BEYOND LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE

REASSESSING THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM

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Foreword by David Boaz

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Foreword

Pollsters, journalists, and political practitioners seem to have an uncontrollable urge to put every politician and thinker into the liberal box or the conservative box. Increasingly, though, these terms fail to describe many Americans, and our understanding of politics has not caught up with reality. This may be at least partly because our outmoded political language continues to shape our thinking. As George Orwell wrote in "Politics and the English Language," "If thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought. A bad usage can spread by tradition and imitation, even among people who should and do know better." There may be no clearer example than the attempt to fit every American into the liberal-conservative straitjacket.

The difficulty of doing this, and the resistance to it by those whose views differ from liberal or conservative orthodoxy, is reflected in the proliferation of such terms as "neoconservative," "neoliberal," "progressive," "social conservative," and "New Right." (Perhaps it is a sign of surrender to label a politician as a "maverick.") All of these terms, however, are just variations on a theme, reflecting only nuances of difference. Surely a country with a political tradition as rich and diverse as our own contains many people whose political views are not adequately described by any of the current terms.

Indeed in the past few years we have seen a number of political figures, movements, and election results that defy traditional liberal-conservative analysis:

- In 1982 the voters of California soundly rejected a proposed gun-control initiative and approved several tax cuts—while simultaneously voting "yes" on a nuclear-freeze initiative.
- After 1968 such leading Democrats as Sen. Henry M. Jackson of Washington and Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago were often referred to as conservative Democrats. Yet they were enthusiastic supporters of the New Deal and subsequent social welfare legislation. Their "conservatism" consisted only of hawkish foreign policy views and a resistance to the lifestyle changes of the 1960s.

- Gov. George Wallace of Alabama was widely regarded as a right-wing presidential candidate in 1968. Yet his candidacy was rejected by most conservative leaders not just for its aura of racism but also for Wallace's reputation as a big-spending governor and his thoroughly interventionist positions on economic issues—such as a 60 percent increase in Social Security benefits, 100 percent parity for farm prices, and public works employment.
- In 1980 independent presidential candidate John Anderson attracted at times the support of as much as 25 percent of the public with his unusual combination of fiscal conservatism, social liberalism, and mildly dovish views on foreign policy. His support actually fell when his views began to seem more conventionally liberal. This decline may have been attributable to other causes, of course, but campaign aide Mark Bisnow in his book *Diary of a Dark Horse* suggests that Anderson lost much of his original support by moving away from his fiscal conservatism.
- Rep. Bill Green (R–N.Y.) and Rep. Ike Skelton (D–Mo.) received identical 50 percent ratings on their 1982 congressional votes from the liberal Americans for Democratic Action. As political analyst Alan Baron points out, though, they actually agreed on only five of nineteen issues, with Green voting liberal on social issues and Skelton voting liberal on economic issues.
- Currently, overwhelming majorities of the American public tell pollsters they support the nuclear freeze and the constitutional amendment to balance the federal budget. Clearly a significant number support both.

What is the common thread in all these phenomena? It is that these election results and political figures cannot be adequately described as liberal or conservative. The early John Anderson, with his fiscal conservatism and social liberalism, would seem the political opposite of George Wallace, with his New Deal economics and hostility to civil liberties and changing lifestyles. But which is the liberal and which the conservative? Or are they both, incongruously, moderates? When voters vote for both a nuclear freeze and tax cuts, are they being liberal or conservative? When California voters in 1978 voted against both a "liberal" anti-smoking initiative and a "conservative" anti-gay initiative, were they being conservative or liberal?

The problem is that our political language is not sufficient to describe political reality. The belief systems of Americans are more complex than the liberal-conservative dichotomy acknowledges. Perhaps the frustration that many Americans have in articulating their political views—the reluctance to describe themselves as either liberal or conservative, the apparently contradictory election and poll results—is a result of the inadequacy of our current political language. Political scientists, pollsters, and journalists offer only two labels to describe the beliefs of millions of Americans.

If these opinion leaders began to recognize the existence of more than two political perspectives in the United States—at least the four-way matrix provided by Professors Maddox and Lilie—our whole way of thinking about politics might change. People would begin to recognize that they have four possibilities to choose from in describing their own views. If the Gallup poll suddenly began asking people to describe themselves as "liberal, conservative, libertarian, or populist," it is likely that at first fewer people would choose "libertarian" or "populist" than actually hold those views, according to Maddox and Lilie. But as these terms gained currency, and their definitions came to be understood, people might come to describe themselves more accurately.

Building a winning coalition might then be seen as a more complex process. Instead of assuming that a moderate Republican would be more successful than a conservative, and a moderate Democrat more attractive than a liberal, because they are closer to the center of the liberal-conservative spectrum, journalists would see that a liberal Democrat and a conservative Republican would likely be fighting for the votes of libertarians and populists. The candidates' selection of issues would then be more complex than if their only goal was to move toward the center of a one-dimensional spectrum.

Given the obvious inadequacy of the terms "liberal" and "conservative," one is driven to ask why political observers continue to use them. Professors Maddox and Lilie offer several possibilities. One is that political scientists and others assume that political "elites" operate along liberal-conservative lines, and thus the dichotomy is relevant for the study of politics. A second possibility is that since the New Deal, divisions over the role of government in the economy have been the defining political issues in the United States and that these divisions fit neatly into the liberal-conservative spectrum. I am inclined toward their third suggestion: The liberal-conservative dichotomy is simple, and it is much easier to divide people into

only two categories. Along with this methodological simplicity is a certain inertia. Having long discussed politics in liberal-conservative terms, one may find it easiest to continue in that vein. One hesitates to do further injustice to Thomas Kuhn's much-abused notion of scientific paradigms, but it is arguable that political scientists have constructed a paradigm of political interpretation—the liberal-conservative dichotomy—and are reluctant to give it up despite the evidence that it increasingly distorts our perceptions.

In this book Professors Maddox and Lilie have given us a better understanding of the political beliefs of Americans. The traditional premise of postwar political science is that Americans can be divided into liberals, conservatives, and "confused." The orthodox definition is that a liberal favors government involvement in the economy and protection of civil liberties, while a conservative is opposed to both economic intervention and the expansion of civil liberties. Anyone whose views do not fit those categories is explained away as "confused."

Maddox and Lilie ask a simple question: As there are two dimensions in this approach, each with two basic positions, should we not recognize four possible combinations of positions? Is it not possible to have a consistent political viewpoint that would lead one to both support economic regulation and oppose civil liberties, or vice versa? Indeed, perhaps going beyond Maddox and Lilie, I would argue that the two latter positions—either supporting government intervention in both economic and personal freedoms or opposing both—are more consistent than either the liberal or conservative viewpoint. Yet a person with either such view—designated "populist" and "libertarian" in this book—would have been defined by most political scientists as "confused" or "divided."

Of course it should be acknowledged that even a four-way matrix cannot adequately describe the political views of every American. Nor do the belief systems held by Americans, or described in this matrix, offer the rigor and consistency that political elites would prefer. Intellectual liberals, conservatives, and libertarians (and intellectual populists, if such exist) would certainly find their positions poorly presented in this matrix. The nature of polling, and of mass opinion, obviously requires us to talk about tendencies toward certain positions, not highly articulated ideologies. In addition some major issues—especially foreign and military policy—are left out of the two-dimensional approach. It is especially unfortunate that foreign policy is not integrated into the approach, but the polling

data seem to be insufficient and foreign policy issues do not lend themselves to clear ideological divisions. Nevertheless, a two-dimensional approach seems a major advance over the one-dimensional approach.

When Maddox and Lilie went back to reexamine the data provided by the Center for Political Studies, they found, interestingly, that the libertarian and populist categories actually included more Americans in the 1970s than did the liberal and conservative categories. As many as 42 percent of those polled in 1980 would be "divided" in a traditional analysis, but are seen to be more or less consistently libertarian or populist in this study.

Professors Maddox and Lilie are not the only political observers to have noticed the inability of the traditional liberal-conservative dichotomy to adequately describe today's complex politics. In *The Almanac of American Politics 1982,* Michael Barone and Grant Ujifusa offered a similar four-part matrix of political beliefs. "Strictly on the basis of intuition," they suggest that 30 percent of the population can be described as liberal on economic issues and conservative on cultural issues (the Maddox-Lilie populists), and 25 percent may be conservative on economic issues and liberal on cultural issues (libertarians). Barone and Ujifusa seem most unfair to traditional liberals, assigning them only 10 percent of the population, whereas liberals averaged twice that proportion in the 1976 and 1980 calculations of Maddox and Lilie.

In 1982 *The Baron Report,* written by Alan Baron, and *National Journal,* under the direction of public opinion analyst William Schneider, began using a more sophisticated, three-dimensional analysis of members of Congress, recognizing that many members "are not liberal or conservative across the board." They chose about a dozen issues each from economic, social, and foreign policy and rated congressmen as liberal or conservative on each dimension.*A few (though only a few) congressmen had liberal ratings on economics and conservative scores on social issues, or vice versa, thus earning the designation "populist" or "libertarian" in *The Baron Report.*

In the 1983 edition of his *Dynamics of the Party System,* Brookings Institution political scientist James L. Sundquist goes beyond the

*A libertarian would quibble with this study's view of social issues. One could get a "liberal" score on social issues by voting for such interventionist measures as busing, automobile regulation, and food stamps.

two-dimensional, four-category approach of Maddox and Lilie to offer eight possible political viewpoints, based on whether a person is liberal or conservative on three sets of issues:

Issues	Groups
Domestic economic and role-of-government issues	L L L L C C C C
Social and moral issues	L L C C L L C C
Foreign and military issues	L C L C L C L C

Sundquist places a few political figures in his chart—President Reagan in Group CCC, Vice President Bush perhaps in CLC, Henry Jackson in LLC or LCC, Republican senators Bob Packwood and Lowell Weicker in CLL, and the populist elements of the New Right in LCC. However, he makes little attempt to assess the size of the various groups or their demographic makeup.

Professors Maddox and Lilie have provided the most comprehensive analysis of the demographics of ideological diversity in America. In chapter IV they look at the distribution of Americans among the four ideological categories—liberal, conservative, libertarian, and populist—over the past 30 years. Although the data are somewhat unreliable for the 1950s and 1960s, the figures for 1972, 1976, and 1980—when almost identical survey questions were asked—offer a fascinating new dimension to our understanding of current politics. The demographic analysis in chapter V adds to the picture with some decided differences between the ideological groups in age, education, and socioeconomic status. Chapter VI examines the voting behavior, ideological self-classifications, and attitude toward government of the four groups.

Some of the most interesting aspects of the entire Maddox-Lilie analysis can be seen in table 14 on voting behavior of ideological types. After nonvoters (overrepresented in 1980 among populists and, to a lesser extent, among liberals) are subtracted, there is a remarkable equality among the four categories in the voting booth. The 54 percent of all Americans who voted in 1980 can be broken down into 13 percent populists, 12 percent liberals, 12 percent libertarians, and 11 percent conservatives (with 6 percent being "divided" or "inattentive"). Reagan's "majority"—28% of the eligible voters—was largely built on conservatives and on libertarians, who apparently overlooked his views on social issues in their enthu-

siasm for his economic conservatism. President Carter's support was even more strongly concentrated among liberals and populists. Independent John Anderson and Libertarian Ed Clark drew almost all their support from libertarians and liberals.

What does the Maddox-Lilie analysis say about the future of American politics? Without repeating their own predictions in chapter VIII, let me suggest a few implications. If we assume that generally the Republican party offers a conservative candidate against a liberal Democratic candidate, then there are two large ideological groups whose views are not well represented by either candidate. During the 1970s the libertarians generally voted Republican and the populists Democratic, presumably because of the dominance of economic issues (though the populists apparently could not stomach George McGovern's views on "acid, amnesty, and abortion" and voted for President Nixon in 1972). This presumption is confirmed by the Dearborn study,* which found that economic issues outweighed law-and-order and morality issues for most people. However, should economic issues be superseded in an election year by civil liberties or lifestyle issues—during a long period of prosperity, perhaps, or if both major parties offered similar economic prescriptions, or if a major civil liberties issue such as the draft became important—then the libertarians and populists might find their partisan leanings shaken.

One of the most important aspects of this study is generational. Populists (and to a lesser extent conservatives) tend to be heavily concentrated in older generations, whereas libertarians and liberals tend to be younger. Liberals and libertarians particularly dominate the baby boom generation, those born between 1946 and 1964, who now constitute some 40 percent of the voting-age population. Although the baby boomers may never be a majority of the voters, their importance was pointed out several years ago by Democratic pollster Pat Caddell: "We have the largest bloc of people in history that are sitting outside the political process. It is, essentially, the baby boom that is not in the political process. . . . If they were all to enter the political system tomorrow and were willing to dispose one way or another—even the percentages of a 15–20 point differ-

*Frank Whelon Wayman and Ronald R. Stockton, "The Structure and Stability of Political Attitudes: Findings from the 1974–76 Dearborn Panel Study," paper prepared for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, 1980.

ential—they would totally turn the political system upside down. . . . He who finally gets these people around a program, the party that does that, will be the majority party for some time." Caddell said that the baby boomers were moderate to conservative on economics but "the liberal cutting edge of society" on cultural and social issues, much as the Maddox-Lilie analysis shows.

Perhaps the first outcroppings of political revolt by the baby boom generation—after the turmoil of the 1960s and the quiescence of the 1970s—came in 1980, when John Anderson displayed a strong appeal on college campuses and among young professionals. One national poll even showed Libertarian Ed Clark getting a remarkable 5 percent among voters in their thirties. Michael Barone has argued that even Eugene McCarthy in 1968 and Jerry Brown in 1976 were offering a program that was more conservative than Democratic orthodoxy on economics and more liberal on social and foreign policy issues. *Washington Post* columnist Mark Shields calls Jerry Brown "Gary Hart's John the Baptist," preparing the way for a candidate who would challenge traditional Democratic liberalism.

Hart's appeal to the "yuppies" (young urban professionals), in the words of some observers, by running to the left and the right of Mondale at the same time, fits this analysis well. Mondale's approach, basically New Deal politics with a few more interest groups added to the coalition, sits well with populist Democrats and many traditional liberals, and is especially popular with older voters. Hart's appeal was not just generational; it offered at least the appearance of ideological differences and appealed to liberals who leaned more toward social issues and to libertarians who liked Hart's attacks on outmoded economic programs and special-interest politics. In this context it is useful to note the large number of Hart voters who told exit pollsters they had voted for Reagan or Anderson in 1980—very likely libertarians in the Maddox-Lilie analysis.

Lee Atwater, deputy director of the Reagan-Bush '84 committee, thinks the baby boom generation—which he sees as "anti–establishment, anti–big government, anti–big institution and anti–big labor"—will have a major impact on the 1984 election. He believes the Reagan coalition of 1980 was a combination of conservatives and populists (though Maddox and Lilie's table 14 suggests that even then Reagan drew more support from libertarians than populists). In 1984, however, Atwater believes that the growing strength of baby boomers will mean that President Reagan must combine

his conservative base with libertarian support. This means highlighting the administration's economic policies and playing down its views on social issues. Reagan must "maintain the fact, as he always has, that he is tolerant," Atwater says.

Is the social liberalism of the baby boom generation a transitory phase? Will the baby boomers—or the yuppies—change their political views as they get older? It is often thought that people get more conservative as they age, especially on lifestyle issues. In general, though, I think that will not be the case here. The 1960s marked a watershed in Americans' thinking about moral and lifestyle issues; those who matured during or after that period are not likely to revert to pre-1960s thinking. As baby boom demographer Landon Y. Jones put it, citing Karl Mannheim, "The crucial question to ask regarding a person's politics—or a generation's—is not how old the person is but when the person was young."

What, then, is the final message of *Beyond Liberal and Conservative*? It is that American ideologies are too complex to be forced into the Procrustean bed of the liberal-conservative dichotomy, that a four-way analysis of ideologies can explain many aspects of current politics, that politicians will have to take into account this more complex ideological makeup in building their coalitions. Perhaps its most important message, though, is a challenge to political observers—to pollsters, journalists, political scientists, and others who analyze politics. These opinion molders have clung to the liberal-conservative dichotomy after it has long since ceased to explain. They have a responsibility to acknowledge that many Americans are not confused or inconsistent in their political views, but that they have a consistent viewpoint that orthodox analysis is not adequate to describe.

Professors Maddox and Lilie have laid down a foundation for further research and study. Political scientists will want to investigate whether the Maddox-Lilie four-way matrix of ideologies holds up in other studies and for different groups of people. Pollsters should begin to offer people the four ideological definitions and ask them to describe themselves as liberal, conservative, libertarian, or populist. Journalists will find the analysis useful in explaining why two "moderate" congressmen may disagree on almost everything, or why it seems likely that President Reagan won the 1980 election on the strength of his economic views and not his social

policies—and why he will definitely have to win reelection that way.

The political world is a complex place; this book will make it a little more understandable.

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