Ideological Labels in America:

Self-Identification of Ideological Positions on Issues and the Operational-Symbolic Ideology Problem

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The "ideology puzzle" has received considerable attention by scholars of American public opinion, including Ellis and Stimson (2012) in their superb examination of the subject. The puzzle is that, on the one hand, Americans who call themselves conservative outnumber those who call themselves liberals and, on the other hand, a majority of Americans take a liberal position on most issues involving federal public policy. Appropriately, Ellis and Stimson focus on the largest group of seemingly inconsistent Americans—those who adopt the conservative label and exhibit liberal policy views. These symbolic conservatives and operational liberals take the conservative label, Ellis and Stimson argue, because of its importance outside of politics. Traditional values, some rooted in religious commitments, lead a sizable group of Americans to adopt the conservative label even when their views about public policy appear to be liberal.

We take up the subject where Ellis and Stimson leave it. We observe that there may be an important difference between labels and policy positions. Asking Americans about how the ideological label they choose for themselves and asking about the positions they take on public policy options may be mixing both the level of abstraction and the specific referent of the question. Analysts seldom ask Americans about their position on the general role of government that the symbolic labels are said to capture. Nor have analysts asked how Americans label the operational policy positions that they report on specific issues. This paper provides a discussion of the theoretical and methodological issues and a first report on how American label their specific policy positions.

We find that many Americans do not view their mismatches between symbolic ideology and issue positions as analysts usually do. Instead, Americans tend to label as moderate many issue positions that analysts would readily label liberal or conservative, reducing the severity of the mismatch that might otherwise be perceived. Contrary to the impression left by Ellis and Stimson, many symbolic liberals choose not to apply the term liberal to their issue positions. If the liberal label is eschewed, as Ellis and Stimson and others argue, it seems to affect liberals as well as other Americans. The common thread between mismatches in both directions is a low level of sophistication about politics. We are hesitant to label mismatches "errors," but it is hard to avoid the inference that political knowledge leads to many guesses and inaccurate characterizations of ideology and issue positions by many Americans.

Previous Studies

Previous research concludes that Americans' expectations of government are remarkably consistent. A majority of Americans favor greater government activity and spending on a wide range of federal programs. Notably, Stimson (1999) finds that a majority of Americans support liberal policies in every year since 1968. Overall policy mood may shift in the conservative direction in a given year, but the public's balance of opinion favors the liberal side.

Yet, when asked to identify their symbolic ideology, those choosing the "conservative" label outnumber those calling themselves "liberal." Much like the longitudinal analysis of operational ideology, studies find this one-sideness of response to be constant (Box-Steffensmeier, Knight, and Sigelman 1998, Robinson and Fleishman 1984, Robinson and Fleishman 1988, Smith 1990, Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson 2002, Stimson 2004). Using a continuous time series made possible with reputable polls before 1970, Ellis and Stimson (2007) find that the preeminence of conservative self-identification has not been constant. Since the New Deal, the relative frequency of those identifying as "liberal" declines over time.

Ellis and Stimson use label "symbolic" for responses to the standard survey questions on ideological self-identification and as "operational" the responses to common questions about current public policy issues. On balance, Americans espouse operationally liberal views, supporting a robust federal government, but at the same time they consider themselves more conservative than liberal (Free and Cantril 1967, Miller 1992, Cantril and Cantril 1999, Jacoby 2000, Schiffer 2000, Stimson 2004, Ellis and Stimson 2012).

It is possible that this misclassification is simply a function of political sophistication. Much early public opinion behavior concludes that the electorate, on the whole, is poorly informed about candidate and party stances on the issues (for example, Campbell, et al., 1964). Analysis of cross-sectional data suggests that more than variation in sophistication about public affairs is at work. Ellis and Stimson (2012) find that the number of self-identified conservatives exhibiting a liberal operational ideology either matches or exceeds the number of those who are consistently conservative. In fact, they report that about one-third of symbolic conservatives are liberal on both economic and cultural policy issues. The inverse is not true for liberals—there are very few conflicted liberals. If a survey respondent identifies symbolically as a liberal, she is highly likely to support liberal policies.

The most significant contribution of Ellis and Stimson is their consideration of three pathways by which Americans may acquire their measured symbolic and operational forms of ideology. First, as the long-standing theory provides (Converse 1964), policy views are constrained by an overarching ideology. Ideology serves as a guide or heuristic for evaluating policy options. In this account, the mass public has a basic understanding of the political spectrum and can locate elites, parties, policy positions, and themselves on that spectrum (Jacoby 1991). We now know that this ideological behavior is conditioned upon education and previous political engagement (Stimson 1975, Knight 1985, Judd and Krosnick 1989, Jacoby 1991).

Second, the framing of political discourse by elites and the media heavily influences how respondents characterize their ideological self-identification and policy preferences. When certain labels are emphasized or favored by political and media elites, the public is more likely to identify with them than others (Conover and Feldman 1981, Gilens 1999, Iyengar 1991, Reese, Gandy, and Grant 2001, Sears and Funk 1990). Public framing often promotes the term "conservative," while the term "liberal" is used with much less frequency and has long had a more negative connotation. As such, conservative identification is held in higher esteem (Jennings 1992, Schiffer 2000). Ellis and Stimson (2007) believe the reason for this dominant frame is grounded in the events of the last half-century that associated liberal views with minorities and social change. The result is that liberal elites often eschew the label in favor of "progressive" or an emphasis on the specific details of how they would address social problems (Sears and Citrin 1985), while conservatives elites retain the label and attack government in general (Jacoby 2000).

Third, and most notable, Ellis and Stimson observe that there are apolitical bases for taking the conservative label but taking liberal views on political issues. For many, traditional values, including religious values, patriotism, and temperance—are associated with the conservative label and are likely to prompt some survey respondents to choose conservative as the label best fitting their own identity (Kellstedt and Smidt 1991). For them, the extra-political sources of a conservative identity are more dominant than the political sources.

It is this category of "conflicted conservatives" who are responsible more most of the mismatch between aggregate statistics on symbolic and operation ideology. Compared with symbolic liberals (who also are operational liberals), conflicted conservatives are shown to be less well educated, less knowledgeable and engaged, less affluent, more white and suburban, and more likely to live in traditional family structures (Ellis and Stimson 2012, 152).

Our Point of Departure

Ellis and Stimson's (2012) analysis suggests that survey respondents who are asked questions about personal identity do not always access the same attitudes or frames of reference that are accessed when asked about specific public policies. "Conflicted conservatives," in this persuasive account, may be both liberal on issues and conservative on identity, which may be largely an "extra-political" identity. Conflicted conservatives "believe that government policies should be guided by principles of caution, restraint, and respect for traditional values, moral and economic" (Ellis and Stimson 2012, 177). They avoid the "liberal" label and gladly call themselves conservatives.

We have two concerns about this account. First, we cannot be certain that the emphasis on an extra-political identity is justified without estimating the independent effects of framing bias against the liberal label and an extra-political identity, which is not attempted by Ellis and Stimson. More direct measures of bias and identity are required to sort this out. Operationalizing the two forms of conservatism is essential and awaits future research.

Second, we are not certain that Americans view their issue positions recorded in response to specific policy questions as analysts do. Based on a correlational analysis of respondents' answers to multiple policy-specific questions, Ellis and Stimson can readily assign liberal-conservative directionality to the response set for questions about policy issues and associate liberal and conservative labels with the observed responses. They provide no confirmation that respondents would apply those labels to their policy preferences as the analysts do. "Conflicted" respondents may not perceive the conflict as analysts do.

These observations lead to analytical distinctions that are not emphasized in Ellis and Stimson. First, we distinguish levels of generality. That is, we distinguish between attitudes about the role of government generally and positions on specific policy issues. Second, we distinguish labels that might be applied to those issue positions (liberal, moderate, conservative) from the issue positions themselves (direct questions about policy alternatives). Making these distinctions yields the possibilities illustrated in Table 1. Ellis and Stimson compare general labels with specific issue positions, but they do not consider the match in other cells or the match between labels and issue positions at either level.

The table outlines a research agenda. The Ellis-Stimson evidence concerns the relationship between the general label and positions on specific issues (cell *c*). Their discussion often blurs the distinction between labels and issue positions applied to the general role of government and does so without evidence that labels and issue position match. We approached the subject not persuaded that labels and issue positions are neatly matched for most Americans at either the level of the general role of government or the level of specific policy issues.

In this report, we expand the Ellis-Stimson analysis to focus on cells *a* and *c*, and leave cells *b* and *d* for future research. We ask three descriptive questions:

- 1. How do the ideological self-identification responses correspond to positions on specific policy issues (cell c, like Ellis and Stimson)?
- 2. How do the respondents' labels for their positions on specific policy issues correspond to their actual positions on those issues?
- 3. How do the respondents' labels for their positions on specific policy issues correspond to their ideological self-identification responses?

Our analysis allows us to examine whether respondents label their specific issue positions as analysts do. We can determine whether the conflicted conservatives appear in responses to specific policy issues as well as in the traditional ideological selfidentification responses. And we can determine whether there is evidence of avoidance of the "liberal" label in respondents' descriptions of their specific issue positions.

We then provide a model of the relationship between the demographic and behavioral characteristics of respondents and their propensity to exhibit a "mismatch" between issue positions and labels. We do this separately for each type of mismatch: using the conservative label for a liberal position, and using the liberal for a conservative position. This extends the analysis of Ellis and Stimson about the correlates of being a conflicted conservative to other categories of "conflicted" respondents and yields a broader perspective on the relationship between labels and opinion.

We keep "conflicted liberals" in the analysis. While they are less common than conflicted conservatives, the number of symbolic liberals who take conservative issue positions is substantial and raises the question of whether the conflict between their positions and ideological labels mirrors that seen among conservatives. In fact, we find a different dynamic that enriches our understanding of labels and issue positions.

Methods and Data

Data for our analysis are drawn from the American Panel Survey (TAPS). TAPS is a monthly online survey of about 2000 people. Panelists were recruited as a national probability sample with an addressed-based sampling frame in the fall of 2011 by Knowledge Networks for the Weidenbaum Center at Washington University. Individuals without internet access were provided a laptop and internet service at the expense of the Weidenbaum Center. In a typical month, over 1700 of the panelists complete the online survey. More technical information about the survey is available at taps.wustl.edu.

Data on policy preferences were available for 1,725 respondents from surveys conducted in December 2011 and February 2012. Item non-response within this subsample was tackled using the method of multiple imputation, where ten unique datasets were created using an algorithm to stochastically impute missing values for each dataset (see Rubin 1987). All estimates are weighted by the inverse of the probability of selection into the sample.

Respondents were asked for their positions on 22 issues that were selected to represent different areas of American domestic and foreign policy (see Appendix). To focus our attention on the policies that are most central to politics, we dropped items using two criteria. First, to be comparable to Ellis and Stimson, foreign policy items were dropped (these focused on defense spending, international trade, the war in Afghanistan, and democracy promotion abroad). Second, we ran a factor analysis of the remaining 18 policy items, and further excluded items that showed an item-scale correlation (standardized factor loading) of less than 0.40.¹ At this step, we dropped the items measuring support for farm subsidies, nuclear power, campaign finance reform, Medicare, and domestic wiretapping. Thirteen items remain; these form the set of issue position and labels utilized in this analysis.

Issue positions are measured on a five-point scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree). After answering each of these questions, respondents were asked to label their position on the issue as "conservative,"

¹ The factor analysis is estimated using the principal axis method, is based on the polychoric correlation matrix of items, and imposes a single factor solution.

"moderate," "liberal," or "none of these." Central to the following analysis is the notion of a mismatch between the issue position and the corresponding label. A mismatch occurs when either of the two liberal positions on the five-point scale (directionality determined in scaling) is matched with a conservative label or either of the two conservative positions is matched with a liberal label. Moderate issue positions and labels, and the label "none of these," are not counted as mismatches.

Findings

Symbolic, Operational, and Labeled Issue Positions

Figure 1 displays the estimated distributions for three measures of ideology: panel (a) depicts symbolic ideology; panel (b), operational ideology—calculated using the 13 issue positions; and panel (c), a measure of symbolic ideology estimated using the 13 labels for issue positions. Symbolic ideology is the familiar self-categorization into liberal, conservative, and moderate, with the former two options divided further into strong, average, and weak subcategories. As Ellis and Stimson find, the conservative ideological identity is slightly more appealing to American citizens than the liberal identity, although there is not much difference between these and the moderate identity. Still it should be noted that self-identified liberalism is less popular than both conservatism and moderate identity.

The second panel in the figure shows the distribution of operational ideology, which is a summary of the actual policy attitudes held by people in the sample. Respondents' levels of operational ideology are calculated on the principal factor of the 13 issue items.² The distribution is skewed toward the liberal end of the scale. Once again, the results echo those of Ellis and Stimson: the median American is operationally liberal despite being symbolically conservative.

The third panel shows the distribution of a scale of symbolic labels for specific issue positions—a new measure that we are able to calculate given our unique set of questions asking people to label their issue positions as conservative, moderate, liberal, or none of these. This scale also is calculated using the principal factor.³ The distribution shows that a large number of respondents stick to the intermediate labels of moderate and none of these, while significant numbers also tend to repeatedly use the liberal, and especially, conservative, labels.

² The scale is reliable—Cronbach's alpha is 0.90. The principal factor accounts for 42% of the variance of the 13 items.

³ Principal axis factor analysis is run on the polychoric correlation matrix of 13 items coded in the following way: "none of these" and "moderate" are coded as 2; liberal, 1; and conservative, 3. A single factor solution is imposed. This factor accounts for 54% of the variance of the items. Cronbach's alpha for the scale is 0.93.

It is noteworthy that "moderate" responses dominate respondents' labeling of their own issue positions. It implies that many respondents who identify as either conservative or liberal, about two thirds of all respondents, label their issue positions moderate and do not have reason to perceive a severe mismatch between their ideological self-identification and issue positions.

Issue Positions by Symbolic Ideology

Among symbolic liberals, our findings are similar to those of previous studies (Figure 2). On some of the more salient issues, strong majorities for liberal policies exist. Those proposals for which the liberal position received the most support among these individuals are increasing education spending, preserving abortion rights, federal recognition of gay marriage, addressing global warming, immigration reform, increasing the minimum wage, expanding Medicaid, privatizing Social Security, regulating business, and programs designed to assist minorities. There is less liberal consensus on the issues of gun control and immigration reform. For the former proposal, a plurality of individuals in this group responded that federal law should ban the possession of handguns. For the latter, we find an unexpected result: the liberal position is actually favored by a plurality of self-identified liberals, but a large number of those surveyed chose not to report a position on this issue. If we omit this group of people from the analysis, as previous work has done (Ellis and Stimson 2012), then a liberal majority exists.

As Ellis and Stimson imply, symbolic conservatives are in much less agreement on issue positions than symbolic liberals. On the side of consistency with symbolic ideology, majorities supporting the conservative issue position are present for the abortion, repealing the Affordable Care Act, federal recognition of gay marriage, gun control, immigration reform, Medicaid expansion, and federal regulation of business. The "social" issues of abortion and homosexual marriage exhibit high levels of support for the conservative position, as do the "economic" issues of limiting federal regulation of business and expansion of the social welfare program also exists. In contrast, symbolic conservatives show a balance in favor of liberal issue positions on education spending, privatizing Social Security, and raising taxes on the wealthy. Symbolic conservatives show now consensus on taxation and global warming, issues on which liberals are clearly harmonious.

Compared with liberals, conservatives are slightly more likely to not take a stance on the policy statements presented. While the difference is not statistically significant, this finding comports with the Ellis-Stimson observation that a significant number of symbolic conservatives are apolitical and may have undeveloped views about many issues central to public discourse.

Moderates deserve attention, too. More than symbolic conservatives and liberals, moderates more frequently respond that they "neither agree nor disagree" with the policy statements. Across all issues, an average of nearly one-fourth (24.2 percent) of responses provided a neutral opinion, compared with 19.2 percent and 17.1 percent for

conservatives and liberals, respectively. Moreover, the modal response for moderates is seldom to "strong agree" or "strongly disagree." Only three times do we find a "strongly" response the most common (education spending, gun control, and immigration reform), which is half as frequent as symbolic liberals and conservatives make the "strongly" option the modal response.

Labeling Issue Positions

In Figure 3, the frequency that four alternative labels for issue positions are chosen is reported for each issue. The general pattern is not surprising. Symbolic ideology is correlated with the most commonly chosen label for issue positions.

A closer look shows important asymmetries. Across all issues, symbolic conservatives are always more likely to label their positions as conservative than anything else, even when an analyst would label many of those issue positions liberal or moderate. Moreover, symbolic conservatives use the conservative label for their issue positions far more frequently than symbolic liberals use the liberal label for theirs. For symbolic liberals, the moderate label is chosen by a plurality on 10 of the 13 issues. On only one issue, support for gay marriage, does a clear majority of liberals label their position as liberal.

The pattern of labeled issue positions among symbolic liberals is not consistent with the Ellis-Stimson narrative. In that account, liberals' unconflicted liberals' ideological commitments and ideological sophistication allow them to apply the liberal label with ease. In fact, while liberals apply the general label to themselves, they do not embrace the term for many of their issue positions and instead more often choose the moderate label.

As one would expect, a plurality of symbolic moderates used the moderate label to describe their policy preferences—with the exception of social security, where slightly more described their position as "none of these." For eight of the 13 issues, more moderates described their positions as conservative than liberal. The "none of these" option was chosen by 20-30 percent of moderates across the 13 issues. These results are consistent with research that describes moderates, on average, as less political than liberals or conservatives.

Plainly, the mismatch between symbolic ideology and issue position labels is common and is not limited to conservatives. In fact, the avoidance of the liberal label extends to symbolic liberals, which is consistent with the long-standing argument that the label has negative connotations. It may illustrate that the importance of the framing pathway described by Ellis and Stimson and, in doing so, raises a question of about how much framing accounts for conflicted conservatives for whom Ellis and Stimson emphasize the extra-political sources of ideological identity.

Mismatches between Issue Positions and Their Labels

For some of the most popular causes—such as spending on education—positions (and symbolic ideology) show a weak relationship to issue position labels. In the case of education spending, nearly half of symbolic conservatives considered opposing a cut in education spending to be a conservative position. More than ninety percent of liberals opposed this same cut in education spending, but only about one-third call this view liberal, with most liberals calling it a moderate position.

Mismatches are most common for issues on which there is a consensus view. In fact, across the 13 issues, there is an important correlation between the size of the issue position plurality and the frequency of mismatches between issue positions and issue position labels. For symbolic conservatives, the correlation is -0.81—more popular causes create more mismatches (liberal positions labeled conservative) for conservatives. For symbolic liberals, the size of the plurality and labeling liberal positions as conservative has a correlation of -0.71.

Consistent with findings about mismatches between symbolic ideology and issue positions, we find that mismatches for issue positions and their labels occur more often in the form of labeling liberal positions conservative than in labeling conservative positions liberal. More than 30 percent of labeling responses associated the conservative label with liberal positions, while only about 20 percent associated the liberal label with conservative positions.

Use of Issue Position Labels by Match of Symbolic and Operational Ideology

Figure 4 displays the distribution of issue position labels by match/mismatch of symbolic and operational ideologies—measured at the general level of abstraction. Operational ideology is split into liberal and conservatives categories along the median. For example, inconsistent conservatives are those identify as symbolic conservatives, but fall to the left of the median panelist with respect to their aggregate policy preferences. The consistent conservative category provides the most predictable results. The average conservative identifies more than half of her policy preferences as "conservative, she hardly ever categorizes any of her beliefs as liberal.

The asymmetry between matched conservatives and matched liberals is obvious. For symbolic liberals with liberal issue positions, liberal and moderate labels are used with nearly equal frequency. Not only does this finding confirm Ellis and Stimson's hypothesis that the electorate has an aversion to the term "liberal," but it is stronger than once thought. Even those who accept the liberal label as a general political identity *and* take liberal issue positions do not use the label with the expected frequency at the individual level.

Mismatched conservatives are the focus of the Ellis-Stimson analysis. While located on the liberal half of the issue scale, they use the conservative label to describe their political identity. They are the most frequent users of the moderate label. The labeling of many of their liberal positions as moderate may be their mechanism for synchronizing their symbolic and operational ideologies. For many of them, it is not a matter of failing to recognize the mismatch because the symbolic identity is extrapolitical; rather, it is a view of issue positions that does not square with the labels applied by the analyst. This may reflect some rationalization on the part of the respondent, but rationalization is a different process than responding to the symbolic ideology survey question in with an extra-political frame of reference. At the individual level, the figure provides some evidence that they are aware of the inconsistency between their self-identified label and operational ideology.

Mismatched liberals (symbolic liberals who fall on the conservative side on the issue scale) are almost as numerous as mismatched conservatives (weighted N = 84 vs. 104). This is contrary to the impression that might be created by the Ellis-Stimson analysis. Mismatched liberals, like mismatched conservatives, choose the moderate label more frequently than other labels. Mismatched liberals also show the most frequent choice of "none of these" as an issue position label.

Matching Issue Position and Issue Position Labels by Symbolic Ideology

Finally, we come to the crux of the ideological mismatching problem identified by Ellis and Stimson. Figure 5 displays histograms of the frequency of labeling mismatches across the 13 issues. There are two sorts of mismatches that are possible: a liberal issue position that is labelled "conservative," and a conservative position that is labelled "liberal." These two forms of mismatch correspond to the two plots in Figure 5. By far the most common pattern is no mismatches at all, in either direction. (Keep in mind that a moderate label or uncertain issue position is never categorized by us as a mismatch.) Indeed, for most issues, only a few percent of respondents mismatch label and position. Overall, liberal positions are combined with conservative labels more frequently (32% of respondents do this at least once) than conservative positions are matched with liberal labels (20% of respondents).

Two issues stand out for the frequency of mismatches between issue positions and their labels. Large proportions (greater than 15 percent) of symbolic conservatives mismatch liberal positions and conservative labels on the issues of education spending and social security (data not shown). These discrepancies are at the heart of the ideological inconsistency problem identified by Ellis and Stimson. On taxing the wealthy, a minimum wage, and regulating business, slightly elevated proportions of conservatives (five percent or more) also show a mismatch between the positions and labels (data not shown).

Sources of Mismatching Issue Positions and Labels

The final step in the analysis is to consider the multivariate determinants of the discrepancy between symbolic labels and operational policy preferences. Given that we have 13 policy issues, it is desirable to construct a single measure capturing the degree to

which respondents' labels and preferences are mismatched. We use the two measures shown in Figure 5—respondents' rates of applying liberal labels to conservatives positions, and vice versa. We then regress various demographic, ideological, and behavioral variables on these measures of mismatches.⁴ The results are shown in Table 2 (see the Appendix for details on the wording of survey items, coding of variables, and measurement of scales).

Our findings regarding the factors that make a respondent more likely to label a liberal position as conservative mirror Ellis and Stimson's findings about conflicted conservatives (see the first to third columns in Table 2). Political knowledge and interest make mismatches between liberal positions and conservative labels less likely, while religiosity makes them more likely. Holding a conservative political identity and a liberal operational ideology are also, unsurprisingly, associated with greater mismatches of this kind, while identifying with the Republican party has a much weaker, but still positive, effect. We find, furthermore that some contextual factors are relevant: conservative parents and using Fox News as a main source of news are both linked to higher numbers of mismatches of this sort. Finally, although Ellis and Stimson use generational effects to explain the use of the word conservative instead of the term liberal, we find no significant effect of age cohorts.⁵

To further explore the correlates of choosing a conservative label for a liberal issue position, we repeat the estimates for three levels of political knowledge (Table 3). Only low-knowledge respondents exhibit a statistically significant effect for religiosity and Fox News watching. While this pattern may be associated with a different form of conservative ideology, as Ellis and Stimson claim, we believe it is at least as likely to be associated with the framing influence of religious and media elites on less knowledgeable individuals.

Having a liberal political identity and a conservative operational ideology are linked to more frequent classifications of conservative positions as liberal (fourth to sixth columns in Table 2). The correlates of this form of mismatching are otherwise quite different. Low levels of political knowledge, but not political interest or religiosity, are associated with greater numbers of these mismatches. Blacks and Hispanics also have an increased tendency toward such ideological mismatches, which may reflect conflicted political identities for these groups.

Conclusion

We confirm and extend the findings of Ellis and Stimson about the mismatch of symbolic and operational ideology. We confirm their findings by showing that symbolic

⁴ The mismatch measures are counts of n successes out of p trials, and can be described using a binomial distribution. Logistic-binomial regression models are thus used.

⁵ Analysis available upon request.

conservatives often are operational liberals, while symbolic liberals are less frequently operational conservatives. We extend Ellis and Stimson in several ways:

- 1. Many Americans do not view their mismatches between symbolic ideology and issue positions as serious mismatches. Instead, Americans tend to label as moderate many issue positions that analysts would readily label liberal or conservative, reducing the severity of the mismatch that might otherwise be perceived. As Figure 4 demonstrates, the moderate classification is the most popular label across three of the four symbolic-operational groups. With substantial frequency, Americans choose "none of these" over the traditional ideological labels.
- 2. Contrary to the impression left by Ellis and Stimson, many symbolic liberals choose not to apply the term liberal to their issue positions. If the liberal label is eschewed, as Ellis and Stimson and others argue, it seems to affect liberals as well as other Americans. Symbolic liberals who exhibit frequent mismatches with their issue positions use the labels moderate and "none of these" far more frequently than other liberals.
- 3. Some issues, such as education and Social Security, generate a large proportion of symbolic-operational mismatches and yield moderate and "none of these" issue position labels with high frequency.

Moreover, we estimate the influence of several factors on the frequency of mismatches between issue positions and their labels and do so for both directions of mismatch—conservative positions labeled liberal and liberal positions labeled conservative is a mismatch associated with religiosity, low political interest, and low political knowledge (and, of course, is concentrated in symbolic conservatives). This finding provides an important confirmation of the Ellis-Stimson argument at the level of issue-specific labels.

We also discover that only low political knowledge is associated with conservative positions labeled liberal (and primarily among liberals, of course). Religiosity, central to the Ellis-Stimson account of extra-political ideology, is not predictive of mismatches in this direction. The common thread between mismatches in both directions is a low level of sophistication about politics. We are hesitant to label mismatches "errors," but it is hard to avoid the inference that political knowledge leads to many guesses and inaccurate characterizations of ideology and issue positions by many Americans. It is not merely a problem of conflicted conservatives; it extends to liberals, too.

There are several missing pieces in the Ellis-Stimson analysis, suggested by Table 1, that warrant additional attention in future research. First, moderate deserve a closer look. Because moderates cannot be "conflicted" under the measures defined in the Ellis-Stimson study or here, they have been ignored. Yet, it seems foolhardy to focus on how elections might pivot on conflicted conservatives, as Ellis and Stimson do in their concluding chapter, without serious consideration of how and why self-identified moderates shift partisan preferences from election to election. Moderates are almost as common as conservatives, they are far more numerous than conflicted conservatives,

and their mean operational ideology is a closer to the median than is the mean for conflicted conservatives.

Second, we should measure more directly key concepts that define the ideological "pathways." Bias in response to political labels and alternative forms of ideological identity go unmeasured in the Ellis and Stimson study and so their independent effects on standard ideological self-identification responses have not been estimated. Until this is done, we cannot be certain whether the stimulus for conflicted conservatives is as strongly motivated by a different sort of conservative ideology as Ellis and Stimson claim.

Third, we should give the role of political sophistication further study. Our finding that political sophistication influences mismatches for both symbolic conservatives and symbolic liberals leaves us suspicious that simple errors are responsible for much of the mismatching that occurs. Exploring the interaction of sophistication with religiosity and other cultural attributes may lead us to reduce our emphasis on alternative ideological identities.

Finally, we should directly measure the positions and labels outlined in Table 1. We have contributed to this effort by asking respondents to label their issue positions. Yet to be measured is the relationship between general ideological labels and measures of general ideological orientation toward government and traditions *without* labels. If we claim that there are two alternative conceptions of conservatism, we should be able to operationalize them and account for differences among conservatives more directly.

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Appendix: Survey Items

General operational ideology (Reliability = 0.90)

Included items:

- 1. Federal programs that provide health care benefits should allow funding for abortion.
- 2. Federal spending for education should be reduced.
- 3. Federal personal income taxes for individuals with incomes higher than \$250,000 should be raised.
- 4. The federal health care reform program adopted in 2010 should be repealed.
- 5. The federal government should recognize the validity of same-sex marriage where state law does.
- 6. Federal law should ban the possession of handguns except by law enforcement personnel.
- 7. The federal government should adopt policies to address the problems of global warming.
- 8. The federal government should find a way to allow people who now are in the U.S. illegally to stay in the U.S. and become U.S. citizens.
- 9. The federal government should guarantee a higher minimum wage for workers.
- 10. Medicaid should be extended to cover more people.
- 11. Social Security should be reformed so that individuals are given private retirement accounts that are invested in the stock market.
- 12. The federal government should do more to regulate business in order to protect the interests of consumers.
- 13. The federal government should support programs designed to help minorities get better jobs and education.

Excluded items:

- 1. The federal government should spend more money on national defense.
- 2. Federal efforts to support farmers with price supports and direct payments should be reduced.
- 3. Candidates for Congress should receive public funds for their election campaigns.
- 4. Medicare, the federal health insurance program for senior citizens, should be reformed so that Medicare is provided by private insurance companies with subsidies from the government.
- 5. Federal policy should encourage greater use of nuclear energy to produce electricity?
- 6. The U.S. should guarantee the protection of American jobs in negotiating trade agreements with other countries.
- 7. US troops should remain in Afghanistan.
- 8. The government should be allowed to monitor communications of Americans when it has reason to believe that someone might be a terrorist.
- 9. The U.S. should provide military assistance to efforts to establish democratic government in foreign countries.

Specific symbolic ideology (Reliability = 0.93)

Do you consider your view of [...] liberal, moderate, or conservative?

Religiosity (Reliability = 0.90)

- 1. Please indicate which statement comes closest to expressing what you believe about the existence of God. (1=I don't believe; 2=I have no way to find out; 3=I believe in some higher power; 4=I believe sometimes; 5=I believe but have doubts; 6=I know God exists.)
- 2. How often do you attend religious services? (1=every day or almost every day; 2=once a week; 3=almost every week; 4=once or twice a month; 5=a few times a year; 6=once a year or less; 7=never.)
- 3. How often do you pray? (1=every day or almost every day; 2=once a week; 3=almost every week; 4=once or twice a month; 5=a few times a year; 6=once a year or less; 7=never.)
- 4. How often do you say grace before meals? (1=every day or almost every day; 2=once a week; 3=almost every week; 4=once or twice a month; 5=a few times a year; 6=once a year or less; 7=never.)

Political knowledge (Reliability = 0.88)

- 1. Which party holds a majority of seats in the US House of Representatives? (1=Democrats; 2=Republicans; 3=Independents; 4=Don't know.)
- 2. How many votes are required in Congress to override a presidential veto? (1=a simple majority of one house of Congress; 2=a simple majority of both houses of Congress; 3=a two-thirds majority of one house of Congress; 4=a two thirds majority of both houses of Congress.)
- 3. How long is one term for a member of the US Senate? (1=2 years; 2=4 years; 3=6 years; 4=8 years; 5=Don't know).
- 4. The ability of a minority of senators to prevent a vote on a bill is known as ... (1=a veto; 2=a filibuster; 3=enrollment; 4=suspension of the rules; 5=Don't know).
- 5. Who is the Vice President of the United States? (1=Nancy Pelosi; 2=John Boehner; 3=Joseph Biden; 4=Harry Reid; 5=Don't Know).
- 6. A president may serve: (1=one term; 2=two terms; 3=three terms; 4=any number of terms; 5=Don't know).
- 7. Members of the US Supreme court serve: (1=two-year terms; 2=ten-year terms; 3=life terms; 4=terms determined by the president; 5=Don't know).
- 8. Who is Chief Justice of the United States Superme Court? (1=John Roberts; 2=Antonin Scalia; 3=Mitt Romney; 4=Hillary Clinton; 5=Don't know).
- 9. Social Security is: (1=the benefit program for senior citizens; 2=the responsibility of the Department of Defense; 3=operated by state governments; 4=funded by the personal income tax; 5=Don't know).
- 10. On which of the following programs is the most money spent each year? (1=aid to foreign countries; 2=Medicare; 3=subsidies to farmers; 4=education; 5=Don't know).

Parents' ideology

- 1. In terms of your father's political views, do you think he considered or still considers himself to be: (1=Very liberal; 2=Liberal; 3=Slightly liberal; 4=Moderate / Don't know; 5=Slightly conservative; 6=Conservative; 7=Very conservative).
- 2. In terms of your mother's political views, do you think she considered or still considers herself to be: (1=Very liberal; 2=Liberal; 3=Slightly liberal; 4=Moderate / Don't know; 5=Slightly conservative; 6=Conservative; 7=Very conservative).

Friends' ideology

How about your closest friends? Most of them consider themselves to be: (1=Very liberal; 2=Liberal; 3=Slightly liberal; 4=Moderate / They are so varied that I cannot characterize them / Don't know; 5=Slightly conservative; 6=Conservative; 7=Very conservative).

Interest in politics

In general how interested are you in politics and public affairs? (1=Very interested; 2= Somewhat interested; 3= Slightly interested; 4=Not at all interested).

Table 1. Conceptions of Ideology

		Label (Symbolic Ideology)	Issue Position	
Specific Policy Issue	Label	а	b	
	Issue Position (Operational Ideology)	c Ellis & Stimson	d	

General Role of Government

Dependent variables:	Number of mismatched labels (max. = 13)						
	Liberal positions, conservative labels			Conservative positions, liberal labels			
Party ID	.05 (.04)		$.09^{*}$ (.04)	$.17^{**}$ (.06)		$.13^{*}$ (.06)	
Symbolic ideology	1.26^{***} (.37)	1.38^{***} (.35)		-1.57^{**} (.48)	-1.16^{**} (.45)		
Operational ideology	-2.60^{***} (.44)	-2.38^{***} (.42)	-2.09^{***} (.41)	1.58^{**} (.55)	2.26^{***} (.52)	.86 $(.51)$	
Parents' perceived ideology	1.34^{***} (.35)	1.39^{***} (.35)	1.46^{***} (.36)	$29 \\ (.49)$	12 (.48)	41 (.48)	
Friends' perceived ideology	.71 (.41)	.72 (.41)	.88* (.40)	34 (.44)	27 (.44)	52 (.43)	
Religiosity	.95*** (.27)	$.97^{***}$ (.27)	1.06^{***} (.26)	.12 (.31)	.14 $(.31)$.00 $(.30)$	
Interest in politics	75^{**} (.29)	75^{**} (.29)	77^{**} (.29)	08 (.39)	10 (.40)	05 (.39)	
Political knowledge	69^{*} (.28)	70^{**} (.28)	72^{**} (.27)	-1.20^{**} (.36)	-1.24^{***} (.37)	-1.19^{**} (.37)	
Fox News is main news source	.45* (.17)	.47** (.17)	.37** (.18)	()	()		
Age	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 $(.01)$.00 $(.01)$.00 $(.01)$	
Gender: female	.02 (.11)	.00 (.11)	.02 (.11)	15 (.16)	18 (.16)	15 (.16)	
Years of education	06(.03)	06 (.03)	06 (.03)	07 (.05)	07 (.05)	06 (.05)	
Income	02 (.02)	02 (.02)	02 (.02)	.00 (.03)	.01 (.03)	.00 (.03)	
Ethnicity: Hispanic	15 (.17)	18 (.17)	11 (.17)	.41* (.20)	.36 (.20)	.38 (.20)	
Ethnicity: Black	.25 (.20)	(.11) .18 (.20)	.29 (.20)	(.20) $.49^{*}$ (.25)	(.20) .28 (.24)	(.25) .48 (.25)	
Ethnicity: Asian	(.20) 13 (.28)	(.20) 15 (.28)	(.20) 09 (.28)	(.23) .12 (.27)	(.24) .06 (.27)	(.23) .06 (.26)	
Ethnicity: Native American	(.28) .17 (.29)	(.28) .15 (.29)	(.28) (.28)	(.27) 02 (.36)	(.27) 07 (.37)	(.20) 08 (.37)	

Table 2. Determinants of Number of Mismatches Between Specific Issue Positions and Labels

Standard errors in parentheses. Estimates obtained using logistic-binomial regression models for complex survey data, combined for the ten multiply-imputed datasets. Models include intercept (not shown) ***p < .001, **p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05. N = 1,725.

Dependent variable:	Number of mismatched labels – (Liberal positions, conservative labels)					
	Sample	Sample: Political knowledge is				
	Low	Moderate	High			
Party ID	01	.06	.24*			
	(.04)	(.06)	(.10)			
Symbolic ideology	.74	2.17^{***}	2.53			
	(.41)	(.56)	(1.32)			
Operational ideology	-2.49^{***}	-3.11^{***}	-5.33^{***}			
	(.64)	(.61)	(1.10)			
Parents' ideology	1.34^{**}	1.66^{***}	1.12			
	(.47)	(.50)	(.93)			
Friends' ideology	.42	.82	1.75^{*}			
	(.55)	(.62)	(.69)			
Religiosity	1.12^{**}	.68	.81			
	(.39)	(.38)	(.53)			
Interest in politics	69^{*}	96^{*}	-1.42			
-	(.33)	(.39)	(.73)			
Fox is main source of news	.61**	.28	.31			
	(.21)	(.30)	(.43)			
Age	.00	.00	01			
	(.00)	(.01)	(.01)			
Gender: female	.02	.10	38			
	(.14)	(.16)	(.32)			
Years of education	06	11^{*}	.00			
	(.04)	(.05)	(.08)			
Income	02	02	05			
	(.02)	(.03)	(.04)			
Ethnicity: Hispanic	32	07	21			
	(.20)	(.26)	(.59)			
Ethnicity: Black	.02	.29	.71			
	(.23)	(.33)	(.47)			
Ethnicity: Asian	26	.21	1.34			
-	(.34)	(.38)	(.89)			
Ethnicity: Native American	.36	.29	-14.49^{***}			
-	(.31)	(.45)	(.60)			
N	587	705	433			

Table 3. Determinants of Number of Mismatches Between Specific Issue Positions and Labels, by Political Knowledge.

Standard errors in parentheses. Estimates obtained using logistic-binomial regression models for complex survey data, combined for the ten multiply-imputed datasets. Models include intercept (not shown) ***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .01, *p < .05.

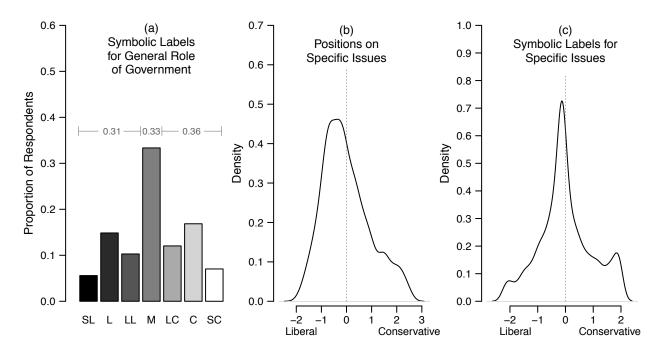


Figure 1. Three Measures of Ideology

Panel (a) is a histogram of the responses to the general role of government self-labeling question, which has a seven-point response set ("SL" is "strongly liberal," while "LL" is "leans liberal"). This plot corresponds to what Ellis & Stimson call "symbolic ideology." Panels (b) and (c) are kernel density plots of the continuous variables obtained from factor analyses of (a) specific issue positions on the 13 policy items (operational ideology), and (c) specific position labels on the 13 policy items. N = 1,725. Analysis is weighted.

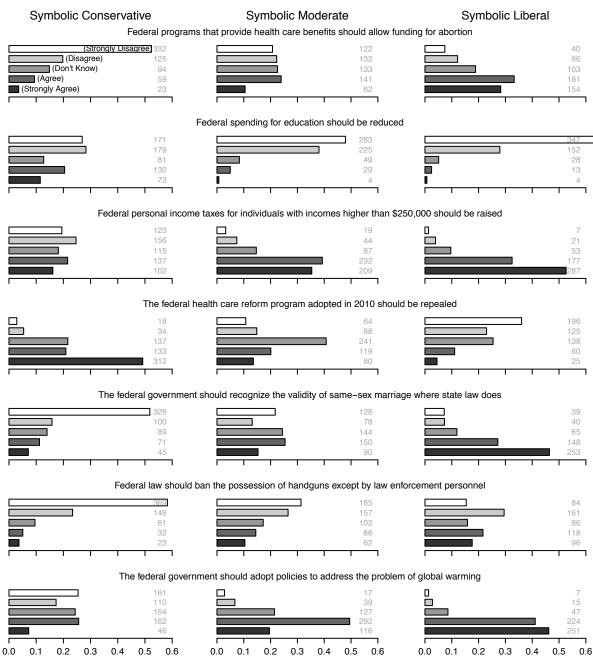


Figure 2. Specific Issue Positions By General Labels

Proportion agreeing, etc. with each policy question

Bars indicate the proportions choosing each of the possible response category for the 13 main policy items. Darker bars indicate agreement with the item; lighter bars, disagreement. Numbers in grey are the sample size within each response category. Total N = 1,725. Analysis is weighted.

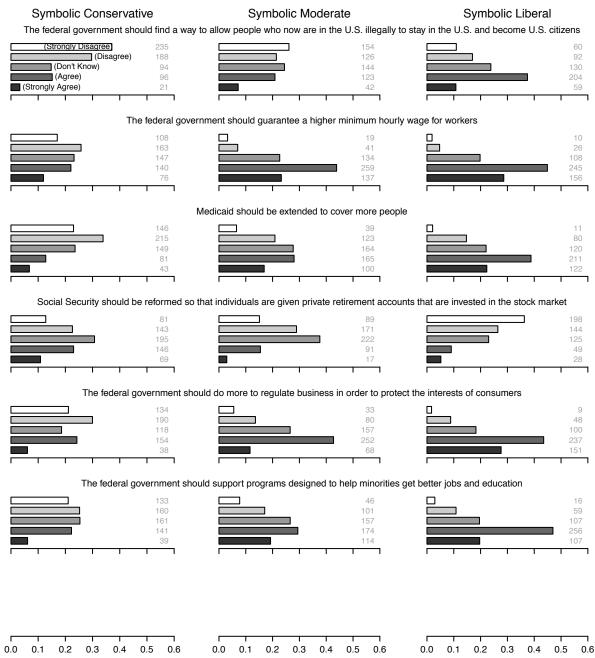


Figure 2, continued. Specific Issue Positions By General Labels

Proportion agreeing, etc. with each policy question

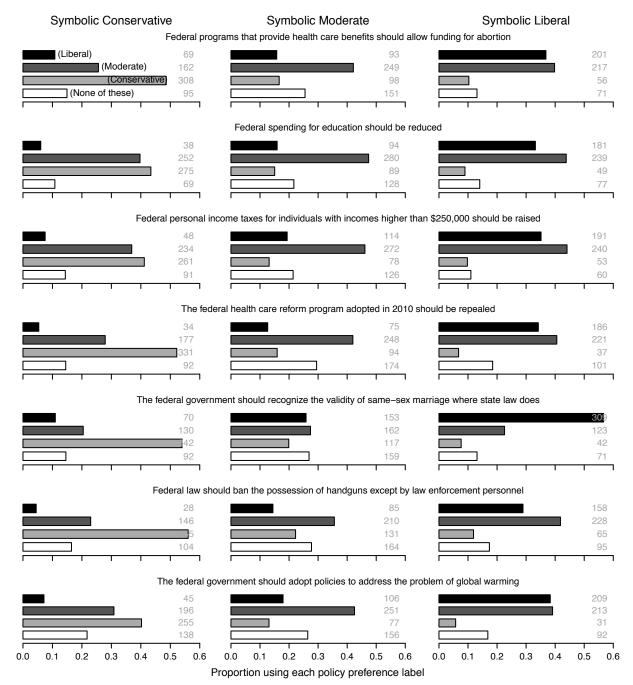


Figure 3. Specific Issue Position Labels By General Labels

Bars indicate the proportion of respondents choosing each response category for the issue position labeling questions. The black bars are the proportion choosing the label "liberal;" dark grey, "moderate;" light grey, "conservative;" and white, "none of these." Numbers in grey are the sample size within each response category. Total N = 1,725. Analysis is weighted.

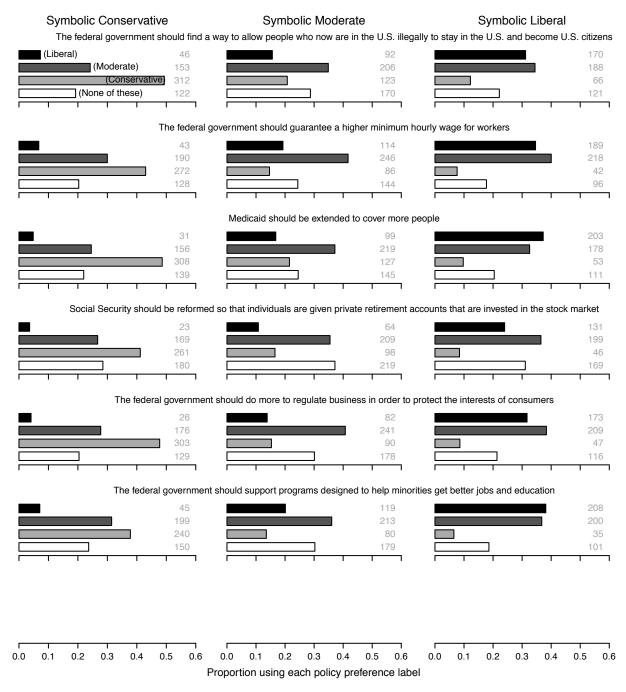


Figure 3, continued. Specific Issue Position Labels By General Labels

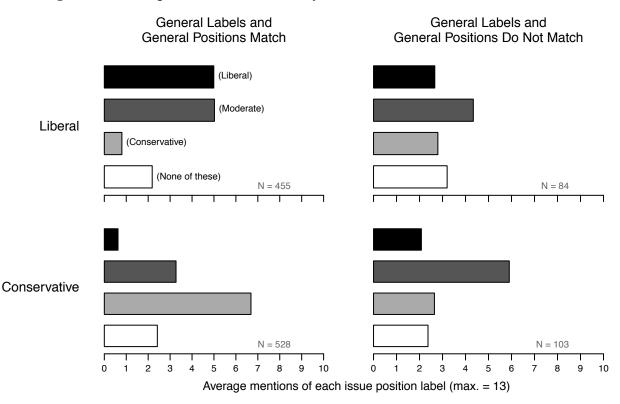


Figure 4. Use of Specific Position Labels by General Labels and General Positions

Each cell in this 2×2 figure shows the distribution of specific issue position labels by whether respondents' general labels (symbolic ideology) and their general positions (operational ideology) match. The horizontal bars within each cell indicate the average usage of each of the four issue labels within each of the four categories. The black bars show the average number of mentions of the "liberal" label; dark grey bars, the "moderate" label; light grey, "conservative;" and white, "none of these." Liberal and conservatives include those leaning toward such identities, but exclude self-identified moderates. "Matching" is defined by comparing respondents' labels for their general ideology to a general policy position scale constructed using their specific positions on the 13 policy issues. Those above the median are considered to be operational conservatives, otherwise operational liberals. Liberals whose labels and positions do not match thus self-identify as liberals, but have a score on the conservative half of the operational ideology scale.

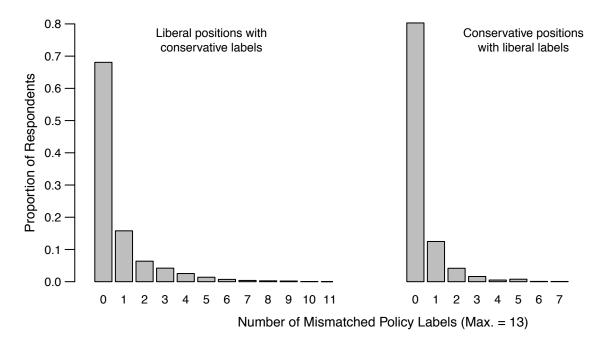


Figure 5. Distributions of the Two Dependent Variables

Each plot shows the proportion of respondents (y-axis) who have different numbers of mismatching policy positions and policy labels over the 13 issues (x-axis). N = 1,725. Analysis is weighted.