

LIBERALISM, CONSERVATISM AND PUBLIC POLICIES:  
A STUDY OF POLICY-ORIENTATION OF  
AMERICAN VOTERS IN 1980

*Jiun Han Tsao*

Abstract

In talking about the liberal-conservative distinction, Prof. Herbert McClosky once indicated that the distinction between the two camps has not always been sharply drawn in the United States. For a political scientist, the argument of liberal-conservative differences is not just a problem for philosophical and theoretical justification, but one of people's attitude under living conditions toward governments in satisfying their best interests. Given this premise, people's attitude toward public policies becomes an important indicator. This paper attempts to study the interactions of two variables, each represented by people's political ideology, either identified themselves as liberal, or as middle of the road, or as conservative, and by people's attitude toward public policies. When confronted with choices between the two, people's consideration of policy interests usually takes precedence of the orientation of political ideology and makes the latter's distinction unclear. The data used in this study is "The American National Election Study of 1980" sponsored by the University of Michigan.