

What Determines the Liberal-Conservative Orientations of College Students? A Comparative Study of Two Universities

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This paper tests the impact of socialization variables- the family, in-school environment, and out-of-school environment- on students' liberal-conservative orientations at two midsize public universities located in the red state of Arkansas and the blue state of Illinois. Using survey data from up to 889 students as well as relying on a cross-sectional research design and OLS estimators, we find evidence that the family is the most important determinant of students' liberal-conservatism. The data also suggest that mothers tend to have greater impact on students' political values than do fathers. In addition, in-school- and out-of-school environments seem to have some influence on students' liberal-conservative orientations. On the other hand, regional variation seems to have some but weak impact on students' political orientations. A notable finding of this study is that instead of just "liberalizing," a majority of students has actually become more moderate than liberal.

This paper intends to contribute to our understanding of political orientation by conducting a comparative study of the liberal and conservative values of students pursuing their education at two midsize public universities in the red state of Arkansas and the blue state of Illinois. To the best of our knowledge, few, if any, studies have conducted such a comparative study in the United States. We hypothesize that the main factors that influence the variation in students' liberal-conservatism *within* and *between* our two universities are socialization variables- the family, in-school environment, and out-of-school environment. Using survey data of up to 889 students and relying on a cross-sectional research design, we find evidence that the family is the most important determinant of students' liberal-conservatism. The data also suggest that mothers tend to have greater impact on students' political values than do fathers. In addition, in-school

environment and out-of-school environment tend to have some influence on students' liberal-conservatism. Moreover, regional variation seems to have some but weak impact on students' political orientations. A notable finding and contribution of this study is that "rather than "liberalizing," a majority of students (contrary to much of previous findings) has actually become more moderate than liberal. Survey data we have used from the American National Election Studies (ANES) and the General Social Survey (GSS) for the same age- and college-enrolled group seem to corroborate the foregoing finding.

Introduction

Scholarship dealing with the political orientation of college students has a long history. One of the earliest studies was conducted by Theodore M. Newcomb in the 1930s. Relying on a sample of 525 female students at Bennington College, Newcomb (1943; see also Newcomb, Koeing, Flacks, and Warwick, 1967; Alwin, Cohen, and Newcomb, 1991) found that the majority held more liberal values by the time of graduation than when admitted as freshmen.

Dey, Astin, and Korn (1991; see also Dey, 1996) relied on a more extensive survey data of college freshmen, from 1966 to 1990, to examine students' political orientations. The data that they used, compiled by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), had an annual sample size of about 250,000 students studying at about 600 U.S. colleges. Dey, Astin, and Korn (1991, p. 16) reported that the percentage of liberals and the far left was as high as 38.1 % in 1971 but dipped to 24.4% in 1990. Conversely, college students who claimed to have conservative and far right political orientation rose from 14.5% in 1973 to somewhere between 18.7% and 22.8 % between 1973 and 1990. Dey et al. (1991, p. 17) also found that the percentage of moderate students ranged from 45.5% in 1970 to 60.3% in 1983, but declined to 54.7% in 1990.

More recently, relying on the 1999 CIRP Freshman Survey and the 2003 College Student Survey (N=6,807), Mariani and Hewitt (2008, p. 777) found that although there were more freshmen identifying themselves as conservative or far right and liberal or far left, the former group outnumbered the latter by 8% at the time of graduation.

However, relying on the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education pre-college survey data, administered to students of 11 liberal arts and 6 non-liberal arts institutions in fall 2006 and a follow-up study of the

same groups in spring 2010 (N = 2,159), Hanson et al. (2012, p. 361) found that the liberal arts students not only started with higher level of liberal values, the average gain made by the same group was also 0.20 standard deviation about twice as high as the gain made by the non-liberal arts students.

On the other hand, Dey (1997, p. 409-410; see also Dey, p. 1996) used annual survey data from CIRP, with about 25,000 freshmen attending as many as 379 institutions from 1966 to 1991, to examine students' political orientations. He found that "rather than liberalizing," students studying at liberal institutions became more liberal while those pursuing their education at conservative institutions held more conservative values.

Finally, to Dodson (2014; see also Bailey and Williams, 2016), college tends to moderate students' political values. Specifically, "While conservative students do become more liberal as a result of academic involvement, liberals become more conservative as a result of their academic involvement" (Dodson, 2014, p. 156).

In sum, although much of the research seems to suggest that college students tend to hold more liberal values (Hyman, 1959; Feldman and Newcomb, 1969; Ladd and Lipset, 1975; Astin, 1977; 1993; Niemi, Ross, and Alexander, 1978; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991, p. 2005), recent findings (ex: Dodson, 2014; Mariani and Hewitt, 2008) have disputed such results. In other words, the impact of college on students' liberal-conservatism remains open.

Determinants of College Political Orientation

We hypothesize that the family, in-school environment (pre-college and college experience), and out-of-school environment (ex: church, peers, and the media) significantly determine the political values of college students.

The family is considered one of the most important factors in influencing the political orientation of pre-adults (Hyman 1959; Easton and Hess, 1962; Jennings and Niemi, 1968; Tedin, 1974; Lorence and Mortimer, 1979; Dalton, 1980; Weidman, 1989; Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers, 2009; Hanson et al., 2012). Parent to children political transmission is especially strong in politically active households (Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers, 2009,

p. 787) and when both parents share similar political values (see Hyman, 1959, p. 59). According to Easton and Hess (1962, p. 238), by the age of 12 or 13, a child is capable of learning about complex issues like democracy, voting, and freedom of speech. Many others, however, argue that adolescence (when students are in high school) is when the parent-child political transmission occurs (Lipset et al., 1954; Jennings and Niemi, 1968). By the last year of high school, parent-to-child political-orientation transmission is said to be maximal (Hyman, 1959, p. 46). And at the age of 18, most college freshmen are expected to firmly hold political values passed from their parents (Hyman, 1959; Niemi, Ross, and Alexander, 1978; Mariani and Hewitt, 2008, p. 778; Jennings, Stoker, and Bower, 2009, p. 793). Similarly, Lipset et al. (1954, p. 1146) have argued that the first vote of 18-year-olds is likely to be affected by their parents' political orientation.

As children get older, however, they face influences from outside the home that could make their political beliefs different from their parents (Lipset et al. 1954, p. 1145; see also Hyman, 1959, p. 78). Such changes seem to start occurring in pre-college years (Hyman, 1959, p. 46; Easton and Hess, 1962, p. 235; Tedin, 1974, p. 1582; see also Stouffer, 1963). In addition, variation in parent-child political orientations seems to be observed at the college level (Newcomb, 1943; Hyman, 1959, p. 104; Niemi et al., 1978; Bowen, 1978). In college, in-school environment may include influences coming from faculty, student peers, major field of study, and type of institutions (see Ladd and Lipset, 1975; Lorence and Mortimer, 1979; Weidman, 1989; Dey, 1996, p. 1997). For instance, Mariani and Hewitt (2008) have found that faculty members tend to be predominantly liberal. If so, college students' liberal-conservative orientations may be in part influenced by faculty members' political values (Newcomb, 1943; Ladd and Lipset, 1975; Astin, 1993, p. 150; Dey, 1996; 1997).¹ The influence of faculty on college students' liberalism seems particularly stronger in liberal arts institutions, where the interaction between students and professors tend to be higher and area of studies like humanities and social sciences are emphasized in classrooms (Hanson et al., 2012, p. 366; see also Feldman and Newcomb, 1969; Ladd and Lipset, 1975; Astin, 1977; Weidman, 1989). Specifically, major-field studies, such as sociology, anthropology, and political science, which deal with social issues are believed to be related to college student liberalism more than those like engineering and agriculture that encourage students to interact with conservative business groups

¹ However, Mariani and Hewitt (2008, p. 778) contend that faculty liberalism is not significantly related to student liberalism.

(Feldman and Newcomb, 1969; Ladd and Lipset, 1975, p. 68; Weidman, 1989; Astin, 1993; Hanson et al., 2012). In addition, it is argued that college student liberalism “is associated with attending prestigious institutions” (Astin, 1977, p. 38; Dey, 1997). Elite or prestigious institutions have relatively liberal subcultures that attract a liberal-left faculty (Ladd and Lipset, 1975, p. 91). Furthermore, student-to-student or peer interaction may have some influence on college students’ political values (Feldman and Newcomb, 1969; Dey, 1996; 1997; Hanson et al., 2012, p. 357). For instance, Niemi, Ross, and Alexander (1978, p. 512) found that compared to non-college youths, college students tended to be slightly more liberal. Dodson (2014), on the other hand, has found that college experience tends to moderate students’ political orientation.

A third attribute of college student socialization seems to be out-of-school environment, including, the media, the church, and society as a whole. The mass media seems to play a role in impacting the political values of children and adults by highlighting certain issues that should be placed in the public agenda (Easton and Hess, 1962; Jennings and Niemi, 1968; Fleishman, 1986, p. 510; Weidman, 1989). Others contend that institutions like the church play a role in making people hold liberal or conservative values (Easton and Hess, 1962; Tedin, 1974; Astin, 1977; Jennings et al., 2009). For instance, whereas Judaism and Catholicism are considered to have some association with the liberal beliefs of college students in the U.S., Protestantism is assumed to have some role in instilling conservative social values (Braungart, 1971, p. 120; Tedin, 1974, p. 1581; Ladd and Lipset, 1975, p. 20; Astin, 1977, p. 37). Moreover, society as a whole may have some influence on college students’ liberal-conservative orientations. According to Dey (1997, p. 406; 1996), some of the variation in college student liberalism or conservatism seem to be attributable to parallel changes in American society’s liberalism or conservatism. Astin (1993, p. 148) even goes as far saying that rather than college attendance, changes in societal political orientations explain changes in political orientations of college freshmen.

Other possible predictors of college students’ political orientations include freshman-senior status, GPA, gender, race/ethnicity, family income, and urban-rural family residence. While seniors are considered more liberal than freshmen (Newcomb, 1943; Astin, 1977; Dey, 1997), high school GPA or ACT is believed to have some positive influence on college student political liberalism (Dey, 1996; 1997; Hanson et al., 2012). In addition, Astin (1977, p.

37) has found that male college students are more liberal than females. However, Dey (1997) and Mariani and Hewitt (2008, p. 778) observe that female students tend to be more liberal than do their male counterparts. It is also found that African American college students tend to be predominantly liberal compared to their white cohorts (Braungart, 1971; Astin, 1977; Dey, 1996; 1997; Hanson et al., 2012). Moreover, greater family income tends to be related to college student political conservatism (Mariani and Hewitt, 2008, p. 778; see also Braungart, 1971; Tedin, 1974; Lorence and Mortimer, 1979; Jennings et al., 2009). Finally, it has been argued that liberals prefer to live in cities, where ethnic diversity is greater, whereas conservatives like to reside in rural areas or small towns with relatively homogenous communities (Dimock et al., 2014, p. 45; see also Walks, 2004; Gainsborough, 2005).

Hypotheses, Data, and Model Specification

We formulated and tested the following hypotheses in this paper:

H1: Family influences college students' liberal-conservative orientations at University of X and University of Z. Specifically, liberal and conservative parents tend to pass their political orientations to their children, respectively.

H2: In-school environments (ex: teachers, fellow students or peers, and books) will likely make students more liberal at University of X and University of Z.

H3: Out-of-school environments (ex: the media, the church, and the community) will likely have positive influence on student conservatism at University of X and University of Z.

H4: Students pursuing their education in the red state of Arkansas at University of X will likely be less liberal than students attending at the blue state of Illinois at University of Z. We assume that region is, in large part, a proxy for the socialization variables that we are testing in H1 and H3 as well as the school peers in H2. In other words, H4 is intended to indirectly test the impact of socialization variables on the political orientations of students pursuing their education at the two universities in the states of Arkansas and Illinois.

We relied on survey data with a sample size of up to 889 that we administered at University of X and University of Z in Spring and Fall 2015

and Spring 2016 to test our hypotheses.² Specifically, we administered in-class surveys to students who attended our own classes and those of other colleagues in our respective universities. We chose these two institutions for two reasons: the first and obvious one is that two of the authors teach at University of X while one of us teach at University of Z. Second, and more importantly, the midsize public universities of X and Z are located in the red state of Arkansas and the blue state of Illinois, which allowed us to control for regional variation in the study of students' liberal-conservative orientations. Of the total sample size of 889, 559 (62.9%) attended at University of X while 330 (37.1%) at University of Z. The percentages of liberal, moderate, and conservative students at both universities were 33%, 42%, and 25%, respectively. Whereas 57.4% of our students were females, 42.6% were males. In addition, the in-state students at the University of X and Z were 91.6% and 93.1%, respectively. Our surveys asked questions pertaining to students' and their parents' political orientations, religiosity, gender, major field of study, party affiliations, issue positions, and other characteristics (see Appendix A for survey instrument). While most of the analyses that we performed in this paper are based on our own survey data, we also used data from the ANES, 2016, and the GSS, 2016, to compare the distribution of political orientation at our universities with that of the 18-22 year olds in the general U.S. population pursuing college education.

Our dependent variable is liberal-conservative orientation of college students. But what do we mean by liberalism and conservatism? It has been argued that defining liberalism and conservatism has been difficult (Smith, 1990, p. 480; Davis, 1992; Dey, 1997; Jost, Federico, and Napier, 2009). To Fleishman (1986, p. 520), the concepts of liberalism and conservatism are not equivalent to political orientation or ideology, as the former are narrower than the latter. For instance, political orientation may include political knowledge, values, and attitudes (Easton and Hess, 1962, p. 234). Others treat liberal and conservative values as aspects or categories of political orientation or ideology (Ladd and Lipset, 1975; Alwin, Cohen, and Newcomb, 1991, p. 77). Dey (1997, p. 339) contends that political attitudes

² Due to missing entries or responses, the maximum sample size that we could actually use in any of our models was 889 or lower. It should also be noted that we were able to decrease the percentage of students who said they "don't know" their own political orientations from 3.9% to 2.9% when we gave them some descriptions and examples of what a "liberal," "moderate," and "conservative" person is before they responded to the survey questions as opposed to when we did not give such guidelines during our initial survey instruments.

(i.e., agreements with specific issues), in addition to liberal and conservative self-identification, are attributes of political orientation [or ideology]. Some others, however, do not treat issues, be they economic or social, as independent entities but as facets or dimensions of liberal-conservative political orientation or ideology (Nie, Verba, and Petrocik, 1976; Lorence and Mortimer, 1979, p. 659; Niemi and Jennings, 1991; Jost, Federico, and Napier, 2009). In addition, Holm and Robinson (1978, p. 242) argue that party identification, besides liberal-conservative values, is a dimension of political orientation. However, while some scholars contend that party identification influences liberal-conservative values (Fleishman, 1986, p. 531), others do not rule out the causal arrow from going the other way around (Levitin and Miller, 1979).

What is less contested by scholars is what liberalism and conservatism refer to. Liberals favor a higher level of governmental intervention in the economy and are open to and supportive of social welfare programs. Conversely, conservatives prefer little or no government intervention in the economy and cherish individual responsibility (Campbell et al. 1964; Conover and Feldman, 1981; Robinson and Fleishman, 1984; Smith, 1990; Davis, 1992; Jost, Federico, and Napier, 2009; Hanson et al., 2012). To Ladd (1976/7, p. 590), "All of the basic understandings of liberal and conservative [ideologies]...revolve around equality." Perhaps it is not just the concern for equality of persons or lack thereof that breeds political conflicts among liberal and conservative citizens of democratic societies. Political conflicts may also arise from disagreeing about the idea of *fairness*, the moral principle that should guide the formulation and implementation of policies appropriate to bring about or maintain a more content society (see also Downs, 1957, p. 112; Rawls, 1999).

In this paper, we will treat liberal-conservative orientation as interchangeable with political orientation or ideology. Historically, scholars have measured liberal-conservative orientation differently either as a dichotomous or a continuous variable, where Likert scales ranging from 3 to 10 points are often used (see Klingemann, 1972; Holm and Robinson, 1978; Levitin and Miller, 1979; Fleishman, 1986; Conover and Feldman, 1981; Robinson and Fleishman, 1984; Sears and Valentino, 1997; Sears and Funk, 1999; Hanson et al., 2012). We measured college students' liberal and conservative orientations by students' self-placement on a 9-point Likert scale. The scale goes from 0 or "Extremely liberal" to 9 or "Extremely conservative," where the in-between categories being "very liberal," "Liberal," Left-leaning moderate," "Moderate," "Right-leaning moderate,"

"Conservative," and "very conservative."³ Our 9-point scale is highly correlated with a 7-point scale ($r = 0.99$) that we formed by combining the "extremely liberal" and "very liberal" as well as the "extremely conservative" and "very conservative," categories, respectively. However, we preferred to use the 9-point scale since it added variability to our dependent variable. Parental liberal-conservative orientation, one of the independent variables, is measured by students' placement of their parents' political orientations on the same 9-point Likert scale. Our survey questions also enabled us to create a second measure of liberal-conservatism with three categories - liberal, moderate, and conservative. Each category is measured dichotomously.⁴

In-school environment and out-of-school environment, the second and third independent variables, are measured by simple "yes" or "no" answers emanating from a survey question that we have rephrased here: if your political orientation did not originate from your parents, did it come from your in-school experience or from your out-of-school environment or both? Our sampling strategy here was to isolate the impact of the family on students' liberal-conservatism from those of in-school- and out-of-school environments.

We have also included nine control variables in our models: a dichotomous age category indicating when students first formed their liberal-conservative views (precollege or college years), major-field of study, freshman-senior status, GPA, gender, ethnicity, religiosity, family income, and urban-rural family residence.⁵ Of the foregoing, major-field of study,

³ While some scholars have used the term "centrist" (Levin and Miller 1979) or "moderate" (see Alwin et al., 1991), to refer to the middle category, others have utilized the phrase "middle of the road" (Ladd and Lipset, 1975; Robinson & Fleishman, 1984; 1988; Dey, 1997; Sears & Funk, 1999; Mariani & Hewitt, 2008; Hanson et al., 2012). We prefer the term "moderate" to "middle of the road," for the latter may imply that today's citizens in democratic countries may not have a good grasp of their political values. Consistent with the foregoing, we prefer the terms "left-leaning moderate" and "right-leaning moderate" to "weak liberal" or "weak conservative." The latter phrases seem to be conducive only when the "middle of the road" category is utilized.

⁴ For the combined data of students' political orientation at the universities of X and Z, the correlation between the 9-point and 3-point scales (the latter specified as liberal, moderate, and conservative) is also very high, $r = 0.87$.

⁵ Other control variables that scholars have referred to but we do not have data for include historically black- and women colleges (Dey, 1997), financial aid based on need and participating

freshman-senior status, and GPA are hypothesized to have some relationship with the in-school environment variable. In addition, religiosity is likely to be one of the attributes of out-of-school environment. Consequently, we will examine whether or not these control variables have similar effects on students' liberal-conservatism.⁶

Given that our main interest is whether college affects students' liberal-conservatism, we specified age as a dichotomous variable. Specifically, forming political orientation by the age of 18 or after are coded 1 and 0, respectively.⁷ We measured freshman-senior status by the number of credit-hours that students accumulated. We measured GPA, gender, and ethnicity by the students' responses to our survey questions pertaining to these variables. While the former is measured as a continuous variable, the latter two are gauged dichotomously. We combined social science, business, science, and humanities subfields and specified each of them dichotomously. Given that our study deals with political orientation, we also elected to gauge the impact of political science majors on the former variable separately.⁸ We measured religiosity by the number of times students claimed to have gone to church, synagogue, or mosque every month. Family income is an ordinal level variable measured by the students' estimates of their parents' combined income: less than \$40,000, between \$40,000 and \$80,000, and greater than \$80,000.⁹ We obtained data for urban-rural family residence from students' responses to the survey question pertaining to this variable. We measured this variable by the population size of cities and towns, where we obtained such data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2015.

We expect that majoring in social sciences (ex: sociology and political science) and humanities (ex: history and English), senior status

in college work-study programs (Astin, 1993), parental education, school climate, and school SES (Jennings et al, 2009).

⁶ We have not observed any multicollinearity problem among our independent variables. The maximum *r* we have obtained is only 0.62, which is the correlation between the political values of our students' parents.

⁷ About 91% of our students claimed that they formed their political orientation by the age of 18 and about 68% by the age of 17.

⁸ The majors of our students at the two universities are well diverse: social science (23%), science (39%), humanities (26%), business (8%), and undeclared (4%). Of the social science majors, 60% of them major in political science.

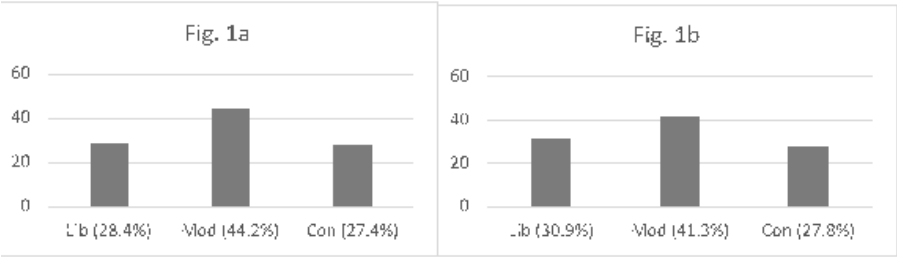
⁹ However, we have measured parental income as a dichotomous variable (low income = 0; high income = 1, and the middle-income family group serves as the baseline). In analysis not shown here, the parental income variable measured as an ordinal variable (low income = 0.5; middle-income = 1; and higher income = 1.5) and included in a fully specified model did not perform any better than when this variable was specified dichotomously.

(higher number of credit hours), being African American, low-family income, and urban dwelling to have positive impact on college students’ liberalism. Conversely, we expect majoring in fields like the sciences and business or any other non-social science and humanities areas, being freshman, religiosity, higher income, and rural family residence to have positive influence on students’ conservatism. Following previous research, we also expect GPA and gender to have positive impact on college students’ liberalism.

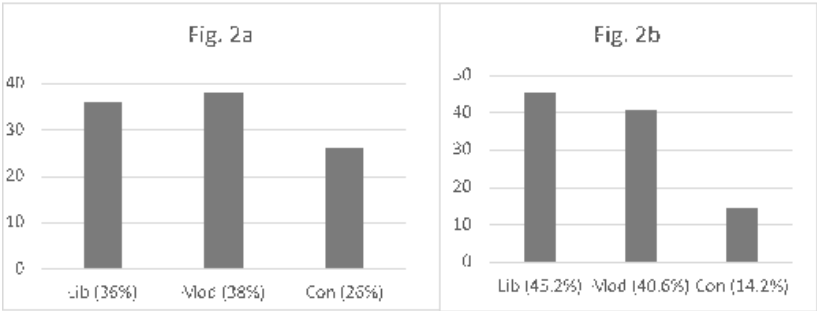
Descriptive Analysis

We first show graphical data for students’ liberal-conservative orientations. As shown in Figures 1a and 1b, a majority of students at University of X claimed to hold moderate values. At University of Z, moderate male students were the majority, but females tended to be more liberal (see Figures 2a and 2b). The percentages of students who claimed to be liberals are higher than conservatives at both universities. The graphs also indicate that male and female students tend to be more conservative at University of X than at University of Z.

Figures 1a & 1b: Male and Female Student Liberal-Conservatism at University of X

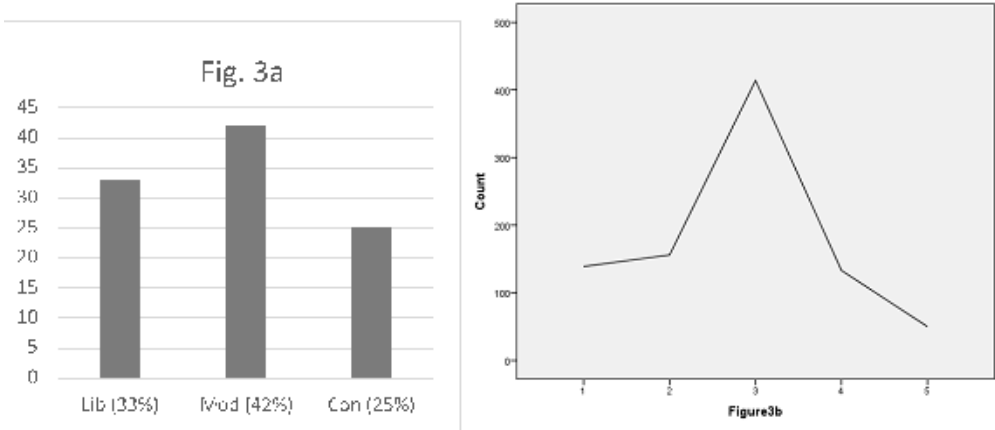


Figures 2a & 2b: Male and Female Student Liberal-Conservatism at University of Z



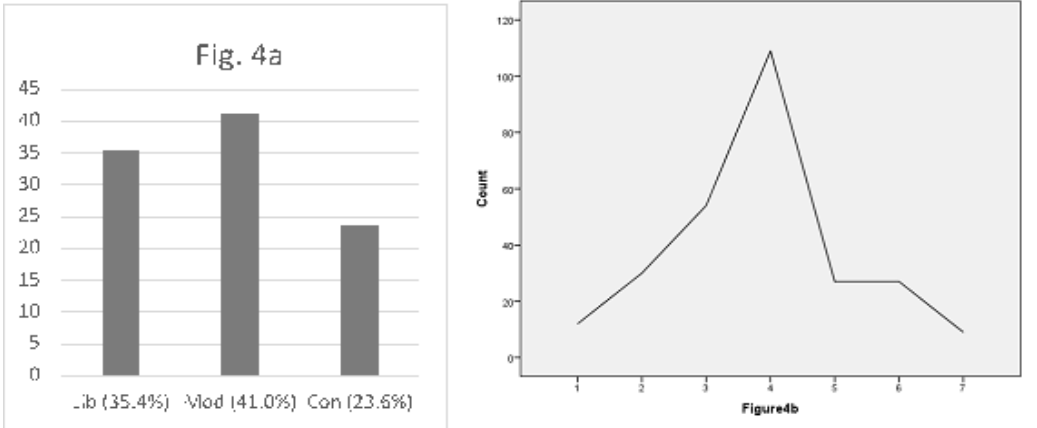
We then combined the political orientation data of students pursuing their education at the two universities. As shown in Figures 3a, the majority of students at the universities of X and Z have claimed to be moderates (42%). Liberals are the second biggest group (33%), and conservatives are the smallest (25%). Thus, “rather than liberalizing [as much of previous studies have contended],” a majority of students report their views as moderate. The trendline shown in Figure 3b also seems to suggest that the moderate political orientation is the mode of the distribution.

Figures 3a & 3b: Student Liberal-Conservatism (U. of X and U. of Z Data Combined)

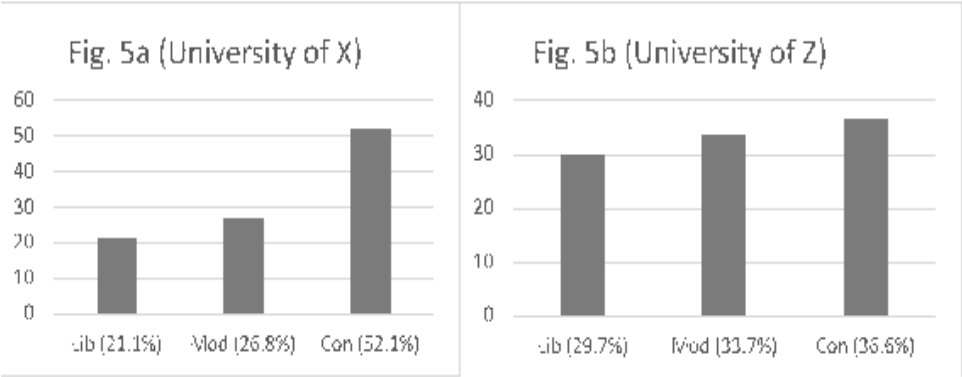


One way of confirming the reliability of our survey responses is to compare them with survey responses from similar or general populations. We used descriptive and graphical methods to determine if our students' distributions of political orientations yield similar results with similar sample groups in the U.S. student population. For the latter groups, we relied on data that we have obtained from the American National Election Studies (ANES) and the General Social Survey (GSS). Figures 4a and 4b show the distribution of political orientations and the trendline for the ANES data for the 18-22 age group pursuing college education in the U.S. And Figures 5a and 4b depict the distribution of political orientations and the trendline for the GSS data for the same age group. The sample size for the ANES data is 73, and the survey was administered in 2016. The sample size for the GSS

Figures 4a & 4b: Political Orientation of 18-22 Year Olds in the United States



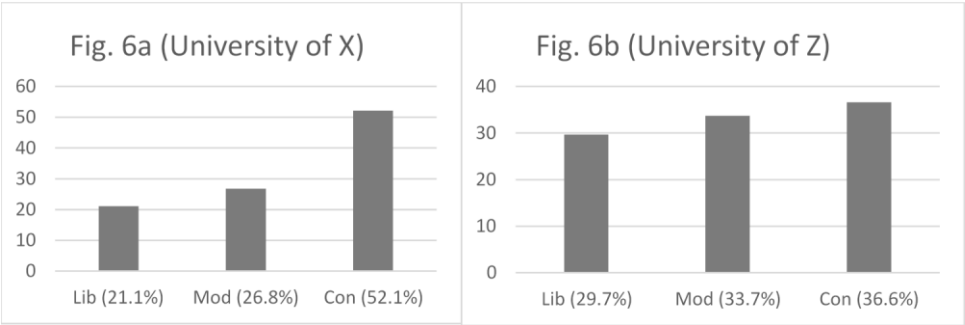
Figures 5a & 5b: Parental Liberal-Conservatism at U. of X and U. of Z



In Figure 6a and 6b, we show the distributions of parental political orientations. Unlike their children, parents of students at the universities of X and Z seem to be more conservative, and the liberal parents are the smallest group. In addition, we can clearly observe that parents in the red state of Arkansas are more conservative (52.1%) than those in the blue state of Illinois (36.6%). data is 94, and the survey was conducted in 2016. It is interesting to observe that the distribution of the students' liberal-conservative orientations at the universities of X and Z (as shown in Figure 3) is consistent with the same age group in the U.S. student population.¹⁰ Interestingly, the trendlines seem to suggest that the distribution of liberal-conservative orientations (measured by a 7-point Likert scale) among the 18-22 year olds in the U.S. student population approximates the normal curve.

¹⁰ In analysis not shown here, we conducted a chi-square test to compare the ANES and GSS data for the 18-22 year olds. We have found that there is no a statistically significant difference between the two datasets, implying that both institutions have produced similar datasets. However, we could not compare our own data with the ANES and GSS datasets since they, due to sample size differences, are not comparable.

Figures 6a & 6 b: Parental Liberal-Conservatism at U. of X and U. of Z



Model Estimation and Analysis

We relied on a cross-sectional research design and ordinary least squares (OLS) estimators to test the impact of socialization on college students’ liberal-conservative orientations. Models 1 through 3, in Table 1, deal with analyses of students’ liberal-conservative orientations at University of X. In Model 1, we show the impact of parents’ political orientation on students’ liberal-conservative values. Both parents’ political orientations have a positively significant impact on students’ political orientation. That is, more conservative parents tend to have more conservative children. Similarly, more liberal parents tend to have more liberal children.¹¹ However, the slope coefficients suggest that mothers tend to have a greater impact on their children’s liberal-conservatism than do fathers. Specifically, for every 1 point of mothers’ conservatism, their children seem to gain 0.40 points of conservatism. And for every 1 point of

¹¹ In an analysis not shown here, we also checked whether both parents’ sharing same political orientations has any more effect on students’ liberal-conservative values. When we included this variable with the separate parental variables in a model, it became significant but it only added 1% to the variance explained in students’ liberal-conservative orientations. In addition, the variance that this variable added to the model is much smaller than what was explained by each of the separate parental variables or that was explained by both parental variables. We also combined the fathers’ and mothers’ political orientation data and created one index of family political values and correlated it with students’ liberal-conservative orientations. However, this variable did not have a higher correlation with students’ liberal-conservatism than the separate or additive family political orientation data.

fathers’ conservatism, their children tend to gain 0.26 points of conservatism. The variance (r-squared) explaining Model 1 is 0.37.

In Model 2, we added the in-school- and out-of-school environment variables with parental political orientations. Parental political orientations are still significant at the 0.05 level. In addition, the in-school environment variable is negatively related to University of X students’ liberal-conservative values. In other words, in-school variables tend to make students more liberal at this university. On the other hand, we did not find a positive and a statistically significant relationship between out-of-school environment and students’ liberal-conservatism at University of X.¹² The variance explained in Model 2 is 0.50.

Table 1- OLS Estimates for the Data of Each University

	University of X			University of Z		
	Mod. 1	Mod. 2	Mod. 3	Mod. 4	Mod. 5	Mod. 6
Intercept	0.99** (0.26)	1.16** (0.24)	0.07 (0.40)	1.14** (0.30)	1.24** (0.30)	1.23** (0.36)
Father PO	0.26** (0.05)	0.29** (0.05)	0.28** (0.05)	0.15** (0.06)	0.15** (0.06)	0.16** (0.06)
Mother PO	0.40** (0.05)	0.40** (0.05)	0.35** (0.05)	0.48** (0.06)	0.49** (0.06)	0.44** (0.06)
School Infl		-1.79** (0.29)	-1.53** (0.30)		-0.44 (0.35)	-0.002 (0.39)
Outside Infl		-0.10 (0.27)	0.001 (0.27)		-0.51 (0.33)	-0.87** (0.38)
Age 18			0.78** (0.33)			0.26 (0.38)
Religiosity			0.17** (0.02)			0.13** (0.04)
Pol Sci			-0.19 (0.41)			-.017 (0.27)
City Size			0.006 (0.006)			0.001 (0.001)
Low Inc			-0.23 (0.32)			-0.84** (0.32)
N	416	416	348	255	255	206
R ²	0.37	0.50	0.58	0.36	0.39	0.41

Dependent variable is student liberalism-conservatism

* p< 0.10, ** p< 0.05

¹² Given that the out-of-school environment variable may include influence from religiosity, in analysis not shown here, we omitted the latter in Models 3 and 4 but the out-of-school environment variable was still insignificant.

In Model 3, we show the best fitting model explaining students' liberal-conservative orientations at University of X. That is, we chose the socialization variables and the five control variables that were (in an analysis not shown here) statistically significant.¹³ All of the variables, with the exception of out-of-school environment, majoring in political science, city-size, and low-income family, are statistically significant. The variance explained in this model is 0.58.

We analyzed students' political orientations at University of Z from Models 4 through 6 in Table 1. In Model 4, we show parental influence on students' liberal-conservative orientation. The parental variables are both statistically significant. As in the case of University of X, the slope coefficients suggest that mothers at University of Z tend to have a greater impact on their children's liberal-conservatism than do fathers. In Model 5, we added the in-school- and out-of-school environment variables to parental influences, but, although the first variable showed sign in the expected direction, they were not statistically significant.

Finally, in Model 6 we show the influence of the socialization variables and the five significant controls on students' liberal-conservative orientations. In addition to the parental influences, out-of-school environment, religiosity, and coming from low-income family were statistically significant. Interestingly, the out-of-school environment variable also became significant, but it is inversely related to student conservatism. The in-school environment variable as well as the age, political science, and city size controls, were not significant, however. Why in-school environment was significant at University of X but not at University of Z is not clear.

In Table 2, we combined the data we collected at the universities of X and Z and analyzed students' liberal-conservative orientations. The results are, for the most part, similar to the separate analyses that we have shown for the two universities in Table 1. In Model 1, we tested parental political influence on students' political orientations. Both parental variables are

¹³ For the sake of simplicity and clarity, we have not included the control variables that failed to show significance in our models. In Table 1, these variables are major fields of study other than political science, GPA, credit hours, gender, ethnic White, ethnic Black, and high-income family. In the combined data, Table 2, high-income family is included in the model since it, in an analysis not shown here, became significant when all variables were included.

statistically significant.¹⁴ Again, the slope coefficients suggest that mothers have a greater impact on students’ liberal-conservatism than do fathers. The

Table 2- OLS Estimates for the Combined Data of the Two Universities

	Mod. 1	Mod. 2	Mod. 3	Mod. 4	Mod. 5
Intercept	1.03** (0.19)	1.17** (0.18)	0.67** (0.33)	4.28** (0.11)	1.15** (0.19)
Father PO	0.22** (0.04)	0.22** (0.04)	0.19** (0.04)		0.23** (0.04)
Mother PO	0.44** (0.04)	0.45** (0.04)	0.40** (0.04)		0.44** (0.04)
School Infl		-1.25** (0.22)	-0.89** (0.25)		-1.24** (0.22)
Outside Infl		-0.30 (0.21)	-0.34 (0.23)		-0.31 (0.21)
Age 18			0.41 (0.26)		
Religiosity			0.16** (0.02)		
Poli Sci			0.14 (0.40)		
City Size			0.001 (0.001)		
Low Inc			-0.38** (0.22)		
High Inc			0.29** (0.14)		
Regional Cntrl				0.50** (0.13)	0.10 (0.12)
N	672	672	502	888	669
R ²	0.38	0.46	0.53	0.02	0.46

Dependent variable is student liberalism-conservatism

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05,

¹⁴ Interestingly, students who participated in our survey claimed that they rarely talked about politics at home. Specifically, 64.3% of them said that they discussed politics only “sometimes” and about 12.4% stated that they “never” talked about politics. Only 6.6% of students said that they talked about politics frequently.

variance explained in this model, with $N = 672$, is 0.38. We added the in-school- and out-of-school environment variables in Model 2. The only variable that is not significant is out-of-school environment.

We show the best fitting model explaining students' liberal-conservative orientations in Model 3. This model includes six control variables (age, religiosity, majoring in political science, city size, low-income family, and high-income family) that became, in an analysis not shown here, significant when we had all the control variables with the socialization variables. The socialization variables, with the exception of out-of-school environment, are statistically significant. Among the control variables, religiosity, high-income family, and low-income family are statistically significant. The latter variable is significant at the 0.10 level. In Model 4, we tested to find out if regional variation influences students' liberal-conservatism. This variable is significant, but the variance it explained is only 0.02. A similar procedure we used, t-test (not shown here), also indicated statistical significance, and the means of students' political orientations at universities of X and Z were 4.78 and 4.28 points (out of 9), respectively. In other words, students at University of X in the red-state of Arkansas, as we have expected, tend to be more conservative than those at the University of Z in the blue-state of Illinois. We also included the socialization variables with our regional control in Model 5. However, the regional control variable became statistically insignificant. The out-of-school environments variable was also not significant.

In sum, the results in Table 2 suggest that whereas parental variables seem to influence conservatism, the in-school environment variable tends to have some impact on students' liberalism. The out-of-school environment variable, on the other hand, seems to have some impact on students' values only at the University of Z, and it tends to show negative signs in all but one

model in Table 1 and 2, which is inconsistent with our hypothesis. Religiosity seems, however, to influence liberal-conservatism.^{15, 16}

College Students' Liberal-Conservative Orientations, Party Identifications, and Issues

Studies about liberal-conservatism rarely avoid the discussion of how party identification and issues positions affect the former variable. For instance, it is widely believed that liberal-conservative orientation and party identification are related (see also Converse, 1975; Holm & Robinson, 1978; Levitin and Miller, 1979; Robinson and Fleishman, 1988; Alwin and Krosnick, 1991; Hanson et al., 2012). Specifically, many scholars have argued that both variables help citizens to understand the complexity of politics (Conover and Feldman, 1981; Niemi and Jennings, 1991). Both variables are also assumed to impact the voting behavior of citizens (Holm and Robinson, 1978). And both variables are influenced by same factors like family and family status (Holm and Robinson, 1978, p. 242). Despite the close relationship between liberal-conservatism and party identification, the two concepts seem to be distinct. For instance, Holm and Robinson (1978, p. 242) contend that the two variables are closely associated dimensions of the more general concept, political orientation. On the other hand, Fleishman (1986) has contended that party identification influences liberal-conservative self-identification. However, Levitin and Miller (1979) have argued that the causal arrow between the two variables could go from liberal-conservatism to party identification. And according to Nie, Verba, and Petrocik (1976, p. 50), the two variables do not necessarily move in tandem: while party

¹⁵ One of our survey questions asked students whether their liberal-conservative values were influenced by neither of their parents' political orientations. We were quite surprised to observe that out of 889 students, 303 of them (or 33.9% of the total number of cases) answered positive to the foregoing question. Consequently, we felt that understanding the characteristics of such students would enhance our knowledge of political value formation. As a result, in analyses not shown here, we conducted a number of correlation and regression analyses among the full range of our variables and chose the ones that significantly affected student and parental political dissimilarities. Subsequently, we were able to identify three such variables - student liberalism, student moderatism, and forming political values after the age of 18. The variance explained in the dependent variable by the three variables is, however, only 0.13.

¹⁶ We also conducted multinomial logistic regression analyses using the ordinal-level data of our students' political orientations (liberals [1, 0], moderates [1, 0], and conservatives [1, 0]). The results are strongly consistent with our ordinary least squares (OLS) findings.

identification is on the decline in the U.S., the liberal-conservative orientation has increased from the 1950s to the 1970s.¹⁷

Many scholars also seem to agree about the existence of a correlation between students' liberal-conservatism and issue positions. However, there is no consensus among scholars on the causal relationship between the two variables. For instance, Robinson and Fleishman (1984, p. 54; see also Bailey and Williams, 2016) have contended that ideology [political orientation] shapes and informs individuals' positions on issues.¹⁸ Other scholars, however, do not consider issues (or political attitudes) as independent entities but as facets or dimensions of liberal-conservative political orientation or ideology (Nie, Verba, and Petrocik, 1976; Lorence and Mortimer, 1979, p. 659; Niemi and Jennings, 1991; Dey, 1997; Jost et al., 2009).

Given the foregoing differences among scholars, our analyses in this paper are limited to only showing correlational relationships among liberal-conservatism, party identification, and issue positions. We measured party identification by the standard 7-point scale. Specifically, we asked students to place themselves into one of the following categories: "strong Democrat," "weak Democrat," "independent-leaning Democrat," "independent," "independent-leaning Republican," "weak Republican," and "strong Republican." We also had a survey question that enabled us to specify party identification as a nominal variable (ex: Democrat, Republican, and Independent). We specified issues by survey questions pertaining to students' positions on LGBT rights, abortion, and welfare entitlements.

In Table 3, we show that students' liberal-conservatism and their party identifications are highly correlated ($r = 0.80$).¹⁹ We also found that the correlations between students' liberal-conservatism and student support for

¹⁷ Bartels (2000), however, seems to suggest that while party affiliation may have declined among non-voters in the U.S., it has increased among voters since the 1970s.

¹⁸ Robinson and Fleishman (1984, p. 55), however, add that individuals tend to be inconsistent with their issue positions and ideological leanings, and that the correlation between the two variables is low.

¹⁹ Interestingly, in an analysis not shown here, we have found that regional variation tends to have a greater influence on students' party affiliations (r -squared = 0.06) than on their political orientations (r -squared = 0.02). Similarly, students at the University of X in the red state of Arkansas tend, on average, to be closely affiliated to the Republican Party while those at the University of Z in the blue state of Illinois claim, on average, to be more of independents.

LGBT rights, abortion, and welfare are moderate ($r = -0.61, -0.63, -0.53$, respectively). Students’ party identification and support for these issues are also moderately correlated ($r = -0.51, -0.51, -0.50$, respectively).^{20,21}

Table 3- Correlation Matrix: Student Liberal-Conservatism, Party ID, and Issue Positions

	Student PO	Student Party ID	LGBT Support	Abortion Support	Welfare Support
Student PO	1				
Student Party	0.80**	1			
LGBT Support	-0.61**	-0.51**	1		
Abortion Support	-0.63**	-0.51**	0.57**	1	
Welfare Support	-0.53	-0.50**	0.29**	0.29**	1

** $p < 0.01$; N= 396

Discussion Of Results

We found evidence that the family is the most important determinant of students’ political orientation at the universities of X and Z. However, as the slope coefficients consistently showed, mothers tended to have a greater impact on students’ liberal-conservatism than did fathers. It is argued, for instance, that mothers tend to do better than fathers in communicating politics with their children more frequently (Acock and Bengtson, 1978, p. 529) and more openly (Shulman and DeAndrea (2014, p. 402). We also found that in-school environment seemed to have some influence on students’ liberalism at the University of X. The same was also true for University of Z but only when the data for the two universities were combined. The foregoing suggests that in-school environment may have more influence on the political orientation of students at the University of X than at the University of Z. In general, parents seem to play a significant role in their children’s adoption of political identity in line with their own. On the

²⁰ In analyses not shown here, we also found that the correlations between fathers’ liberal-conservatism and their support for LGBT rights and abortion are lower ($r = -0.45$ and -0.52) than those of their children. The same was the case with mothers ($r = -0.45$ and -0.46).

²¹ Our correlational analyses do not seem to support Bailey and Williams’s (2016) findings that more conservative students tend to have more liberal or less conservative values on social policies.

other hand, the influence of in-school environment tended to make students more liberal. However, the overall impact of the out-of-school environment, if any, did not seem to be to make students more conservative, as we hypothesized. One explanation for the foregoing anomaly could be that the out-of-school environment may consist of attributes that do not necessarily affect students' liberal-conservatism in only one direction. For instance, whereas the liberal media and peers may have a positive impact on students' liberalism, the church and the conservative media may have a positive influence on student's conservatism. Hence, untangling this variable into its specific attributes may potentially lead to more accurate results.

Interestingly, regional variation had some but only weak impact on students' political orientations in the red state of Arkansas and the blue state of Illinois. We are not certain why. It could be the case, however, that the digital-age may have afforded undergraduate students at the U.S. universities to have an equal or nearly equal access to national (or global) political news, events, and issues, thereby, possibly shaping their political orientations more similarly.

Control variables that showed consistent significance include forming political values by the age of 18, religiosity, coming from high-income family, and coming from low-income family. The first three variables seemed to impact students' conservatism, while the last was associated with liberalism.

In addition, we showed some evidence that our students were more moderate and liberal than their parents. Our findings support that of Dodson's (2014) work and suggest that instead of just "liberalizing [as much of previous studies has contended]," a majority of students seems to have actually become more moderate than liberal. In fact, even parents of students at the universities of X and Z were, as Figures 6a and 6b suggest, more moderate than liberal.²² Given the above observations, we can only suggest

²² In analyses not shown here, we also found that liberal and conservative students at the universities of X and Z and their parents tend to be more supportive or critical, respectively, of the LGBT and abortion issues than are their moderate counterparts. For instance, the correlation of liberal, conservative, and moderate students and their support for the LGBT are 0.47, -0.48, and -0.03, respectively. For the abortion issue, the correlations for these groups are 0.50, -0.41, and -0.14, respectively. Put differently, moderates as a group are on average less likely to hold antagonistic and diametrically opposite views when dealing with such issues than are liberals and conservatives.

that scholars take “moderatism” seriously and study why many individuals are increasingly becoming so.²³

Finally, our data suggested that students’ liberal-conservatism and party identifications are highly correlated. We also showed that students’ liberal-conservatism and party identification are moderately correlated with their issue positions.

Limitations of this Study

Although our findings about students’ liberal-conservative orientations seem to be consistent with what we have observed in sample groups surveyed in the ANES and the GSS, a study that deals with more than two universities and over a long period of time will likely lead to more accurate and generalizable results. In addition, surveys that directly ask parents about their political values will likely yield more accurate findings. Finally, a study that specifies in-school environment and out-of-school environment with specific attributes (ex: teachers, books, peers, and the media) rather than one with broad categories like ours may potentially measure more accurate impacts on students’ political orientations.

Conclusion

Relying on a sample data of up to 889 students and a cross-sectional research design with OLS estimators, we found evidence that the family is the most important determinant of students’ political orientations at the universities of X and Z. However, as the slope coefficients consistently showed, mothers tended to have a greater impact on students’ liberal-conservatism than did fathers. We also found that in-school environment seemed to have some influence on students’ liberalism at University of X as well as at universities of X and Z when the data were analyzed together. In contrast, impact of the out-of-school environment variable on students’ liberal-conservative orientations at the universities of X and Z, if any, is not clear. Lastly, regional variation seems to have some but weak influence on students’ liberal-conservatism. A notable finding and contribution of this paper is that instead of just “liberalizing [as previous studies have

²³ Although they have not suggested to take “moderatism” seriously as we do here, several scholars have observed that moderates are the largest category (see Downs, 1957; Klingemann, 1972; Nie et al., 1979; Ladd, 1981; Robinson & Fleishman, 1984; Dey, 1997; Mariani & Hewitt, 2008).

contended],” a majority of students seems to have actually become more moderate than liberal.

Appendix A: Political Orientation Survey Instrument

1. Generally speaking, what is your political orientation?
 - a. Liberal b. Moderate c. Conservative d. None of the above e. I don't know
2. More specifically, what do you consider yourself?
 - a. Extremely Liberal b. Very liberal c. liberal d. Left-leaning moderate. e. Moderate f. Right-leaning moderate g. Conservative h. Very conservative i. Extremely Conservative j. None of the above k. I don't know
3. How old were you when you first held your political orientation? _____
4. Which of your parents has influenced your political orientation?
 - a. Father b. Mother c. Both d. Neither
5. If you answer "Neither" in Question # 4, do you think your in-school experiences (ex: teachers, students, books) have any influence on your political orientation?
Yes _____ No _____
6. If you answer "Neither" in Question # 4, do you think out-of-school experiences (ex: church, media, neighbors, elders) have any influence on your political orientation?
Yes _____ No _____
7. With respect to the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) group, what is your position?
 - a. Support/accept b. Tolerate/can live with c. Don't support/accept
8. With respect to abortion, what is your position?
 - a. Support b. Tolerate/can live with c. Don't support
9. What is your position with respect to the government's social welfare policy of helping the poor?
 - a. Support b. Tolerate/can live with c. Don't support
10. Generally speaking, what is your father's political orientation?
 - a. Liberal b. Moderate c. Conservative d. None of the above e. I don't know
11. More specifically, what does your father consider himself?
 - a. Extremely Liberal b. Very liberal c. liberal d. Left-leaning moderate. e. Moderate f. Right-leaning moderate g. Conservative h. Very conservative i. Extremely Conservative j. None of the above k. I don't know
12. Generally speaking, what is your mother's political orientation?
 - a. Liberal b. Moderate c. Conservative d. None of the above e. I don't know
13. More specifically, what does your mother consider herself?
 - a. Extremely Liberal b. Very liberal c. liberal d. Left-leaning moderate. e. Moderate f. Right-leaning moderate g. Conservative h. Very conservative i. Extremely Conservative j. None of the above k. I don't know
14. With respect to the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) group, what is your father's position?
 - a. Support/accept b. Tolerate/can live with c. Don't support/accept d. Don't know
15. With respect to abortion, what is your father's position?
 - a. Support b. Tolerate/can live with c. Don't support d. Don't know

16. With respect to the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) group, what is mother's position?
a. Support/accept b. Tolerate/can live with c. Don't support/accept d. Don't know
17. With respect abortion, what is your mother's position?
a. Support b. Tolerate/can live with c. Don't support d. Don't know
18. Do you consider yourself a (an) _____?
a. Democrat b. Republican c. Independent d. None of the above e. I don't know
19. More specifically, what do you consider yourself?
a. Strong Democrat b. Weak Democrat c. Independent-leaning Democrat d. Independent
e. Independent-leaning Republican f. Weak Republican g. Strong Republican h. Don't know
20. Does your father consider himself a (an) _____?
a. Democrat b. Republican c. Independent d. None of the above e. I don't know
21. Does your mother consider herself a (an) _____?
a. Democrat b. Republican c. Independent d. None of the above e. I don't know
22. How often did your family discuss politics at home as you grew up?
a. Always b. Most of the time c. Sometimes d. Never
23. How many times, if at all, do you go to church (synagogue or mosque) in a month?

24. What is your major? _____
25. What is your GPA? _____
26. How many credit hours have you accumulated including this semester? _____
27. What is your gender? _____
28. Do your parents live together? Yes _____ No _____
29. Where do your parents live? City: _____
State: _____
30. What is your ethnicity? a. White American b. Hispanic American c. African American
d. Asian American e. Native American f. Other _____
31. What is your parents' estimated combined annual income or salary?
a. Less than \$40,000 b. \$40,000-80,000 c. Greater than \$80,000 d. I don't know

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