

A Distinction with a Difference? Investigating the Difference Between Liberals and Progressives

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Abstract

As political scientists examine ideology in American politics, the vast majority of studies conceive of ideology as a continuum ranging from conservative to liberal. However, a large number of those who hold left-leaning political attitudes now call themselves progressive. To date, there has not been significant work in the study of American politics on the difference between those who call themselves liberals and those who call themselves progressives. We examine seven hypotheses to locate systematic differences between these two groups. We find that they do not significantly differ in issue positions, issue priorities, or feelings toward Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders. Those holding more sexist attitudes, on the other hand, appear to be more likely to identify as progressives than as liberals. This difference appears to be more social than policy-based.

Over the past several decades, the ideological positions of the two major American parties have polarized: the Republican Party has systematically moved to the right while the Democratic Party has moved to the left (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal, 2006; Noel 2013). At the same time, partisans have become better sorted in terms of partisan and ideological labels, with Democrats becoming more likely to identify as liberals and Republicans becoming more likely to identify as conservatives (Levendusky 2009). Most Republican candidates are quick to identify themselves as conservatives, so much so that the label has become ubiquitous among the party's members. Democrats, on the other hand, less-often publicly identify themselves as liberals in the contemporary era. Research consistently shows that American citizens are more likely to self-identify as conservatives than they are to call themselves liberals, even among those who hold left-leaning policy attitudes (Ellis and Stimson 2012). At the same time, the liberal label has been shown at times to be harmful for Democratic candidates (Neiheisel 2016).

Many Democratic elites seem to be addressing this problem by using alternative ideological language. Rather than calling themselves liberals, some Democratic elected officials prefer to call themselves *progressives*. Some citizens have begun to do the same. And yet, the vast majority of scholarship on political ideology focuses on the terms “conservative” and “liberal.” In this research, we begin to examine the measureable differences between progressives and liberals, in an attempt to better understand the “progressive” term. Conventional wisdom and elite rhetoric are inconsistent on this matter. One possibility is that the term progressive is merely a substitute for the term liberal, but without the negatively charged valence that comes along with that term. Another is that progressive preferences are to the left of liberal preferences, an argument that may be informed by the tendency of Bernie

Sanders to label himself as more progressive – and thus more left-leaning – than Hillary Clinton, his opponent and the eventual winner of the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination contest. A third possibility is that liberals and progressives hold similar issue preferences but prioritize different sets of issues. In this research, we attempt to adjudicate among these possibilities and address the following question: How do liberal and progressive identifiers differ from one another – in terms of ideology, partisanship, or something else? When political scientists categorize all left-leaning respondents as “liberal,” are they missing an important ideological subgroup on the left – or are these terms interchangeable?

We use data drawn from a nationally representative survey to show the contexts in which progressive identity is and is not associated with shifts in public opinion relative to liberal identity. Our analyses show that liberal and progressive identifiers evaluate liberals and progressives as groups differently from one another, but this difference does not extend to evaluations of the major 2016 Democratic candidates, Clinton and Sanders. We further find no systematic evidence that progressives hold different issue preferences or issue priorities than do liberals. Last and perhaps most important, we find strong evidence that higher levels of sexism correspond with higher probabilities that a person identifies as a progressive rather than as a liberal. On the whole, this implies that while liberals and progressives largely do not differ from one another on matters of policy, progressives appear to be motivated to identify as such due to less egalitarian views of women. These results lead to a number of important implications about the meaning of contemporary ideological identities.

Ideological Labels as Heuristics

Much of the classic research on American public opinion and political behavior

suggests that people care little, know little, and pay little attention to politics (Campbell et al. 1960; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Despite these formidable limitations, people are still able to form attitudes about politics and political figures by making generous use of heuristics. These heuristics provide citizens with cognitive shortcuts that allow them to simplify the complex social world in which they live (Conover and Feldman 1989; Lodge, McGraw, and Stroh 1989; Lau and Redlawsk 2001). These simplifications allow them to quickly form judgments on various political topics.

The heuristics that citizens use to judge political figures, for example, may come from several sources. Many heuristics stem from the characteristics of the candidate. There is evidence that people's assessments of political figures can be influenced by the figures' religious identities (Jacobsmeier 2013), sex (Koch 2000), and race (McDermott 1998). Party labels can also powerfully inform citizens' views of political figures (Rahn 1993). In addition, candidates' discussion of issues and their positions on those issues can further influence people's ideological assessments of candidates (Banda, 2016). In sum, people's views of politicians and other people seem to be informed by various types of labels and information cues associated with those people.

Furthermore, ideological labels themselves can act as heuristics. Democrats' use of the progressive label to describe themselves is common today.¹ To the extent that an individual holds left-leaning issue positions, they may call themselves liberals or progressives. As of now, we are unaware of any work examining what considerations are relevant in determining whether a given individual chooses the liberal or progressive label. We are also unsure as to

¹ Though we discuss the use of the progressive label by Democratic candidates in the bulk of this paper, we should note that third party and independent candidates might use the label. Candidates in nonpartisan elections might also find the label useful.

the perceived meanings of the liberal or progressive label when used to identify another person. In this research, we focus on what the progressive label means to those who use it to identify themselves, and how the progressive label affects citizens' ideological assessments of other people who are identified as such. We are particularly interested in the difference between the use of the progressive and the liberal labels.

Liberal vs Progressive Identity

In addition to functioning as a heuristic, ideological labels can also act as identities. Ellis and Stimson (2012) have found marked differences between what they call “symbolic” and “operational” liberals and conservatives. Mason (2018) has similarly found that issue-based ideology and identity-based ideology are separate constructs. It is therefore possible that self-identified liberals and progressives differ from one another not in policy positions, but instead in a sense of social distinction. Although most public arguments between liberals and progressives appear to be based in policy differences, the vehemence of many of these disputes lead us to believe that an identity-based defense is involved.

Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory posits that conflict between groups can strengthen group identification. Though liberals and progressives tend to compete only in Democratic Party primaries, this competition can grow intense when it occurs over long periods of time. The 2016 Democratic primary between Clinton and Sanders may have generated a clearer boundary between traditional liberals (embodied by Clinton) and the more recently named progressives (embodied by Sanders). As that contentious primary trailed on, the conflict between the two camps became more intense. The outcome of the primary was decided by June of 2016, but the animosity engendered by the competition may have led to two separate identities that have grown stronger in opposition to one another.

We examine three possibilities about what identifying as a progressive rather than a liberal means to identifiers of the two groups. First, given that Democratic elites tend to avoid calling themselves liberal (Ellis and Stimson 2012; Coggins and Stimson, Forthcoming) but do not shy away from using the progressive label, it is plausible that at least some citizens have adapted to the change in ideological language by identifying as progressives rather than as liberals. If this is the case, then the word “progressive” may just be a substitute for the word “liberal.” In this case, then, we should not observe systematic differences between the policy preferences or identities of liberals and progressives.

The second possibility stems from the disproportionate use of the term “progressive” as a descriptor of political figures like Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, both of whom hold ideological positions that are further to the left than most elite Democrats. Thus, it is possible that people respond to these descriptions of elites by taking on different ideological identities based on their levels of agreement with the political figures that are associated with those ideological labels. In other words, people who feel greater affinity for elites who are labeled as progressives should be more likely to identify themselves as progressives rather than as liberals, who they might view less favorably. They should further express more left-leaning policy preferences given that their preferred elites do the same. This implies the following expectation:

Hypothesis 1: progressive identifiers will express more left-leaning issue preferences than will liberal identifiers.

The third possibility about potential differences between liberal and progressive identifiers centers not on issue preferences, but on issue priorities. This perspective is agnostic on the degree to which the two sets of identifiers should hold different issue positions, but it does suggest that the kinds of people who call themselves progressives may hold different issue priorities than do people who identify as liberals. Progressives and liberals differentiate themselves from one another not necessarily because they hold different views, but rather because they wish to focus on different issues. In other words:

Hypothesis 2: progressive identifiers will express different issue priorities than will liberal identifiers.

To this point, our arguments have centered on how progressive and liberal identities might shape policy preferences and priorities. But as identities, these labels should also inform affective evaluations of groups and political candidates that are associated with those groups. More specifically, given that liberals and progressives identify as such, they should view their own groups more positively than they do the other group (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Brewer 2001). This tendency will be especially apparent when identifiers view themselves as being in competition with or threatened by the opposing group (Brewer 1999). In other words:

Hypothesis 3: progressive (liberal) identifiers will express more positive evaluations of progressives (liberals) than will liberal (progressive) identifiers.

Liberal and progressive identifiers may evaluate political figures who are associated with liberals and progressives in similar ways. Liberal identifiers should hold less positive feelings for Bernie Sanders, the 2016 insurgent independent-turned-Democratic presidential nominee hopeful, than progressive identifiers because he was strongly tied to the progressive label, both in terms of how he described himself and how others described him. His primary opponent, Hillary Clinton, on the other hand, represented the Democratic Party's establishment wing. Liberals should report warmer feelings towards her than should progressive identifiers because Clinton is more closely tied to the more traditional liberal symbol. Put more formally:

Hypothesis 4: progressive identifiers will express more negative evaluations of Hillary Clinton than will liberal identifiers.

Hypothesis 5: progressive identifiers will express more positive evaluations of Bernie Sanders than will liberal identifiers.

Given our interest in observing the differences between liberal and conservative identifiers, it is also sensible to examine the determinants of choosing to identify as one rather than the other. Conventional wisdom about "Bernie bros" suggests that, for at least a small segment of people, identifying as a progressive

– and perhaps support for Sanders during the 2016 nomination contest – was driven less by policy concerns and more by attitudes about women and racial resentment. In other words, what sets liberal and progressive identifiers apart from one another, at least since 2016, may be sexist views and/or feelings of racial resentment. Higher levels of sexism, perhaps motivated or exacerbated by the candidacy of Clinton in 2016, might encourage people with otherwise left-leaning preferences to identify as a progressive rather than as a liberal due to the liberal label’s longstanding association with feminism and women’s rights in the American context. Furthermore, people who feel less comfortable about the increasing prominence of members of racial and ethnic minority groups in American society may be more likely to identify as progressives instead of as liberals, due to the liberal label’s historical association with the Democratic Party and expanding the rights of minorities. In other words:

Hypothesis 6: people with more sexist attitudes are more likely to identify as progressives than liberals.

Hypothesis 7: people with higher levels of racial resentment are more likely to identify as progressives than liberals.

Research Design

We test our theory using data drawn from a survey of 1,000 American adults. The survey uses a national sample² fielded online by YouGov from July 13th to July 22nd of 2018. In order to test our hypotheses, we must code respondents who identify as liberals or progressives. We do so using the following survey item: “*People use a lot of different words to describe their political ideology. Which of the following best describes your political ideology?*” Respondents could

² YouGov provides researchers with survey weights, which we use throughout our analyses.

then select liberal, progressive, conservative, alt-right, libertarian,³ none of the above, or they could skip the question. If they chose none of the above or to skip the question, they were asked a follow up question that said, “*Though none of the labels match you, which of the following is closest to you?*” Respondents could then choose from the first five items on the previous list or they could identify themselves as moderates. About 11% of respondents identified as progressives while approximately 26% self-identified as liberals. Because we are primarily interested in observing how liberals and progressives differ from one another, our analyses focus exclusively on these respondents.

We create a binary variable coded 1 if the respondent identifies as a progressive and 0 if they identify as a liberal. This serves as the key independent variable of interest in our analyses of Hypotheses 1 through 5. It is also the dependent variable we use when testing Hypotheses 6 and 7.

To test Hypothesis 1, we rely on 9 items capturing respondents’ preferences on nine issues: abortion, healthcare, immigration, impeachment, the minimum wage, policing and race, space expenditures, trade, and college tuition. Responses to all of these items range from 1 to 7 – where higher values correspond with more left-leaning preferences – except for the questions tapping opinions about abortion, the minimum wage, and expenditures on space.⁴ Abortion attitudes are measured on a 1 to 4 scale while views of space expenditure were measured ranging from 1 to 3. Both were coded such that higher values indicated more left-leaning preferences. Last, the minimum wage question asked respondents what they think the federal minimum wage should be.⁵ Higher values of this variable should also match with more left-leaning preferences.

³ Note that the order of these first five items was randomized.

⁴ Exact question and response wording can be viewed in the appendix.

⁵ Among progressive and liberal identifiers, this measure ranges from \$0 to \$1,025 per hour. We assume that respondents who entered answers above \$40 per hour did not take the question seriously and recode those values as

Hypothesis 2 requires that we observe the differences in the issue priorities rather than in the issue preferences of liberals and progressives. We leverage survey items that asked respondents to rank the nine issues mentioned before in order of importance. Thus, these measures range from 1 – the most important – to 9 – the least important.

Respondents were asked to rate their feelings towards several political figures and entities using standard feeling thermometer items. More specifically, the survey collected affective evaluations of liberals, progressives, Hillary Clinton, and Bernie Sanders. These serve as the dependent variables for testing Hypotheses 3 through 5. Each measure ranges from 0 to 100, where higher values correspond with warmer or more positive evaluations of the group or person.

As noted above, the key independent variable of interest for testing Hypotheses 1 through 5 is the binary variable indicating whether a given respondent identifies as a progressive or as a liberal. This variable also serves as the dependent variable for Hypotheses 6 and 7. The primary independent variables of interest for our final two hypotheses are measures of sexism and racial resentment. We capture sexist attitudes using a composite measure of the following eight survey items:

- *Discrimination against women is no longer a problem in the United States.*
- *Women often miss out on good jobs due to sexual discrimination.*
- *It is rare to see women treated in a sexist manner on television.*
- *On average, people in our society treat husbands and wives equally.*
- *Society has reached the point where women and men have equal opportunities for achievement.*

missing. This decision removed only four observations – or roughly 1% of liberals and progressives – from our analyses and does not alter the substance of our findings.

- *It is easy to understand the anger of women’s groups in the United States.*
- *It is easy to understand why women’s groups are still concerned about societal limitations of women’s opportunities.*
- *Over the past few years, the government and news media have been showing more concern about the treatment of women than is warranted by women’s actual experiences.*

Responses to each of these questions ranged from 1 for “strongly disagree” to 5 for “strongly agree.” We code all eight variables so that higher values corresponded with more hostile views towards women, summed the variables together, and then recoded the composite measure so that it ranged from 0 – least hostile – to 1 – most hostile.⁶ The Cronbach’s alpha for this variable was equal to about 0.9. We plot the distribution of our measure of sexism in the left-most panel of Figure 1. Note that, perhaps unsurprisingly, most liberals and progressives express low levels of sexism as captured by our measure. The median value of sexism among these identifiers is 0.25 and 0.5 is at the 90th percentile of the distribution.

[Figure 1 about here]

We similarly construct a measure of racial resentment from six similar items, all of which were similarly coded from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree.” The question were written as follows:

- *Irish, Italians, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.*
- *Over the past few years blacks have gotten less than they deserve.*
- *It’s really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.*

⁶ Interested readers should note that among liberal and progressive identifiers, the highest value of the sexism score was equal to approximately 0.9.

- *Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.*
- *Government officials usually pay less attention to a request or complaint from a black person than from a white person.*
- *Most blacks who receive money from welfare programs could get along without it if they tried.*

We coded each variable such that higher values indicated higher levels of resentment, summed them together, and rescaled them so that they ranged from 0 – least resentful – to 1 – most resentful. This variable exhibits a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.92. The right-most panel of Figure 1 shows the distribution of this variable

Finally, we control for several key demographic and political factors in all of our regression models. First, given the key role of partisanship in shaping public opinion, we control for partisanship by including binary indicators of whether or not a given respondent identifies as an independent or as a Republican.⁷ These measures treat partisan leaners as partisans, not as independents. We also control for whether or not a respondent is a woman. In addition, we include a series of dummy variables capturing the racial and ethnic identities of respondents, their levels of education, their family income, their age in years, and a squared age term in case age exhibits nonlinear effects on the dependent variables in our models. We report the summary statistics of all of the variables used in our analyses in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

We use ordered logistic regression models to evaluate Hypothesis 4 because the issue preference variables are ordinal in nature with one exception: minimum wage preferences. We

⁷ Democrats serve as the excluded category.

thus use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to model minimum wage attitudes. In these tests, we expect that the estimated coefficient of the progressive identity variable will be positive, indicating that progressives hold more left-leaning preferences than do liberal identifiers. We also use OLS to model participants' issue priority attitudes for our tests of Hypothesis 2. We do not have a clear directional expectation for these tests, but a positive coefficient for the progressive identity variable would indicate that progressives prioritize that issue less – because the most highly prioritized issue is coded 1 while the least prioritized issue is coded 9 – than liberal identifiers. We test Hypotheses 3 through 5 using OLS regression due to the continuous nature of feeling thermometer scores. We expect to observe a negative coefficient – indicating cooler feelings – for the progressive identity variable when estimating feelings towards liberals and a positive coefficient – corresponding with warmer feelings – when modeling feelings towards progressives. We further expect to observe a positive coefficient when we predict feelings towards Bernie Sanders and a negative coefficient when estimating feelings towards Hillary Clinton. Last, we test Hypotheses 6 and 7 by modeling progressive identity, a binary variable, using logistic regression. We expect that the estimated coefficients for the sexism and racial resentment measures will be positive, indicating that higher levels of sexism and resentment correspond with higher probabilities that a respondent identifies as a progressive rather than as a liberal.

Results

Before presenting the formal tests of our hypotheses, we first describe the distribution of progressive and liberal identity across a number of political and demographic variables. We also

show these data in Table 2. Note that whereas our analyses focus only on liberal and progressive identifiers, we consider them in the context of the entire sample here.

[Table 2 about here]

These descriptive data communicate a great deal of information about the kinds of people who call themselves liberals and progressives. Note that across partisan identities, 52% of Democrats also identify as liberals while only 17% identify as progressives. The proportion of independents and Republicans who identify as progressives or liberals are similar to one another. About one quarter of men and women identify as liberals while only 10 and 13% respectively identify as progressives. Hispanic identifiers appear particularly unlikely to identify as progressives relative to people who identify with one of the other racial or ethnic groups, but the levels of liberal identity do not appear to vary much across racial and ethnic groups. Not surprisingly, the proportion of liberal identifiers increases as respondents' levels of self-reported ideology become more liberal. This pattern is also apparent for progressive identity, but there appear to be no discernible differences among respondents who place themselves as moderate, liberal, or very liberal. There appears to be little variance across age categories in terms of liberal identity, but progressive identity seems to be somewhat more common among younger people than it is among older people. Last, these data suggest that the rate of liberal identity increases as levels of education increase. Progressive identity, on the other hand, seems to be more common among people with higher levels of educational attainment, but also among those who did not complete high school.

We next turn to our tests of Hypotheses 1 and 2, the results of which we present graphically in Figure 2.⁸ The points represent the coefficients while the horizontal lines capture the 95% confidence intervals for the progressive identity variable. The labels on the y axis

⁸ We report the full results of these models in the appendix.

identify which issue preference or priority each coefficient predicts. If a 95% confidence interval overlaps with the vertical dashed line plotted at 0 on the x axis, that indicates that the associated marginal effect of progressive identity on a given attitude is not statistically discernible from zero at traditional ($p \leq 0.05$) levels of significance. The pane on the left side of the figure shows the results from the issue preference models while the pane on the right shows the same for the issue priorities models.

[Figure 2 about here]

Turning first to the issue position models, note that only one of the estimated coefficients of progressive identity differs significantly ($p \leq 0.05$) from zero: that produced for the model predicting attitudes about policing and race. Further note that, contrary to the expectations laid out by Hypothesis 1, the coefficient is negative. This means that progressive identifiers on average hold *less* left-leaning preferences on this issue than do liberal identifiers. Our results thus fail to uncover any support for Hypothesis 1.

Next, we examine the tests of Hypothesis 2. None of the nine progressive identity coefficients differ significantly from zero at $p \leq 0.05$, though two differ at the less stringent level of $p \leq 0.1$. Those two coefficients are those generated in the models estimating the prioritization of policing and race and college tuition. Progressive identifiers appear to prioritize policing and race less than liberal identifiers. They also seem to prioritize college tuition more relative to liberal identifiers. These results provide some evidence favoring Hypothesis 5, but not much given that only two of the nine tests uncovered significant effects of progressive identity on issue priorities.

We next turn to our tests of Hypotheses 3 through 5, which we present in Table 3. The first two columns of results report the coefficients and standard errors produced when predicting

feelings towards liberals and progressives while the last two columns show the same, but for evaluations of Clinton and Sanders. The quantities of interest here are the estimated coefficients for progressive identity, which are shown in the first row of the table.

[Table 3 about here]

These tests provide strong evidence favoring Hypothesis 3. Progressive identifiers report feeling about 15.5 units cooler towards liberals than do liberal identifiers. Similarly, progressive identifiers also appear to feel about 12 units warmer towards progressives as a group relative to liberal identifiers. Both coefficients differ from zero at traditional levels ($p \leq 0.05$) of statistical significance. While these results may not be entirely surprising, they are useful in that they demonstrate that, even among presumably politically aligned ideological groups, identifiers still view their own group more positively than they do the other group. This suggests that liberal and progressive social identities are distinct from one another.

We fail to uncover support for Hypotheses 4 and 5. The estimated coefficient for the progressive identity indicator is negative as expected in the feelings towards Clinton model, but this effect does not approach statistical significance. The progressive identity coefficient in the feelings towards Sanders model is also negative, which is not at all what we expected. However, it also fails to differ significantly from zero. Thus, we are unable to draw many conclusions from these results beyond that it appears as if progressive identity does not inform the affective views of Clinton or Sanders relative to liberal identity.

We present tests of Hypotheses 6 and 7 in Table 4. The first column of results comes from a model using all available respondents. The results suggest that people who score higher on our measure of sexism are significantly ($p \leq 0.05$) more likely to identify as progressives than they are to identify as liberals. This finding provides strong support for Hypothesis 6. The

coefficient generated for racial resentment is positive as predicted, but substantively small and fails to approach traditional levels of statistical significance. Thus, our test fails to produce evidence supporting Hypothesis 7.

[Table 4 about here]

Given that distribution of the sexism measure is right-skewed,⁹ we estimate a second model predicting progressive identity and present it in the second column of results. This model excludes extreme outliers by dropping all respondents whose sexism scores are above 0.5, which is the 90th percentile of the distribution. We do this to ensure that our results are not driven by these extreme outliers. As shown in Table 5, they are not: the estimated coefficient for the sexism score is positive and differs significantly from zero. Further note that the coefficient estimated for the racial resentment measure also fails to differ from zero in this supplementary model.

While the results shown in Table 4 allow us to infer that respondents with higher levels of sexism are also more likely to identify as progressives than as liberals, they do not allow us to draw substantive inferences. To do that, we calculate and plot in Figure 2 the predicted probability of identifying as a progressive across the range of the sexism variable. The left-most panel shows the results from the full model while the right-most panel shows the results from the model that excluded the most extreme outliers on the sexism measure. Note that the y-axes differ between panels.

[Figure 3 about here]

The predicted probabilities shown in Figure 3 show that as levels of sexism increase, so too does the predicted probability of identifying as a progressive rather than as a liberal. The results of the full sample model show that the predicted probability of identifying as a

⁹ See Figure 1 in the research design section.

progressive rather than as a liberal is about 0.21 at the lowest level (0) of sexism and increases to 0.6 as the value of sexism increases to its maximum (0.9), an increase of approximately 0.39. The magnitude of this effect is large and shows that sexist attitudes are a powerful predictor of identifying as a progressive rather than as a liberal.

Turning next to the results produced by the model lacking extreme outliers, we observe a similar pattern. The predicted probability of identifying as a progressive instead of as a liberal is 0.18 at the lowest value of sexism (0) and increases to a maximum of 0.46 at the highest value of sexism (0.5). Thus, the predicted probability increases by about 0.28 across the range of sexism in this model. Note that the predicted probabilities generated by this second model are similar to those in the full sample model at the same values of sexism.

Conclusion

We find that there are some differences in public opinion between people who identify as liberals and progressives, but fewer than one might expect given contemporary political rhetoric. In particular, we have found that the most pronounced differences between liberals and progressives are social, rather than policy-based. Progressive and liberal identifiers express warmer feelings towards their own ideological groups relative to the opposing set of identifiers, but they do not appear to evaluate Presidential candidates that are associated with their own or the opposing group in systematically different ways. They also do not appear to exhibit different issue positions and appear to largely hold similar issue priorities. We further find no evidence that racial resentment informs progressive versus liberal identification. That said, we do observe strong evidence that people with more sexist views are more likely to identify as progressives than they are as liberals. These findings lead to several important implications.

First, we include a major caveat that the meaning of progressivism may be different among activists and the general public. Activists in recent years have described candidates and policies that are further to the left of liberal candidates and policies as being more progressive. While it is plausible that this is what the concepts means to elites, progressive identifiers do not seem to follow suit. If the policy preferences of progressive identifiers largely mirror those of liberal identifiers, then perhaps the identity does not hold policy-based implications that differ from the more traditional liberal identity.

Second and related to the previous point, our results also suggest that elites who suggest that progressives have different issue priorities than do liberals may be misinterpreting the politics of the term “progressive.” On the whole, our tests of Hypothesis 5 failed to uncover much in the way of systematic differences between the issue priorities of liberals and progressives. So if the dividing line between liberal and progressive identifiers is not about policy preferences or priorities, what is it about?

The answer is largely social. Liberals and progressives prefer members of their own ideological group label. Their identities also appear to be shaped in part by their attitudes about women. Whereas the political attitudes of progressives and liberals appear quite similar to one another on average, the results of our models of progressive identity strongly suggest that what drives people into the progressive rather than the liberal camp is the degree to which they express sexist views. It is plausible that progressive identifiers find the liberal label attractive on many dimensions, but not on topics directly tied to sexist views like the place of women in society. Thus, they choose to identify with an ideological group – progressives – that shares many of the same goals as liberals do, but that they do not view as being as closely tied to groups like women. This might further imply that women candidates specifically and candidates who are open to engaging anti-sexist policies more generally may be disadvantaged in gaining the support of voters with left-leaning preferences but who identify as progressives rather than as liberals.

Future research might examine how progressive identifiers view groups like feminists

and candidates – beyond Hillary Clinton – who are strongly associated with feminism. Observing how progressives and liberals describe their own and each other’s ideological groups could allow social scientists to learn more about the differences between these groups. Future research might also consider how the progressive label affects citizens’ evaluations of candidates, other people, and groups. Researchers might study how assessments of the character traits of candidates and non-political figures are affected by the label. Future research might also focus on how the progressive label affects assessments in the presence of powerful information cues like party labels. Finally, examining the origins and consequences of the strength of progressive identity would add to our understanding of mass politics in the U.S.

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Table 1: Summary Statistics

	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Progressive identity	0.31	0.47	0	1
Liberals thermometer	73.45	24.50	0	100
Progressives thermometer	71.01	24.44	0	100
Clinton thermometer	63.98	29.42	0	100
Sanders thermometer	70.70	27.17	0	100
Abortion views	3.59	0.78	1	4
Healthcare views	5.94	1.58	1	7
Immigration views	4.63	2.11	1	9
Impeachment views	6.02	1.72	1	7
Minimum wage views	13.54	4.49	0	40
Policing and race views	5.75	1.82	1	7
Space views	2.21	0.77	1	3
Trade views	3.25	1.79	1	7
Tuition views	5.97	1.33	1	7
Abortion importance	5.24	2.34	1	9
Healthcare importance	2.07	1.44	1	9
Immigration importance	4.63	2.11	1	9
Impeachment importance	4.78	3.01	1	9
Minimum wage importance	4.17	2.03	1	9
Policing and race importance	4.91	2.08	1	9
Space importance	7.93	1.65	1	9
Trade importance	5.64	2.20	1	9
Tuition importance	5.48	2.10	1	9
Sexism	0.28	0.15	0	.90625
Racial resentment	0.29	0.25	0	1
Independent identity	0.12	0.32	0	1
Republican identity	0.06	0.24	0	1
Respondent is a woman	0.60	0.49	0	1
Respondent is African American	0.11	0.32	0	1
Respondent is Hispanic	0.09	0.29	0	1
Respondent's race/ethnicity is "other"	0.08	0.27	0	1
Level of education	3.79	1.53	1	6
Family income	5.97	3.39	1	16
Age in years	50.57	16.33	18	88

Note: summary statistics are unweighted.

Table 2: Liberal and Progressive Identity Across Political and Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	Ideological identities	
	Percentage liberal	Percentage progressive
Partisanship		
Democrats	52	17
Independents	12	14
Republicans	3	4
Sex		
Women	27	13
Men	25	10
Race and ethnicity		
White	26	11
Black	29	16
Hispanic	28	7
Other	23	19
Self-placed ideology		
Very conservative	1	4
Conservative	1	2
Moderate	16	16
Liberal	76	17
Very liberal	82	16
Age		
18-34	28	14
35-50	25	12
51-69	26	11
70+	26	7
Education		
< high school	19	16
High school	23	8
Some college	23	8
Two-year degree	28	11
Four-year degree	27	15
Postgraduate education	45	16

Note: percentages calculated using survey weights.

Table 3: How Progressive Identity Shapes Affective Evaluations of Groups and Candidates

	Groups		Candidates	
	Liberals	Progressives	Clinton	Sanders
Progressive identity	-15.505* (3.851)	12.014* (3.065)	-7.563 (4.662)	-3.665 (4.387)
Independent identity	-19.392* (6.974)	-2.680 (5.425)	-18.752* (7.740)	-4.480 (7.249)
Republican identity	-30.211* (7.621)	-12.884* (6.344)	-32.293* (7.839)	-34.860* (7.029)
Respondent is a woman	-0.214 (2.846)	-3.135 (2.775)	3.696 (3.622)	1.224 (3.298)
Respondent is African American	-0.442 (5.329)	-9.643* (4.390)	10.795 (7.701)	1.706 (5.990)
Respondent is Hispanic	-1.374 (3.498)	-0.314 (4.034)	11.302* (4.722)	-2.953 (5.198)
Respondent's race/ethnicity is "other"	0.561 (7.559)	10.567* (4.441)	-3.127 (7.758)	-10.556 (8.815)
Level of education	-0.978 (1.033)	0.435 (0.991)	-1.539 (1.287)	2.347+ (1.280)
Family income	1.066* (0.476)	0.150 (0.408)	0.874 (0.615)	-1.320+ (0.713)
Age in years	-0.208 (0.537)	-0.728+ (0.426)	0.243 (0.660)	0.702 (0.775)
Age ²	0.003 (0.005)	0.007* (0.004)	-0.001 (0.006)	-0.007 (0.007)
Intercept	81.771* (13.013)	84.288* (9.286)	57.003* (16.602)	56.783* (19.258)
N	338	334	332	333
Log-likelihood	-1,522.305	-1,517.028	-1,564.200	-1,552.329

Note: cells are ordinary least squares regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Higher values of the dependent variables capture more positive evaluations of the objects.

* $p \leq 0.05$ (two-tailed), + $p \leq 0.1$ (two-tailed)

Table 4: How Sexist Attitudes Shape Progressive Identity

	Full sample	No outliers
Sexism	2.125* (0.997)	2.832* (1.226)
Racial resentment	0.020 (0.749)	-0.187 (0.792)
Independent identity	1.386* (0.449)	1.377* (0.469)
Republican identity	1.004* (0.583)	1.335* (0.634)
Respondent is a woman	0.093 (0.311)	0.087 (0.332)
Respondent is African American	0.236 (0.405)	0.129 (0.421)
Respondent is Hispanic	-0.665 (0.583)	-0.548 (0.604)
Respondent's race/ethnicity is "other"	0.722 (0.531)	0.632 (0.577)
Level of education	-0.081 (0.109)	-0.056 (0.116)
Family income	0.064 (0.051)	0.060 (0.053)
Age in years	0.035 (0.054)	0.037 (0.058)
Age ²	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)
Intercept	-2.418+ (1.383)	-2.600+ (1.407)
N	319	300
Log-likelihood	-172.299	-160.823

Note: cells are logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is coded 1 if the respondent identifies as a progressive and 0 if they identify as a liberal.

* $p \leq 0.05$ (two-tailed), + $p \leq 0.1$ (two-tailed)

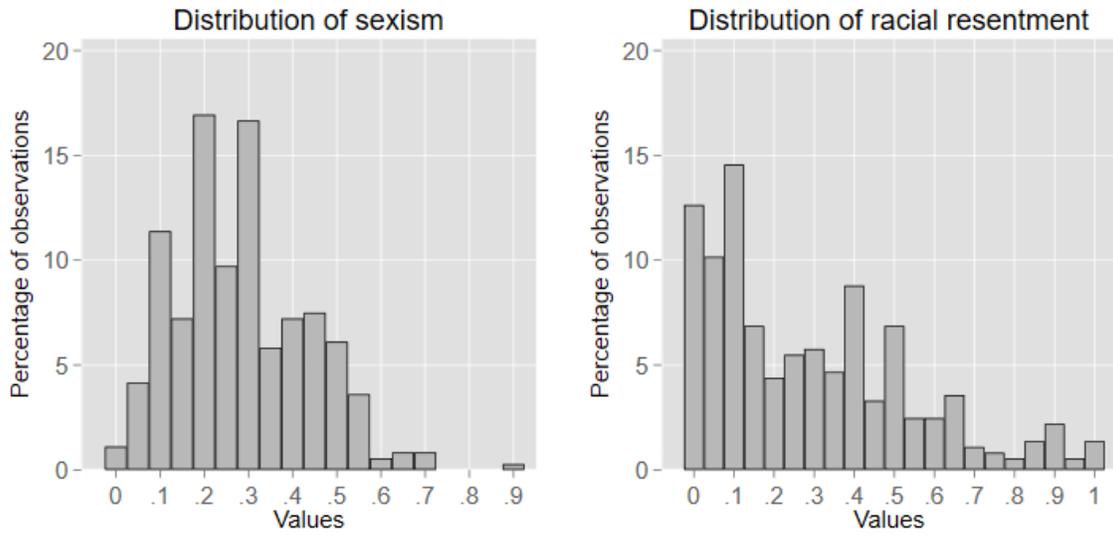
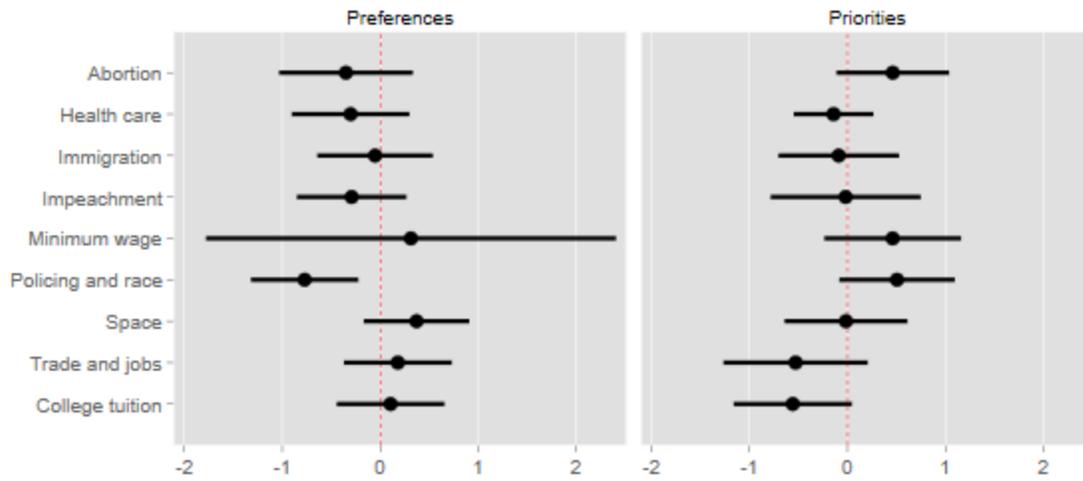


Figure 1: the distribution of sexism and racial resentment among liberal and progressive identifiers



Marginal effects of progressive identity on issue preferences and priorities

Figure 2: The effects of progressive identity on issue preferences and priorities. Points are the coefficients estimated for the progressive identification indicator in each model of issue preferences and priorities. Horizontal lines represent 95% confidence intervals.

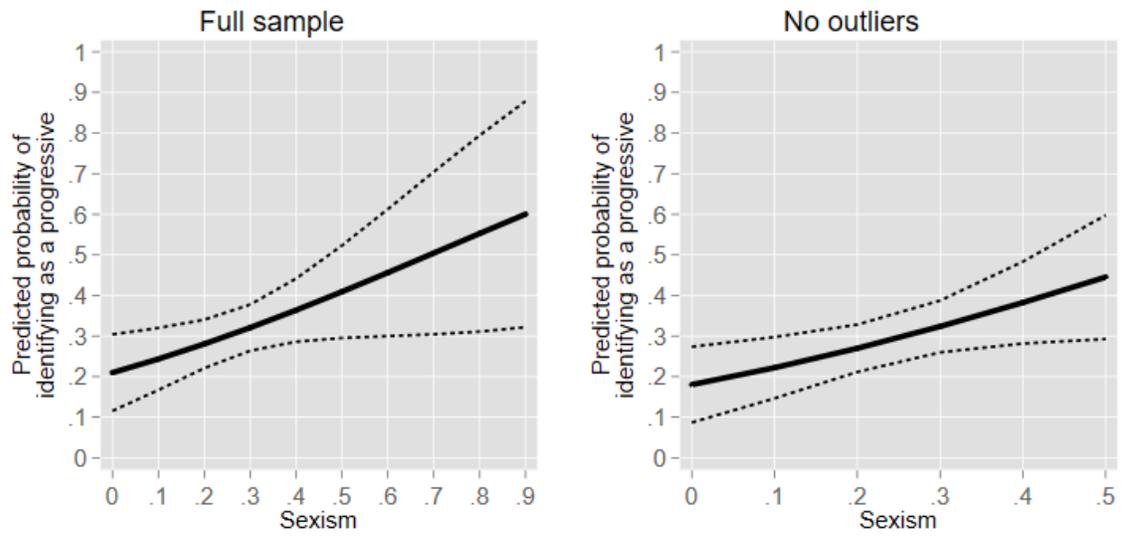


Figure 3: The predicted probability of identifying as a progressive across levels of sexism. Generated using the values presented in Table 4.