

Conservatives, morals linked in poll

By Jennifer Harper
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Americans have come to perceive conservatism as a stronghold of traditional ideas: According to a new Harris poll, the public believes conservatives support moral values and oppose same-sex "marriage," homosexual rights and abortion.

And liberals provided almost a mirror image of the findings.

According to a survey of 2,209 adults in mid-January, 85 percent said conservatives opposed same-sex "marriage." When asked the same question about liberals, 78 percent said the group would support same-sex "marriage."

Another 81 percent said conservatives opposed homosexual rights while 82 percent said that liberals would support the same issue.

In addition, 77 percent said conservatives opposed abortion

rights and 84 percent said liberals supported those rights.

"In the past, conservatives were often labeled as unkind or hard-hearted, mostly because liberals were espousing the feel-good issues du jour, popular among Hollywood stars and other vocal figures," said Ian Walters, spokesman for the Virginia-based American Conservative Union.

The public was receptive and comfortable with typical liberal causes, he said.

"But then September 11 brought with it the awful reality that America was vulnerable to attack, that there was evil in the world. Conservative values, which protect our way of life, became more acceptable and accessible to many Americans after that," Mr. Walters said.

The Harris poll showed that the ideologies were not so diametrically opposed when it came to moral values — though there

is still a sizable point spread.

The poll found that 78 percent felt conservatives supported moral values, while 54 percent said the same about liberals. A further breakdown of the question showed that 28 percent felt liberals actually opposed moral values, while 10 percent said the same about conservatives.

The conservative cause has received a drubbing on occasion, though.

For example, "Political Conservatism as Motivated Social Cognition" — a joint study released two years ago by psychologists from the University of California at Berkeley, Stanford University and the University of Maryland — found that "common psychological factors linked to political conservatism" included "fear and aggression, dogmatism and intolerance of ambiguity, uncertainty avoidance and need for cognitive closure."

The researchers said they

were not passing judgment, but faulted conservatives because they wanted an "idealized past and condoned inequality."

Meanwhile, the Harris poll found that 70 percent said conservatives supported cutting taxes while 39 percent believed the same thing about liberals.

The issue of gun control brought out mixed reactions: 50 percent of the respondents said conservatives opposed gun control while 40 percent said they supported it; 10 percent were unsure.

Sixty-three percent said liberals supported gun control, 24 percent said the group opposed it and 13 percent were unsure.

Some urge the public to examine the nuance of political labels, lest they become "epithets" rather than an apt reflection of political beliefs.

"We may be 'conservative' on some issues and 'liberal' on others, but it's the specifics that mat-

PUBLIC IMAGE OF RIGHT AND LEFT

Americans have clear perceptions about what conservatives and liberals support and oppose, says a Harris poll of 2,209 adults taken in mid-January.

Here is what respondents think about conservatives:

85% say conservatives oppose same-sex "marriage."

81% say conservatives oppose homosexual rights.

78% say conservatives support moral values.

77% say conservatives oppose abortion rights.

70% say conservatives support cutting taxes.

54% say conservatives oppose affirmative action.

Here is what respondents think about liberals:

84% say liberals support abortion rights.

82% say liberals support homosexual rights.

78% say liberals support same-sex "marriage."

74% say liberals support affirmative action.

54% say liberals support moral values.

44% say liberals oppose cutting taxes.

Source: Harris Poll

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ter, not the labels," said veteran New York-based sociologist and pollster Leo Bogart, who initially

suggested to Harris that it measure what political labels "mean to people."