

Developing Policy-Specific Conceptions of Mood: The United States

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Abstract

In this paper we first lay out the project of “Policy Specific Mood,” our program for generating public opinion series specific to policy areas as defined by the Policy Agendas Project. We show how adding agendas codes to the (already existing) mood opinion data base allows us to generate large numbers of regular time series of opinion in specific policy areas.

Most public opinion series in the United States—and in other nations to the limit of our knowledge—is cyclical, reflecting changes in party control of government and related changes in actual policy. Wlezien’s thermostatic model shows how policy movement in a particular direction generates an opinion response in the opposite direction. Such cyclic behavior characterizes most policy opinion. In this paper, however, we focus on deviant cases characterized by linear trend. All such cases in the U.S. involve issues of equality and tolerance of differences. We examine three such cases, for Blacks, for women, and for gays. We observe, finally, that government action does not match the quite strong consensus on equality as a social goal and ask why.

Public policy mood, in its original concept (Stimson 1991), was a set of global attitudes toward government. That was true both because theory dictated it and because at the origin of this research plan—in 1987—more specific measures would have stretched available data to the limit. Some 24 years later theory has not changed. But data availability has increased remarkably.

Our database of individual survey national survey results now numbers almost 8,000 individual administrations of some 400 different question series. Where once it was difficult to find enough data to estimate a single national mood, now we can do the same in numerous highly specific policy domains. And we have done so, generating more than 30 policy-specific mood series using the standardized policy coding scheme of the Agendas Project (Baumgartner & Jones 1993, Jones & Baumgartner 2005) to organize those topics.¹

The main left-right dimension of public policy mood, we have long known, captures much—but not all—of the full scope of policy debate in American politics. The issue is usually treated as one of two dimensions which capture all but a few issues and then some stray residual issues which are different. That remains the case, as we will show below. But the luxury of having policy specific estimates is that we can treat those issues which do not fit well with the two dimensional account in detail, rather than treating them as just strange items which do not work.

Our starting point is the familiar, Mood itself. We display the standard estimates of Mood in Figure 1. Opinion movement in the norm is cyclical. And those cycles coincide across policy domains because they are responses to a common cause, government policy. But normal though it is, cyclical opinion movement is not the only possible dynamic. We shall learn something important by observing sets of issue preferences which do not cycle. The most striking cases involve belief in equality of various kinds.

In this paper we are ignoring the norm of cyclical public opinion movement, long established as the normal and dominant longitudinal track of public opinion. We are instead focusing on deviant cases. And

¹All these data will become available for public use through the Policy Agendas website <http://policyagendas.org> before the close of the project.

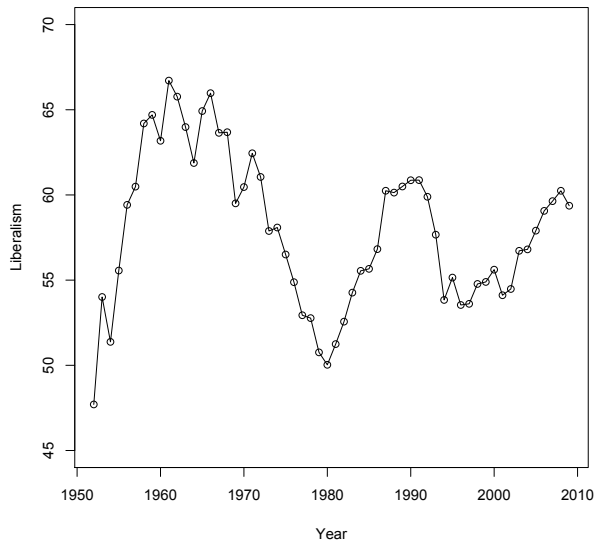


Figure 1: Public Policy Mood (Liberalism): 1952 to 2010

the deviant pattern that we observe—for a handful of series out of hundreds—is linear trend. Trending we find specifically for attitudes toward equality of various sorts.²

Our research plan is to first generate policy-specific moods for three types of equality—race, women, sexual orientation—observing that each trends in the liberal³ direction over time. While this finding alone is interesting, we are left without a proper explanation. In that vein, we consider the component parts of each series with an eye toward understanding why the public’s “equality mood” moves so differently than the global mood series.

We offer the explanation of generational change to help us understand why equality mood, despite party control, surges on in the liberal direction. Yet, we are left unsatisfied: with near consensus

²See (Stimson, Tiberj & Thiébaud 2010) for a related finding for the case of openness and tolerance in France.

³Throughout the paper we use “liberal” in its American sense, as a synonym for left.

belief in equality across three issue areas, inequality persists. What explains this disconnect? We review the record of government action on equality of various kinds. And then we spend the remainder of our time sorting out this puzzle.

1 Policy-Specific Moods

Most policy-specific moods are correlated with the global Mood estimates. This is very much as expected. Since the underlying Mood accounts for about forty percent of all variance in public policy preferences data—and much that it does not account for is simple error—then it is necessarily closely correlated with subsamples of policy content. This is particularly the case with all of the standard content of the left-right dialogue over the scope of the federal government in economic life.

We display four components of the welfare state (healthcare, education, environment, and welfare) along with global Mood for reference in Figure 2. Although the differing mean levels of the four partially disguise the parallelism of the five series, it is quite strong, with correlations of the individual and common series ranging from .52 (education) at the low end to .84 (healthcare) at the high end.

1.1 Equality is Different

First for African Americans, then for women, and then for gays and lesbians, American beliefs have evolved from a traditional status quo to a new belief in equality. The status quo, in all cases, was a traditional society which held that discrimination was the natural order of things. Not to be too timid about the matter, most Americans believed that blacks and women were biologically inferior, and gays morally inferior, all of which justified a society in which discrimination was both expected and normal—and assertions of equality were considered radical and deviant. We make our way through the three issue areas, taking on each one separately so as to dissect the component parts of the mood series and gain a better understanding of the



Figure 2: Parallel Movements in Various Categories of Welfare State Liberalism: Health, Education, Environment, and Welfare, 1952–2009

driving opinion forces.

1.1.1 Race

We can see over a half century of a trending process in American views on race in Figure 3. Starting in the 1940s when about four in ten Americans believed in equality as a goal and supported policies to end or reduce discrimination as a means, those beliefs gradually grow over sixty years to where majority and minority are reversed. What is impressive in the figure is not how far we have come (from about 41% to about 63% supporting equality), but how utterly steady the process is. The growth is like the movement of a glacier, very slow but very steady.

We can also see the thermostat at work in racial attitudes (Kellstedt 2003). In mood and all its correlates, for example, the year 1980 is a



Figure 3: Ethnic Minority and Racial Group Liberalism, 1952–2009

conservative high water mark. We see that too in racial attitudes. But here the movement is only *relative* to the steadily liberalizing trend. But because the trend is modest in speed, racial attitudes are highly correlated with other left-right attitudes, even though the one trends and the others do not. This latter finding is undoubtedly contrary to what Kellstedt may have predicted, but it appears to be merely an artifact of time. That is, because our racial attitudes series covers more ground than his, we are able to observe its trending nature in a fashion unavailable to his work.

1.1.2 Gender

The graph for attitudes toward women’s equality in society and the workplace is strikingly similar to that for racial equality and, as we will see, for sexual orientation as well.⁴ (See Figure 4.) The issues are

⁴We should note that due to limitations of available data, we do not have survey questions on the full range of issues that might be considered women’s equality issues.

newer, as are the survey measures. But the pattern is the same—a trending line in the pro-equality direction. For the issue of the role of women in American society we see a pro-equality majority in our first measures in the early 1970s (a half decade after the outset of the women’s movement). That position grows steadily and predictably to a point near 90% approval of equality measures by 2008. If the questions continue to be asked, it looks like the ultimate limit is unanimity.

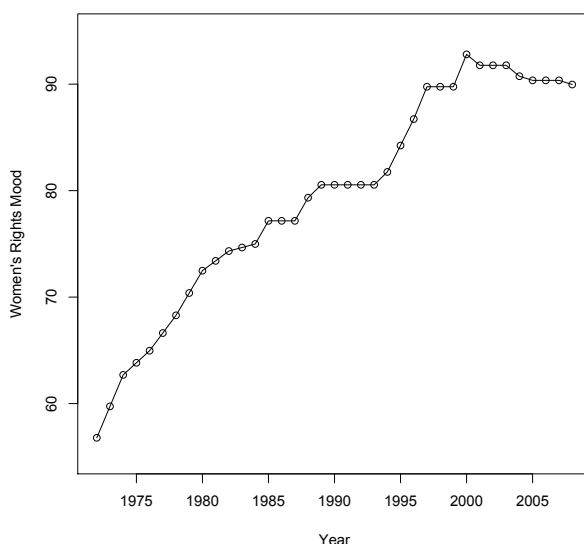


Figure 4: Attitudes Toward Women’s Equality Issues (Pro-Equality), 1972–2008

We should caution readers that this series is specific to attitudes about women in the workplace and society and can not be used interchangeably as a measure of attitudes toward women’s equality in other domains of life. For instance, Sapiro and Conover (2001) demonstrate that attitudes toward women’s equality in the workplace, in government, and in the home are distinct. Just because an individual favors equality for women in one of these three domains does not mean that he or she necessarily supports women’s equality in other domains of

The series contains general questions regarding whether a woman’s place is in the home, or whether women should be equal with men in society and the workplace.

life (although favoring equality in the workplace is highly correlated with favoring equality in government). Further, some research suggests that when questions prompt respondents to think about women as mothers, support for women’s equality in the workforce is lessened. Mayeri, Brown, Persily and Kim (2008) analyze responses to four separate questions about women in the workplace administered repeatedly by the GSS between the mid 1970’s and 2004. When asked whether women should let men run the country and whether wives should put their husbands’ careers first, the responses look nearly identical to women’s equality mood. The series trend in the liberal direction over time and reach a level of approximately 80% liberal responses by 2004. When asked whether it is better for women to tend the home and for men to work, and whether preschool children suffer if their mothers work, the responses are far less liberal and the slopes of the lines are less steep. While responses to these questions trend in the liberal direction during the 1970s and 80s, by the mid-1990s the series flattens out with liberalism holding between 50 and 60%.

Together, the works of Sapiro and Conover (2001) and Mayeri et al. (2008) demonstrate that public attitudes toward gender equality vary by domain and with changes in question wording. Nevertheless, it seems clear that attitudes toward gender equality have evolved over time, moving in a liberal direction rather than cycling in a thermostatic manor.

1.2 Generational Change

It seems clear from these three cases that attitudes toward equality are shaped by different factors than are attitudes toward other issue areas, such as health care, education and the environment. While attitudes toward the latter set of issues exhibit cyclical peaks and valleys of liberalism, the belief in equality—and opposition to discrimination—has grown slowly and steadily over time.⁵ Over the course of decades, the belief in the equality of African Americans, women, gays and lesbians has become a majority view.

⁵Interestingly, in the case of support for racial equality, we see thermostatic changes in mood despite the fact that the series is trending. Thus, attitudes toward equality are not completely immune to short-term shifts based on public debate and policy changes.

The process of socialization and generational replacement likely accounts for the trends we observe in attitudes toward equality. When young people come of age, the need to fit into society leads them to accept the beliefs of a society as they are at the moment they come of age. They are not fundamentally more open or tolerant than their elders, it is just that they experience a different context than did their parents or grandparents. Thus, if there is a growing belief in equality, it will seem natural to the young to accept it, just as it was natural for those who came of age in a previous context not to do so. That means that once a belief in equality begins to evolve, it is swept along by the tidal force of demography. The young become the middle-aged and create a still more tolerant context for the next generation. And equally, the older generations who do not accept the changed views leave the electorate, resulting in a steady, linear process of increased liberalism.

Table 1 provides exactly the type of evidence we need to validate the generational change theory. The American National Election Study (ANES) has asked only one question on a consistent basis that is related to our analysis. But we believe its evidence powerful enough to support our theory. Using data from the ANES, we evaluate respondents' beliefs about the role of women on a seven point scale. The responses range from "women and men should have an equal role" to "women's place is in the home." To get at the generational aspect of our theory, we divide the respondents up by birth cohort, shown in the first column of the table. The second column indicates the percentage of respondents in that birth cohort who believe in full equality for women—those answering "women and men should have an equal role." Finally, the last column gives the number of respondents in each cohort. It would be difficult to imagine more fitting results: as the cohorts get younger and younger, the percent believing in full equality grows larger and larger.⁶

We saw an upward trend in beliefs in equality in the earlier Figure 4. Table 1 tells us *who* believed more in equality. The last piece of the puzzle is sorting out time and cohort effects. Since the youngest cohorts are a larger and larger proportion of each successive study,

⁶Mayeri et al. (2008) present a similar analysis of attitudes toward traditional gender roles by birth cohort using data from the GSS. Their findings are very similar to the findings presented here.

Table 1: Belief in Women’s Equality by Birth Cohort: (Percents are those choosing the strongest full equality pole of the seven point scale.)

Birth Cohort	Full Equality Percent	N
1991 or later	70.2	285
1975–1990	62.3	944
1959–1974	51.0	4564
1943–1958	46.8	8660
1927–1942	37.2	5580
1911–1926	30.0	4731
1895–1910	24.5	1922
1895 or before	21.1	232

Source: American National Election Studies Cumulative File

we cannot tell for sure whether it is the case that the trend over time explains the cohort effects or the cohort effects explain the trend.

We explore the two types of effects together in Figure 5. We collapse the eight cohorts of Table 1 into four and display that same belief in women’s equality measure by birth cohort and time together. There we see that reality is a little of both. Each cohort becomes more committed to equality as time passes. But each cohort is also more committed than had been the previous generation at the same time.⁷ Generational replacement explains the trend in attitudes toward women.

1.2.1 Sexual Orientation

The time series measuring support for gay rights is the shortest of the three equality measures presented here, but the trend is quite similar (see Figure 6). Since the late 1970s, when public attention to the issue

⁷The exception however is that the very youngest cohort is not notably stronger in commitment to equality than the previous one. This is an expected effect of the growing consensus.

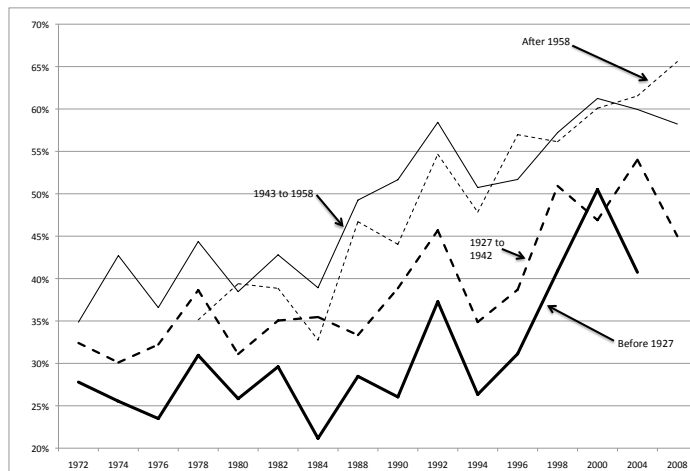


Figure 5: Belief in Women's Equality Over Time by Birth Cohort

began to intensify and polling data first became available, the public has become steadily more liberal in its attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. While we do find some evidence of thermostatic response as we do in racial equality mood, the liberal trend is unmistakable.

2 Decomposing Equality Moods

Although convinced by the support for our generational change theory, we are perplexed by a more normative question—Why isn't the government doing more to ensure equality, given that public support for equality appears to be so high? For issue areas like health and welfare, public attitudes and government action move together through time, each influencing the other (see Erikson et al. 2002). Yet for equality, we do not observe the same relationship between public mood and government action. That is not to say, of course, that the government has done nothing. In the case of equality for minorities and women,

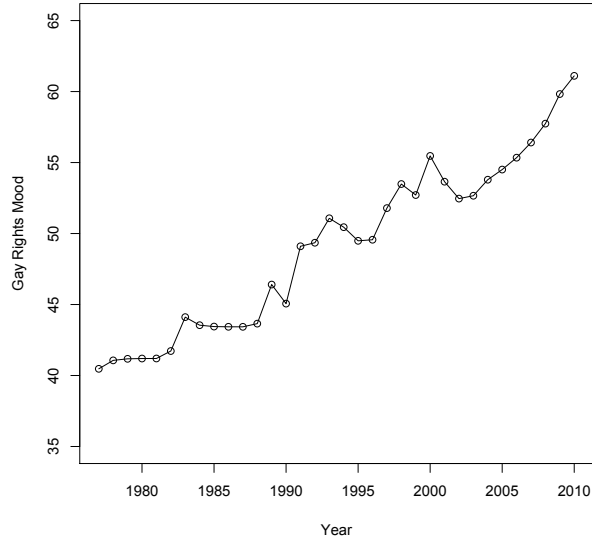


Figure 6: Attitudes Toward Gay Rights (Liberalism), 1972–2010

the government was highly active during the 1960’s and -70’s, passing landmark legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and Title IX in 1972. In the case of gay rights, government action has been more recent, including the passage of federal hate crimes legislation in 2009 and the repeal of “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” in 2010. Despite these victories for equality, inequities continue to persist (in the form of higher rates of poverty and incarceration among Blacks, the wage gap that disadvantages women, the lack of access to federally recognized marriages for gays and lesbians, and so on and so forth), while our collective belief in equality grows. What explains this disconnect?

In the case of gender equality, Sapiro and Conover (2001) argue that favoring equality as a normative value is fundamentally different than favoring specific policies designed to achieve equality:

Whether individuals ‘favor’ gender equality (a normative principle or value) does not tell us whether they believe

that equality now exists (a perception) or even whether they endorse specific programs for achieving equality (policy preferences). The relationships among normative principles, perceptions, and policy preferences is complicated. The long train of public opinion research suggests considerable slippage between normative principles and behavior... (pg. 7).

Due to the “slippage” described by Sapiro and Conover (2001), we can not treat a belief in equality as a normative value as interchangeable with a pro-equality policy preference. Furthermore, there are important distinctions to recognize between different types of pro-equality policies. Some policies seek to equalize the *opportunities* available to members of marginalized groups, by protecting them against discrimination, while others seek to directly influence outcomes, by increasing the number of Blacks or women in certain professions with affirmative action policies, for instance. And while equality of opportunity is the touchstone of a liberal society (i.e. all Americans are entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit happiness), the right to equality of outcomes has not been equally embraced by Americans. (In fact, for many Americans, policies designed to equalize outcomes are seen as at odds with a free-market economy.) For these reasons, we anticipate that public attitudes toward outcome oriented pro-equality policies, such as affirmative action, should enjoy less support than does racial equality as an abstract value. Further, we contend that it is the lack of consensus for specific policies that has resulted in the relative lack of government action on equality issues. We present evidence that speaks to this notion by paying closer attention to the survey questions that make up the racial equality series and the gay rights series—the component parts, so to speak.⁸ What we find is that the public is indeed far less supportive of equalizing outcomes than of equalizing opportunities.

⁸In the case of gender equality we do not have access to questions about specific policies designed to equalize outcomes; nevertheless, we hypothesize the same dynamic is at work: outcomes are different than opportunities.

2.1 Racial Equality Mood

One of the great benefits of developing policy-specific mood scores is that scholars across subfields can analyze public opinion as it pertains to their area of interest—without merely speculating that the movements of global mood are perfect correlates to the specific mood of interest. We have seen that issues of equality are of an entirely different flavor than global mood. Because these series are so rich, we are able to take policy-specific mood one step further and look at the component parts of the equality series. Racial equality, although long the topic of much discussion among scholars, was not studied in the longitudinal sense until recently (Carmines & Stimson 1989, Kellstedt 2003). From this analysis, we learned that racial equality mood has a cyclical nature, ebbing and flowing much like global mood. What we did not see from that analysis, however, was the overall *general* trending nature of racial mood. That is, taken together (and with more data), we see racial mood moving consistently in the liberal direction—much more than we see its cyclical patterns (see Figure 3).

This requires an explanation, perhaps one beyond our generational change theory. While we believe cohort replacement motivates a large portion of change, we recognize there is more to be learned. We can attempt to expose more of the story by examining the questions that make up the series—the responses are our key to understanding the underlying attitudes, especially if we consider our theory about equality of outcomes. We have attempted to do exactly this in Figure 7. The black line in the center is the full series reported earlier in Figure 3. When we pull apart questions pertaining to equality of opportunity, we find that respondents are slightly more liberal. This dimension includes questions about the speed of civil rights, housing opportunities, and desegregation.⁹ The lower line is our equality of outcomes estimate, which includes questions about improving the condition of African Americans and spending to aid African Americans. While the lines are surely different, the difference appears to be at the margin.

We could stop here, citing slight differences, but we think there is a different dynamic affecting our estimates: both social desirability and confusion. In full disclosure, after developing our outcome equality

⁹For the full question series, please see the Appendix.

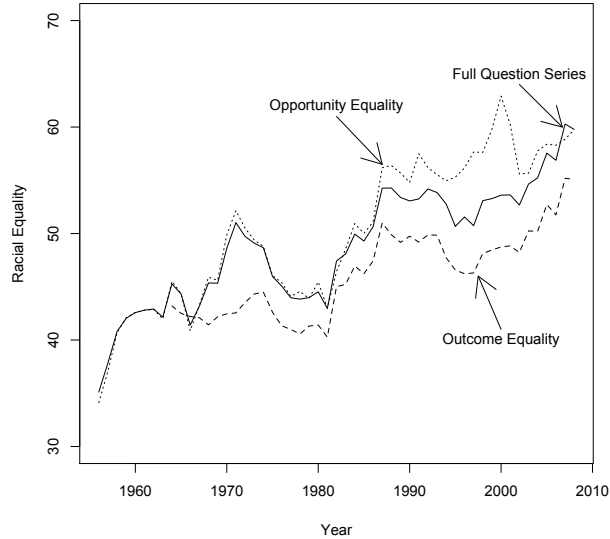


Figure 7: Racial Equality Mood, Decomposed

notion, we turned to breaking apart the question series ourselves and found the task more difficult than expected. What exactly constitutes “outcomes”? These decisions were not without debate. Our solution was two-fold: to report these findings, and also to work harder at putting ourselves in the shoes of survey respondents. What we realized is that most of the survey questions look alike: spending more, doing more, and attending to enforcement of equality are one in the same. Pulling apart “outcomes” is easily obfuscated by question wording.

Previous scholarship offers some guidance on this topic. The works of Sniderman and Carmines (1997) and Le and Citrin (2008) reveal that many Americans dislike affirmative action programs for Blacks because they are perceived as attempting to equalize outcomes by providing preferential treatment to one group versus another on the basis of race. This aspect of affirmative action programs, Sniderman and Carmines (1997) note, actually violates the closely guarded liberal value of equality of opportunity in the minds of many Americans.¹⁰

¹⁰As with most of the issues here, question wording also plays a role in levels of public

For this reason, we chose to create a separate series comprised only of responses to questions on affirmative action.

Figure 8 displays this new series. When it comes to spending more and doing more to aid African Americans, we are, on balance, a liberal public. But when it comes to affirmative action, we see a very different picture: perpetually low and declining support for outcome equality.

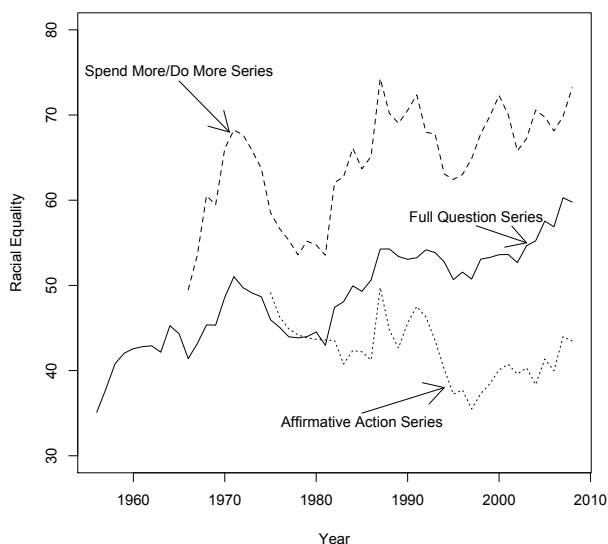


Figure 8: Racial Equality Mood, A Different Look

2.2 Gay Rights Mood

With gay rights issues, we also enjoy a healthy variety of survey questions. We begin with the same assumption as in racial equality: that the component parts of the full series may cover up multiple dynamics

support for affirmative action programs. Le and Citrin (2008) find that when questions about affirmative action refer to “quotas” for Black or women, respondents are less likely to support these policies.

at work. More specifically, the public holds different views on matters of opportunity and outcome. For instance, Egan, Persily and Wallsten (2008) observe that attitudes toward gays in the workforce and the military (the public domain) have liberalized more rapidly than has public acceptance of gay marriage and gay sex (the private domain). Our data allow us to explore this concept by decomposing attitudes toward gays rights in three separate domains: the workplace, the military, and gay marriage and adoption.

Figure 9 shows that support for gay and lesbian equality in the workplace is popular from the time survey measures are administered beginning in 1977, with support upward of 60%. Public support for gays in the military has historically been lower than support for the equality of gays in the workplace. Support for gays in the military, however, quickly jumped to the majority position around 1993. This surge seems to be motivated by President Clinton’s promise of fully equal treatment before and during the 1992 campaign, which undoubtedly motivated public discussion and ultimately, the rethinking of attitudes about gays in the military. Since the mid-1990’s support for gays in the military has continued to increase.

Gay marriage and adoption, however, have only recently reached the majority level, not enjoying the widespread support like workplace and military equality. Extending the right to marry and adopt has indeed been a flashpoint issue. It is these types of questions—those pertaining to the right to marry—that pull down the full series we see in the earlier Figure 6. We believe our “outcomes” story holds here as well. The questions that make up this last series explicitly mention “legality:” “Do you favor or oppose allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally?”, “Do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose allowing gays and lesbians couples to enter into legal agreements with each other that would give them many of the same rights as married couples?” “Do you think gay or lesbian couples, in other words, homosexual couples, should be legally permitted to adopt children?” These are all clearly questions of equality of outcomes—they imply a tangible equality with heterosexuals, one that would likely require governmental action or intervention, much like the affirmative action questions of racial equality.¹¹

¹¹The marriage issue is also freighted with symbolism. And the idea that marriage is “blessed by God” makes gay marriage particularly unattractive to religious traditionalists.

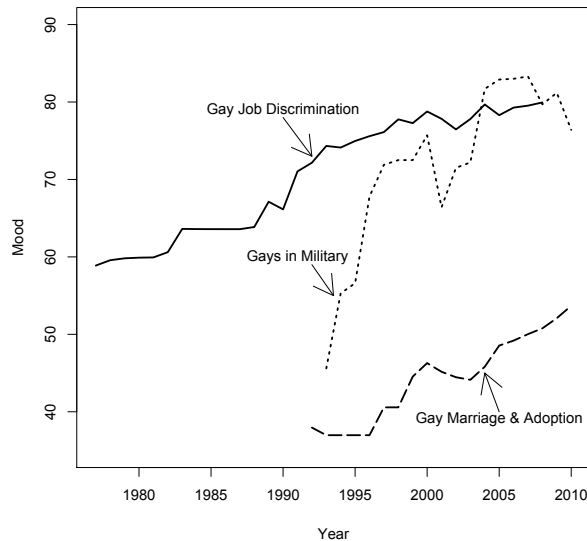


Figure 9: Gay Rights Liberalism, Decomposed Into Three Issue Categories

3 Government Action on Equality Issues

Here we turn to a summary of how American government has responded to the growing support for Equality. We exploit the Policy Agendas database to observe government action.

3.1 Racial Equality

The 1960's saw considerable Supreme Court and Congressional action aimed at ending race-based discrimination. The first key Supreme Court ruling came in 1954 in *Brown v. The Board of Education*. Here, The Court struck down the precedent set by *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1869) by declaring segregation in public schools unconstitutional. A wave of court cases on disenfranchisement and malapportionment followed,

including: *Gomillion v. Lightfoot* (1960), *Baker v. Carr* (1962), and *Reynolds v. Sims* (1964). Together, these cases established that the practice of diluting Black votes through malapportionment and the manipulation of electoral districts is unconstitutional. In 1967 the Supreme Court took up the issue of interracial marriage in the case of *Loving v. Virginia*, finding that laws barring interracial marriage are unconstitutional.

Congress also addressed the issues of segregation and voting rights during this period. The 24th Amendment outlawing the poll tax passed both houses of Congress in 1962 and was ratified by the states in 1964. More comprehensive legislation aimed at ending race-based discrimination followed when Congress passed and president Johnson signed into law the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Some provisions of the latter piece of legislation require periodic renewal, making voting rights a perennial issue in Congress. Congress revisited and extended those provisions in 1970, 1975, 1982, and 2006. Congress also revisited the issues of discrimination in housing and employment, passing the Civil Rights Act of 1968 and the Civil Rights Act of 1991, respectively. The 1991 law strengthened the 1965 Act by stipulating that damages can be awarded in some instances of employment discrimination.

In the two decades since the strengthening of the Civil Rights Act, public support for racial equality has grown. Yet, action by the Court and by Congress has tapered off since that time. To demonstrate this, we created a factor score that represents annual government action on the topic of civil rights. The individual series that comprise the factor include annual counts of Congressional hearings, Congressional referrals, House roll calls, Senate roll calls, public laws, CQ lines, executive orders, and the number of net liberal important laws (as defined by Mayhew are refined by Erikson et al. 2002) on the topic of civil rights and voting rights.¹² The factor has an eigenvalue of 2.56 (out of 9.0) and all of the individual items that comprise the factor load fairly well on the first dimension (see Table 2).

By graphing this factor over time we can get a rough look at the trends in the amount of government attention to the issue of civil rights. Figure 10 does just this, displaying both the civil rights gov-

¹²These data are available from the Policy Agendas Project.

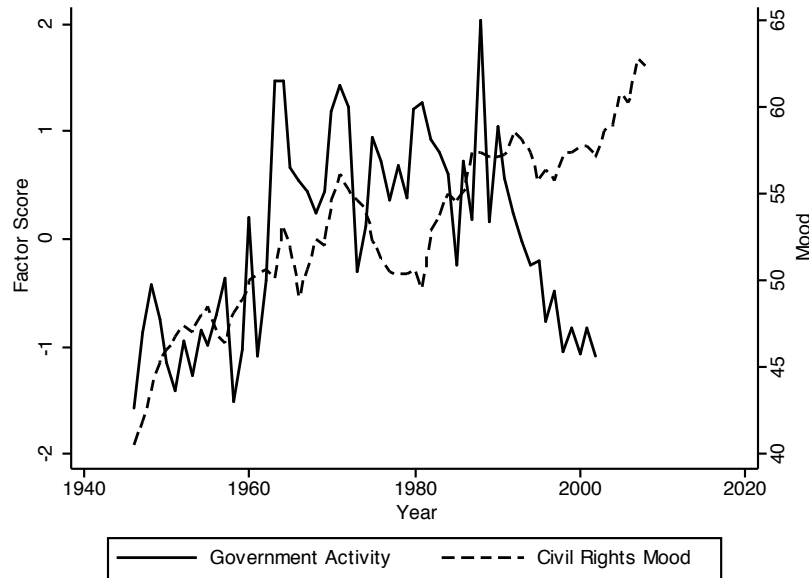


Figure 10: Civil Rights Mood and Civil Rights Government Activity Factor, 1947–2010.

ernment activity factor and the civil rights mood over time. Notice that from the start of the series through the early 1970's, both government activity and mood trend in the liberal direction. But this positive relationship between the two series gives way to a negative one by the latter half of the 1970's. And by the early 1990's civil rights liberalism and government activity have begun to diverge sharply, with government activity dropping off while the public becomes more and more pro-equality. Why, we wonder, is the government doing less and less to ensure equality while public demand for equality continues to rise?

Table 2: Civil Rights Government Activity Factor Loadings

Type of Government Activity	Factor Loading	Number of Cases
Hearings	.59	739
Referrals	.60	280
House Roll Calls	.52	295
Senate Roll Calls	.45	644
Public Laws	.68	49
CQ Lines	.59	178
Executive Orders	.12	46
Supreme Court	.66	488
Net Liberal Laws	.33	15
Eigenvalue	2.56	

Note: Entries are unrotated factor loadings on the first dimension. The N's shown are the total number of observations in the underlying dataset. The underlying data consists of annual counts of various governmental activities by topic area. Each activity series begins on or about 1946 and ends between 2003 and 2007.

3.2 Gender Equality

As with racial equality, the push for gender equality also experienced several major victories during the 1960's and 1970's, but has since seen less government action on the topic.¹³ Since the early 1990's in particular, government action on gender equality has tapered off significantly, while public support for gender equality has continued to climb. Among the key pieces of legislation passed to date are The Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The latter contains provisions outlawing employment discrimination on the basis of sex. Title IX was added to the Civil Rights Act in 1972 to protect against sex-based discrimination in education programs receiving federal funding. The Equal Rights Amendment was also passed by Congress in 1972 but was never ratified by the states. The Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974, the Women's Education Equity Act (1974), the Military Procurement Bill of 1975, and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (1978) followed. In 1984, Congress enacted the Civil Rights Restoration Act over President Reagan's veto. The law clarifies that civil rights laws (such as title IX) apply to whole institutions, not just the specific programs receiving federal aid. The Family Medical Leave Act, which grants qualifying employees 12 weeks of time off following the birth or adoption of a child or for a personal or family illness, was enacted in 1993. The Violence Against Women Act became law the following year, and President Obama signed the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act into law in 2009.¹⁴

The Supreme Court has also issued numerous rulings that have expanded gender equality and reproductive rights, including: *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965), *Phillips v. Martin Marietta Corporation* (1971), *Reed v. Reed* (1971), *Roe v. Wade* (1973), *Cleveland Board of Education v. LaFleur* (1974), *Taylor v. Louisiana* (1975), *General Elec. Co v. Gilbert* (1976), *Kirchberg v. Feenstra* (1981), *Roberts v. U.S. Jaycees* (1984), *Hishon v. King and Spaulding* (1984), *Harris v. Forklift Systems, Inc.* (1993), *United States v. Virginia* (1996), and

¹³The National Women's History Project provides a detailed timeline of legislation and Supreme Court decisions that are pertinent to the Women's Rights Movement: <http://www.legacy98.org/timeline.html>

¹⁴Due to the structure of the Policy Agendas Project data, we are not able to provide a factor analysis for women's rights and gay rights at this time. The coding scheme does not include distinct codes for women's rights and gay rights.

Kolstad v. American Dental Association (1999). As with Congressional action on gender equality, the bulk of these rulings came during the 1970's. While public attitudes toward gender equality have become increasing liberal since that time, government action on the issue has not kept pace.

3.3 Gay Rights

In the case of gay rights, the history of government activity is newer, has often taken place at the state and local levels, and is peppered with both victories and setbacks. Much of this activity has taken place since the start of the 1990's and has centered on the issue of same-sex marriage.

Government attention to the issue of same-sex marriage during the 1990's was catalyzed by a series of court rulings in Hawaii. In 1993 the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled that the state could not deny same-sex couples the right to marry without providing a compelling reason for doing so (Stateline 2008).¹⁵ When the state failed to provide such a reason, a Circuit Court judge ordered the state of Hawaii to begin issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples in December of 1996 (Baehr v. Miike 1996). That same year, the issue of same-sex marriage received attention from the federal government when Congress passed and President Clinton signed into law the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). The act established the federal definition of marriage as a union between one man and one woman. The act also provided that states were not required to honor same-sex marriages performed in other states.

Following the passage of the federal DOMA in 1996, numerous states passed laws banning same-sex marriage that were modeled after the federal legislation. Yet, while many states were banning same-sex unions, Vermont became the first state to grant civil unions to same-sex couples in 2000 (Stateline 2008).

¹⁵Stateline.org created a timeline of federal and state action on same-sex marriage, which is now found on Pew's web site: <http://pewforum.org/Gay-Marriage-and-Homosexuality/Gay-Marriage-Timeline.aspx>

The issue of same-sex marriage resurfaced on the Congressional agenda in 2002 when The Federal Marriage Amendment, which seeks to ban same-sex marriage, was first introduced (H.J. Res 93 [107th]). National attention to the issue intensified in March 2003 as the Supreme Court prepared to hear arguments in *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003). In what has become a landmark decision, the Court struck down a Texas sodomy law (Egan, Persily and Wallsten 2008). The following year, same-sex couples filed suit in Massachusetts, seeking the right to marry. In November of 2004 the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled in their favor, legalizing same-sex marriage statewide (Stateline 2008).

Also during 2004, voters in 13 states considered constitutional amendments prohibiting gay marriages, all of which passed (Missouri, Louisiana, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon and Utah) (Stateline 2008). Additional states followed suit in subsequent years. To date 39 states prohibit same-sex marriages (National Conference of State Legislatures 2011).¹⁶ But equal marriage laws have also gained momentum in recent years. As of May 2011, five states and the District of Columbia issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples (Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont, New Hampshire, District of Columbia) and four states permit civil union (Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, New Jersey) (National Conference of State Legislatures 2011).

In addition to the issue of gay marriage, the federal government has taken up the issue of hate crimes (implementing the Hate Crimes Statistics Act in 1990 and the Matthew Shepard Act in 2009), gays in the military (implementing “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” in 1993 and the repeal of that policy in 2010), and employment discrimination (Clinton issued Executive Order 13087 in 1998 that prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation in the federal civilian workforce). Further, The Employment Non-Discrimination Act was first introduced in Congress in 1994 (Human Rights Campaign, 2011).¹⁷ The legislation has been subsequently introduced several times but has yet to become law.

¹⁶Source: <http://www.ncsl.org/default.aspx?tabid=16430>

¹⁷The source for this information is the HRC ENDA timeline, found here: <http://www.hrc.org/sites/passendanow/timeline.asp>

Unlike government action on racial and gender equality, which peaked between 1965 and 1985, pro-gay rights action seems to be peaking now. This is perhaps due to the mismatch between the lack of de jure equality for gays and lesbians and growing public support for such equality.

4 Belief and Action: Concluding Observations about Equality

What we have observed, first with race, then with gender, and then with sexual preference, is strong and quite uniform evidence of growing belief in equality. Such trends started at different times and proceeded from different levels, but the similarity of trends toward support of equality is quite uniform.

One might think that such changing public opinion would be accompanied by equally strong trends in actual equality. And there is some evidence for gains in actual equality. But gains in actual equality do not match the near uniform support for equality that we see in the public opinion data—nor is there much reason to expect gains in the near future. Blacks still suffer the disadvantages of relative poverty. Women still face a glass ceiling in the workplace. Gays still cannot enjoy the legal advantages of marriage. And while these remain true, there is little discussion of further policy steps toward equality. And there is little action.

After the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, there was little left of de jure segregation and discrimination by race in the United States. In the case of women, the Equal Rights Amendment was never ratified. But anti-discrimination provisions have been implemented at the federal level. The gay rights agenda was partially satisfied with the abolition of formal anti-gay practices in the military. The legal protections of marriage seem to be gaining ground, but are not actually in place in most jurisdictions.

So what is the disconnect here? Why is it that growing support for equality is not matched by increased action from the government on

these issues? To answer that question we need to dig into what respondents are saying when they answer survey questions about equality. If we do, we quickly see that there are two sorts of survey questions widely employed. One is the question of opportunity, e.g., should women and blacks have an equal role in society and the workplace? The second concerns proposals to eliminate various lingering inequities by equalizing outcomes.

What we learn from these question forms is (1) that full equality is endorsed by most, and (2) that most wish to remove existing forms of discrimination, even though they were once culturally accepted practices. What we do not learn about is support for programs that would actively produce more equal outcomes, not just eliminate the barriers to them. The closest we come for race and gender is affirmative action programs which would give advantages in employment to classes of workers previously subject to discrimination. But here consensus ends. Affirmative action programs lack majority support, let alone consensus. But by and large we lack evidence of support for measures that would produce actual equality because few such measures are ever seriously proposed and the issues do not become the subject of survey questions. So we know that there is a consensus on the desirability of equality as a social goal and a consensus that discrimination which would prevent equality should be eliminated. But we do not observe evidence of support for policies that would actually produce equal outcomes.

One can frame this discrepancy as inconsistent at best, cynical at worst. If citizens *really* believe in equality, should they not also support programs designed to produce it? Isn't it disingenuous to claim to support equality and be unwilling to take the next step and produce it? Here we encounter a pattern that is quite normal in American opinion and values. That is the fundamental belief in individualism, in getting ahead on your own, that frowns upon measures designed by produce equality of outcomes. American opinion wants individuals to have to strive and struggle to attain goals such as equality. It doesn't believe that barriers should limit the possibilities. But it also doesn't believe that actual social assistance should help some to be equal with others. This is seen across the board in opinion studies.

On the matter of income, for example, Americans are concerned

about and do not like growing inequality. And that carries over to weak majority support for a redistributive income tax system. But more direct measures that would produce more equality of incomes often fail majority support. And so it is with social equality issues, such as race, women, and gay rights. The true consensus is for elimination of barriers to equality. But that does not extend into support for policies—for example, quotas of any kind—that produce equal outcomes.

So is opinion inconsistent and cynical? We take the opposite approach and conclude that were survey respondents asked the tough questions about policies to produce actual equality, they would in large numbers say no. So they are consistent up to a point.

A Appendix

A.1 Generating Policy-Specific Mood

For those familiar with the concept and estimation of the original global Mood (Stimson 1991), the extension to policy-specific moods will be mostly straightforward. Global Mood is an annual and aggregate measure of the public’s preferences for more or less government—across multiple policy domains. Our task is to break down global Mood into its component parts (where the data allow) and generate policy specific moods. We began by assigning policy codes to the approximately 400 (and growing) survey question series that make up the Mood database. Each question is given a code that matches a Policy Code from the Agendas Project coding scheme. Importantly, when questions covered multiple topics, we assigned multiple codes. This was the case for about 25 percent of our database.

Understanding the policy specific mood series we have generated requires some familiarity of the Policy Agendas Codebook as well. There are 19 major topic areas, ranging from Health (Major Topic 300) to Community Development and Housing Issues (Major Topic 1400), each of which is then broken down into subtopics, often on the order of 15 subtopics. Major topic 100 (Macroeconomics), for example, covers a broad range of issues (e.g., Inflation, Subtopic 101; Unemployment Rate, Subtopic 103) that have been the subject of public debate—and the topic of much survey research—in the United States for quite some time. As such, the data series for both the Major Topic and many of the Subtopics are rich for Macroeconomics. In other words, we are able to estimate multiple policy specific mood series within Major Topic 100. On the other hand, some topics have not enjoyed as much public attention, and as such, the public opinion data are sparse. Major Topic 800 (Energy), for example, falls into this category. Our estimates for Energy Policy Mood will, as a result, be less reliable, if even possible.

Because of the disparity in data availability and the potential effect on the caliber of our estimates, we have also created simple quality scores for our policy moods: High and Low, based on our judgments from two indicators. For each series we estimate, we include infor-

mation on the number of series and the number of administrations. Thus, we know how much data was used to generate each mood estimate. While the old adage of “more is better,” holds in some cases, it should not be applied as a general rule when it comes to policy specific moods. For example, an environmental studies scholar interested in public support for mass transportation need not be discouraged by the availability of only one survey question coded squarely in his or her Policy Code, 1001. The reason is two-fold. First, the available question reads “Are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on mass transportation?”, a direct measure of the concept in which the scholar is interested. Secondly, the series has been asked across many years, making the estimate even more reliable.

The intuition behind the second reason is inherent in the estimation process. After assigning policy codes to each question series, we were able to move to phase two, estimation. To do so, we used Stimson’s (1991) dyad ratios algorithm, which accomplishes a task similar to principal components analysis. The algorithm assesses the variation over time within series by rendering them as ratios of the same stimulus question repeated over time. When more than one question series is used for a policy specific mood, it assesses covariation between series by observing the covariation of those ratios.

A.2 Survey Questions for Policy-Specific Series

A.2.1 Racial Equality Series

Spend More/Do More Series

- I would like to get your opinion on several areas of important government activities. As I read each one, please tell me if you would like to see the government do more, less or do about the same amount as they have been on...Helping minority groups?
- Are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on... improving the conditions of Blacks?
- I’m going to show you a list of problems, and I’d like you to

tell me if each is something the government should be making a major effort on now, or something the government should be making some effort on now, or something not needing any particular government effort now...Trying to solve the problems caused by ghettos, race, and poverty.

- Are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on... assistance to blacks?
- Do you think the government should do more to help blacks, or has it done enough, or has it done too much already?
- Should federal spending on aid to blacks be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?

Affirmative Action Series

- Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks. (Suppose these people are at one end of a scale, at point 1.) Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help blacks because they should help themselves.
- Some people say that because of past discrimination, blacks should be given preference in hiring and promotion. Others say that such preference in hiring and promotion of blacks is wrong because it discriminates against whites. What about your opinion—are you for or against preferential hiring and promotion of blacks?
- Do you generally favor or oppose affirmative action programs for women and minorities?
- Statement A: Affirmative action programs are still needed to counteract the effects of discrimination against minorities, and are a good idea as long as there are no rigid quotas. OR, Statement B: Affirmative action programs have gone too far in favoring minorities, and should be ended because they unfairly discriminate against whites.
- Some people say that because of past discrimination, blacks should be given preference in hiring and promotion. Others say that such preference in hiring and promotion of blacks is wrong because it gives blacks advantages they haven't earned. What

about your opinion – are you FOR or AGAINST preferential hiring and promotion of blacks?

- Some people think that if a company has a history of discriminating against blacks when making hiring decisions, then they should be required to have an affirmative action program that gives blacks preference in hiring. What do you think? Should companies that have discriminated against blacks have to have an affirmative action program?

Full Racial Equality Series

- Civil Rights Too Fast
- Do you think the government should do more to help blacks, or has it done enough, or has it done too much already?
- Do you believe that where there has been job discrimination against blacks in the past, preference in hiring or promotion should be given to blacks today?
- Do you think the (present) administration is pushing racial integration too fast, or not fast enough?
- Statement A: Affirmative action programs are still needed to counteract the effects of discrimination against minorities, and are a good idea as long as there are no rigid quotas. OR, Statement B: Affirmative action programs have gone too far in favoring minorities, and should be ended because they unfairly discriminate against whites.
- If negroes are not getting fair treatment in jobs and housing, the government should see to it that they do.
- As you may know, Congress passed a bill that says that black people should have the right to go to any hotel or restaurant they can afford, just like anybody else. Some people feel that this is something the government in Washington should support. Others feel that the government should stay out of this matter. Have you been interested enough in this to favor one side or another? [If yes] Should the government support the right of black people to go to any hotel or restaurant they can afford, or should it just stay out of this matter?
- (De)Segregation?

- Some feel that if negroes are not getting fair treatment in jobs the government in Washington ought to see to it that they do. Others feel that this is not the federal government's business.
- Some people say that Negroes should be allowed to live in any part of town they want to. Ho do you feel? Should Negroes be allowed to live in any part of town they want to or not?
- Some people say that the government in Washington should see to it that white and Negro (black) children are allowed to go to the same schools. Others claim that this is not the government's business.
- Are you in favor of desegregation, strict segregation, or something in between?
- Are you in favor of desegregation, strict segregation, or something in between?
- Are you in favor of desegregation, strict segregation, or something in between?
- Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every possible effort to improve the social and economic position of Negroes and other minority groups. Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help minorities because they should be expected to help themselves. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought very much about this? [1970-1988]
- There is much discussion about the best way to deal with racial problems. Some people think that achieving racial integration of schools is so important that it justifies busing children to schools out of their own neighborhoods. Others think that letting children go to their neighborhood schools is so important that they oppose busing. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought very much about this?
- Should federal spending on aid to blacks be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?
- Some people say that because of past discrimination, blacks should be given preference in hiring and promotion. Others say that such preference in hiring and promotion of blacks is wrong because it gives blacks advantages they haven't earned. What about your opinion – are you FOR or AGAINST preferential hiring and promotion of blacks?

- Some people think that if a company has a history of discriminating against blacks when making hiring decisions, then they should be required to have an affirmative action program that gives blacks preference in hiring. What do you think? Should companies that have discriminated against blacks have to have an affirmative action program?
- In general, do you favor or oppose the busing of (negro/black) and white school children from one district to another?
- Are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on...improving the conditions of Blacks?
- Suppose there is a community wide vote on the general housing issue. There are two possible laws to vote on: A. One law says that a homeowner can decide for himself whom to sell his house to, even if he prefers not to sell to Negroes/Blacks/African Americans. B. The second law says that a homeowner cannot refuse to sell to someone because of their race or color. Which law would you vote for?
- Some think Blacks/Negroes have been discriminated against for so long that government has a special obligation to improve their living standards. Others believe that government should not be giving special treatment .. Where would you place yourself on
- Are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on... assistance to blacks?
- Some people say that because of past discrimination, blacks should be given preference in hiring and promotion. Others say that such preference in hiring and promotion of blacks is wrong because it discriminates against whites. What about your opinion—are you for or against preferential hiring and promotion of blacks?
- I'm going to show you a list of problems, and I'd like you to tell me if each is something the government should be making a major effort on now, or something the government should be making some effort on now, or something not needing any particular government effort now...Trying to solve the problems caused by ghettos, race, and poverty.
- I would like to get your opinion on several areas of important government activities. As I read each one, please tell me if you

would like to see the government do more, less or do about the same amount as they have been on...Helping minority groups?

- Do you generally favor or oppose affirmative action programs for women and minorities?

A.2.2 Gender Equality Series

- Recently there has been a lot of talk about women's rights. Some people feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry, and government. Others feel that a woman's place is in the home. Place yourself on this 1-7 scale, 1 being full equal role, 7 being place is in the home.

A.2.3 Gay Equality Series

Gay Equality in the Workplace Series

- In general, do you think homosexuals should or should not have equal rights in terms of job opportunities?
- School boards ought to have the right to fire teachers who are known homosexuals.
- Do you favor or oppose laws to protect homosexuals against job discrimination?

Gays in the Military Series

- Do you think homosexuals should be allowed to serve in the United States Armed Forces or don't you think so?
- Do you think homosexuals who do NOT publicly disclose their sexual orientation should be allowed to serve in the military or not?
- Do you think homosexuals who DO publicly disclose their sexual orientation should be allowed to serve in the military or not?

Gay Adoption & Gay Marriage Series

- Would you favor or oppose a constitutional amendment that would define marriage as being between a man and a woman, thus barring marriages between gay or lesbian couples?
- Do you think it should be legal or illegal for homosexual couples to get married (If legal/Illegal, ask:) (Is that strongly or somewhat?)
- Do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose allowing gays and lesbians couples to enter into legal agreements with each other that would give them many of the same rights as married couples?
- Would you support or oppose a law that would allow same-sex couples to form civil unions, giving them many of the legal rights of married couples?
- Would you support or oppose amending the United States Constitution to ban same-sex marriage?
- Would you support amending the U.S. (United States) Constitution to make it against the law for homosexual couples to get married anywhere in the U.S., or should each state make its own laws on homosexual marriage?
- Do you believe gays and lesbians should be allowed to get legally married, allowed a legal partnership similar to but not called marriage, or should there be no legal recognition given to gay and lesbian relationships?
- Which comes closest to your view? Gay couples should be allowed to legally marry, or gay couples should be allowed to form civil unions but not legally marry, or there should be no legal recognition of a gay couple's relationship?
- Would you support or oppose amending the United States Constitution to ban same sex marriage?
- Do you favor or oppose allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally?
- Should same-sex couples be ALLOWED to marry, or do you think they should NOT BE ALLOWED to marry?
- Do you think gay or lesbian couples, in other words, homosexual couples, should be legally permitted to adopt children?

- Do you think marriages between homosexuals should or should not be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?
- Do you think marriages between homosexuals should or should not be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?
- Do you think homosexual couples should or should not be allowed to form legally recognized civil unions, giving them the legal rights of married couples in areas such as health insurance, inheritance and pension coverage?

Full Gay Equality Series

- Would you favor or oppose a constitutional amendment that would define marriage as being between a man and a woman, thus barring marriages between gay or lesbian couples?
- Do you think it should be legal or illegal for homosexual couples to get married (If legal/Illegal, ask:) (Is that strongly or somewhat?)
- Do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose allowing gays and lesbians couples to enter into legal agreements with each other that would give them many of the same rights as married couples?
- Would you support or oppose a law that would allow same-sex couples to form civil unions, giving them many of the legal rights of married couples?
- Would you support or oppose amending the United States Constitution to ban same-sex marriage?
- Would you support amending the U.S. (United States) Constitution to make it against the law for homosexual couples to get married anywhere in the U.S., or should each state make its own laws on homosexual marriage?
- Do you believe gays and lesbians should be allowed to get legally married, allowed a legal partnership similar to but not called marriage, or should there be no legal recognition given to gay and lesbian relationships?

- Which comes closest to your view? Gay couples should be allowed to legally marry, or gay couples should be allowed to form civil unions but not legally marry, or there should be no legal recognition of a gay couple's relationship?
- Would you support or oppose amending the United States Constitution to ban same sex marriage?
- Do you favor or oppose allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally?
- Should same-sex couples be ALLOWED to marry, or do you think they should NOT BE ALLOWED to marry?
- Do you think gay or lesbian couples, in other words, homosexual couples, should be legally permitted to adopt children?
- Do you think marriages between homosexuals should or should not be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?
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- Do you think homosexual couples should or should not be allowed to form legally recognized civil unions, giving them the legal rights of married couples in areas such as health insurance, inheritance and pension coverage?
- In general, do you think homosexuals should or should not have equal rights in terms of job opportunities?
- School boards ought to have the right to fire teachers who are known homosexuals.
- Do you favor or oppose laws to protect homosexuals against job discrimination?
- Do you think homosexuals should be allowed to serve in the United States Armed Forces or don't you think so?
- Do you think homosexuals who do NOT publicly disclose their sexual orientation should be allowed to serve in the military or not?
- Do you think homosexuals who DO publicly disclose their sexual orientation should be allowed to serve in the military or not?

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