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THE INDEPENDENCE OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL ISSUES IN THE POLITICAL ATTITUDES OF OLIVET NAZARENE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, 2010 - 2013

David Claborn and Lindsey Tobias

This paper maps peoples' politics onto three axes to see how those axes interrelate. 617 Midwestern faith-based university students answered 10 questions on social issues, 12 questions on economic issues, and 11 questions on foreign affairs. This project is specifically interested in knowing if the social and economic answers explain the foreign affairs answers. The biggest conclusion drawn is how little they do. One's social and economic attitudes predict 5.5% of one's foreign affairs. We can also conclude that social attitudes of these students drive party identification much more than economic or foreign affairs as students identify as Republican four-to-one, yet tilt left on economic issues and foreign affairs.

Finding out the unique political personalities of those with whom you work is a fun part of the job of political science professors. This paper is borne out a questionnaire we offered to students over a three year period. Olivet Nazarene University takes pride in having a conservative theology as does the denomination. They also both come out of a desire to serve the poor and needy and that calling has stayed vibrant for more than a hundred years. So we come to the data with questions of how caring for the underprivileged balance out against a strong sense of public morality.

After going over how the data was collected, we'll describe some interesting findings. For members of the Olivet community this will be the most interesting part of the paper. Then we plot the students' answers into a figure we think may suss out some conclusions. That figure is a cube comprising three dimensions or axes: social issues and economic issues making up the first two (and will seem very familiar to students of politics.) But a third and novel axis to join to the conventional two is foreign affairs. In a separate paper Claborn proposes this 3-D schema as a way to allow the diversity within political groupings, without losing the elegance of a diagram.¹

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¹ Claborn, D. "If You Can't Join 'Em, Don't: Untangling Attitudes on Social, Economic and Foreign Issues by Graphing Them", *Olivet Nazarene University Digital Commons*, (2015)

Methodology

In this second phase of the project we asked 617 students² 10 questions on social regulation, 12 questions on economic regulation, and 11 questions on foreign policy over five semesters. Those questions and the results from each are on the next page. 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 voila, the 3-D schematic is created.

The *social regulation measure* (SocialReg in our dataset) was constructed from four social issues (abortion, euthanasia, marijuana laws and pornography) and sought to find the respondent's attitude against what is already legal or the norm. Abortion, because it is such a long lived issue and can be seen as something of a bellwether on social regulation in general, was given more and contextualized questions.³ Ten questions with three and five part answer options were adjusted to fit on a scale of -1 to 0 to 1. If a student answered in the least regulatory way possible on all questions, their score was -1, most regulatory answers possible was 1, and 0 then is point in between.

The *economic regulation measure* (EconReg) was constructed from the twelve questions on attitudes toward public spending on racial issues, crime, education, drugs, environment, parks, poverty, health, foreign aid, the role of taxes and the minimum wage. The same -1 to 1 scale was used with -1 being the score of someone who answered in the least regulatory way possible, 1 is the most, and 0 as the midpoint.

The *foreign affairs measure* (ForeignAffairs) questions are not focused in some of the ways political scientists would expect. They are not measuring idealism and realism exactly (despite the language compromises made for the narrative above). They are not hoping to capture interventionism against isolationism, militarism against pacifism, or multilateralism v. unilateralism. They are hoping to capture an impression of all of the above. This third dimension was to be the students' take on foreign matters, not a more specific opinion on the morality of military usage, for example. This conception has grander goals in mind as the hope is to capture each student's full constellation of thinking on foreign matters. So the questions are not focused, but still do suggest a basic pessimism or optimism about international action. Take a look at the questions and answer options for more clarification. -1 was the totally pessimistic answer, and 1 was the totally optimistic answer, and 0 is the midpoint.

To check internal reliability against meandering attention spans or too-zealous-agreeableness (an error of respondent acquiescence), the ideological bent of the answer options varies. Sometimes it begins with liberal, sometimes conservative. The set of social regulation questions seem the most liable to

² In a Midwest residential faith-based university of approx. 2,500 students. 80% of them residential, more than 80% of which are from Illinois, Michigan, & Indiana, which make up an organizational unit for the university's denomination: the Church of the Nazarene. 30+% of students are Nazarene (with Catholics being the second largest tradition), and around 17% are minority students. So this is a terrible vehicle for extrapolating about larger populations. To incentivize taking the poll, I offered an extra credit worth around .1 of one percentage point in the class, so participation was not far from voluntary.

³ A version of the SocialReg variable with abortion having equal weight with the other three issues was constructed and found that abortion did indeed drive much of the willingness to regulate social matters. Mean=.297, median=.400 for the original, and once abortion is allowed equal weight we see a mean of .156, median=.232. That's more than a 40% drop in our SocialReg variable. Still, because abortion is *the* social issue of the last several decades, letting it have inordinate weight in the model seems appropriate.

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%
	37%	48%	8%	6%	2%
	7%	21%	29%	35%	6%
	29%	43%	13%	11%	4%

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%

						Patriotism is an overrated quality
						It our leader meets with our enemies it makes us appear weak
						We must use our military power from time to time to protect our supply of oil, to avoid a national crisis
						It does not make sense to try to understand terrorists because they are self-evidently evil

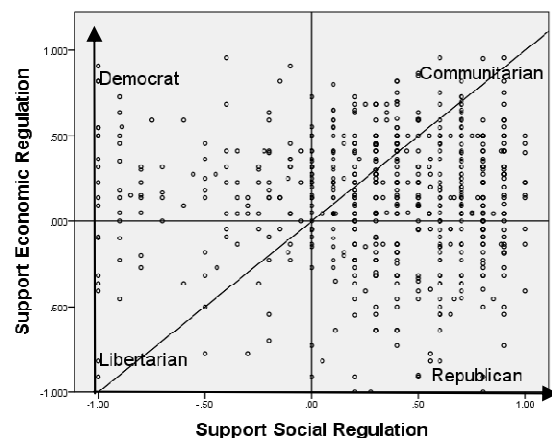
Language for these questions was taken from professional polling organizations. All of the social regulation language was originally crafted in the General Social Survey (GSS), as was the language for all spending questions, and the gap between rich and poor language. Language for the questions on taxes 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.

acquiescence issues since an opinion option in twelve of the thirteen questions is “about right”. Searching for those who answered “about right” every chance they could, we find 8 respondents did so. Their answers in the other two planes showed normal variance, though, so they were all kept. To keep respondents from giving answers they think the professor wants to read (also known as a social desirability error), the respondents were anonymous. To keep their anonymity, the webhost acted as a third party and sent back a list of email addresses which completed the survey, with no means to trace to answers.

Like other scholars doing similar work, we must admit that the questions and answer options here leave something to be desired in terms of reliability and validity. But tests and retests, multiple people error-checking the database, and using language taken from the GSS, NES and (an admittedly less credible popular attitudinal grapher) politicalcompass.com all still confirm that the dataset is stable, as error-free as we can get it, and capturing the referents we hope to capture.

Findings

- Upperclassmen were *twice* as likely as underclassmen to reject euthanasia laws, and *twice* as likely to reject abortion laws “for any reason”, and 35% more likely to reject pornography laws. But their EconReg scores were not significantly different. Yet upperclassmen self-identify as Republican or leaning-Republican at the same rate: 76%. This means upperclassmen are either more libertarian leaning Republicans, or they misidentify themselves at higher clips than their younger counterparts.⁴
- What does misidentification look like then?
 - If we draw a diagonal line across the figure, demarcating a Democratic half and Republican half created from the attitudes, we first notice that there are more Republican respondents in our sample: 62% to 38%. But it is not as large as the self-identification gap: 76% to 23%. Which means 82 respondents said they lean conservative when their answers show them leaning liberal. That is 13% of all answerers or one out of every 7 or 8— which is actually around the average error for political self-identification.⁵
 - A second impression is how many students end up in each quadrant. The most obvious pattern is how few students end up in the Libertarian quadrant, and how many end up in the Communitarian quadrant. There is literally more than an order of magnitude difference: 32 Libertarians and 347 students in the fourth quadrant.
- One’s major is revealing.⁶ Theology majors are the most willing to regulate social affairs, the least willing to regulate economically, and are quite pessimistic of international actions. Education best represented our Communitarian quadrant as those respondents were 50% more willing to regulate



⁴ “But they’re just more libertarian.” To answer this question we split libertarians and communitarians into Republican halves and Democratic halves, so someone who identifies as Republican yet ended up on the democratic half of a libertarian attitude was considered misidentified.

⁵ Swedlow, 2009, see table 3, p. 1065.

⁶ College of one’s major is actually the variable since too many majors exist to draw any statistical inferences.

social affairs than the average, and were the most willing to regulate economic affairs (62% more than the average.) Future educators were the least optimistic in the international sphere, as well.

- Gender differences are more pronounced at Olivet than nationwide differences. An average Olivet woman is more economically liberal than 70% of Olivet men, and more socially conservative and internationally optimistic than men as well.
- ACT scores
 - positively correlated with a religiosity variable that was created from one's self-description, strength of that identity, and attendance.⁷ Higher ACT scores predicted higher religiosity, in other words. It is speculative and controversial, but sports based financial aid could explain some or much of this finding. A sports scholarship provides motivations to attend a faith-based school that are both not academic and not faith-based. This is not saying athletes are less smart and less religiously-active; it is saying athletic money incentivizes students who otherwise would not be attracted to a university that is faith based.
 - were also significantly related to party identification. Look at the strange relationship with our two-party system –from highest to lowest:
 Libertarian (26.3),
 None, but leaning Republican (26.0),
 None, but leaning Democratic (25.6),
 then Republican (24.9),
 then Democratic (24.4).
 This clear pattern of higher ACT scores correlating with those further from the 2-party system is disrupted by those who answered None-At-All (23.66) having the lowest average score.
 - ACT scores are positively correlated with more conservative self-identification (if not significantly), yet they predicted different actual policy wishes: less regulation on euthanasia and marijuana laws, but spending on assisting the poor is “too little.”
- Religiosity correlated with more pacifist answers rather than militaristic, and also correlated with a more conservative political self-ID.

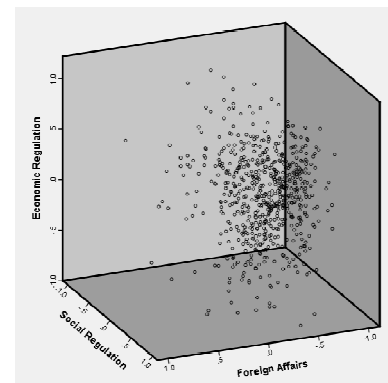
The Model

There are more telling conclusions that we can draw about Olivet student politics, though. Below we plot the student answers into the previously mentioned 3-dimensional cube. Then we describe what adding a 3rd dimension (foreign affairs) to the social and economic answers tells us before concluding.

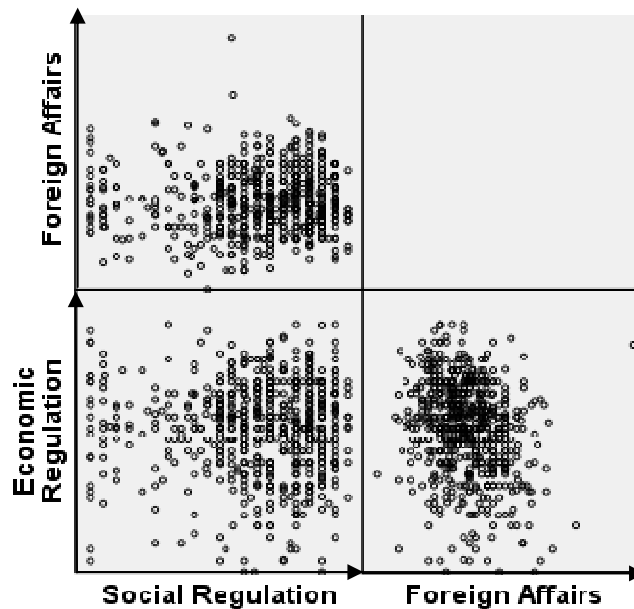
Graphing the data

Like most indices of social phenomena, they cluster at the center, which shows an expected moderation.

To see the relationships between the three axes better, the 2-D scatterplots which make up the cube are below:



⁷ The variable was constructed as follows. *ReligiousIdentity* was a text box, and if the respondent typed “none” or the equivalent, it was coded as 0, and only that information was used for this variable. *Belonging* asked for strength of that religious identity: strongly identify, somewhat identify, or not very strongly. And *Attendance* has 7 gradations: never, around once a year, several times a year, once a month, 2-3 times a month, weekly, more than once a week.



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. On these questions at least, Olivet Nazarene students are

- conservative on social issues (more willing to regulate than not: .2968, on a -1 to 1 scale)
- slightly left leaning on economic issues (more willing to regulate than not: .13 on a -1 to 1 scale)
- optimistic in foreign affairs (more principled/moral than pragmatic/realistic: -.2971, on a -1 to 1 scale.) More discussion on their relationship is in the next subsection.

The scatterplots make it easier to see the basic findings. For the foreign affairs variable, notice the clear center of gravity to the left, which is toward optimistic/idealistic answers. The social regulation tilts to the right, or the more regulatory attitude. And the median of the social regulation variable says perhaps more: if you cut the data into fifths, a full half of answerers are in the two most regulatory quintiles.

Adding the Foreign Affairs Axis to our Social and Economic Axes

When we add a foreign affairs axis and create a cube, we can then answer if domestic attitudes correlate with those foreign affairs answers. We explain below that the social and economic axes do significantly predict the foreign affairs axis, but with surprisingly little power. Then we describe some patterns within the ideological quadrants.

Using a linear regression we answer specifically “does the 2-D face of the square showing Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians and our fourth quadrant explain or predict the 3rd dimension –foreign affairs?” Answer: yes, and to a statistically significant degree. But shockingly the 2-D square only predicts 5.5% of one’s foreign affairs opinions. That is worth repeating. Even after asking a student 22 questions about social and economic regulation, those answers can tell us only around a *twentieth* of what their opinions on foreign affairs will be. “But Republicans will be more militant, Democrats more peace-seeking, and Libertarians less governmental in foreign affairs, right?” If we blur our eyes and seek evidence to back our presuppositions, then yes, we can find that to be true. But five-point-five percent

of foreign affairs attitudes are explained by our knowledge of one's political attitude. That strikes us as one really small number.

One reason for this counterintuitive finding could be how lousy we are at actually answering like the party we claim describes us. The note on misidentification above speaks to this as well. So yes, self-identified Republicans tend to be more militant, and Democrats peaceniks on the oil question and several others, as presented below. But once you take into account all the respondent's other answers, which often vary from some supposed party-line, then only roughly a twentieth of the time is there a configuration of someone like a predictable Republican, who then goes on to have consistently more militaristic answers (or whatever conventional wisdom you want to ascribe to being Republican). We are human. We refuse to be encapsulated by simple terms like "Republican" or "Democrat". Generalizing a Republican or Democratic foreign policy seems to cloud more than clarify—not unlike the original left to right spectrum this whole paper hopes to throw into doubt.

To be sure, we ran the regression with each individual question to see if there were counter-acting variables and the conventional wisdom was instead really correct, minus some pesky broken questions. But there were none. Even when cheating and cherry picking the few significant variables and creating a model from them, we can still only explain 8% of the variance on foreign affairs.

Does each ideological bent have a distinct attitude on foreign affairs?

There are two answers here. Within quadrant variation—there was only one: the libertarians. 30% of their attitudes on foreign affairs were explained by their views on social regulation. The relationship was negative: meaning the more likely libertarians were to regulate social affairs (which, remember is defined here as left of center), the more pessimistic they were on foreign affairs, and vice versa. Put another way, more ideological Libertarians are also more optimistic abroad; more socially pragmatic Libertarians are likewise less idealistic about foreign affairs.

The second answer is across the quadrants rather than within the quadrants. And here the libertarians and communitarians are not significantly different from each other or the liberals and conservatives. But the Democratic quadrant (which tilted more idealistic) and the Republican quadrant (which tilted more realistic) were significantly different. When Democrats and Republicans are isolated, do they show a significant pattern in foreign affairs opinions, then? Yes, as suggested. The difference between Democratic foreign affairs opinions are almost twice as far from 0 as Republicans.⁸

What about when you cut the data into four equal parts: the most Libertarian, Republican, Democratic and Communitarian quarters of the answers?⁹ Do you then see foreign affairs differences? Yes, and with similar results: Communitarians as the most idealistic, a tick more than Dems, and Republicans are the least idealistic, at around 63% of what the Communitarian answerers gave. Yet note that the more Republican answerers is still idealistic—a full 22 percentage-points away from the 0.

Is looking at one axis predictive? Not for the social regulation measure—the results were insignificant. Not a single social regulatory question shows a significant correlation. But the economic measure is

⁸ 154 Republicans have a foreign affairs measure 22 percentage points to the more idealistic side of 0, and 84 Democrats have a measure 34 points to the more idealistic than 0. $P < .001$

⁹ We did this by simply drawing median lines up and down, left and right.

significant and negative. That means the more libertarian one's economic views, the more realist their foreign affairs views.¹⁰

The following chart shows this relationship. We broke up EconReg into roughly ten parts, from least regulatory to most.

Foreign Affairs Attitudes by Economic Outlook		
Economic Measure broken Roughly into Tenths (Deciles)	Foreign Affairs, From Idealistic (-1.00) to Realistic (1.00)	N
Least Economically Regulatory Tenth (or Libertarian Economics)	-.20	55
-.363 - -.150	-.21	75
-.149 - -.045	-.28	56
-.044 - .091	-.28	60
.092 - .150	-.29	72
.151 - .227	-.33	21
.228 - .318	-.30	69
.319 - .455	-.34	94
.456 - .591	-.35	64
Most Economically Regulatory Tenth (or Socialist Economics)	-.39	51
Total	-.30	617

With a correlation score of $-.234$, the table shows that with the exception of one row, each decile grows more idealistic than the one before.

If we break down the economic index to find out which questions drive this correlation, only three of the twelve are significant: spending on health care, the role of minimum wage, and spending on foreign aid not surprisingly and perhaps tautologically. And those three alone explain 9.3% of the variance of the foreign affairs variable.

Yet another way of trying to understand the foreign affairs views of the answerer is via their self-claimed partisanship. How much does party explain? 1.5% exactly. It is statistically significant, but that is one small amount of the clustering that party ID tells us—so small we are inclined to say that it simply does not explain it.

Conclusion

These quite faithful students¹¹ display the characteristics of the university and denomination: a willingness to regulate economically (for the underprivileged, perhaps), coupled with a willingness to regulate social affairs as well (to reduce publicly damaging behavior, such as drugs, euthanasia and abortions.) Textbooks place this political disposition squarely in a communitarian or populist or

¹⁰ Specifically, the relationship has a correlation score of $-.234$, $p < .001$

¹¹ Less than 5% can be categorized as “none” for religious tradition versus a nationwide average of 20% per Pew Research Center. See footnote 7 for construction of the religious tradition variable.

“inclusive social hierarchy”¹² quadrant of a political map. It essentially leans Democratic on economic matters and a Republican on social matters. And with this paper we now know that it strongly correlates with an idealistic or liberal leaning on foreign affairs.¹³

In our data, we found that only three questions drive the significance in the already weak explanation of foreign affairs (attitudes toward spending on health care, foreign affairs, and the minimum wage.) We also find that the conventional wisdom on the foreign affairs of Democrats and Republicans holds true. Communitarians are the most idealistic, then Democrats, then Libertarians, with Republicans as the most Realistic (in international relations terms.) Yet that same confirmation is almost comically weak as one’s party self-identification explains only 1.5% of his or her 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.

¹² Swedlow, B., “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

¹³ “Liberal” in an international relations sense, that is. Which “rejects power politics” and is based on “the need for international cooperation, distribution of shared interests, and the role of non-state actors in shaping state preferences and policy choices.” Shiraev, E. and Zubok, V. (2014) *International Relations*. New York: Oxford University Press.