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If You Can't Join 'Em, Don't : Untangling Attitudes on Social, Economic and Foreign Issues by Graphing Them

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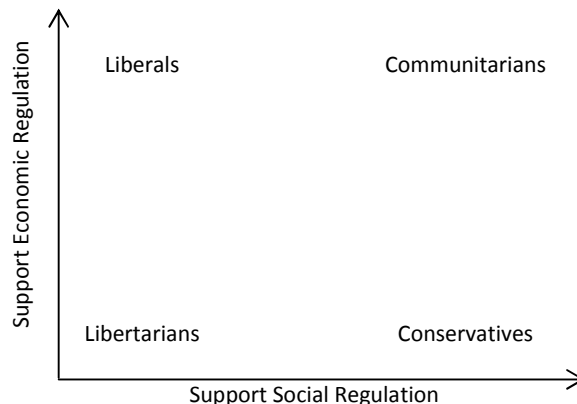
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IF YOU CAN'T JOIN 'EM, DON'T: UNTANGLING ATTITUDES ON SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND FOREIGN ISSUES BY GRAPHING THEM

David Claborn and Lindsey Tobias

“Are you politically left or right?” Students of politics cringe at how reductionist a simple political spectrum is. This is why early on in politics classes students learn how to expand the one dimension to two. Attitudes on social and economic regulation can show students the inconsistencies of Republicans and Democrats, and introduce Libertarians and Communitarians as consistent counterparts. What comes about when we add a foreign affairs axis to the social and economic regulation axes? This project adds that foreign affairs axis to our conventional 2-D graph, thus making a 3-D cube of political attitudes. We then find that this third axis is quite independent of the other two with only 3 of 22 political answers significantly related to the 11 foreign affairs answers respondents give.

One of the most satisfying teaching experiences each year is covering how our left-to-right understanding of the range of American politics gives away so much information. The better way to understand political differences, I say to the students, is by expanding our one-dimensional line to a two-dimensional square with four quadrants: the x-axis is more-to-less social regulation, and the y-axis is more-to-less economic regulation.



Libertarians like less of both types of regulation, and the less-well-known communitarians¹ prefer more of both, and our American versions of liberals and conservatives make up the confused quadrants that like regulation in one place but not the other.

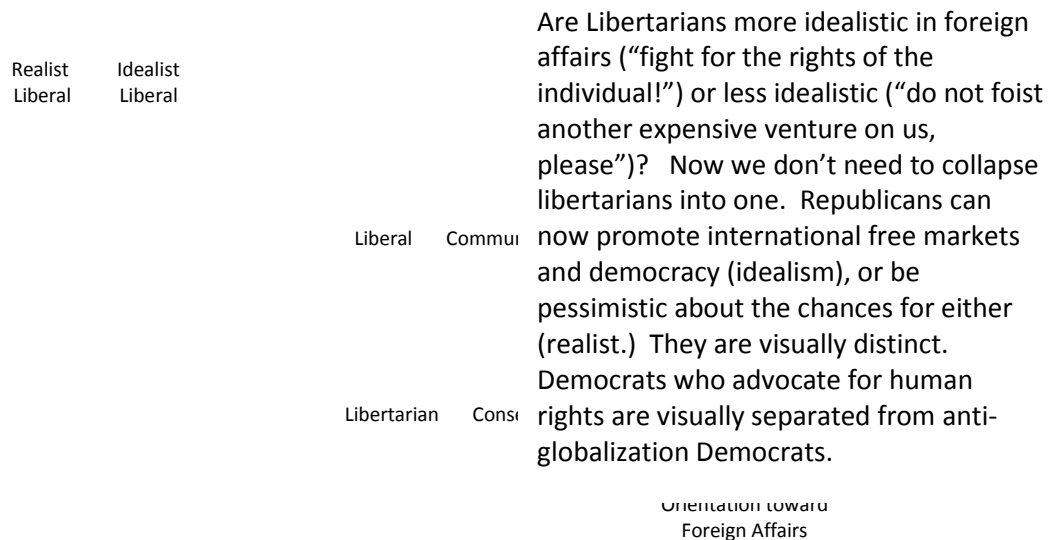
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¹ Communitarian in this paper will be synonymous with “populist.” This quadrant is home to religious conservatives, to the Green Party, and to many African American and Hispanic voters. One of the reasons communitarian (or populist, for that matter) remains less-well-known may be because research actually shows it may not have a coherent existence—it may not cluster in way that conservative, liberal and libertarian does, and

So this project asks “why stop there?” and pushes the concept from two-dimensional square to a three-dimensional cube. We hope the move adds to an already great teaching tool before getting too complex. A quick search for previous attempts came up dry. Both conventional wisdom and the established literature have little to say on a 3-D schematic: there is not yet a popular three-dimensional illustration taking us beyond Republican, Democrat, Libertarian and Communitarian. See the literature review below for a fuller discussion of what does exist.

What would this third axis be? Since another satisfying classroom moment comes from explaining how our attitudes on foreign policy seem to be more independent from the left-right spectrum than conventional wisdom holds, we hoped a third axis based on international politics views would be it. Let’s turn our four ideological quadrants into *octants* (think of a cube cut in half on each face creating 8 pieces.) These octants would just be the regular four quadrants from above (liberal, conservative, libertarian, communitarian) each with a more realist-tilting or idealist-leaning view on international relations. *Voila*, we now have a visual that captures even more political variance and gives away less.



After going over the research on schematically showing political variance, we plug in some answers to questions on all three axes to see how they relate.

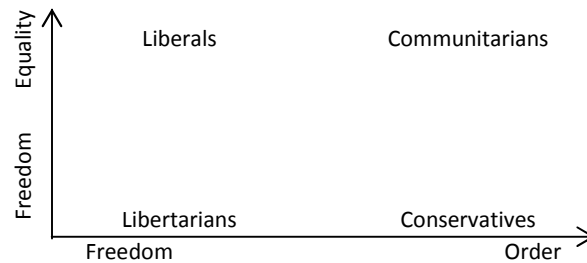
Literature Review

The two-dimensional diagram is often called a “Nolan Chart” after an early Libertarian Party of the U.S. official David Nolan’s iteration of it. His “World’s Smallest Political Quiz” site asked a series of (libertarian-phrased) political questions which enabled people to see their placement within the axes. But the idea and these same axes go back more than thirty years to Maddox and Lilie’s 1984 book which laid out the basic 2-D illustration that many textbooks now include.²

therefore may not even be an orientation. The Green Party and Christian conservatives would give a hearty amen to their not being cut from the same cloth. See Swedlow’s “Beyond liberal and conservative: Two-dimensional conceptions of ideology and the structure of political attitudes and values,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* (June 2008), 13(2), 157–180.

² William S. Maddox and Stuart A. Lilie, *Beyond Liberal and Conservative: Reassessing the Political Spectrum* (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 1984).

Popular textbook authors Janda, Berry and Goldman created their own diagram similar to Maddox and Lilie's which uses *values* rather than *attitudes*.³ A range from more freedom to more order defines one axis, and more freedom to more equality defines the other. And the four quadrants are, conveniently, the same: Conservative, Liberal, Libertarian and Communitarian.



The two ways of constructing these political attitudes (ideological v. values basis) have stayed in their distinct and separate realms for some time, with the values-based research finding more success. That is perhaps based on an Occam's razor preference for the more basic answer –why rely on the second order explanation when you can have the first? But proponents of the ideological construction would shy away from a faulty assumption in that, namely, respondents' political opinions should not be taken into account when determining their political attitudes because we do not always know why we do what we do. Or put another way, maybe our values do not wholly determine our ideological answers, and answers are therefore still worth studying. Nevertheless, researchers closer to psychological explanations in politics have filled out this value-based construction literature well over the last few decades. See the work of Milton Rokeach and Stanley Feldman in particular.⁴

Even though it is losing the battle of the sheer number of articles, the ideological construction is bolstered recently by research showing that the values camp's belief that there is a direct connection between values and political answers does not stand up to the evidence. Jacoby (2006) found peoples' values are prioritized as more and less important to them and evidence that we cannot juggle these values in political issues is instead a function of a lack of knowledge or sophistication.⁵ Put another way, we're not just puppets of our blunt values. And if you're going to ask people to prioritize those values, why not also learn from their self-identified political leaning?

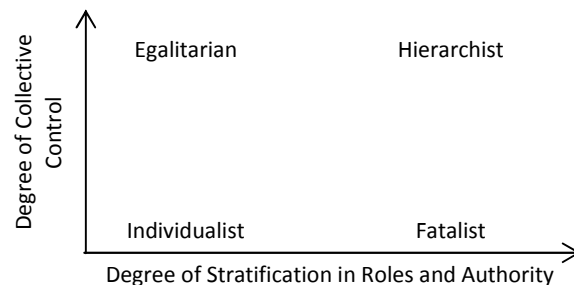
³ Kenneth Janda, Jeffrey M. Berry and Jerry Goldman, *The Challenge of Democracy* (11th edition) (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2011). The biggest cleavage in this research is this difference between those who claim values drive these attitudes versus those who think the attitudes may have something unique to say. This paper takes a perhaps optimistic stance that the differences between the camps are real, but in a generalizing graphic like this, the common patterns outweigh the differences enough for us to go forward.

⁴ Milton Rokeach, *The Nature of Human Values* (New York: Free Press, 1973). Stanley Feldman, 'Structure and Consistency in Public Opinion: The Role of Core Beliefs and Values', *American Journal of Political Science*, 32 (1988), which took NES data and fashioned three categories of American attitudes (economic individualism, Equality of Opportunity, and Free Enterprisers) in an attempt to get at core values rather than simply having messier beliefs built on those values.

⁵ William G. Jacoby, 'Value Choices and American Public Opinion', *American Journal of Political Science*, 50 (2006)

In that vein, Swedlow (2009) found that differences between the psychology heavy values construction and ideological construction are overblown. Both constructions are strongly correlated.⁶ Although, to be sure, Swedlow found the year before (2008) that the ideological construction creates a fourth position where the values research might be able to untangle whether the quadrant belongs to order and caring concerned Communitarians, or instead to a more populist paternalistic “inclusive social hierarch.”⁷

In the shadow of the more psychological approach came a more anthropological approach: Mary Douglas’s and Aaron Wildavsky’s Cultural Theory of Risk project which changes the axes to *feelings* for or against collective stratification, and feelings for or against individual autonomy.⁸ With their phrasing we see similar outcomes: an order quadrant, a liberty quadrant, an equality quadrant, along with a new quadrant: fatalists –those for whom luck or chance or randomness is the best explanation of variance. The fatalist, for example, might say “rules and roles are important to keep a lid on how much trouble we will cause, but let’s not fool ourselves into believing those constructions are real.” See their figure below.



But about the three-dimensional aspect, we were surprised to find no scholarly research done on adding a dimension to our well-worn 2-D concepts. Popular conceptions can be found on the internet mixing some interesting dimensions. Splitting Social Regulation into a Personal Freedom and a Political Freedom axis occurs multiple times, one of which is a political dystopian game mainly going for the cynical chuckle.⁹ A website called the Friesian Institute creates a similar cube.¹⁰ But as of yet there does not seem to be any iterations of a 3-D spectrum which have passed peer-review.

Testing

But opinions on foreign affairs aren’t going to be independent from the ideological quadrants, right? To answer this question, we asked 617 students¹¹ 10 questions on social regulation, 12 questions on economic regulation, and 11 questions on foreign policy from 2010-2013. Those questions and the results from the Olivet Nazarene University students are on the next page.

⁶ Brendon Swedlow and Mikel L. Wyckoff, “Value Preferences and Ideological Structuring of Attitudes in American Public Opinion” *American Politics Research* November 2009 37: 1048-1087

⁷ Brendon Swedlow, “Beyond liberal and conservative: Two-dimensional conceptions of ideology and the structure of political attitudes and values” *Journal of Political Ideologies* June 2008 13 (2): 157-180

⁸ Douglas, M., & Wildavsky, A. B. (1982). *Risk and Culture: An essay on the selection of technical and environmental dangers*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

⁹ See the original chart at Wikipedia’s entry for “Jennifer Government Nationstates”, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jennifer_Government:_NationStates last accessed on 6/2/2015.

¹⁰ See Friesian.org/quiz, last accessed 6/2/2015.

¹¹ In a Midwest residential faith-based university of approx. 2,500 students. The racial minority population over the course of the survey rose from 11% to 17%. The rate of students self-identifying as members of the school’s denominational affiliation (Church of the Nazarene) went from 39% to 29%.

Social Questions:

What is your opinion on abortion?			
	Legal	Illegal	Don't know
When the woman's life is endangered by the pregnancy	55%	20%	25%
When the woman became pregnant as a result of rape	36%	45%	19%
When there is a strong chance of birth defect in the baby	17%	62%	20%
When the family is low income and cannot afford any more children	71%	11%	17%
When the woman is not married and does not want to marry the man	9%	74%	17%
For any reason	9%	70%	21%

A person should have the right to end their own life	
For any reason	11%
Because they are tired of living and ready to die	0.2%
Because they have an incurable disease	15%
Because they have asked not to be resuscitated if they fall unconscious	9%
Never	65%

Which statement best describes your view		
There should be no laws against pornography	There should be laws against pornography for those younger than 18	There should be laws against pornography
7%	45%	48%

Do you think marijuana should be made legal or kept illegal		
Should be made legal	Should remain illegal	Don't know
34%	44%	22%

Economic Questions:

Are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on...			
	Too much	About the right amount	Too little
Improving the conditions of blacks/African Americans	33%	22%	44%
Halting the rising crime rate	9%	52%	40%
Education	7%	70%	22%
Dealing with drug addiction	21%	37%	41%
Improving and protecting the environment	25%	38%	36%
Parks and recreation	22%	28%	49%
Assistance for the poor	29%	41%	30%
Improving and protecting the nation's health	29%	37%	33%
Assistance to other countries	51%	19%	30%
Spending on national defense	33%	26%	41%

Taxes for "rich people" are	
Too high	22%
About right	32%
Too low	46%

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Don't Know	Agree	Strongly agree	
The government should try to lessen the gap between rich and poor	14%	24%	16%	36%	9%	
	28%	39%	14%	13%	6%	Patriotism is an overrated quality
	37%	48%	8%	6%	2%	It our leader meets with our enemies it makes us appear weak
	7%	21%	29%	35%	6%	We must use our military power from time to time to protect our supply of oil, to avoid a national crisis
	29%	43%	13%	11%	4%	It does not make sense to try to understand terrorists because they are self-evidently evil

Foreign Affairs Questions:

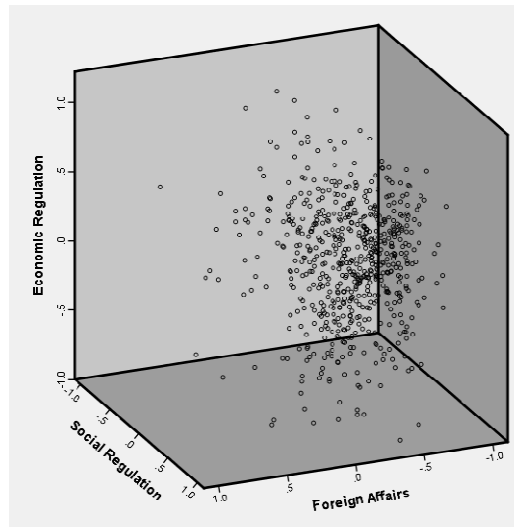
How Important are the following issues?			
	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important at all
Promoting market economies abroad	19%	66%	14%
Promoting and defending human rights in other countries	54%	42%	4%
Helping to bring a democratic form of government to other nations	16%	61%	23%
Strengthening the United Nations (and other international organizations)	33%	54%	13%
Combating international terrorism	60%	38%	3%
Combating world hunger	69%	29%	2%
Promoting the spread of nuclear weapons	67%	31%	2%

Language for these questions was taken from professional polling organizations. All of the social regulation language was originally crafted in the General Social Survey (GSS), as was the language for all spending questions, and the gap between rich and poor language. Language for the questions on taxes and how important the specific foreign affairs events came from the National Elections Survey (NES). The last four questions (Patriotism, meeting with enemies, militant oil, and understanding terrorists) came from aforementioned political compass popularizer David Nolan's website, gotoquiz.com/politics/political-spectrum-quiz.html.

Based on their answers to these questions, we recognized each student's overall attitude on social regulation, on economic regulation, and on foreign affairs. Their average social answer, average economic answer, and average foreign affairs answer then made up their attitude score. Each score then became an x-coordinate, y-coordinate and z-coordinate, and thus the 3-D schematic is created.¹²

How independent was foreign affairs from social and economic positions? 19 of the 22 questions were statistically insignificant. These questions (attitudes toward spending on health care, spending on foreign affairs unsurprisingly, and attitudes on the minimum wage) did show a pattern¹³, but even then, only 5.5% of the foreign affairs position of any given student was explained by the 22 answers they gave before.¹⁴ Put another way, one foreign affairs answer out of each 20 was predictable. Is that totally independent? No. But when you have a person's opinions on 22 political issues, and yet can forecast only one half of one answer when asking 11 more political questions, it strikes us as hard not to see that third set of questions as quite distinct.

Here are the 617 students represented in the cube:

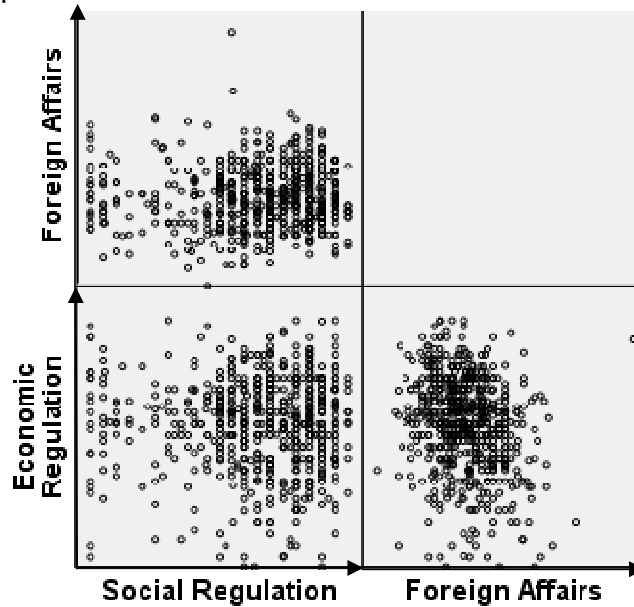


¹² For the complete project, see Claborn, D. and Tobias, L., "The Independence of Foreign Affairs and Importance of Social Issues in the Political Attitudes of Olivet Nazarene University Students, 2010 – 2013", *Olivet Nazarene University Digital Commons*, (2015)

¹³ There was a less than 5% chance they would occur randomly, or $p < .05$.

¹⁴ The method for finding this was an OLS regression.

Or better for a 2-D paper:



Imagine holding a cube in your hand and looking at three faces –that’s how these three graphs are oriented: as if you were looking at one side, then rotate and look at another, then look at the top.

Applying These Results

To give just example of how this research can be useful, let us go back to 1984 and see that Maddox and Lilie expected the four quadrants to have predictable foreign policies. To them, Liberals were nonmilitary interventionists, Populists (or Communitarians in our language here) were non-internationalists, Libertarians were nongovernmental internationalists, and conservatives were military interventionists. Maddox and Lilie end up not having data that would answer the questions enough for them (although they do gently confirm conservatives and liberals as described.) Our data can shed some light on these questions.

**Foreign Affairs Indices
by Student's Relative Ideological Quadrant**

	Idealist	Multilateral	Pacifist
-.5	-.45 Populist -.38 Dem -.28 Rep -.25 Lib	-.38 Dem -.27 Rep -.36 Populist -.24 Lib	-.36 Dem -.27 Populist -.19 Lib -.15 Rep
0			
.5	Realist	Unilateral	Militant

The "Idealist" column was constructed from answers to the questions on Patriotism, TalksWithEnemies, MilitantOil, Nukes and UnderstandingTerrorists. (See the appendix for those specific questions and answers.)

The "Multilateral" column was constructed from IntITerrorism, Patriotism, Nukes, and UnderstandTerrorists.

The "Pacifist" column was constructed from IntlFreeMarkets, IntlHumanRights, IntlDemocracy, IntlUN, IntlHunger, TalkWithEnemies, UnderstandTerrorists

If we take the populist quadrant of student answerers, we do not find a "non-internationalist" pattern at all, and do find the reverse to be true as they were the most idealistic answerers. Like Maddox and Lilie, answering whether the Libertarian quadrants of answers is "nongovernmental internationalists" or not is difficult since the questions too often assume diplomacy (via government) or military action (via government) rather than offering a civic or voluntary or trade based internationalism. But it is noteworthy that they reject working with other countries, are more idealistic than the other quadrants, and as nonviolent as anyone. Therefore, the Maddox and Lilie predictions do not describe the answers 617 students gave.

Conclusion

Several scholars have shown the utility of the 2-D diagram, but none have offered a 3rd axis that has caught on in the popular media or in classrooms or that has added to the academic discussion. Our attempt here is for foreign affairs to be that third axis.

In these data, we found that only three questions drive the significance in the already weak explanation of foreign affairs. So with surprising independence from the social and economic axes, an axis on foreign affairs seems like a great candidate for further study. Specifically, future research questions could ask if there are patterns to the clustering of attitudes within the cube. Only 5% of the foreign affairs variance is explained by the social and economic questions, but that crude regression score still leaves room for some more advanced metrics to find patterns not found here.