

American Politics in Two Dimensions

Santa Clara University, CA

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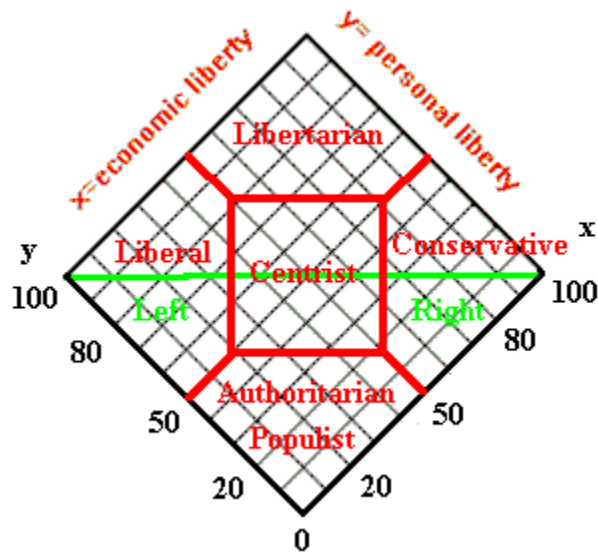
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“You and I are told increasingly that we have to choose between **a left or a right**. There is only an **up or down**: **Up**, to man's age-old dream – the ultimate in individual freedom consistent with law and order – **or, down** to the ant heap of totalitarianism.”

Ronald Reagan, Republican National Convention, 1964



Left – Right versus Up – Down

The Left – Right, liberal – conservative choice is marked across the center.

Liberals emphasize certain freedoms, such as the right to private behavior, regardless of whether it offends the majority.

Conservatives emphasize other freedoms, such as the right to own property, regardless of whether some come into ownership of more than others.

In the Libertarian viewpoint, neither Liberals nor Conservatives *consistently* support freedom.

What is freedom? For libertarians, it is the right to be left alone, to enter into relations with others based only on mutual consent, to have a well-defined sphere of privacy in which your behavior is nobody else's business, to buy and to sell as you and your counter-party agree.

What is your position in the two-dimensional political spectrum?

For a rough estimate, I'll ask two sets of five questions. The first set of five pertain to private behavior. And, the second, to marketplace behavior. For each question, indicate whether you agree, disagree, or are neutral.

Personal Liberties

Should you have the political right to:

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
	20 points	10 points	0 points
Own and watch a pornographic video?			
Have sexual relations with adults?			
Not wear a seatbelt Or motorcycle helmet?			
Use unapproved medical treatments?			
Consume marijuana?			
TOTAL POINTS:			

Economic Liberties

Should you have the political right to:

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
	20 points	10 points	0 points
Work for less than the minimum wage?			
Buy any normal product made overseas?			
Not hire somebody because of race?			
Not participate in Social Security?			
Not support government welfare?			
TOTAL POINTS:			

Once you have your total points on both Personal and Economic Liberties, you should plot your position on the two-dimensional diagram.

Compare Your Position to Others

According a telephone survey conducted by Rasmussen Research in the year 2000, this is how the American public is distributed on the two-dimensional political spectrum: ¹

Libertarians	16 percent	Conservatives	7 percent
Liberals	13	Authoritarians or Populists	14
Centrists	32	“borderline”	17

Focusing on young people, in 2002, a survey of about 3,000 people conducted by The Washington Post, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard University, compared the

¹ Unfortunately, Rasmussen did not indicate how the borderline cases are distributed.

political views and behaviors of young adults to those of older people.² The survey found that young adults, much more than older people, favored free-market economic positions, such as school vouchers and privatization of Social Security. It also found that they were much more tolerant of private behavior.

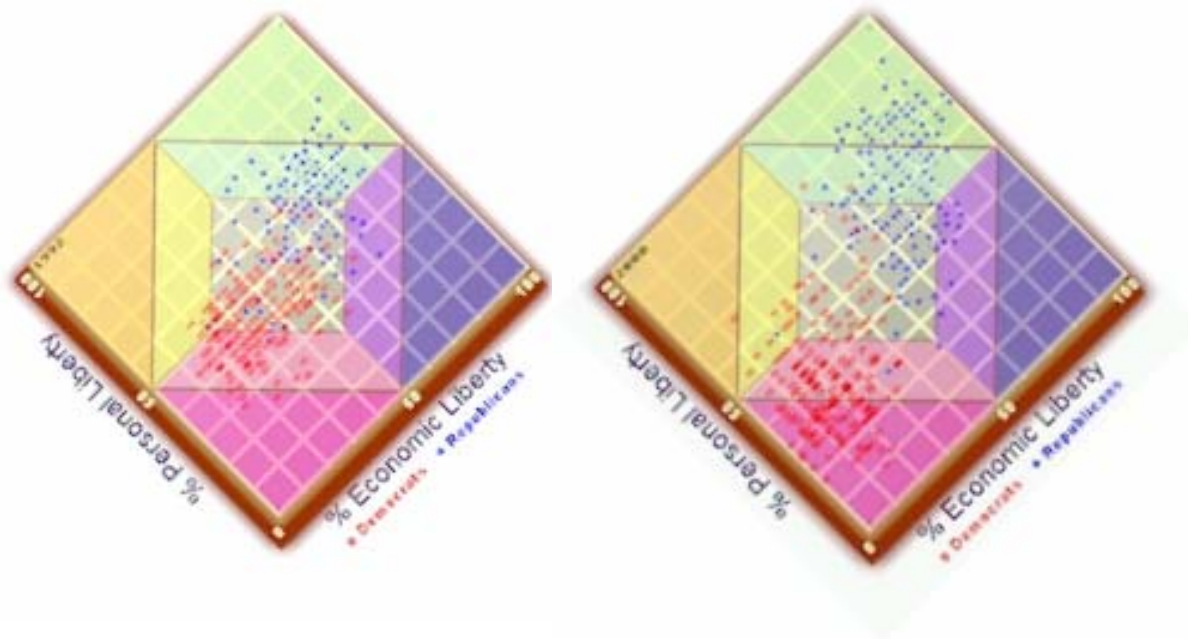
This combination of views implies that the young adults tend to be libertarian. Economically, they might be attracted to the conservative position. But, in terms of their tolerance of private behavior, they might be attracted to the liberal position.³

A Two-Dimensional Index of Congressional Voting

Since 1991, I have been constructing an annual two-dimensional index of Congress, the Republican Liberty Caucus Index of Congress. Notice that this is a two-dimensional index from a particular viewpoint. The results can be found at: <http://www.republicanliberty.org/>

For each chamber of Congress, the Senate and the House of Representatives, I identify 40 roll call votes. Twenty each in the Personal Liberties and Economic Liberties dimensions of freedom.

Here, I show distribution of members of Congress on the two-dimensional axis in 1992 and 2001.



² Amy Goldstein and Richard Morin, "Young Voters' Disengagement Skews Politics, Graying Electorate's Issues Predominant, Fueling Trend." *Washington Post*, October 20, 2002, Page A08.

³ I should point out that a variety of sources indicate that young people are increasingly conservative in their own private behavior, while being increasingly tolerant of the divergent private behaviors of others.

By 1992, the spectrum had already shifted considerably to an up – down orientation. Even so, most Republicans and Democrats were Centrists or near Centrists. In addition, in the center, the Republicans and Democrats were intermingled.

By 2001, the shift was appeared to be nearly complete and, furthermore, there was almost a complete separation between the scatter of points representing Republicans and those representing Democrats. Most Republicans are in the upper part of the diamond, and most Democrats in the lower part. The center is relatively empty.

The complete separation of Republicans and Democrats shown above is consistent with the high degree of partisanship in Washington today. This is a time of clarification in political viewpoints. This clarification will continue until one party is overwhelmingly victorious, and the other party chooses to realign itself in order to be competitive.

To say that Congressional voting has shifted almost to an up – down orientation implies that conservatives are the civil libertarians of today. How could this be true? First, it isn't true. Conservatives are not *consistently* better than liberals in defending private behavior. Liberals – how should I put this – have slipped in defending private behavior.

Consider equal rights. Liberals don't believe in equal rights. They believe in quotas and set asides.

Consider freedom of association. Liberals would deny the Boy Scouts the right to decide their rules of membership.

Consider freedom of speech. Liberals want the government to sponsor public broadcasting, to subsidize the arts and the humanities, and to regulate political speech.

To be sure, Liberals are a bit better than Conservatives on some issues. For example, the same First Amendment that protects freedom of association for Boy Scouts protects, or should protect freedom of association for those who want to join into civil unions. But, Conservatives don't fully appreciate freedom of association.

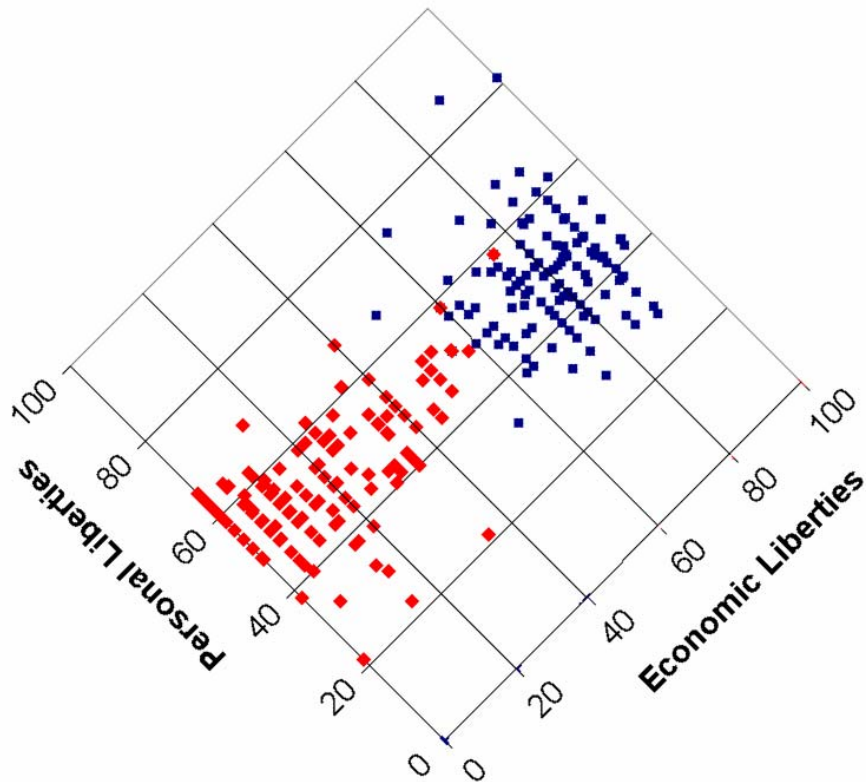
A Shift Back of the Political Axis?

I have recently completed my 2003 index of Congress. This index indicates that the political axis has dramatically shifted back, away from “up – down,” and toward “left – right.”

Republicans remain much better than Democrats in the area of economic liberties.

But, Republicans are no longer indicated to be better in the area of personal liberties. If anything, Democrats are now a little better in this dimension of the two-dimensional diagram.

Only two Republicans are shown to clearly be libertarians, Ron Paul of Texas and Jeff Flake of Arizona. And, there is a bigger gap between them and other Republicans than there is between Republicans and certain Democrats.



**“War is the health of the State.”
Randolph Bourne**

The most obvious reason for the shift in the political axis is the War on Terrorism and the associated Patriot Act mentality. Republican advantages in certain areas of personal liberties, such as the free exercise of religion, choice in education, and gun ownership, have become offset by Democratic advantages in freedom of expression, privacy, and the protecting the rights of minorities.

I’ll illustrate this point with a few of the votes I included in the 2003 RLC Index.

#106. War on Drugs amendment to the War Supplemental Appropriation Bill – to decrease funding for counter-drug activities in Columbia by \$61 million. Rejected 209 – 216. Only 18 Republicans voted for this amendment, whereas only 10 Democrats voted against it.

#206. Homeland Security amendment to the Defense Authorization Bill – to authorize the use of U.S. military to assist the Department of Homeland Security patrol the border. Adopted 250 – 179. Only 19 Republicans voted against, whereas only 42 Democrats voted for it.

#408. Warrants amendment to the Commerce-Justice-State Appropriation Bill – to bar funds from being used to use “sneak and peek” searches; that is, to delay notice that a search warrant has been obtained. Adopted 309 – 118. Republicans split almost 50-50 on this amendment, whereas only 4 Democrats voted against it.

#409. Citizenship information amendment to the Commerce-Justice-State Appropriations Bill – to bar funds to any state or local entity that restricts its officials from transmitting information regarding a person’s citizen status or immigration status to the Department of Homeland Security. Rejected 122 – 305. Again, Republicans split almost 50-50 on this amendment, whereas only 2 Democrats voted for it.

#420. Medical Marijuana amendment to the Commerce-Justice-State Appropriation Bill – to bar funds from being used to interfere with state laws regarding medical marijuana. Rejected 152 – 273. Only 15 Republicans voted for this amendment, whereas two-thirds of Democrats voted for it.

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