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Abstract

Carman and Wlezien examine the seven-point ideological placements of government institutions--the president, Congress, and the Supreme Court--and policy included in the 1997 Pilot Study. They find that respondents are likely to place the government institutions and policy on the ideological scale and that the distribution of means is sensible. They also find that respondents' placements are positively related. This clustering partially reflects the negative correlation between self placement and placements of institutions and policy, i.e., the more extreme one's self placement, the more distant one's placement of the three government institutions and policy. The clustering also reflects the patterned connection between institutional placements on the one hand and policy placements on the other. That is, respondents' placements of the three government institutions independently predict respondents' placement of policy, and the estimated effects of institutional placements differ understandably. Carman and Wlezien find that measures of self-institution ideological distance predict respondents' "too liberal" and "too conservative" assessments of the separate institutions, which were included in the 1997 Pilot Study. They also find that measures of absolute self-institution distance predict thermometer evaluations of the corresponding institutions, though the estimated effect is most pronounced for Clinton, sharply lower for the Congress, and lower still for the Supreme Court. They suggest that these differences may reflect differences in the function and salience of the institutions. Carman and Wlezien conclude that the seven-point measures capture meaningful information and work well, and should be included in future studies, perhaps as part of the NES core.

Date: February 3, 1998

To: NES Board

From: Christopher Carman and Christopher Wlezien

Re: Ideological Evaluations of Government Institutions and Policy in the
1997 Pilot Study

The 1997 Pilot Study asked respondents to place the president, the Congress, the Supreme Court, and government policy on a seven-point ideological scale. This marks a change from previous studies, which only have asked respondents to place the president. Discussions during the meeting of the Planning Committee suggested that placements of the full set of government institutions and policy itself might offer important information that would be of use to a wide range of scholars. Here is our assessment of these items.

Descriptives:

The frequencies and descriptive statistics for the government institution and policy placement measures are shown in Table 1. Note that all respondents were asked to place themselves and Clinton, and a subset of (429) respondents were asked to place the Congress, the Supreme Court, and policy (and the two political parties).¹ The subset represents the (441) respondents who provided a self identification minus twelve respondents who were excluded for other reasons. Most of the subset of respondents who were asked about the other institutions and policy did provide placements, only slightly (1-2 percent) less frequently than they placed the political parties.

The mean placements of the three institutions and policy, and placements of self and the two political parties are shown in Figure 1. The array of means is intuitively satisfying. The mean for Clinton is well left of center, just inside the Democratic party mean. The means for the Congress and the Supreme Court are right of center, slightly to the right of mean self placement. The mean placement of government policy is about equidistant from mean placements of Clinton on the one hand and the Congress and Supreme Court on the other.

Correlational Structure:

Intercorrelations among institutional and policy placements together with party and self placements are shown in Table 2. Here we can see that placements of government institutions and policy all are positively related, which is understandable, except for the specific correlation between Clinton and the Congress. We also can see that the placements of government institutions and policy (and, to a lesser extent, the political parties) are negatively related to self placement. That is, the more extreme one's self placement, the more distant one's placement of institutions and policy. Plots of institutional and policy placements predicted by self placement indicate that this tendency is pronounced, as is clear in Figure 2. The tendency partially accounts for the positive

correlations among institutional and policy placements. As shown in Table 3, when controlling for self placement, all of the correlations are dampened, and the correlation between placements of Clinton and Congress is indistinguishable from zero. A good deal of clustering remains, and this is as one might expect, partly because policy placements should effectively summarize placements of the separate institutions. The regression analyses in Table 4 confirm this suspicion.

In the first model, we see that placements of the three institutions do independently predict policy placement. The estimated effects differ understandably, as the Clinton placement matters most, the Congress placement a little less, and the Supreme Court placement about half as much. The sum of the three coefficients is slightly less than 1, suggesting that policy placement nicely--but less than perfectly--summarizes institutional placements. In the second model, we see that adding self placement only slightly diminishes each of the institutional coefficients; in the third model, we see that adding party identification has virtually no effect whatsoever. These results suggest that the seven-point placements of the three institutions capture different information and that the information they do capture is meaningful.²

Another way to assess the validity of the measures is to examine how they predict other measures of ideological placement. For this we use the items included in the Pilot Study that ask *directly* about the relative placements of the three government institutions, i.e., whether the institutions are "too liberal" or "too conservative." Using responses to the items, we create seven-point scales for each institution, where the value 1 indicates that respondents think the phrase "too conservative" fits the institution "extremely well," and the value 7 indicates that respondents think the phrase "too liberal" fits the institution "extremely well." See Appendix A for more information about the specific items and the construction of the scales. Frequencies and descriptive statistics for our three measures are shown in Table 5. (Note that we only include the 429 respondents who provided a self placement on the seven-point ideological scale.³)

Several things in Table 5 are worthy of note. First, respondents were quite likely to provide "too liberal" and "too conservative" placements of the institutions. Second, the pattern of responses for each institution is multi-modal, and this actually makes some sense given the question wording, which is explicitly relative, and construction (see Appendix A). Finally, the means are satisfying; indeed, they represent virtual linear combinations of mean self and institutional placements from Table 1.

Now let us assess how well the seven-point placements predict "too liberal"/"too conservative" placements. To do so, it is necessary to create relative placements from the seven-point measures, by subtracting institutional placements from self placement. The measures capture both direction and distance, and range from -6 to 6, where the sign of the value indicates direction--a positive (negative) value indicates that the respondent is more conservative (liberal) than the institution. (Note that the range of the directional distance measures, -6 to 6, is twice the range of the "too liberal"/"too conservative" measures, -3 to 3.) The regression analyses in Table 6 indicate that the directional

distance measures predict "too liberal"/"too conservative" assessments and that the effects are about the same across the three institutions. These findings indicate that the two sets of measures capture much of the same information, which supports our earlier findings.

External Prediction:

One way to assess the utility of the seven-point placements is to examine whether and how they predict respondents' evaluations of the institutions. We begin with thermometer evaluations, which we have for each government institution, and regress these evaluations on measures of self-institution ideological distance. Specifically, we use absolute distance measures for each institution--these measures are the absolute values of the directional distance measures from above.⁴ Results of regressing the thermometer ratings on the corresponding absolute distance measures are presented in Table 7.⁵ These results indicate that the measures significantly predict thermometer ratings for all three institutions. The estimated effects differ across institutions, however--the effect is most pronounced for Clinton, sharply lower for the Congress, and even lower for the Supreme Court. These differences may be understandable, that is, given the differences in both the function and salience of the institutions.

To further assess the seven-point measures, we incorporate parallel measures of ideological distance constructed from the "too liberal"/"too conservative" assessments (from Table 5) into our models. These "absolute ideology" measures were generated by subtracting out the midpoint of the scales and then taking their absolute values. (Note that the range of these variables, 0 to 3, is half the range of the absolute distance measures, 0 to 6). The results of these regression analyses, in Table 8, indicate that the absolute distance measures perform about as well as they did previously (in Table 7). The results also show that absolute ideology measures work independently and that their effects differ across institutions, but in a less obvious way--the measures predict evaluations of Clinton and the Supreme Court, but not the Congress.⁶ These results suggest that the "too liberal"/"too conservative" measures may contain some politically relevant information that is not captured by the seven-point placements. Note, however, that identical analyses of institutional job approval, which only are possible for the president and Congress, reveal a different pattern, as shown in Table 9. Here we see that absolute distance measures work well but absolute ideology measures do not, even for Clinton. What, then, is clear from these analyses is that the seven-point placement measures predict institutional evaluations quite well.

Observations and Recommendations:

Respondents are able to place government institutions and policy on a seven-point ideological scale and these placements appear to be meaningful. First, the means are as we would, a priori, expect. Second, respondents' placements of each institution independently predict respondents' placement of governmental policy, and certain placements (especially for the president and Congress) matter more than others (the Supreme Court). Third, absolute self-institution ideological distance measures predict thermometer evaluations of

the corresponding institutions, though the estimated effect is most pronounced for Clinton, sharply lower for the Congress, and even lower for the Supreme Court. These differences may be understandable, given the differences in both the function and salience of the institutions. All of these analyses suggest that the seven-point measures work well. There also is reason to think that these measures are useful in ways we have not considered here, e.g., in assessing the electoral origins of divided government. Thus, we conclude that the new seven-point placements of government institutions and policy should be included in future studies, perhaps as part of the NES core. We suggest that placements be asked of all respondents, not only those who provide a self placement.⁷

We are less certain about the utility of the "too liberal"/"too conservative" institutional measures. These measures capture much of the same information as strict distance measures constructed from the seven-point placements, but they also contain something else. There is some evidence that the "too liberal"/"too conservative" measures contain separate, politically meaningful information, though the evidence is mixed. When taken as absolute distances from their midpoint, the measures independently predict thermometer evaluations of Clinton and the Supreme Court, but not ratings of Congress. These measures do not predict job approval for any of the institutions, however. Even to the extent the measures do predict institutional evaluations, it is not clear that the connections reflect ideological evaluations per se. Still, in our minds, the "too liberal"/"too conservative" items may warrant inclusion in at least one full-fledged National Election Study, if only to provide a more complete assessment.⁸

Appendix A: Institutional "Too Liberal"/"Too Conservative" Measures

A "too liberal"/"too conservative" measure for each institution was constructed from a series of four variables in the Pilot Study. In the study, respondents were randomly assigned to two treatments and then asked the following question:

Does the phrase "Too conservative" ("Too liberal") describe [the institution] extremely well, quite well, not too well, or not well at all?

If respondents answered "extremely well" or "quite well," they were asked the next question in the questionnaire. If the respondent answered "not too well" or "not well at all," they were asked the follow-up question:

What about "Too liberal" ("Too conservative")? Does the phrase "Too liberal" ("Too conservative") describe [the institution] extremely well, quite well, not too well, or not well at all?

Respondents were asked first about Congress, then the President, and finally the Supreme Court.

Using responses to these items for both treatments, we constructed a seven-point scale for each institution. The following coding procedure was used:

Coding Procedure for "Too Liberal"/"Too Conservative" Measures

"Too Conservative" Response	"Too Liberal" Response	Code
"extremely well"	-	1
"quite well"	-	2
"not too well"	"not well at all"	3
"not too well"	"not too well"	4
"not well at all"	"not well at all"	4
"not well at all"	"not too well"	5
-	"quite well"	6
-	"extremely well"	7

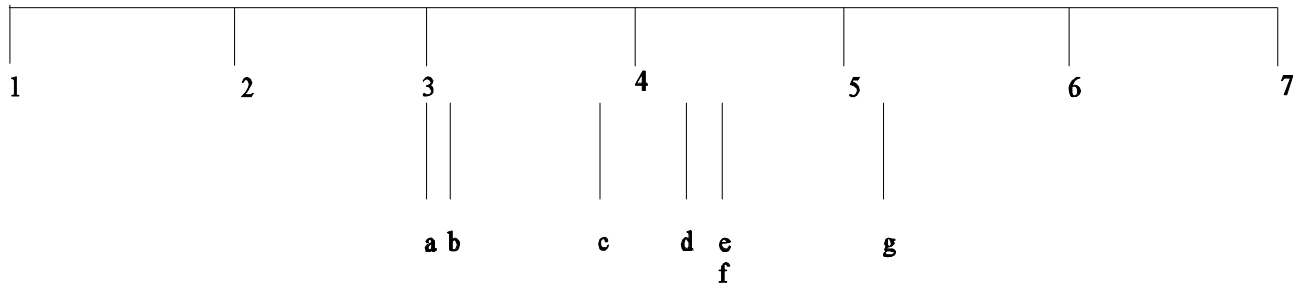
Notes

1. It is interesting and important to note that respondents were much (about 12 percent) more likely to place Clinton than they were to place themselves.
2. Separate analyses described in the last two columns of Table 4 indicate that the estimated effects of institutional placements differ by education level in two important ways: (1) the effect of the Clinton placement is larger among the more educated and the effect of the Congress placement is larger among the less educated; (2) the Supreme Court placement does not independently predict policy placement among the less educated.
3. We could not isolate the other 12 respondents who were not asked to place government institutions and policy on the seven-point scale (see Table 1 and the corresponding text).
4. Separate analyses (not reported here) indicate that directional distance measures do not independently predict institutional thermometer ratings.
5. To correct for positivity bias, the thermometers were adjusted using each respondent's average thermometer evaluation of seven groups: blacks, whites, labor unions, big business, people on welfare, gays and lesbians, and Christian fundamentalists. Specifically, the respondent's average rating of these seven groups was subtracted from the respondent's thermometer rating of each of the institutional thermometers. These adjustments actually do not make much difference for the analyses.
6. Using the raw "too liberal"/"too conservative" measures does not make any difference. Note that the connections between the absolute distance measures and thermometer ratings may be partially complicated by our coding of certain responses to the "too liberal" and "too conservative" items, particularly where respondents stated "not too well" or "not well at all" to both of the original and follow-up items (see Appendix A).
7. It is worth noting here that all respondents were asked to place the institutions on the "too liberal" and "too conservative" scales.
8. We have not examined the experimental component of the items, which is not the purpose of this report.

Table 1: Frequencies and Descriptive Statistics for the Seven-Point Ideological Placement Items

		Self v302	Clinton v306	Congress v310	Supreme Court v311	Gov't Policy v314	Dem. Party v312	Rep. Party v313
Extremely Liberal	1	7	59	1	7	3	30	3
	2	47	138	19	17	42	145	7
	3	69	112	66	47	105	122	30
Moderate	4	133	106	124	144	151	70	52
	5	81	53	142	130	84	35	116
	6	95	32	63	61	27	16	192
Extremely Conservative	7	9	6	5	9	2	4	23
Valid N		441	506	420	415	414	422	423
DK	8	110	10	9	13	14	6	6
NA, RF	9		3		1	1	1	
INAP	0		32	122	122	122	122	122
Sys. Miss. N		110	45	131	136	137	129	128
Total N		551	551	551	551	551	551	551
Mean		4.26	3.15	4.42	4.43	3.87	3.00	5.22
Standard Deviation		1.38	1.45	1.11	1.16	1.10	1.27	1.14

Figure 1: Means of the Seven-Point Ideological Placement Items



a 3.00 Democratic Party

b 3.15 Clinton

c 3.87 Government Policy

d 4.26 Self Placement

e 4.42 Congress

f 4.43 Supreme Court

g 5.22 Republican Party

Table 2: Correlations Among the Seven-Point Ideological Placement Items

	Self	Clinton	Congress	Supreme Court	Gov't Policy	Dem. Party	Rep. Party
Self	1.00						
Clinton	-0.23**	1.00					
Congress	-0.30**	0.15*	1.00				
Supreme Court	-0.33**	0.31**	0.48**	1.00			
Gov't Policy	-0.37**	0.49**	0.44**	0.44**	1.00		
Dem. Party	-0.19**	0.67**	0.05	0.18**	0.38**	1.00	
Rep. Party	-0.13*	-0.32**	0.38**	0.20**	0.03	-0.05	1.00

* $p \leq .01$

** $p \leq .001$

Table 3: Partial Correlations Among the Government Institution and Policy Placement Items, Controlling for Self Placement

	Clinton	Congress	Supreme Court	Gov't Policy
Clinton	-			
Congress	0.09	-		
Supreme Court	0.29*	0.43*	-	
Gov't Policy	0.45*	0.37*	.36*	-

* $p \leq .001$

Figure 2: Predicted Seven-Point Placements of Government Institutions and Policy, by Self Placement

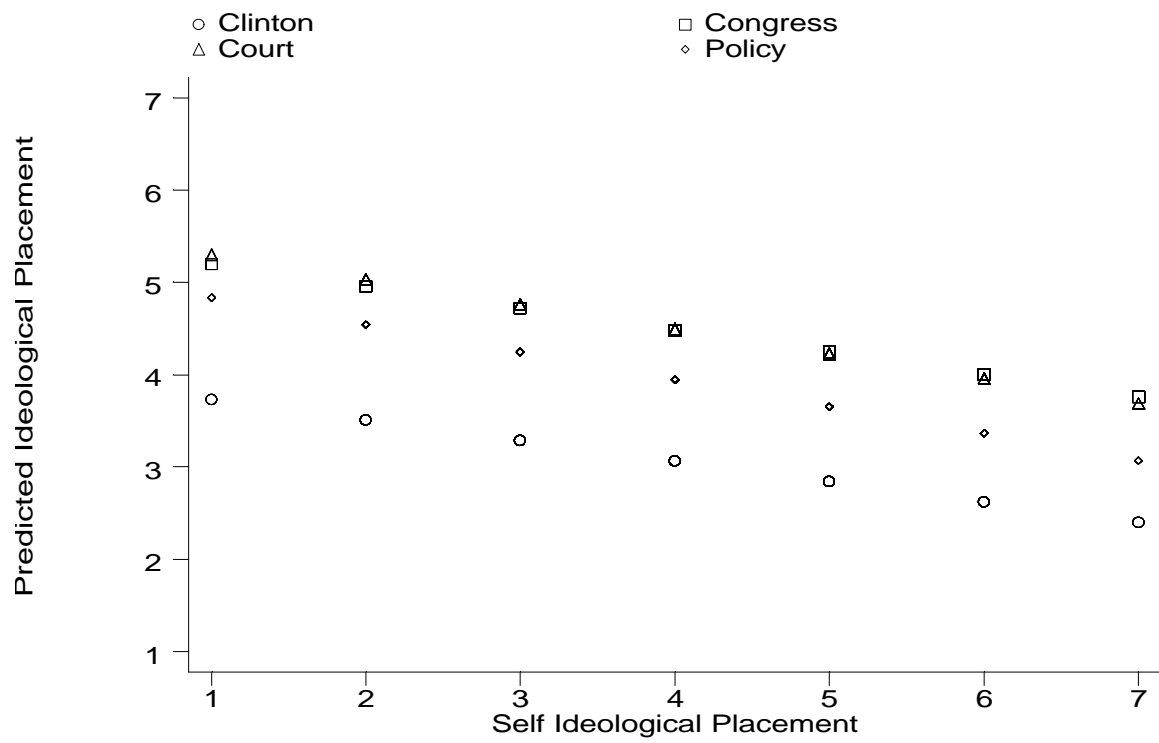


Table 4: Regressions of Policy Placement on Placements of Government Institutions

		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Low Educ.	High Educ.
Clinton	b	0.32**	0.30**	0.29**	0.26**	.34**
	(s.e.)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.05)
	[β]	[0.39]	[0.37]	[0.35]	[0.34]	[0.37]
Congress	b	0.30**	0.27**	0.26**	0.30**	0.26**
	(s.e.)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.06)
	[β]	[0.30]	[0.27]	[0.27]	[0.32]	[0.24]
Sup. Court	b	0.16**	0.14**	0.14**	0.06	0.20**
	(s.e.)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.06)
	[β]	[0.17]	[0.14]	[0.15]	[0.06]	[0.21]
Self Place't	b		-0.12**	-0.11**	-0.07	-0.14**
	(s.e.)		(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.04)
	[β]		[-0.15]	[-0.13]	[-0.09]	[-0.19]
Party ID	b			-0.02		
	(s.e.)			(0.03)		
	[β]			[-0.03]		
Constant		0.90**	1.68**	1.75**	1.85**	1.40**
	(s.e.)	(0.20)	(0.30)	(.30)	(.42)	(.41)
R ² adjusted		.40	.41	.41	.31	.53
N		402	402	399	208	194

* $p \leq .01$

** $p \leq .001$

Table 5: Frequencies and Descriptive Statistics for Institutional “Too Liberal”/ “Too Conservative” Measures				
		Clinton	Congress	Supreme Court
Too Conservative	1	3	10	13
	2	47	130	114
	3	9	19	17
Neither	4	153	148	183
	5	28	4	10
	6	134	108	80
Too Liberal	7	58	13	9
Valid N		432	432	426
System Missing		9	9	15
Total N		441	441	441
Mean		4.83	3.88	3.80
Standard Deviation		1.53	1.65	1.52

Table 6: Regressions of “Too Liberal”/“Too Conservative” Assessments on Directional Distance Measures

		Clinton		Congress		Supreme Court	
Dir. Distance	b	0.42**	0.53**	0.40**	0.40**	0.39**	0.50**
	(s.e.)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.06)
	β	[0.58]	[0.74]	[0.50]	[0.49]	[0.53]	[0.69]
Self Placement	b		-0.35**		-0.10		-0.29*
	(s.e.)		(0.07)		(0.10)		(0.09)
	β		[-0.32]		[-0.09]		[-0.27]
Party ID	b		0.11*		0.12*		0.09
	(s.e.)		(0.04)		(0.04)		(0.04)
	β		[0.16]		[0.15]		[0.13]
Constant		4.29**	5.18**	3.93**	3.92**	3.85**	4.73**
	(s.e.)	(0.07)	(0.27)	(0.07)	(0.42)	(0.06)	(0.38)
R ² adjusted		.34	.37	.25	.26	.28	.30
N		417	412	414	411	408	405

* $p \leq .01$

** $p \leq .001$

Table 7: Regressions of Institutional Feeling Thermometers^a on Absolute Distance Measures

		Clinton		Congress		Supreme Court	
Abs. Distance ^b	b	-9.88*	-6.98*	-4.41*	-4.10*	-3.20*	-3.05*
	(s.e.)	(0.66)	(0.84)	(0.63)	(0.65)	(0.68)	(0.69)
	[β]	[-0.62]	[-0.44]	[-0.35]	[-0.32]	[-0.24]	[-0.23]
Self Placement	b		0.90		1.25		0.43
	(s.e.)		(.95)		(0.68)		(0.75)
	[β]		[0.05]		[0.11]		[0.04]
Party ID	b		-4.10*		-0.04		0.49
	(s.e.)		(0.57)		(0.43)		(0.47)
	[β]		[-0.37]		[-0.01]		[0.07]
Constant		21.42*	27.97*	6.02*	0.36	12.45*	8.43*
	(s.e.)	(1.64)	(3.11)	(1.27)	(2.87)	(1.41)	(3.08)
R ² adjusted		.38	.46	.12	.12	.06	.06
N		366	363	365	363	359	357

* $p \leq .01$

^a To adjust for positivity bias, the Feeling Thermometers (FT) were centered using the formula: (Centered Institution FT) = (FT Institution) - [(FT Blacks + FT Whites + FT Christian Fundamentalists + FT Gays and Lesbians + FT Labor Unions + FT Big Business + FT People on Welfare)/7].

^b Absolute Distance measures were calculated using the formula:
 Abs. Distance = | (Self Placement) - (Institutional Liberalism) |

Table 8: Regressions of Institutional Feeling Thermometers on Absolute Distance and Absolute Ideology Measures

		Clinton		Congress		Supreme Court	
Abs. Distance	b	-8.04**	-5.93**	-4.30**	-3.99**	-2.22*	-2.15*
	(s.e.)	(0.79)	(0.90)	(0.66)	(0.67)	(0.71)	(0.72)
	[β]	[-0.50]	[-0.37]	[-0.34]	[-0.31]	[-0.17]	[-0.16]
Abs. Ideology ^a	b	-4.59**	-3.29*	-0.15	-0.05	-3.42**	-3.34**
	(s.e.)	(1.09)	(1.05)	(0.76)	(0.76)	(0.82)	(0.83)
	[β]	[-0.21]	[-0.15]	[-0.01]	[-0.00]	[-0.22]	[-0.22]
Self Placement	b		1.04		1.34		0.12
	(s.e.)		(0.94)		(0.68)		(0.74)
	[β]		[0.06]		[0.12]		[0.01]
Party ID	b		-3.89**		-0.10		0.45
	(s.e.)		(0.57)		(0.43)		(0.46)
	[β]		[-0.35]		[-0.01]		[0.06]
Constant		23.98**	29.01**	5.94**	0.01	14.81**	12.32**
	(s.e.)	(1.72)	(3.10)	(1.46)	(3.01)	(1.48)	(3.13)
R ² adjusted		.41	.47	.11	.12	.10	.10
N		362	359	361	359	353	351

* $p \leq .01$

** $p \leq .001$

^a Absolute Ideology measures were calculated using the formula:

$$\text{Abs. Ideology} = | \text{“Too Liberal”} / \text{“Too Conservative”} - 4 |$$

Table 9: Regressions of Institutional Job Approval^a on Absolute Distance and Absolute Ideology Measures

		Clinton Approval	Congress Approval
Abs. Distance	b	-0.17**	-0.14**
	(s.e.)	(0.04)	(0.04)
	[β]	[-0.27]	[-0.17]
Abs. Ideology	b	-0.10	-0.09
	(s.e.)	(0.04)	(0.05)
	[β]	[-0.11]	[-0.09]
Self Placement	b	0.06**	0.04
	(s.e.)	(0.04)	(0.04)
	[β]	[0.08]	[0.05]
Party ID	b	-0.20**	-0.04
	(s.e.)	(0.02)	(0.03)
	[β]	[-0.42]	[-0.09]
Constant		3.83**	2.83**
	(s.e.)	(0.13)	(0.19)
R ² adjusted		.39	.04
N		399	394

* $p \leq .01$

** $p \leq .001$

^a Institutional Job Approval measures are four point variables, where 1 represents “disapprove strongly” and 4 represents “approve strongly.”