A Social Identity Theory Perspective on Ideology

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Ideology as a measure of political attitudes has heretofore been inadequate in explaining issue positions, partisan attitudes, and political behavior. The often surprising lack of correlation between positions on issues and ideological self-placement suggests that our theoretical understanding of ideology is incomplete. Borrowing from Social Identity Theory, we propose a framework to enhance our theoretical leverage in understanding these relationships. We use an innovative survey featuring a social-psychologically informed battery of questions to assess social identification with self-perceived ideological groupings (i.e., "Liberal," "Conservative," and "moderate"). We find that Liberal and Conservative self-identifications exist and have expected effects on ideological constraint and group assessments in following with the predictions derived from Social Identity Theory. These findings are an important first-step in a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the place of ideology in the American polity.

Introduction

The precise nature and meaning of ideology in the American political context has confused and bedeviled scholars for decades. How can Americans talk so much about "liberal" and "conservative" yet seemingly understand these terms so little? As far back as 1981, Conover and Feldman (1981) determined that there was clearly more to ideology than issue preferences. The fact that a single question perceived to summarize "liberal-conservative identification," as compared to a summary of items derived from issue positions, better predicts important political phenomena such as vote choice clearly indicates that there is more to an ideology than just a set of positions on issues. Though the standard measure of ideology asks respondents to place themselves based on "the political views that people might hold," ideology would clearly seem to be more than just a convenient summary of positions across a variety of issues. The common and frequent real-world use of the term, e.g., "I *am* a conservative," "my opponent *is* a liberal," etc., as opposed to simply, "I hold conservative views" in itself clearly indicates that for many, there is a sense of self identification, not just issue placements, when using these terms.

Where does this self identification come from then? Is it a symbolic attachment to an ideal (Conover and Feldman 1981)? A mental construct based on evaluations of "conservative" and "liberal" politicians or political groups? It is our opinion that political scientists have largely failed to take under consideration that the terms "liberal" and "conservative" provide meaningful social groups in the present political context towards which many voters may indeed have a meaningful social identification, correlated with, but nonetheless independent of, their positions on issues. We argue that examining

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ideology solely as a summary of political attitudes is missing a big part of the picture--rather, much like partisanship, ideology has also become a meaningful social identification. That is, for many citizens, they perceive conservatives and liberals as distinct social groups and derive personal value from identifying themselves as liberal or conservative. The group identification of partisanship is well-established; as ideology and partisanship have become ever more closely aligned in the electorate, it follows that ideology may increasingly exist not just as a set of attitudes, but also as a meaningful group identification, like partisanship.

In short, it is not just the various social groups that citizens may associate with an ideology which form the basis of an ideological identity, but the very groups "conservatives" and "liberals" themselves. To claim, "I am a conservative" is to claim psychological membership in a group of like-minded persons. Furthermore, based on the social-psychological perspective of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel and Turner 1986), there are clear implications for how a group-identification aspect of ideology should have a different political meaning than an ideology based solely or primarily on policy preferences.

In this research, then, we undertake the first effort to explore ideology as a social identity. Informing our research using Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel and Turner 1986), we use appropriate social-psychological measures of group identity for ideology to answer the following research questions: To what degree does ideology exist as an identity? How does ideological constraint vary with ideological identity? How does ideological identity versus specific issue attitudes explain placement on the standard

seven-point ideology scale? Finally, an understanding of ideological identity can

illuminate the controversial nature of the relationship between ideology and PID.

Understanding Ideology with Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory attempts to explain how self-perceived membership in a

social group affects social perceptions and attitudes. Social identity is defined as, "that

part of an individual's self concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership

of a group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to the

membership" (Tajfel, 1978). The theory holds that individuals attempt to maximize

differences between the in-group (the group to which one psychologically belongs) and

the out-group (psychologically relevant opposition group) and thus perceive greater

differences between one's in-group and the relevant out-group than actually exist and

show favoritism toward in-group members (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Importantly, these

social identifications are not based on any formal group membership, but rather self-

perceived membership in a particular group. A wide variety of experiments have

demonstrated the Minimal Group Paradigm (MGP), which shows even the most

simplistic and transient social categorizations to invoke a series of perceptual biases

towards members of the in-group, and the relevant out-group. Given the pervasive use

and self-definition of "liberal" and "conservative" in the American political context, it

would thus be surprising if persons *did not* develop social identifications with these

groups.

Moving beyond social-psychological foci, social identity theory has increasingly

been used as a compelling basis for studies examining political identifications across a

variety of contexts: Great Britain (Kelly 1988), Scotland (Abrams 1994), and Australia (Duck, Hogg, and Terry 1995) and the United States (Greene, 2005). So, what should we expect ideological identification based on a social identity to look like*?* Following from the group differentiation aspect of social identity theory, the group nature of ideology should naturally create a bipolar ideological spectrum where individuals characterize the "liberals" and "conservatives" into *us* and *them* and exaggerate perceived differences to favor their own group. In social identity theory, intergroup differentiation occurs in two primary ways: in-group favoritism and out-group derogation (Brewer and Brown, 1998). In-group favoritism simply refers to the tendency for group members to mentally exaggerate and enhance the favorable qualities of the relevant in-group to which they see themselves belonging. Out-group derogation, in contrast, is exaggeration of the negative characteristics of relevant out-groups, thereby also making one's in-group seem superior. The net result of either process is enhanced group differentiation. Interestingly, in-group favoritism and out-group derogation need not co-occur (Brewer and Brown 1998). Consequently, in the case of ideology, we may expect either or both processes to be a factor in political attitudes associated with ideology and more so for more sophisticated voters who understand how their ideological identification is related to broader political attitudes.

The Differences Between the Identities?

In Converse's classic levels of conceptualization study (1964), only a small percentage of the American population (2-3%?) were classified as "ideologues" while those who thought about politics in terms of "group benefits" represented the largest category (40%-50%). But how much of this difference between the classic ideologue and

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the political numbskull who thinks in terms of "group benefits" has gotten lost in how we think of ideology if ideology also represents a "group benefit?" Remember that the earliest voting studies emphasized group attachments as the key to explaining political phenomena (Lazarsfeld *et al* 1948), while *The American Voter* identified those who approach politics from the "group benefits" standpoint as clearly the largest segment of American society and the ones least capable of engaging in sophisticated discourse (Campbell *et al* 1960). If instead we begin to consider ideology as a social identity, we shift the focus from a solely issues-based definition to a more inclusive concept of ideology as a psychological identification more akin to partisanship. The importance of this is that the closer one gets to identifying with a group at a "identification" level, social identity scholars argue, the more that group identification should constrain the attitudes and behavior of the identifier (Conover 1984, Turner 1987, Wetherell 1982).

However, in the case of ideology, much like that of religious identification, the forces that spawn an identification are not demographic in nature, instead they are the forces of socialization, education, and life experience, and they are inextricably tied to the political environment itself. For example, we have significant reason to believe that a conservative identity will be different, and probably stronger than a liberal identity. Over two decades ago, Conover and Feldman (1981) wrote that liberal and conservative are not just two sides of the same coin, but different coins. In an era where most liberal politicians are afraid to even admit to being liberal (MacGillis 2008) and talk of being "beyond labels" or "progressive" rather than liberal, while Republicans claim to be "a proud conservative," there is strong reason to believe that a "conservative" identification

is seen as having a higher social value among many. For example, here is Democratic

presidential candidate Barack Obama on being liberal:

> "There's nothing liberal about wanting to make sure that everybody has
> health care. We are spending more on health care in this country than any
> other advanced country. We got more uninsured. There's nothing liberal
> about saying that doesn't make sense, and we should do something smarter
> with our health-care system."

Of course, government-supported universal health care is a defining issue of modern

liberalism in America.

Empirically, 2004 NES data show that not only is the mean "conservative" feeling

thermometer placement quite a bit higher than the "liberal" feeling thermometer (60 to

55), Republicans rate "conservatives" much more highly than Democrats rate "liberals"

(72 vs. 65). In short, given the asymmetry of "liberal" and "conservative" in

contemporary American politics, there is reason to expect that the social identifications of

"liberals" and "conservatives" may very well differ.

Thus far, we have largely left political "moderates" out of the discussion, yet this

represents a substantial portion of Americans, 26% in the 2004 NES (and varying

between 20-28% over the 30+year history of the measure). Does being a political

"moderate" represent a political identity distinct from being a "liberal" or "conservative"

or does it more properly represent an absence of ideology? The fact that, empirically,

those who respond "don't know" to the ideology question are little different from those

who respond "moderate," suggests that the latter is more likely the case. On the other

hand, Greene (2005) did find some genuine social identification as independents among

many self-described Independents—though not nearly at the levels of social identification

among true partisans. To the degree that "moderate" represents a positive political in-

group, like "independent" we should expect to see social identifications, and failure to find such would seem to indicate that "moderate" and "independent" are not psychological analogs.

Data and Measures

Since our study is the first to deal with liberal/conservative ideology as a social identification, we created an original survey which combined these new ideology measures along with more traditional measures of ideology as well as a broad array of political questions (e.g., issue placement, feeling thermometers, etc.) typically included in political surveys.

A total of 931 adults who were enrolled in undergraduate classes at one of two large public universities responded to a survey on abortion and political attitudes for course credit. Of these participants, 923 participated at North Carolina State University, a large, public, southeastern university, while the other 108 participated at San Jose State University, a large, public, west coast university. The students at NCSU tended to be more conservative, which we address with a dummy variable in our analyses. These respondents were average in levels of political engagement and interest, and differ from a national sample of college students by being more conservative and Republican. Obviously, it would be highly problematic to infer national adult ideological identification based upon this sample. Therefore, our primary focus is on the *relationships* between ideological identification and related political attitudes. For example, though the level of liberal social identification in this sample cannot be assumed to be nationally representative, there is little reason to believe that the *relationships*

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between this identity and one's partisanship or position on abortion are substantially different for those in this sample than for an appropriately representative national sample.

We should also note that, if anything, the results would probably be stronger with a representative adult sample. Sears (1986) notes that college students have less stable and less crystallized political attitudes than the public as a whole. This is likely very much the case with a newly developing ideology. Consequently, we might expect any significant relationships we find to be attenuated as to what might be found with a full adult sample.

The primary original contribution of this survey comes from a comprehensive set of measures of political ideology as a social identification. We combined relevant elements of Mael and Tetrick's (1992) Identification with a Psychological Group (IDPG) scale along with items from Crocker and Luhtanen's Collective Self Esteem Scale (CSE) (1992)—an extensively used and well-validated series of items designed to measure social identifications for a variety of possible groups. The first five items are from the IDPG and the latter three are from the "importance to identity" subscale of the CSE. The final eight items were chosen as they all assess a personal sense of identification with a group. Respondents only completed the scale for "liberal" or "conservative" or "moderate" as it would not make sense to have them complete a scale for what would clearly be the relevant out-group as well. Respondents answered the following ten items for their chosen ideology with response categories ranging from 1, strongly disagree, to 7, strongly agree.

1. When someone criticizes Liberals, it feels like a personal insult.
2. I don't act like a typical Liberal.
3. When I talk about Liberals, I usually say "we" rather than "they."
4. If a story in the media criticized Liberals, I would feel embarrassed.

5. When someone praises Liberals, it feels like a personal compliment.
6. In general, I'm glad to be a Liberal.
7. Being a Liberal is an important reflection of who I am.
8. Being a Liberal is not an important part of my self image.

After identifying themselves as liberal or conservative according to the standard NES 7-point ideology scale, conservatives completed the identity scale with "conservatives" as the object and liberals completed the scale with "liberals" as the group object. In half of our sample, those who answered "moderate" went on to the identity scale for moderates. In the other half, they were asked to choose whether they were closer to conservatives or liberals, and then filled out an identity scale for this chosen ideology. As analyses indicated that moderates forced to choose a liberal or conservative identity had substantially less ideological social identification than those who first chose a liberal or conservative ideology, we omitted these persons from analyses due to concerns that they would artificially attenuate any effects of a genuine ideological identification.

Since we were very much concerned with how ideology and ideological identification may relate to specific issue attitudes, we included a wide variety of issue questions, using standard NES question wording: government services, government guaranteed jobs, government aid to Blacks, government health insurance, defense spending, environment versus jobs, and abortion. For analyses in which we wanted to control for issues positions, we created an issues index which was the mean of the seven-point issues scales, plus the abortion question rescaled to the same 1-7 metric. In assessing attitudes towards the Iraq war, we used three dichotomous items: whether the war was the right decision, whether the war was worth it, and whether we should

withdraw our forces now. Since these items were all highly correlated and load on a

single factor, we created a single Iraq war index. For gay marriage, we explicitly include

the option of civil unions, unlike the NES question wording. We coded the variable as

those who oppose gay marriage and civil unions as 1, and those who support such

policies as 0.

In order to assess how our identification measures relate to consistent ideological

thinking, we borrow from Barker and Tinnick's (2006) measure of constraint and create

an additive scale of liberal constraint for each of our eight measured issues on which the

respondent falls on the liberal side of the issue. We likewise create a similar scale of

conservative constraint for the number of issues upon which respondents fall on the

conservative side of the issue.

The remainder of our variables can be placed into two groups: NES political

measures and demographic measures, including religiosity, appropriate to a college-age

population. Political interest used the NES questions assessing interest in politics in

general. Party identification and ideology were measured with the standard seven-

category measures. Political knowledge was number of correct responses to five factual

questions about politics: British Prime Minister; portion of Congress required to overturn

a veto, which branch of government can declare legislation unconstitutional, which party

is more conservative, and which party has a majority in Congress. On the demographic

side, Gender was coded as a dummy for female respondents. Race was coded as a

dummy for non-white respondents. Religiosity was measured on a five-point scale of

self-assessed importance of religion in one's life. Finally, our models included a dummy

variable indicating whether participants were enrolled at NCSU or SJSU.

Analyses

To begin, we take a basic look at the descriptive statistics for our measures of ideological group identification for liberals, conservatives, and moderates (table 1). For both liberals and conservatives, the mean and median identity fall just into the positive side of the identity scale (i.e., greater than the midpoint of four on the seven-point scale). For a substantial minority of the respondents, there was not a positive social identification with either liberal or conservative. Yet on average there was, and moving out to the 75th percentile, there was a clear and substantively meaningful identification. This was true in all cases, though slightly more so for conservatives. Not surprisingly, among moderates the figures were a good bit lower—an average identity falling below the scale midpoint and even the 75th percentile barely making it into the territory of a positive social identification.[1] Given the fact that we are dealing with results from a population of college students, it would be unwise to extrapolate too much based on these results. Nonetheless, they do show positive, and real, group identification for the majority of liberals and conservatives in our sample. Furthermore, in a national adult sample there is good reason to believe that we may see stronger indications of group identification. We expect that with adults who have held a consistent ideology for years, there would likely be higher scores. It is reasonable to expect that, like partisanship, ideology becomes a stronger identification (though, not necessarily more extreme, as measured by the standard NES scale), the longer it is held.

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[1] Due to our split sample design where in half the surveys "moderate" respondents were then asked to choose "liberal" or "conservative" and completed a group identification scale based on that ideology, the number of liberal identification and conservative identification scores is much greater.

Next, we briefly examine how the social identity measures accord with the seven-point ideology measure (table 2). In not much of a surprise, as ideology increases on the standard scale, level of ideological social identification increases as well. Furthermore, the identity means are quite similar on both the liberal and conservative sides. Certainly, this would seem to indicate the traditional measure, in addition to measuring the extremity of ideological views is also capturing the strength of one's ideological identification.

The series of bivariate correlations in table 3 further contribute to elucidating the relationship between identification and the traditional measure of ideology as well as specific issues. Among the most interesting findings of this table is the rather striking symmetry between liberal and conservative identification. Both correlate quite strongly with ideology and partisanship at right about .50. Just as table 2 showed that ideological identification is related to the standard ideology measure, it is clearly and not surprisingly related to partisanship as well. Additionally, both liberal and conservative identity correlate significantly, and largely similarly, with our issue indices and the specific issue items, especially the strong correlations for government services and defense spending. What is also notable is the major difference: the social issues of abortion and gay marriage are quite significantly correlated with conservative identification, but not significantly correlated with liberal identification. Given the greater role that these two issues appear to play for many conservatives, especially religious conservatives, this is probably not surprising, yet it does seem notable that these issues play no role in a liberal social identification in our sample. Finally, this table provides our first indication of the

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limited utility of a moderate social identification as it does not show a significant

correlation with a single one of our party, ideology, or issue measures.

Another way to assess the impact of ideological social identity is to examine its

relationship to the standard 7-point ideological self-placement scale. If ideological self-

placement is primarily a function of issue positions, then these attitudes should show the

greatest effect in explaining this variable. If instead, as we propose, ideological self-

placement represents in large part a sense of identification with an ideological group, then

we should find that our measures of liberal, conservative, or moderate identification are

more important in explaining self-placement on the traditional ideology scale.

As table 4 shows, for both liberals and conservatives, the latter is the case. Social

identification with one's ideological group has the greatest effect in predicting self-

placement on the 7-point ideology scale, controlling for both issue attitudes and party ID.

While issue positions also have a statistically significant effect, this effect is both

statistically and substantively smaller for conservatives than for liberals, and party ID is

not statistically significant for either group. Moderates also show a statistically

significant effect of social identity on ideological self-placement, but the overall

explanatory value of the model is much smaller (adj. R^2 = .05) than for either liberals or

conservatives.

These results provide strong support for our contention that ideology is more than

the sum total of one's issue attitudes. In fact, ideological self-placement as traditionally

measured in the NES and most political behavior research is best explained by a sense of

psychological identification with ideological groups, in combination with one's positions

on the issues. We therefore contend that ideology cannot be fully understood without taking this aspect of group identification into account.

Our subsequent analysis examines the relationships between ideological self identification and issues more fully in a multivariate context by regressing the three social identification scales on the aforementioned issues along with partisanship and appropriate demographic controls (table 5). In this multi-variate context, we can see that party identification and political interest are the dominant factors, much more so than issues, in predicting both a liberal and conservative social identification. Interestingly, a good number of issues, government services, aid to Blacks, the environment, and abortion predict a conservative identification, whereas none of the individual issues predict a liberal identification at a statistically significant level. On some level, it would seem that a conservative social identification is more tied to issues than a liberal one. Interestingly, females have higher identification for both ideologies, which may indicate a greater tendency for women to affiliate with political groups (Elder and Greene 2003; Norrander 1999) The proverbial dog that did not bark is noteworthy as well. Political knowledge came nowhere near statistical significance. Thus it seems safe to conclude identification is not a proxy for the cognitive content/complexity of one's political views. Finally, in keeping with the findings in table 3, the model itself predicting moderate social identity did not even reach statistical significance.

A classic understanding of ideology involves the concept of issue constraint— holding common liberal or conservative views across an array of issues. In table 6, we therefore explore how identity is related to constraint for both liberals and conservatives. The most striking finding of these results is the asymmetry between liberals and

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conservatives. Whereas a liberal identification has a small coefficient and is not

statistically significant in predicting constraint, the conservative model shows identity to

be highly significant, both statistically and substantively, in predicting constraint. This

provides our first clear evidence for the different realities of liberal versus conservative

identity. This relationship becomes even more interesting when dividing the models

based on knowledge (table 7).[2] Among high knowledge liberals, liberal identification

does predict constraint, though not among low knowledge liberals. Given the robust

results for conservative identity, it is not surprising that not just the high knowledge

respondents, but low knowledge conservatives, as well, become more constrained with

greater conservative identification. Additionally, partisanship is a highly significant

predictor in the low knowledge models, but not at all significant in the high knowledge

models. This would seem to suggest that when persons have the political knowledge to

accompany their ideological identification there is a meaningful impact on their

ideological constraint. They are more aware of "what goes with what" in terms of

ideology and issues. Given the fact that "conservative" ideology seems to be discussed in

a positive light much more commonly in mass media (especially cable television and talk

radio), and conservative politicians are more willing to embrace that identity and

proclaim their issue positions in that light, it may be that this knowledge threshold is

simply lower for conservatives.

Perhaps the best test of whether social identity theory can help us better

understand ideology is by using "Liberal" and "Conservative" feeling thermometers as

dependent variables. Assuming that the feeling thermometers present a generalized

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[2] Low knowledge respondents answered 3 or fewer political knowledge question correctly. High
knowledge respondents answered at least 4 of the 5 questions correctly.

assessment of the social groups "liberals" and "conservatives," we should expect to see clear in-group and out-group effects based on respondents' strength of ideological social identification. In table 8, this is exactly what we find. There is strong and clear evidence of both in-group favoritism and out-group derogation based upon the strength of a liberal or conservative social identification. Importantly, these effects are not just a matter of partisanship, or ideology as issue attitudes, as we control for these rival factors along with our other political and demographic controls. In addition to being highly statistically significant, the results are quite substantively significant as well. For example, moving from minimum to maximum liberal identification would result in an approximate 37 point increase on the "liberals" feeling thermometer. The in-group effect among conservatives is even stronger, leading to a potential range of 45 points on the "conservative" feeling thermometer. In keeping with social identity theory, we also find significant out-group derogation effects that are strong, but smaller in magnitude than in-group favoritism. These results strongly suggest that both liberal and conservative social identifications are quite real and have the expected impact on political thinking that social identity theory predicts. Additionally, given that it is not a very high knowledge threshold to recognize that a conservative identity should lead to support for "conservatives," these same models run separately for low and high knowledge respondents (not shown) do not show any prominent knowledge effects and find the same in-group and out-group biases for both high and low knowledge respondents.

"Conservatives" and "Liberals" feeling thermometers present obvious targets to assess in-group and out-group biases based on ideological identification. In order to more broadly examine how ideological self-identification may affect political attitudes,

we ran similar regression models to those in table 8, but with George Bush, Democratic Party, and Republican Party feeling thermometers as dependent variables (table 9). Insofar as ideologies are increasingly clearly tied to a particular political party (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998) we should likely expect similar in-group and out-group biases, though to less of a degree than with liberal and conservative feeling thermometers. The expected impact on the Bush ratings is a little less clear, as President Bush is clearly much more associated with the Republican party, per se, than with political conservatism. Additionally, Bush does not represent an in or out-*group*, but rather an individual who can be perceived according to a variety of political classifications (e.g., Republican, president, conservative, individual, etc.).

The results in table 9 provide considerable support for our expectations. On the Republican and Democratic feeling thermometers, there is strong evidence of both in-group favoritism and out-group derogation based upon conservative and liberal social identifications. Again, it is important to note that this occurs while controlling for partisanship and issue-based ideology. The coefficients follow the same pattern as previously, in that in-group favoritism is stronger than negative out-group sentiment. Interestingly, the issue summary plays a significant role in out-group negativity, but not positive in-group feelings. Finally, it does seem that George Bush presents a much less obvious target of in-group and out-group sentiment. Liberal identification does lead to a significantly more negative assessment of Bush, but the magnitude is much less than the negative effect on attitudes towards the Republican party and Conservatives. Surprisingly, a conservative social identification does not appear to have any impact on Bush's feeling thermometer. Though we have no clear explanation, it may be that many

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conservatives are essentially disowning Bush as a "true Conservative" given his generally failed presidency.

Table 10 and 11 replicate the analyses in table 9, first for high knowledge respondents and then for low knowledge respondents. These results clearly reinforce the mediating factor of political sophistication in the impact of an ideological social identity. In the high knowledge condition, where respondents presumably understand that Republicans and President Bush are generally conservative and that Democrats are liberal, we see consistent, quite statistically significant in-group and out-group bias effects (table 10). In the low sophistication condition (table 11), in contrast, the only significant effect for an identity is a conservative identification predicting Republican in-group attitudes. It would seem that without much political knowledge, respondents do not perceive Bush or the parties as relevant in or out-groups. Again, we believe the best explanation for this is that due to the realities of the political environment, there is a basic asymmetry in which less political sophistication and interest is required to make the cognitive connection between conservative identification and Republican party support.

Finally, after 11 tables, we believe it is worth mentioning some of the results we have not shown. Those who label themselves "moderate" (27% in our sample and 26% in the 2004 NES) are quite distinct from those who choose a liberal or conservative label. In short, there appears to be little, if any, moderate social identification. The one regression model we have shown with moderate identity (table 4) is quite representative. In general, nothing much predicts a moderate identity and moderate identity has virtually no predictive power over any of the political variables we examined. Furthermore, those moderates who were forced to choose whether they were liberal or conservative and then

complete a matching social identity scale were clearly deficient in having any true liberal or conservative identity. When we re-ran our models selecting only those respondents who first identified as moderate but then had to complete a liberal or conservative identity scale, we simply did not find the same in-group and out-group effects. In fact, not a single such model even proved to have overall statistical significance. In sum, Moderates are all over the place on issues (no consistency, no constraint); they do not identify strongly with other moderates (or liberals or conservatives, if forced to choose); they do not display the same positive or negative affect toward liberals or conservatives on feeling thermometers-- they simply do not see these as in-groups or out-groups. It seems that, to a considerable degree, moderates really are outside of the ideological polarization between liberals and conservatives. Unlike leaning independents on partisanship, they don't seem to behave like ideologues in practice, and they do not genuinely adopt a liberal or conservative identity if we try to force them to. Political "moderates," a good quarter of the population, are very much their own political animal and cannot be as readily explained within the liberal-conservative dichotomy as we would like.

Discussion

Though this is admittedly a first, exploratory study, we believe that it offers a number of worthwhile theoretical and empirical contributions to our understanding of ideology in the contemporary political context. Most prominently, ideology is not just a set of positions on issues, or even an attitude towards a symbolic concept, but a unique and important identification with other liberals or other conservatives. "Liberal" and

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"conservative" themselves represent psychological groups to which many persons have a sense of belonging. Moderates, in contrast, are characterized by a lack of psychological belonging with either moderates or liberals/conservatives. Social identity theory, thus, gives a well-grounded social-psychological basis for understanding the ways in which ideology does not simply describe a constellation of issue positions, but is nonetheless a personally relevant and important political referent for many citizens.

Our results demonstrate that by conceiving of and measuring this social identity component of ideology, we can understand and predict political phenomena in ways unique to this theory. Most prominently, we are able to demonstrate how ideological self-identification shapes views not just towards ideological in-groups and out-groups, but towards both parties as well, and even prominent political figures, i.e., the president, depending upon the context. In our consistent finding that in-group favoritism outweighed the magnitude of out-group derogation, we find that, as far as ideology goes, politics is more about the "us" than the "them."

Our results also fit into the bigger picture of placing our understanding of politics into the group context. As demonstrated with partisanship both in the United States (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Greene 2005) and elsewhere (Duck, Hogg, and Terry 1995; Kelly 1998), politics is not just about our attitudes towards political objects, but our sense of identification with group objects as well. To the extent that political discourse is framed in terms of partisan and ideological differences, citizens will respond with group identifications and loyalties. Understanding the nature and impact of these political identities is therefore an essential element in our study of political attitudes and behavior.

Conclusion

Though we believe we present a compelling case for the contribution of social identity theory to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of ideology, there are clearly some very important caveats to the present research. Although there is no reason to doubt the validity of the relationships we discuss here, we are realistically dealing with a sample from but two populations of college students. If anything, we believe our results would probably be stronger in a nationally-representative adult sample, yet we appreciate the need to be cautious in our conclusions short of such a sample. A clear first step in extending this research is to validate and extend these findings with an appropriate national sample. Additionally, the present study took place outside a campaign/electoral context and did not include any measures of political behavior. Presumably, the ultimate test of the importance of the social identity perspective to ideology is how it may help us better understand attitudes and behavior—especially voting—at election time.

Though it has been beyond the scope the present research, our findings plainly suggest that political scientists need to do more to understand just what our traditional seven-point ideology measure is really getting at. Though not quite as influential or ubiquitous as the classic partisanship scale, the ideology scale remains central to a vast array of research into American political behavior. Yet this scale does not directly measure a fundamental aspect of ideology—ideology as social identification. Future efforts examining the nature of contemporary American ideology would be well-served to consider the role for social identification in how we understand both the measurement and use of ideology.

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Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

	Liberal Identity	Conservative Identity	Moderate Identity
Mean	4.19	4.50	3.89
Std Deviation	1.10	1.10	.73
25%	3.50	3.875	3.40
Median	4.25	4.50	3.875
75%	4.875	5.25	4.25
Number	296	370	137

Table 2
Mean Differences in Social Identification by Ideology

Ideology	Liberal Social ID Mean	Conservative Social ID Mean
Extremely Liberal	5.23	
Liberal	4.51	
Slightly Liberal	3.64	
Slightly Conservative		3.87
Conservative		4.84
Extremely Conservative		5.35

Liberal Social ID by Ideology ANOVA (2,289) $F = 49.55$, $p < .001$
Conservative Social ID by Ideology ANOVA (2,367) $F = 64.07$, $p < .001$
Mean differences between Liberal and Conservative ideology categories are also statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level.

Table 3
Liberal, Moderate, and Conservative Social Identity Correlations

	Liberal Social ID	Moderate Social ID	Conservative Social ID
Ideology	-.51*	.14	.50*
Party ID	-.49*	.02	.49*
Issues scale	-.32*	-.03	.42*
Iraq issues	.29*	.02	-.40*
Government services	.24*	-.02	-.25*
Guaranteed job	-.17*	.04	.13*
Aid to blacks	-.18*	.02	.24*
Universal health care	-.19*	-.06	.23*
Defense spending	-.25*	-.15	.24*
Environment vs. jobs	-.15*	-.01	.27*
Gay marriage	-.11	-.01	.26*
Abortion	-.08	.03	.27*

*Statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level

Table 4
Predictors of Self-Placement on 7-point Ideology Scale

	Ideology Scale Liberals	Ideology Scale Conservatives	Ideology Scale Moderates
Liberal Social ID	-.24*** (.04)	--	--
Conservative Social ID	--	.29*** (.03)	--
Moderate Social ID	--	--	.04** (.02)
Issues scale	.22*** (.04)	.07* (.04)	-.001 (.02)
Iraq issues	-.17 (.14)	-.15* (.09)	.09** (.04)
Party ID	.05 (.03)	.01 (.03)	.02** (.01)
Religiosity	.02 (.03)	.06** (.03)	.003 (.01)
Female	-.13* (.07)	-.07 (.06)	-.01 (.02)
Nonwhite	-.27*** (.08)	.11 (.11)	.02 (.03)
School	.18* (.09)	.14 (.14)	-.003 (.04)
Constant	2.91*** (.37)	3.94*** (.30)	3.64*** (.12)
Adjusted R^2	.42	.33	.05
N	275	346	119

*p < .10   **p < .05   ***p < .01
Cell entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

Table 5
Predictors of Liberal, Moderate, and Conservative Social Identification

	Liberal Social ID	Moderate Social ID	Conservative Social ID
Government services	.07	-.06	-.08**
	(.05)	(.06)	(.04)
Guaranteed jobs	-.02	.04	-.04
	(.04)	(.05)	(.04)
Aid to blacks	-.02	.04	.08**
	(.04)	(.05)	(.03)
Universal health care	.001	-.07	.01
	(.04)	(.05)	(.03)
Defense spending	-.06	-.12**	.002
	(.04)	(.05)	(.04)
Environment vs. jobs	-.03	.00	.07**
	(.05)	(.05)	(.03)
Gay marriage	.21	-.28	.17
	(.22)	(.19)	(.10)
Abortion	-.01	-.01	.04*
	(.04)	(.04)	(.025)
Iraq issues	.29	-.11	-.37**
	(.24)	(.24)	(.15)
Female	.23*	.03	.25**
	(.12)	(.15)	(.10)
Nonwhite	-.08	-.13	.19
	(.13)	(.18)	(.17)
Religiosity	-.06	.15**	.04
	(.06)	(.07)	(.05)
Political knowledge	-.03	.01	-.04
	(.06)	(.06)	(.04)
Political interest	.24***	.09	.19***
	(.08)	(.08)	(.06)
Party ID	-.29***	.02	.28***
	(.05)	(.05)	(.04)
Constant	3.43***	4.12***	2.50***
	(.71)	(.75)	(.57)
Adjusted R^2	.28	.00	.34
N	264	116	342

*p < .10   **p < .05   ***p < .01
Cell entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

Table 6
Predictors of Liberal and Conservative Ideological Constraint

	Liberal Constraint	Conservative Constraint
Liberal Social ID	.09	--
	(.10)	
Conservative Social ID	--	.51***
		(.10)
Party ID	-.33***	.32***
	(.08)	(.08)
Political knowledge	.17**	.17**
	(.09)	(.08)
Political interest	.08	.29**
	(.12)	(.11)
Religiosity	-.29***	.17**
	(.08)	(.08)
Female	-.15	-.41**
	(.19)	(.18)
Nonwhite	-.32	-.48
	(.21)	(.34)
School	.22	-.30
	(.25)	(.43)
Constant	5.05***	-.97
	(.68)	(.73)
Adjusted R^2	.20	.29
N	275	345

*p < .10   **p < .05   ***p < .01
Cell entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

Table 7
Predictors of Liberal and Conservative Ideological Constraint
By Level of Political Knowledge

	Liberal Constraint		Conservative Constraint	
	High Knowledge	Low Knowledge	High Knowledge	Low Knowledge
Liberal Social ID	.33** (.14)	-.16 (.14)	--	--
Conservative Social ID	--	--	.64*** (.15)	.41*** (.14)
Party ID	-.06 (.13)	-.50*** (.10)	.22 (.16)	.36*** (.10)
Political knowledge	.46* (.25)	-.17 (.18)	-.23 (.27)	.16 (.16)
Political interest	.07 (.17)	.12 (.17)	.54*** (.17)	.09 (.16)
Religiosity	-.37*** (.11)	-.19 (.12)	.11 (.12)	.25** (.12)
Female	-.21 (.24)	.10 (.29)	-.50* (.28)	-.34 (.24)
Nonwhite	-.27 (.29)	-.40 (.31)	-.57 (.55)	-.37 (.44)
School	.33 (.33)	.10 (.40)	-.41 (.75)	-.25 (.54)
Constant	2.60* (1.38)	6.71*** (1.02)	.33 (1.60)	-.47 (1.02)
Adjusted R^2	.16	.17	.29	.23
N	146	129	160	185

*p < .10   **p < .05   ***p < .01
Cell entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

Table 8
Liberals and Conservatives Feeling Thermometers

	Liberals Feeling Thermometer		Conservatives Feeling Thermometer	
	Ingroup	*Outgroup*	*Ingroup*	*Outgroup*
Liberal Social ID	6.21*** (1.02)	--	--	-5.77*** (1.20)
Conservative Social ID	--	-4.60*** (1.17)	7.60*** (.90)	--
Issues scale	-3.70*** (1.20)	-6.35*** (1.34)	3.22*** (1.03)	4.71*** (1.41)
Iraq issues scale	1.70 (3.85)	3.35 (3.07)	-3.72 (2.37)	-11.31** (4.53)
Party ID	-2.12** (.86)	-1.93* (.99)	3.12*** (.77)	-.56 (1.01)
Political knowledge	.44 (.89)	1.60* (.89)	-.58 (.68)	-.63 (1.05)
Political interest	-1.19 (1.28)	-1.00 (1.31)	-2.26** (1.01)	-1.31 (1.50)
Religiosity	-1.32 (.83)	-.89 (.93)	.71 (.72)	2.09** (.98)
Female	1.73 (1.90)	2.10 (2.10)	-2.07 (1.60)	-.30 (2.23)
Nonwhite	-1.67 (2.17)	9.97** (3.93)	-.10 (3.03)	-.61 (2.56)
School	-.50 (2.60)	-10.13** (4.91)	-3.60 (3.79)	-2.83 (3.05)
Constant	70.75*** (10.85)	93.19*** (11.04)	28.80*** (8.51)	68.33*** (12.77)
Adjusted R^2	.31	.28	.44	.25
N	274	345	345	274

*p < .10   **p < .05   ***p < .01
Cell entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

Table 9
Bush, Republicans, and Democrats Feeling Thermometers

	Bush Feeling Thermometer		Republicans Feeling Thermometer		Democrats Feeling Thermometer	
	Ingroup	*Outgroup*	*Ingroup*	*Outgroup*	*Ingroup*	*Outgroup*
Liberal Social ID	--	-2.22***	--	-4.02***	2.70***	--
		(1.16)		(1.29)	(.96)	
Conservative Social ID	1.93	--	6.56***	--	--	-2.51**
	(1.18)		(.92)			(1.20)
Issues scale	3.42**	3.19**	1.01	4.14***	-.92	-6.54***
	(1.34)	(1.36)	(1.05)	(1.52)	(1.13)	(1.37)
Iraq issues scale	-25.16***	-30.45***	-8.50***	-14.61***	2.51	.003
	(3.08)	(4.39)	(2.41)	(4.90)	(3.64)	(3.13)
Party ID	6.64***	3.03***	8.02***	2.92***	-7.46	-6.24***
	(.96)	(.98)	(.78)	(1.09)	(.81)	(1.01)
Political knowledge	-1.24	-.58	-1.98***	-.72	-1.10	.85
	(.89)	(1.02)	(.70)	(1.14)	(.84)	(.91)
Political interest	-1.91	-1.42	-2.66**	-.92	1.48	.13
	(1.31)	(1.45)	(1.02)	(1.62)	(1.20)	(1.33)
Religiosity	2.01**	.28	.27	1.49	.37	-.10
	(.94)	(.95)	(.73)	(1.06)	(.79)	(.95)
Female	5.16**	2.74	.56	2.05	.17	-.02
	(2.08)	(2.16)	(1.62)	(2.41)	(1.79)	(2.11)
Nonwhite	3.02	-2.72	-.09	-1.68	-1.16	7.04*
	(3.94)	(2.47)	(3.08)	(2.76)	(2.05)	(4.00)
School	-3.99	-5.76*	-.07	-.33	-.89	-7.45
	(4.93)	(2.95)	(3.85)	(3.29)	(2.45)	(5.01)
Constant	47.15***	82.86***	25.92***	64.29***	69.61***	111.61***
	(11.07)	(12.35)	(8.65)	(13.80)	(10.25)	(11.26)
Adjusted R²	.48	.38	.57	.27	.42	.34
N	345	274	.45	274	274	345

*p < .10 **p < .05 ***p < .01

Cell entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

Table 10
Bush, Republicans, and Democrats Feeling Thermometers – High Political Knowledge

	Bush Feeling Thermometer		Republicans Feeling Thermometer		Democrats Feeling Thermometer	
	Ingroup	*Outgroup*	*Ingroup*	*Outgroup*	*Ingroup*	*Outgroup*
Liberal Social ID	--	-4.15** (1.58)	--	-5.40*** (1.74)	5.95*** (1.30)	--
Conservative Social ID	3.87** (1.64)	--	6.59*** (1.36)	--	--	-3.47* (1.75)
Issues scale	2.18 (1.81)	1.17 (1.70)	1.23 (1.50)	4.53** (1.87)	-.13 (1.40)	-7.38*** (1.93)
Iraq issues scale	-25.91*** (4.31)	-26.48*** (6.15)	-7.41** (3.56)	-12.58* (6.75)	-3.18 (5.05)	-.95 (4.59)
Party ID	6.54*** (1.68)	1.07 (1.37)	8.26*** (1.29)	3.70** (1.51)	-5.28*** (1.13)	-4.61** (1.79)
Political knowledge	-3.06 (2.78)	-2.59 (2.70)	-2.72 (2.30)	-2.16 (2.97)	-3.99* (2.22)	.74 (2.97)
Political interest	-.74 (1.78)	-2.39 (1.89)	-3.15** (1.47)	-.39 (2.07)	1.82 (1.55)	.56 (1.90)
Religiosity	2.78** (1.20)	-.54 (1.24)	-.52 (.99)	.15 (1.36)	1.20 (1.01)	-.19 (1.28)
Female	6.16** (2.83)	-.18 (2.64)	2.04 (2.34)	1.82 (2.90)	-1.51 (2.17)	-1.46 (3.02)
Nonwhite	-.52 (5.70)	1.05 (3.20)	-4.37 (4.71)	-1.26 (3.51)	-4.97* (2.63)	9.26 (6.07)
School	-5.17 (7.68)	-8.99** (3.59)	8.82 (6.35)	3.35 (3.94)	7.32** (2.95)	14.98* (8.19)
Constant	48.29** (19.80)	109.88*** (20.13)	19.31 (16.37)	68.03*** (22.10)	63.45*** (16.53)	88.45*** (21.11)
Adjusted R^2	.56	.28	.61	.30	.42	.35
N	160	146	160	146	146	160

*$p < .10$ **$p < .05$ ***$p < .01$

Cell entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

Table 11
Bush, Republicans, and Democrats Feeling Thermometers – Low Political Knowledge

	Bush Feeling Thermometer		Republicans Feeling Thermometer		Democrats Feeling Thermometer	
	Ingroup	*Outgroup*	*Ingroup*	*Outgroup*	*Ingroup*	*Outgroup*
Liberal Social ID	--	-2.05 (1.71)	--	-2.75 (2.04)	.42 (1.38)	--
Conservative Social ID	.17 (1.80)	--	6.35*** (1.37)	--	--	-1.67 (1.73)
Issues scale	4.21** (2.03)	5.67** (2.25)	.84 (1.54)	4.32 (2.70)	-.47 (1.83)	-6.47*** (1.94)
Iraq issues scale	-23.64*** (4.45)	-29.10*** (6.21)	-9.18*** (3.38)	-16.29** (7.43)	3.88 (5.03)	-.42 (4.27)
Party ID	6.37*** (1.34)	3.63** (1.45)	7.72*** (1.02)	2.52 (1.73)	-8.43*** (1.17)	-7.47*** (1.29)
Political knowledge	.73 (1.95)	-4.87** (2.25)	-.73 (1.48)	-1.63 (2.70)	1.84 (1.83)	2.08 (1.86)
Political interest	-2.11 (1.96)	-.15 (2.15)	-2.21 (1.48)	-1.36 (2.57)	.66 (1.74)	-.27 (1.87)
Religiosity	1.28 (1.45)	2.40* (1.44)	.87 (1.10)	3.10* (1.72)	-.64 (1.17)	-.19 (1.39)
Female	3.76 (3.04)	7.90** (3.49)	-.15 (2.31)	2.74 (4.10)	1.20 (2.83)	1.79 (2.92)
Nonwhite	6.76 (5.57)	-8.13** (3.79)	2.18 (4.22)	-3.05 (4.53)	4.59 (3.07)	3.09 (5.33)
School	-2.40 (6.71)	-5.59 (4.87)	-3.24 (5.08)	-5.43 (5.83)	-9.09** (3.95)	-19.34*** (6.42)
Constant	47.54*** (16.42)	70.43*** (17.87)	27.76** (12.45)	67.01*** (21.38)	80.34*** (14.48)	125.36*** (15.73)
Adjusted R^2	.40	.47	.53	.19	.50	.36
N	185	128	185	128	128	185

*p < .10   **p < .05   ***p < .01

Cell entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.