinion (e.g., Kellstedt 2003), or, as I will suggest, changing tides of ideological identification. Framing helps outline the process by which symbols are linked to labels like “liberal” and “conservative.” The micro-macro connection is clearer when the powerful force of framing is considered because the individual experience behind system level changes makes sound theoretical sense. Ascertaining and measuring frames, and tying them to large-scale changes, is, of course, a highly nuanced task. There is work to be done.

Framing in the Real World

Outside the orderly confines of a laboratory, the media—newspapers and television—are the primary arena for framing to occur (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; McCombs and Shaw 1972). But, as venues, the media have virtues. The media serve as a proxy for public discourse, an indicator of the nature of public discussion (Baumgartner, et al. 2008). Over-time analysis of media sources can thus document shifts in the nature of public discourse. In the previous chapter, a dramatic change of frame produced a dramatic shift in public discourse, and as a result, a dramatic shift in liberal identification. But, the present task is different. Now we shall look for more nuanced shifts. But the tipping point, we may find, was the reframing of the liberal label in the 1960s. Perhaps it's just been a matter of reinforcement since then. The data will tell us.

Framing theory contributes heavily to the theoretical premise of this chapter: most basically that the symbols, images, and issues linked to ideological identifications in the mass media play a decisive role in determining how citizens evaluate liberals and conservatives as a group, and thus, the identities citizens ultimately choose. But, a proper longitudinal framing study is a tall order—too tall for the confines of a dissertation chapter. A bona fide framing study like Baumgartner, et al. (2008) outlines a set of potential frames (65 unique arguments across seven dimensions in 3,939 *New York Times Index* articles in their case) and traces the use of these frames over time.

There is an alternative to this exhaustive process, one that considers the *intuition* of framing theory when the data parameters are much larger (more than 10,000 full length articles will be evaluated in this chapter). The goal is to uncover how liberal was portrayed to the mass public through the media. We can get a high quality read on this presentation by tracing the major symbols and images connected with liberal over time. There is a trade off to be sure. Baumgartner, et al. (2008) produced the seminal work on the reframing of the death penalty in the United States. This chapter will do well to be a noteworthy first cut

at the packaging of the liberal label to the American people.

A Read of the Environment

The question of this chapter is simple: what is the public exposed to? Or more directly, what *has* the public been exposed to in relation to “liberal”? It is sensible to start this longitudinal investigation with a source that spans the full time series of ideological identification: news print. The assumption is that newspapers are a reasonable and dispassionate indicator of the themes associated with “liberal,” a safe assumption, I believe. Not only is the purpose of high quality journalism to report news in a factual sense, this also often includes reporting directly the commentary of elites. Thus, the benefit of newspapers as a source is twofold: they give a factual report of the environment and a review of elite rhetoric, precisely what the theory requests.

A healthy sum of scholars have both used and validated *The New York Times* as the nation’s leading newspaper, but not simply because it is the most widely circulated among its peers. When *The Times* covers a topic, so do other widely circulated and regional sources (Althaus, Edy and Phalen 2001; Baumgartner, DeBoef and Boydston 2008; Soroka 2002; Woolley 2000). The *New York Times Historical* database is also one of the few sources that covers the entire span necessary for investigating a lengthy time series like the one under consideration here: the series of ideological identification, 1960-2000. It is thus a welcomed finding that *The Times* is also the single best indicator of public discourse.

Time Series Analysis of *The New York Times*

Turning now to *The New York Times*, the task is to search for the themes, symbols, and images that are most tightly associated with the liberal label over time. To do this, I began by conducting an exhaustive search for all front page articles from 1960—2000 that mention “liberal.”² These articles were then downloaded and converted into text format for

²Data from 1960—2000 are available and downloaded from a single source, ProQuest. After 2000, data must be collected from a different source, which compromises comparability in the conversion from downloaded file to readable file.

easier readability.

An Avenue for Evaluation

There are, of course multiple avenues for analyzing this vast dataset. The central goal is understanding how “liberal” is framed for public consumption. I have posited throughout this dissertation that the moral foundations of liberals and conservatives, these moral principles that guide how citizens evaluate symbols and groups (e.g., ideological groups) are different—and that these differences matter. They help explain why liberals and conservatives have such difficulty understanding the positions of the other side (Graham, Haidt and Nosek 2009). This is a potential angle.

Generally speaking, liberals endorse only two of the five moral foundations: harm/care and fairness/reciprocity, those that cause citizens to disapprove of those who cause pain and suffering, approve of those who alleviate harm, and also constitute citizens’ sensitivity levels to equality and justice and those who violate these principles (Koleva, Graham, Iyer, Ditto and Haidt 2012). Conservatives, in the diction of Haidt (2012), have “broader cuisines” and make use of all five elements, but the most striking differences between liberals and conservatives involve the final three dimensions of in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity (Koleva, et al. 2012). These three relate to individuals’ attachments to groups, tendencies to create hierarchically structured societies of dominance and subordination, favorability for obedience, and disgust sensitivity to various social contaminants (Koleva, et al. 2012). Critical in the moral foundations structure and findings is that liberals view these latter three foundations significantly less relevant in deciding whether things are right or wrong. Liberals are, at best, ambivalent to these foundations (Haidt 2012). In fact, liberals often go so far as to violate the other three foundations in their moral decisions and affections to ensure the protection of harm/care and fairness/reciprocity foundations (Haidt 2012).

Considering the framing of the liberal label through the lens of moral foundations

rhetoric lends a unique perspective. It grants the ability to step back from specific political or social issues and determine if there is a moral undercurrent in the way that “liberal” is framed for the American public. And if so, perhaps this undercurrent has contributed to persistent deflated levels of liberal identification—above and beyond any particular issues.

Lakoff (2002) has demonstrated that liberals and conservatives use different sets of words to create frames that make policies seem overall morally “good” or morally “bad.” Words, that is, do the work of politics (Luntz 2007). Language used by elites and the media to frame “liberal” shapes how citizens evaluate liberals as a group; words are full of symbolic meaning. And symbols make particularly strong framing devices (Chong and Druckman 2007). Theoretically, then, there is good reason to expect that if the liberal label is framed in a manner consistent with those foundations that appeal to liberals (harm/care and fairness/reciprocity), this should positively affect liberal identification. This connection between individuals’ chosen ideological label *and* morally appealing language should enhance the self-image liberals have of their ideological group, and draw in those who also have the dispositional and moral foundation principles that lean in the liberal direction. Quite simply, moral language and symbols that appeal to liberal individuals paired with stories that mention *liberal* itself is a force that has the capacity to positively affect liberal identification.

The force works both ways, however. Because liberals are ambivalent to the language of in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity foundations, its use in conjunction with the liberal label will do very little to enhance liberals’ self-images or attract liberal leaners. Liberals will be largely unaffected by this language—it simply does not appeal to their moral foundations.

But, might it attract “natural conservatives”? There is no reason to believe, for example, that liberals and conservatives are any differently affected by the use of moral language. So, if the liberal label is being framed with moral language that *appeals* to conservatives, it

stands to reason that conservatives may be drawn to the liberal identity. Yet, this possibility rests on a critical nuance: that the connection between the conservative-appealing moral language and “liberal” is positive. That is, for this connection to have the ability to attract conservatives, “liberal” would have to be seen as *promoting* in-groups, authority, hierarchy, or tradition. If “liberal” is seen as *undermining* these conservative-appealing foundations, conservatives would, of course, not be drawn to the liberal identity. In fact, this undermining would likely serve to enhance conservatives’ views of their chosen identities because it would highlight that liberals are unsupportive of these moral foundations.

Thinking back to the model of ideological identification from the first empirical chapter, moral foundations are a component of the dispositions that shape citizens’ ideological identifications (see Figure 4.3). Framing is environmental. But framing in the moral foundations sense links the two—the use of this language appeals to citizens’ predispositions, making it even more powerful frame. In Chong and Druckman’s (2007) conception, using moral foundations rhetoric as a framing device works by making already present beliefs more applicable and more strong. Thus, framing ideological terms in moral foundations language affects the symbols and images linked to ideological labels. This, in turn, shapes the way citizens evaluate “liberal” and “conservative.” And it is these evaluations that drive ideological identifications themselves (Conover and Feldman 1981).

This investigation thus has the potential to lend new leverage on explaining association with the liberal identity. If the moral foundations principles associated with “liberal” have been consistently less appealing to liberal citizens, understanding why liberal identification is and has long been a two-to-one underdog to conservative identification is considerably more straightforward. That is, if “liberal” is largely void of ties to harm/care and fairness/reciprocity foundations (or is strongly overpowered by the other three foundations), then liberals in the mass public are left with little positive reinforcement. Coupling this with

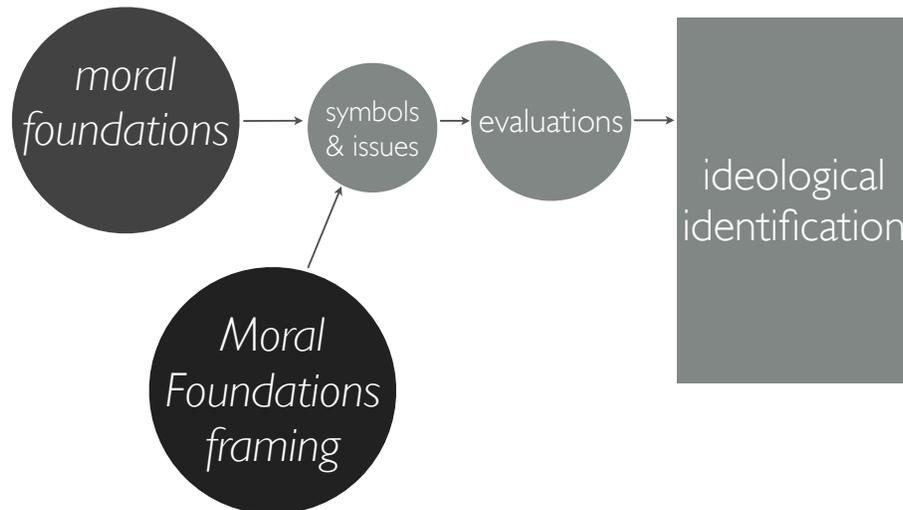


Figure 4.3: Model of Ideological Identification Formation, Considering Moral Foundations Theory

the fact that few elites outwardly identify as “liberal,” as discussed in the previous chapter, liberal citizens not only have very limited leadership, they would also lack exposure to morally-reinforcing symbols in the media.

The second potential source of leverage is more temporal, and certainly a more strenuous test of the theory. The ideological map of the American citizenry has changed at the margins since the major shift in the 1960s. But, there are shifts to be sure. Should these shifts coincide with the changing dialogue of moral foundations symbols, then we have uncovered something truly novel about ideological identification in the U.S.: that it is affected by and responds to the moral foundations framing of political elites and the media.

Design

As a first cut at evaluating this sizable dataset, I trace the usage of the five moral foundations “language” in articles mentioning “liberal” to assess the media’s framing of the liberal

label. I search for the number of times each one of the five moral foundations are used in stories mentioning “liberal” from 1960—2000 using the moral foundations dictionary developed by Graham, Haidt and Nosek (2009).³ Quantitative content analysis of texts, such as the method employed here, is considered to be the most objective approach to analyzing linguistic data (Silverman 1993). This dictionary consists of multiple synonyms for each of the foundations such that the full meaning of the moral dimension is captured. For example, the harm/care dictionary includes 51 words that connote harm and care, such as “peace,” “compassion,” “protect,” “fight,” “war,” and “kill,” while purity/sanctity principles are captured by considering the use of words like “holiness,” “sin,” “disgust,” “adultery,” and “clean.”⁴

To be clear, the present analysis is silent on valence, the positivity or negativity, tied to the moral foundations language. For now, the assumption I am making about the framing of the moral foundations language is that when the harm/care and fairness/reciprocity frames are employed, the frames are positive in relation to the liberal label. Conversely, when less appealing frames are used in conjunction with “liberal,” I am assuming these are negative in tone. As a result, the overall presentation of the in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity frames *as tied to “liberal”* would simultaneously be less appealing to liberals and reinforce conservatives’ moral attachment to the conservative identity. To provide some validity to this assumption, I hand-coded a set of 50 stories from 1980s, ten randomly chosen from each moral foundation. The results largely comply with my assumptions, as the following examples demonstrate. In an August 12, 1980 article centered on Jimmy Carter’s platforms for reelection, *The Times* quotes Carter as saying “The issue we are debating is one of *fairness*” (fairness/reciprocity foundation; emphasis added). An

³I am especially grateful to Mindy White for writing the Python code to evaluate the articles using this method.

⁴Number of synonyms for remaining three foundations: fairness/reciprocity $n=44$, in-group/loyalty $n=50$, authority/respect $n=70$, purity/sanctity $n=80$. Also, see Appendix for full Moral Foundations Dictionary.

October 3, 1980 story, detailing the Republican platform of Ronald Reagan notes he would appoint judges who “respect traditional family values and the *sanctity* of innocent human life” (purity/sanctity foundation; emphasis added). After winning the 1980 presidential election, *The Times* published a story on Reagan’s new “brain trust,” with particular focus on a member of his foreign policy task force and prominent figure in the presidential transition, Dr. Kirkpatrick. In explaining her alienation from the “liberal Democratic Party,” she notes the rise of the counterculture and anti-war movement, and claims that “the *en-emy* is them. Purveyors of unfreedom. Freedom is our central value” (December 1, 1980; in-group/loyalty foundation; emphasis added). Referring to the difficulty in finding a job during the recession, a conservative college placement director noted that “lack of *respect* for the work ethic may be the single biggest deterrent to getting a job” (June 17, 1980; authority/respect foundation; emphasis added). Finally, President Carter, in an attempt to contrast himself from then-candidate Reagan “offered himself as a President with the experience to know that there are ‘no easy answers’ and to understand that the Presidency is ‘a place of *compassion*’” (August 15, 1980; harm/care foundation; emphasis added).

What the Data Show

Figure 4.4 plots the frequencies of two condensed types of language in the front page *The New York Times* stories mentioning “liberal” from 1960—2000: language appealing to liberals (harm/care and fairness/reciprocity dimensions) and language less appealing or relevant to liberals (in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity dimensions).

Gray bars represent the use of language less appealing to liberals, and the black bars represent the frequency language that does appeal to liberals. Considerable variation exists in these two types of language over the time series, a clear indication that there are observable shifts in the nature of public discourse as it relates to moral foundations symbols and language. But there is also noteworthy variation *within* years, between the two types of language. In 1960, for example, harm/care and fairness/reciprocity language is used less

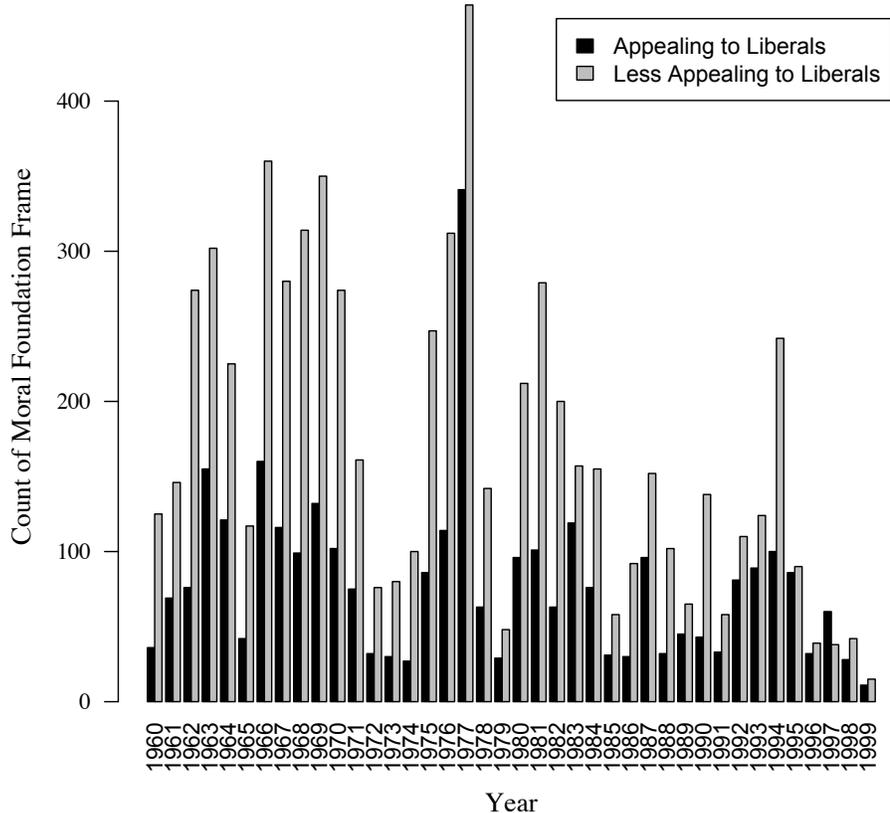


Figure 4.4: Frequencies of Use of Moral Foundations Language in Front Page Articles of *The New York Times*, 1960—2000.

than half as much as its counterpart. This divide is substantial throughout the 1960s, when less appealing or less relevant language outweighs liberal moral foundations language by a margin of 2:1 in nearly every year. This pattern continues throughout the 1970s, although to a lesser extent. At most points in the 1980s, liberal appealing language is decidedly outdone by less appealing language. By the 1990s, however, the tide shifts, with morally liberal-appealing language and symbols almost matching its counterpart. Indeed the 1990s boasts the *only* year (1997) that liberal appealing language wins out.

Beginning with the more general hypothesis suggested above: do the media, on average,

frame liberals in terms of the moral foundations symbols that appeal to liberals? Figure 4.5 helps gain some ground on answering this question. The short answer is no, and not by a long shot. Figure 4.5 is constructed by subtracting the less appealing language (gray bars in Figure 4.4) from the appealing language (black bars in Figure 4.4) for each year. The figure reveals a stark pattern: less appealing and less relevant language overpowers appealing language in all but one year (1997) in a 40 year series.

A closer look back at Figure 4.4 also reveals a few noticeable patterns: the first is that in the 1960s, less appealing language grows significantly, reaching its second highest level in 1966. This year, of course, is a pivotal year in the large decline of liberal identifiers. In 1967 and 1968, the other two years that make up the sharp movements in liberal identification, the margin by which less relevant language outweighs appealing language is its highest in the entire series (Figure 4.5).

So, moral foundations language in stories mentioning “liberal” generally lacks liberal appeal. Moral frames that specifically lack appeal to liberals are used much more often—again, overpowering the tenor of language in all but one year in the entire series of media coverage. This is strong evidence in support of the first, more general hypothesis, that considers the overall portrait of the presentation of “liberal” to the public. Results strongly support the notion that the media frames the liberal label in a fashion that is unlikely to attract liberals themselves.

While the lack of parity between the two types of language is striking, moral foundation theory suggests that liberals are really only sensitive to harm/care and fairness/reciprocity language. Appeals to the other three foundations are mostly irrelevant to liberals. Looking now to Figure 4.6, this assertion is put to the test. The gray bars represent the count of the use of liberal-appealing moral foundations language in front page *The New York Times* stories that also mention “liberal.” The black line is a familiar series: liberal identification.

There is some relationship evident from the figure, but the empirical test is correlation.

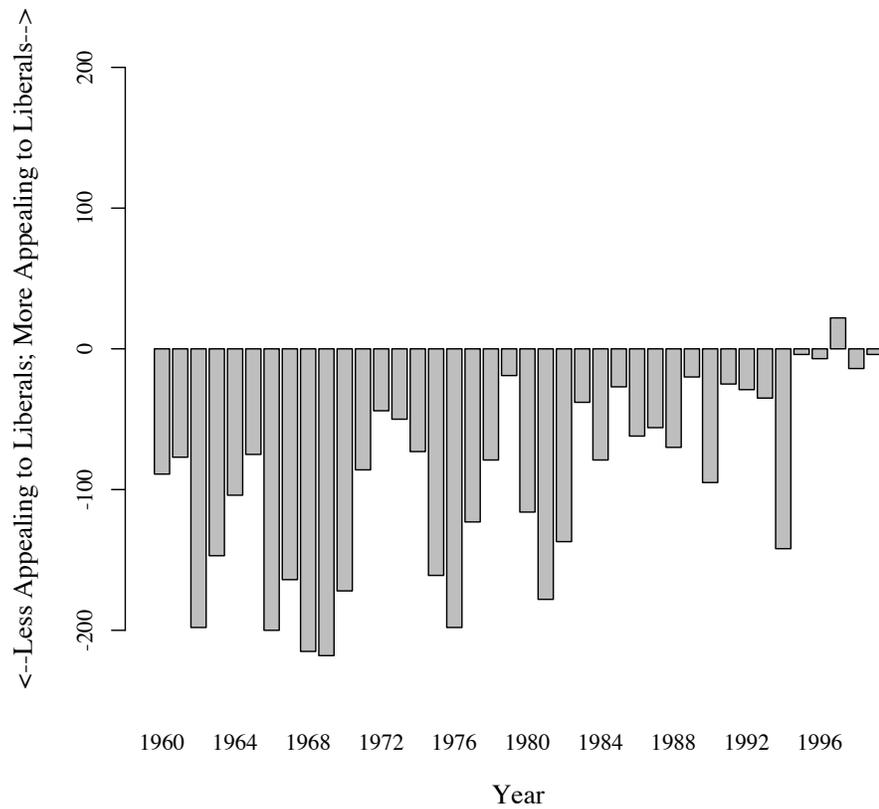


Figure 4.5: Net of Moral Foundations Language in Front Page *The New York Times* Stories Mentioning “Liberal” (calculated by subtracting “less appealing” language from “appealing” language)

The correlation between the two series is $p = .15$, hardly an overwhelming finding. But, it is in the proper expected direction: as those morally relevant symbols and language are used more and more in relation to “liberal”, liberal identification itself increases. Given this connection is measured over a 40 year period, there is at least modest evidence that the manner in which the media frames the “liberal,” this central component of political discourse, shapes the way citizens think about their ideological identities, and thus, how they identify.

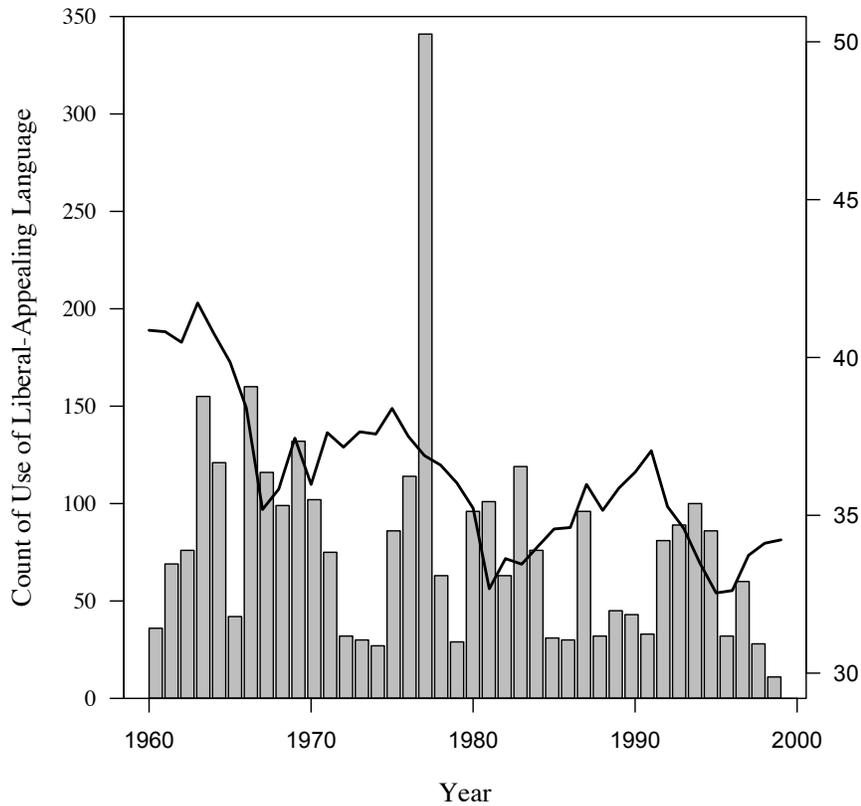


Figure 4.6: Count of Use of Liberal-Appealing Language in *The New York Times* with Liberal Identification

An Alternative Avenue

Another potential avenue for exploring the framing of the liberal label is taking seriously the inconsistency between those moral frames that appeal to liberals and those that are less relevant. It may be that the extent to which “liberal” is *not* framed in an appealing manner matters for liberal identification. Perhaps, that is, the *lack* of positive framing has an effect on the ideological identification choices of citizens. While the principles of in-group/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity may be significantly less relevant to liberals, the use of this moral language is still significantly overpowering that language

which *does* appeal to liberals. This is a testable idea. The empirical question is similar to the previous one: do these documented shifts in the nature of public discourse affect association with the liberal identity?

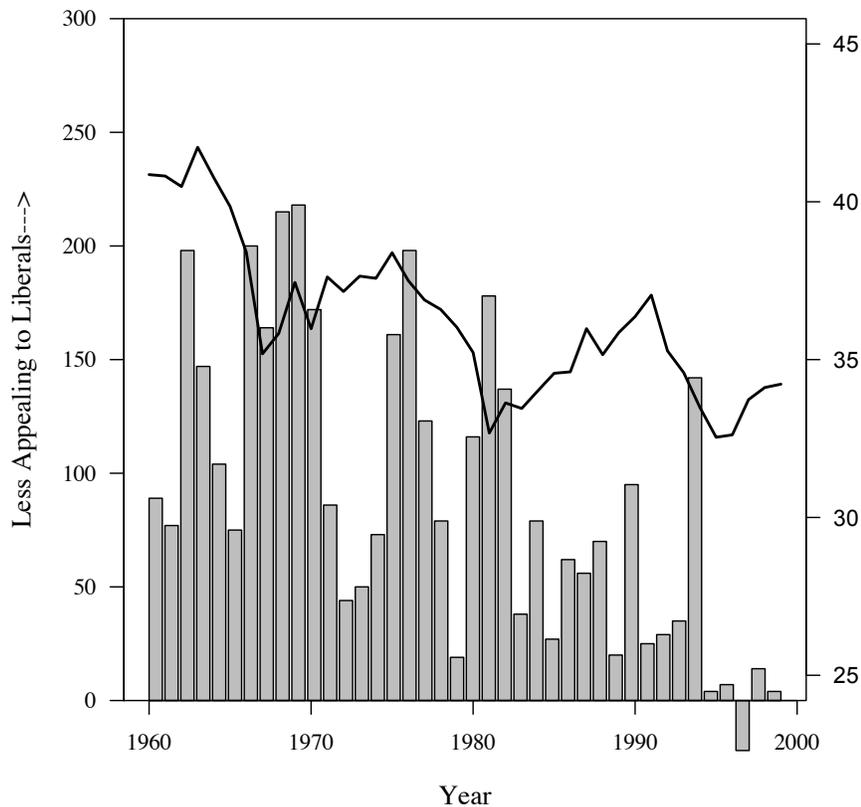


Figure 4.7: Net Difference in Moral Foundations Language in Front Page *The New York Times* Stories Mentioning “Liberal” (constructed by subtracting “appealing” language from “less appealing” language) & Liberal Identification, 1960-2000

Figure 4.7 plots the net difference in language with liberal identification. Net difference in this configuration is the reverse of Figure 4.5 so that the liberal identification series can be plotted on the same plane. Here it is the number of liberal-appealing articles subtracted from the number of less appealing articles, by year. Gray bars represent the margin by which the media framing of “liberal” is less relevant to liberal moral foundations—the

degree to which these frames overpower liberal-appealing frames. The higher the bars, the less relevant the language is to liberals. Liberal identification is again the black line.

Again, the empirical test is correlation. For this analysis, I allow for potentially important period effects by correlating the series by decade. The results, the margin by which the value of liberal-appealing language is dominated by less relevant language with liberal identification, is presented in Table 4.1. Throughout three decades of American history, the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the media’s framing of the liberal label has a marked effect liberal identification. Results are less compelling for the 1990s, when the connection between the media’s moral foundations framing of “liberal” has no real significant effect on liberal identification. With the exception of one year (1994), the use of these two types of languages is quite balanced throughout the 1990s, evidenced by the smaller gray bars in Figure 4.7 compared to other decades. Without variance, moral foundations language can do little by way of affecting ideological identifications.

By and large, however, as language is dominated by rhetoric less relevant to liberals, liberal identification loses ground. This is a decidedly more surprising finding, given that these frames should be of little importance to liberals. Yet, the degree to which they overpower more appealing frames is clearly a meaningful and powerful force. This finding reinforces the notion that the manner in which the media frames “liberal” matters for understanding liberal ideological identification.

Table 4.1: Correlation of Effects of Media Framing of “Liberal” & Liberal Identification

Decade	Correlation
1960-1969	– .41
1970-1979	– .41
1980-1989	– .60
1990-1999	.02

Liberal citizens, these analyses demonstrate, are exposed to framing of the liberal label that they find, by and large, unmoving. The moral symbols and language they find most

appealing is largely overwhelmed by less relevant moral language or flatly missing from the media's framing of their chosen ideological identities.

Next Steps

In this chapter, I have attempted to begin the first critical steps in building a longitudinal understanding of liberal identification in the U.S. By focusing on the moral foundations rhetoric and symbols associated with the liberal identity in the mass media, I have linked a key element of the micro-level psychological theory of identity formation and maintenance to the broader, macro level of the environment.

In future research, I plan to look more closely at moral foundations rhetoric evaluated in this chapter. In particular, I will extend my consideration of the context (positivity and negativity) of the use of the moral frames. This coding judge for each moral word identified, whether or not it was positively or negatively associated with "liberal." That is, does the association with "liberal" endorse the liberal label or not? This extension may lend crucial insight, for example, in explaining why the correlations between harm/care and fairness/reciprocity foundations are not more strongly associated with liberal identification. If these frames are connected with the liberal label in a negative fashion, this underwhelming result makes considerably more sense. This valence coding may also aid interpretation of why the use of the less relevant frames has a marked effect on liberal identification.

I also intend to move beyond the moral foundations lens, and develop a "Political Symbols Dictionary" that mirrors the societal and political groups of the American National Election Study's feeling thermometer measures. Joining these two sources together will provide a method for tracking the groups associated with liberal alongside the changing affects citizens hold for these political and societal groups. Such analyses lend the ability to link the liberal label with its changing symbolic meaning using a different avenue.

5 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In three parts, this dissertation has endeavored to make a significant and meaningful contribution to the study of ideological identification in the U.S. I have focused especially on the liberal identity, a central component of American political and social rhetoric that has often eluded political scientists. While studies have certainly evaluated significant elements of the series of ideological identification—both at the macro and micro level—they are silent on the more complete, longitudinal series, *especially* the liberal identification. Data limitations, for example, have thus far prevented acknowledgment of the dramatic shift in liberal identification in the 1960s, which I am able to overcome because of the recent work of others (Ellis and Stimson 2012). Prior to this data availability, most modern ideological studies simply accepted as fact the deflated levels of liberal identification. My study has attempted to provide deeper historical context of the origins of present conditions.

I began by building a framework for ideological identification formation and maintenance, drawing from multiple theories that, when considered together, constitute a more complete model of how these identities are formed, and how and why they can (and do) change. My model suggests that two major forces, psychological predispositions and environmental factors, are the central components of citizens' ideological identifications. Innate personality features and characteristic adaptations like moral foundations (e.g., Haidt 2012) largely dictate the way in which individuals interpret and interact with their environments. In essence, individuals are psychologically prepared to adopt certain attitudes (like ideological identifications) over others (Jost and Sulloway 2003; Jost 2006; Jost and

Gosling 2008). Contrasting affinities toward stability versus change, and the related pull between hierarchy—which typically supports stability—and equality—which typically mandates change—captures a critical facet of the liberal-conservative pattern. And, moral intuitions take the dispositional understanding of ideological identifications one step further: extant literature demonstrates they are a powerful mechanism underlying these identities as well (Haidt and Graham 2007; Haidt, Graham and Joseph 2009; Graham, Haidt and Nosek 2009; Graham and Haidt n.d.; Haidt 2012). But the environment—political elites and the media—is itself a powerful agency, for it controls what symbols, images, and rhetoric individuals encounter. In essence, it controls *to what* individuals respond. Taking these two elements together, the first empirical chapter organized the model of ideological identification that informed the second and third empirical chapters.

In both the second and third empirical chapters, I demonstrated this robust power of the environment. The second empirical chapter took on a case study of sorts, zeroing in on the 1960s, tracing the decline in liberal identification, the largest shift in ideological identification to date. What I discovered was that the liberal bundle became one of crime, race, and rioting, in large part a product of media presentation. Both *The New York Times* and *Newsweek* lent compelling evidence of this notion. Race, crime, rioting—and liberal—became inextricably linked in the rhetoric of conservative elites and in media coverage throughout the 1960s. Liberal elites, since the 1960s, have ceased to label themselves or their policies “liberal.” Further, ANES correlational data provided strong evidence that the mass public recognized these connections born in the 1960s, tightly associating liberals with racialized groups beginning in the 1960s, correlations that grew throughout the 1960s and continued to last into later decades. Indeed, “liberal” remains racialized today, one key finding that helps explain the central puzzle of this dissertation: why liberal policy programs and liberal politicians remain popular despite the unpopularity of the liberal label itself.

The third empirical chapter linked together the 1960s with the modern day, testing the longitudinal power of moral foundations rhetoric on the framing of the liberal label. Moral Foundations Theory (e.g., Haidt 2012), while a major force in the larger field of psychology, has made little inroads thus far in empirical studies of political science. But, given the considerable role that predispositions play in informing ideological identifications, moral intuitions cannot be ignored, especially in light of the evidence presented in the third empirical chapter. The message was unmistakable: since the 1960s, elite rhetoric and the media have consistently framed “liberal” with moral symbols less appealing to liberals themselves. This finding contributes another critical piece in explaining the consistent levels of deflated liberal identification. Moral foundation theory suggested that, in order to understand why “liberal” is far less preferred to the conservative label, we must consider the moral palates of individuals. Liberals, on average, endorse exclusively two moral foundations: harm/care and fairness/reciprocity, while conservatives consider all five moral domains when making decisions. Evidence from the third empirical chapter offers two central insights. First, political elites have long capitalized on the racialized and stigmatized associations of the liberal identity born out of the 1960s (Chapter 2), and the media has framed the liberal identity in language that lacks liberal appeal. Second, moral intuitions inform preferences, and this includes ideological preferences as well, I believe. The very terms “liberal” and “conservative” connote symbols and images well beyond the political world (Ellis and Stimson 2012). These connotations play a hefty role in shaping how individuals identify ideologically. Moral intuitions help make sense of these meanings, and thus, ideological identities are partly driven by moral intuitions. Without considering this critical element of citizens’s predispositions, and how they have been morally framed by the media, it is impossible to understand how the liberal identity became less preferred and why it remains so. All of this suggests that scholars have been unable to explain “what happened” to the liberal identity partly because they were looking in the wrong place. Moral

intuitions are central piece to answering this question.

In addition, the third empirical chapter demonstrated that “liberal,” once a term whose meaning eluded more than 50% of Americans, has since the late 1960s been full of definition. The short story is that the more citizens know about liberals, the less they like the liberal identity. And this finding, along with clear evidence of the racialization of “liberal,” liberal elite abandonment of the label, and the way in which the liberal label has been morally framed to citizens, builds a final piece of evidence to explain the seemingly eternal unpopularity of liberal identification in the U.S.

It is my belief that any study that attempts to make a significant contribution to the understanding of a central part of American politics recognizes its own limitations. My dissertation is no exception. Along the way, there have been numerous supplemental ideas and alternative avenues for investigation. I consider what precedes this conclusion to be a healthy start, but just that: the beginning.

Probably the most obvious area for further analyses is the final chapter. Besides improvements already suggested, I also intend to extend the study for the full time series (1936-2012). My dissertation, necessarily I believe, placed emphasis on a period of particular disruption in the ideological history of the U.S. As such, the surrounding analysis focused on *how* that period came to influence the following years. A complete study of the series, however, would only enhance our understanding of the shifting tides of ideological identification.

A MORAL FOUNDATIONS DICTIONARY

The following sections give the full list of words used in the *New York Times* search detailed in Chapter 3. Dash lines (-) indicate a stem word, meaning all variants of that stem are counted as a mention of that word.

Harm/Care Foundation

safe-, peace-, compassion-, empath-, sympath-, care, caring, protect-, shield, shelter, amity, secur-, benefit-, defen-, guard, preserve, harm, suffer, war, wars, warl-, warring, fight, violen-, hurt-, kill, kills, killer-, killed, killing, endanger-, cruel, brutal, abuse-, damag-, ruin-, ravage, detriment-, crush-, attack-, annihilate-, destroy, stomp, abandon-, spurn, impair, exploit, exploits, exploited, exploiting, would-.

Fairness/Reciprocity

fair, fairly, fairness, fair-, fairmind, fairplay, equal-, justice, justness, justifi-, reciproc-, impartial-, egalitar-, rights, equity, evenness, equivalent, unbias-, tolerant, equable, balance-homologous, unprejudice-, reasonable, constant, honest-, unfair-, unequal-, bias-, unjust-, injust-, bigot-, descriminat-, disproportion-, inequitable, prejud-, dishonest, unscrupulous, dissociate, preference, favoritism, segregat-, exclusion, exclud-.

In-Group/Loyalty

together, nation-, homeland-, family, families, familial, group, loyal-, patriot-, communal, commune-, communit-, communis-, comrad-, cadre, collectiv-, joint, unison, unite-fellow-, guild, solidarity, devot-, member, cliqu-, cohort, ally, insider, foreign-, enem-betray-, treason-, traitor-, treacher-, disloyal-, individual-, apostasy, apostate, deserted, deserter-, deserting, deceiv-, jilt-, imposter, miscreant, spy, sequester, renegade, terroris-immigra-.

Authority/Respect

obey-, obedien-, duty, law, lawful-, legal-, duti-, honor-, respect, respectful-, respected, respects, order-, father-, mother, motherl-, mothering, mothers, tradition-, hierarch-, authorit- permit, permission, status-, rank-, leader-, class, bourgeoisie, caste-, position, complain- command, supremacy, control, submi-, allegian-, serve, abide, defere-, defer-, reve-renerat-, comply, defian-, rebel-, dissent-, subver-, disrespect-, disobe-, sediti-, agitat-, insubordinat-, illegal-, nonconformist, oppose, protest, refuse, denounce, remonstrate, riot- obstruct.

Purity/Sanctity

piety, pious, purity, pure-, clean-, steril-, sacred-, chast-, holy, holiness, saint-, wholesome- celiba-, abstention, virgin, virgins, virginity, virginal, austerity, integrity, modesty, abstin- abstemiousness, upright, limpid, unadulterated, maiden, virtuous, refined, intemperate, decen-, immaculate, innocent, pristine, humble, disgust-, deprav-, disease-, unclean-, contagio- indecen-, sin, sinful-, sinner-, sins, sinned sinning, slut-, whore, dirt-, impiety, impious, profan-, gross, repuls-, sick-, promiscu-, lewd-, adulter-, debauch- de-, defile-, tramp, prostiut- unchaste, wanton, profilgate, filith-, trashy, obscen-, lax, taint-, stain-, tarnish-, debase-, desecrat-, wicked-, blemish, exploitat-, pervert, wretched-.

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