

University of Virginia Center for Politics



Political Ideology Survey

Purpose: Students very often have little understanding of the meaning of ideological terms. While these terms are often vague and elusive to adults as well, it is possible through this survey and the subsequent two lessons for students to glean a sophisticated comprehension.

Objectives:

1. The student will examine her/his political beliefs.
2. The student will explain the difference between *liberal* and *conservative* political points of view.
3. The student will discern the significance of *political ideology* in examining political issues.

Key Words:

conservative
liberal

ideology/political ideology
Second Amendment

Materials:

1. Blackboard
2. Student handout: *Ideological Survey*. An interactive version is available on the Youth Leadership Initiative CD-ROM "A More Perfect Union."
3. Student handout: *Quiz: Identifying Ideology*.
4. Student handout: *Editorial: Gun Control Isn't Crime Control*
5. Student handout: *Editorial: Smith and Wesson accepts Gun Safety Pact*
6. Student handout: *Editorial: Janie's Got a Gun*
7. Overhead: *Second Amendment*

Procedures:

1. Create five columns on the board, labeling them as follows from left to right: "strong liberal," "weak liberal," "moderate," "weak conservative," and "strong conservative." Ask students to characterize themselves as one of the five without explaining the meaning of the terms. Tally their responses under each column.
2. Distribute the student handout *Ideological Survey*. Ask students individually to respond to each of the statements on the survey by placing a "T" for true if they agree with the statement or "F" for false if they disagree with the statement, in the column labeled "T/F." Students should write nothing yet in the column labeled "L/C."

- After the students have completed the survey, go through the survey with them and reveal which statements are conservative and which are liberal using the list below. As you read through the list, have the students code their responses by placing an "L" for liberal and a "C" for conservative according to the nature of their response. For instance, if a student responds to a conservative statement with "T" then she/he should place a "C" in the last column. If responding to the same statement with an "F" the student would place an "L" in the column. The following are the ideologies of the statements on the ideological survey.

1. C	6. L	11. L	16. C	21. L
2. C	7. L	12. C	17. L	22. L
3. C	8. C	13. L	18. C	23. L
4. C	9. C	14. C	19. L	24. L
5. C	10. L	15. L	20. C	25. C

- After the students have coded their responses, ask them to characterize themselves again as "strong liberal," "weak liberal," "moderate," "weak conservative," or "strong conservative," but this time do it according to the following scheme:

21-25 Liberal responses	=	Strong Liberal
16-20 Liberal responses	=	Weak Liberal
21-25 Conservative responses	=	Strong Conservative
16-20 Conservative responses	=	Weak Conservative
10-15 of either responses	=	Moderate

- Chart the students' responses on the board underneath the earlier tally. If there is a change, ask students to theorize about what may have caused the change.
- Explain to the students that any **ideological survey** is imperfect in that it is not sophisticated enough to cover the entire gamut of a political belief system, and that they should continue to examine and hone their political beliefs.

Evaluation:

- Use the attached matching quiz in which students must identify certain statements as liberal or conservative.
- Ask students to find a newspaper editorial and analyze it for **liberal** or **conservative** ideology.
- Have students write an essay theorizing why some students had a different ideology profile after the survey than before.
- Ask students to read the following editorials featuring opinions about the right to bear arms guaranteed in the second amendment. (Attached)
 - Gun Control isn't Crime Control*
 - Smith and Wesson Accepts Gun Safety Pact*
 - Janie's Got a Gun*
- After reading the editorials, ask students to explain how they relate to the second amendment of the constitution. Does the author support the 2nd amendment? Does



the author feel this amendment needs to be changed? Can you change an amendment?

Technology:

Have students visit websites of lobbying groups and ask them to evaluate them for ideology.

- www.nraila.org
- www.aflcio.org/home.htm
- www.aclu.org/index.html
- www.immigrationforum.org/index.htm

Ideological Survey

Question	T/F	L/C
1. The Federal Government places too many restrictions on modern corporations.		
2. Union workers receive wages and benefits so high that they damage their company's ability to compete.		
3. High government taxes hurt the economy.		
4. Only people who cannot work should be eligible for welfare programs.		
5. Illegal immigration lowers wages and increases crime.		
6. New government programs should be created to further assist poor people in the United States.		
7. The wealthy should be taxed at a higher percentage than the lower and middle classes.		
8. One of the best ways to help the poor is to set policies that help businesses earn a profit and create new jobs.		
9. Government programs discourage able bodied people from helping themselves.		
10. The government should not restrict abortion and other reproductive choices.		
11. The government has a special responsibility to assist minorities.		
12. Faith-based organizations should be used to improve poverty and crime in local communities.		
13. Public funding should not be used to support religious institutions including schools.		
14. Government should not financially support art projects that are morally objectionable.		
15. The First Amendment should protect pornography from government censorship.		
16. Free trade between the U.S. and other nations is generally beneficial.		
17. America's high crime rate is directly traceable to a cycle of poverty, poor health care, poor education, and discrimination.		
18. A less regulated capitalist system increases innovation and creates long-term economic success.		
19. Gay marriage should be legal.		
20. Economic success should take precedent over environmental policies.		
21. The federal government should not get involved in setting academic standards for local public school districts.		
22. Americans should have a <i>right</i> to affordable health care.		
23. The death penalty is cruel and unusual punishment.		
24. Limiting the sale and possession of firearms does not violate the second amendment right to bear arms.		
25. The giving of a prayer before public school sporting events, activities and other programs should be allowed.		

TOTAL Conservative Responses:

TOTAL Liberal Responses:



Quiz: Identifying Ideology

Directions: Fill in the following blanks with the letter that best describes the statements.

A. Liberal

B. Conservative

- _____ 1. Our national government should tax less and therefore allow its citizens to decide how best to spend their own money.
- _____ 2. When companies are given more economic freedoms they create more jobs and opportunities for citizens to become prosperous.
- _____ 3. The death penalty is cruel and unusual punishment.
- _____ 4. Limiting the sale and possession of guns violates the Second Amendment right to bear arms.
- _____ 5. Our government has an obligation to provide for all of its citizens basic necessities like food and healthcare.

Directions: Fill in the chart below by identifying the candidates and stances.

<u>Republican nominee:</u>	<u>Democratic nominee:</u>
Stance on:	
Abortion -	
Social Security -	
Taxes -	
Guns -	

Does each candidate fit your idea of a conservative/liberal? Explain why or why not.

Sample Editorial

+ *Gun Control isn't Crime Control* (Opposes gun control)
<http://www.newsargus.com/newsport/edit/08112000.html>

Gun Control isn't Crime Control

By MIKE ROUSE

Violence has declined as we have become better armed.

Gun control inevitably will emerge as an issue in this year's presidential and Congressional elections. Candidates will be telling us that restrictions on gun ownership will reduce crime.

David R. Kopel says not. Kopel is research director of the Independence Institute and an associate policy analyst at the Cato Institute. When the candidates start talking about gun control and crime, keep in mind these facts from Kopel's research, which he shared in an editorial-page article in the Wall Street Journal: There is little relationship between the number of murders and the number of guns owned by U.S. citizens.

Gun ownership in this country is at a record high, according to statistics from law enforcement agencies and gun manufacturers, but the rate of gun violence is falling.

From 1972 to 1992, the gun supply doubled. The homicide rate remained about the same, at 9.4 deaths per 100,000 population.

The vaunted Brady Law, pride of the gun-control lobby, has, in fact, had no effect on the number of people killed since it was passed.

The murder rate has not changed since the Brady Law was enacted. The rate of gun suicides has fallen, according to the American Medical Association, but the overall rate of suicides has remained about the same.

The Clinton administration bandies about figures on the number of people who have been denied the right to buy guns because of the background checks required by the Brady Law. But many of those rejections are based on incomplete criminal justice records – for instance, a record that shows an arrest but not a conviction.

Others were rejected who were not really dangerous. Two brothers might have gotten into a fistfight in the front yard 20 years ago. They could be rejected for gun ownership because they were involved in "domestic violence," even if that was their only transgression.

While the accidental gunshot deaths of children make excellent campaign rhetoric, that problem is much smaller than it is made out to be. Those who want stricter gun control claim that 10 children a day are killed by guns. What they don't tell you is that those statistics include "children" up to 19 years old, including males who live in the inner cities. They will not be



helped by such specious laws as those requiring trigger locks. Such laws will be noticed mainly by law-abiding people, not the gang members shooting each other on the streets.

As for younger children, fewer are being killed by guns even as gun ownership increases. In the early 1970s, according to the National Center for Health Statistics, about 500 children 14 and under were being killed each year by gun accidents. In 1998, the figure was 121.

The federal "assault-weapons" ban has not affected the number of gun deaths. That law, along with the Brady Law, was one of the highly touted triumphs of the gun-control bunch during the Clinton administration. In fact, it did not apply to a gun's rate of fire but with identifiers like bayonet lugs and protruding grips on rifles. Manufacturers made cosmetic changes, and the guns are still available.

It doesn't matter, though. Law enforcement statistics show that "assault weapons" -- and that is a dumb term to use to distinguish one gun from another -- are used in only a minuscule fraction of crimes.

Think about these facts when the gun issue arises during the campaigns. And you might wonder why the people who make such a fuss over gun control don't turn their efforts instead to real ways to fight crime.

Sample Editorial

+ *Smith and Wesson Accepts Gun Safety Pact* (Supports gun control)
<http://www.2facts.com/stories/index/e00177.asp>

Smith and Wesson Accepts Gun Safety Pact

While National Rifle Association officials denounce President Clinton, and the Republican-controlled Congress dithers, Smith & Wesson is doing the right thing on gun control. The nation's oldest and largest handgun manufacturer is changing the way it does business. It has consented to a slew of restrictions on the manufacture, sale and distribution of handguns, many of which are used to kill people. In exchange for these enlightened actions, the Clinton administration has agreed to head off a threatened lawsuit by the federal government and 13 cities against Smith & Wesson.

This accord is significant because it marks the first time a major gun manufacturer has acknowledged, however tangentially, its role in helping to contain gun violence. Although one of Smith & Wesson's competitors was quick to condemn this "betrayal of Second Amendment rights and a capitulation to the Clinton administration," other gun manufacturers could provide a valuable national service by following Smith & Wesson's responsible example.

Gun violence claims more than 30,000 lives and injures another 100,000 people annually in the United States. Little wonder that about 70 percent of Americans support sensible measures to control the proliferation of handguns and other firearms.

Smith & Wesson's unprecedented concessions are altogether sensible. The company has agreed to install child trigger locks on all of its handguns within 60 days. Within the next 36 months, it also will develop technology to prevent guns from being fired by anyone other than the owners. A second hidden serial number will be included on all handguns to help counter criminals who remove other identification marks from their weapons.

The company also has developed a code of conduct for the sale and distribution of its handguns. Authorized dealers and distributors will be barred from selling Smith & Wesson firearms at gun shows unless would-be buyers have passed criminal background checks. Those who violate this code could lose their franchises with the company. Persons who purchase more than one firearm from a dealer will be permitted to take home one gun on the day of sale, and can claim the rest 14 days later. This provision should help deter illegal gun trafficking.

An even greater deterrent would be for all gun manufacturers to follow Smith & Wesson's lead. Other companies may find it in their self-interest to do so. No single gun-control measure will stop criminals from getting firearms and misusing them. But the measures agreed to by Smith & Wesson could make a difference, at the very least, by preventing thousands of kids from killing or maiming themselves and others.

From the San Diego Union-Tribune, San Diego, California, March 2000

Sample Editorial

+ *Janie's Got a Gun* (Opposing gun control)

<http://www.purepolitics.com/news/politicaeditorials.htm>

Janie's Got a Gun

By AIMEE J.

Some proponents of gun control have asked: if there was no Second Amendment, would pro-gun advocates still oppose common sense gun legislation. To this irrelevant question, I have two responses. First, there IS a Second Amendment and asking hypothetical questions is a waste of time. Nevertheless, I find it interesting that certain politicians, pundits, and citizens seem to overlook the fact that the right for citizens to bear arms was so important to the Founders of this country that they made it a right second only to the First Amendment which gives us our freedom to say, write, and believe what we wish without fear of sanction by the government. The Second Amendment was so placed to protect these rights.

My second response is a more practical one; one that has been replayed, but apparently bears repeating. More than 2,000 gun laws have been enacted since the 1960s' reforms. After the shooting at Columbine High School last year, legislators in true knee-jerk fashion introduced more and stricter gun control measures. Yet, none of these proposals before the Congress would in any way have prevented that tragedy. Clearly, laws are no impediment to the criminally minded. Practically, gun laws only serve to abridge the rights of law-abiding citizens. By definition, criminals have no regard for the law.

Therefore, if all the gun restrictions that have been proposed and will be proposed are finally adopted, the end result will inevitably be the total disarmament of the American people, leaving only criminals and the government in possession of firearms. With this thought, I turn to the gun control advocates and ask, is an America with no Second Amendment truly the Land of the Free?

Second Amendment

Right to Bear Arms

A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right to bear arms shall not be infringed.