

Moderate Democrats?

“I really don’t understand how there can be a moderate democrat (almost an oxymoron).”

Comments as received (my own, last).

The persons responding below, were responding to the single sentence above.

CT: Seriously? Someone said that to you? I consider myself to be an “Independent Democrat.” I’ve often wished (along with many others, I believe) that there were a viable third-party in this country, but I doubt that will really ever happen. Democrats come in all flavors. Republicans, on the other hand, seem to think they have to march in lock-step. Someone gets out of step (Liz Cheney, for example), and it’s “off with her head.” Maybe that’s why they don’t understand us Democrats who are allowed to make up our own minds about all sorts of things. Sad

NH: I don’t recall any moderate Democrats or any Democrats for that matter being part of the man-child facilitated and encouraged effort to overthrow the government on January 6, 2021 but I do recall that one hell of a lot of conservative “good” Christians sure as hell did.

JK: Dear Dick's Friend,

You are absolutely correct! Of course, the analogous statement, "moderate Republican (almost an oxymoron)", is also just as true.

The linguistic problem, here, is one that has its roots in much academic political science, and almost all of the news media. They like to pretend there is one linear continuum, from Liberal/Progressive/Democrat on one extreme, to Conservative/Trumpist/Republican on the other. Of course, whichever flavor of Republican you are, you already know that Trumpist does not equal Conservative (at least not traditional pre-2015 Conservative), and until he won over the party in summer 2016, Trumpist did not equal Republican, either. But the dualistic one-dimensional "linear continuum" continues to exist in news media fever dreams, and when anyone does not toe the extremist line of his/her chosen party, he/she is declared a "moderate" (or worse!). You've got Mitt and Klinzinger and Liz Cheney and newby Peter Meijer in Michigan. We've got Manchin and Synema, and, locally, Henn Co Atty Mike Freeman. We used to have Tom Bakk, but we ran him off, and now nobody knows WHAT he is... None of these individuals is even remotely "moderate" in the sense of lacking firm and/or extreme positions on many issues. They each just refuse to profess ALL of their own party's radical stances.

A better (still flawed, but better) model than the line with two extremes is a four-square, with two axes. One axis is economic/financial and runs from conservative to liberal, the other axis is social/cultural and has the same two extremes. So the four "boxes" are (1) Conservative on economics, Conservative on culture; (2) Liberal on econ, Liberal on culture; (3) Conservative on econ, Liberal on culture; and (4) Liberal on econ, Conservative on culture. I'm a group (4) guy myself, but I try not to let anybody call me a "moderate". I have an opinion on any issue you can think of, believe me. That's not "moderate". Group (1) is the GOP mainstream, and surveys show 20-25% of all Americans are firmly in that box. Group (2) is the DFL mainstream, and nationwide research puts them at 25-30%, Group (3), oddly enough, contains most of the few political office-holders of both parties who are not in (1) or (2), but only 15-20% of the voting population. Group (4) contains almost NO actual nationally-prominent office holders of either party, but

research places 30-35% of the population in (4). Nobody really understands why such a big group almost never gets any of "their own" elected to high office, while the (3)s sometimes do... Both (3) and (4) contain Republican, Dem, and Independent voters. News media calls (3)s "moderates", and usually tries hard not to talk at all about (4)s, but when it does, it calls them moderates too - in spite of the fact that they agree with (3)s on almost NOTHING. Of course, there is a lot of space in each of the 4 boxes, so just being in the same box as someone else doesn't mean you agree with them on everything.

One can devise even better models for classifying folks' politics, and deep thinkers have done so. The next step up is to add a third axis, which is usually "foreign/military policy". But now the "space" is 3-dimensional, and there are 8 "types" of people, and the more "axes" you add, the more complicated it gets.

Bottom line for me, though, is that if you care about politics, you probably have a "yes" or "no" opinion on just about any question of the day, and having a set of preferred answers that doesn't precisely match with the firebrands of either party doesn't make you a moderate. Only people who lack strong opinions on much of anything can truly be moderates, and those folks tend not to vote or care about party politics...

Jim "Don't Call Me A Moderate!"

JP: It betrays the actual chasm in the political landscape. There are many moderate Democrats, many of them are in office now, and I know quite a few of them. There are actually only a few extreme progressives....

But the real dilemma in this comment is that almost everyone agrees that there no longer is anything called a Moderate Republican anymore. These mainly came from the Northeast and Midwest USA, with a few from West or the border states. Most of them are being purged out of the Trump Republican party as they did not give fealty to the former President. (I don't see Liz Cheney as a moderate however, she is a conservative but understands the constitutional danger of the autocracy promoted by Trump et. al. as a slippery slope to an ersatz democracy a la Hungary, Brazil, Philippines, Russia or Poland.)

The authoritarian impulse is very close to the surface in the GOP right now, and that is why you see big majorities of people who identify that way on most topics.

When it comes to Democrats (as we see in DC) it is, and always has been, like herding cats.

FH: Radical Democrats make up fewer than 10% of the total. Most Dems would classify themselves as independent thinkers and voters, including those who are somewhat liberal, like myself. Honestly, my greater concern is the radical right, who can't accept that we're a very diverse country, as we should expect. We're all immigrants, but for the Native Americans who settled here long before whites did.

LH: A moderate democrat is a person whose political beliefs include:
the rule of law must be evenly applied;
that for democracy, facts and actions must be transparent with a strong free press;
that human needs are as important as institutional needs;
that there are constitutional limits on what government can do and what citizens can do for themselves;
that government services must be paid for and the way we pay is a reflection on which people pay for these expenses;

that taxes and revenue also reflect government priorities to ensure upward mobility, fairness in burdens, and a healthy social system;
that society needs people to enforce the laws as much as people need freedom to make their own decisions within our legal framework;
that those limits are decided by the Constitution and the courts;
it is just good manners to be cognizant of other citizens' backgrounds and beliefs;
that the voting process is accessible for the most citizens;
and that the voting results must be recognized as binding.

KV: First of all Dick, I applaud your effort to build bridges. We have too many people building walls these days, who are encouraged to do so by those constantly 'stirring the pot'. These 'pot stirrers' use words/ways that enflame and divide instead of words/ways that call us to mend, seek forgiveness and reconciliation, words/ways that challenge us to move forward together to solve or at least work on solving humanity's problems -problems common (you name them) to all of us. If we keep fighting each other, calling names, putting people in boxes instead of embracing commonalities; nothing will be accomplished and we'll continue chasing our tails until it all explodes (person/family/nation/earth... you get the point).

Ask yourself why you continue to connect with Dick? There is something(s) basic that unites you, yes? Figure out what that is- write it down, make copies and tape to your TV screen/car radio/ mirror/book or newspaper... etc. These words of reminder of your connection with Dick will resonate and heal more deeply than all the 'noise' out there.... noise that's meant to tear people apart, leaving us with a broken world. Let's build bridges...

PS: I put forth this challenge:

For one day: Focus on/observe/list all words you hear, read, see that enflame, trigger/conjure up disgust, anger, resentment... negativity in you...and source.

Likewise, for one day flip it... focus on/observe/list all the words you hear, read, see that calm, give a sense of trust and well-being, a bit of fun, innocence

-brings a smile to your face, triggers a positive memory- words that are positive...& source

Honestly reflect on these 2 exercises. Decide how you will focus on what we people hold in common, leave judgement up to God, and all day long say "Thank you, thank you, thank you"

SS: Just a quick note because I have a meeting soon on one of my "moderate" pieces of legislation. I don't find the terms moderate, progressive, conservative or liberal very useful. (Maybe that makes me automatically "moderate".) There are too many contradictions in politics and public policy to assign individuals to a specific spot along the yardstick or around the circumference of political opinion.

If your friend is talking about politicians, those of us who stand for election and consequently have the privilege of voting for policy proposals, I'd say that the degree of one's trust in the market as the ultimate problems solver might be a useful way of differentiating one's "politics." The so-called "social issues", among them abortion, gay rights, freedom of speech, even voting rights, are moral issues and I think defy useful stereotype. Most of those bounce around on the spectrum of government's invasion or protection of personal liberties or otherwise civilly protected rights. The recent rhetorical scrum has not been useful in solving problems, just--it seems to me--an effort of self-righteous certification.

There's more to say about this, but I gotta go. Will talk or write about this again.

Dick: You and I have known each other for many years. I've always called myself a "moderate, pragmatic democrat" – in fact, it is at the right-hand side of every blog I have posted since this site began in 2009. Another friend, apparently conservative and a person whose business is words, challenged me on "pragmatic". I looked 'pragmatic' up in my big dictionary. Definition 1(b) is a single word "practical". Practical fits my entire career where my job, often dealing with disagreements, was to sort out and hopefully help resolve problems between people with differing opinions.

I have often said that my political hero and indeed mentor was a Republican Governor, Elmer L Andersen, and "I like[d] Ike" (Dwight Eisenhower), then and now. I have also often said that today's Democratic party is very much like what I remember the old Republican party leadership to have been, but these folks – all of them – wouldn't recognize today's so-called Republicans. Forever, in my mind, the January 6, 2021 insurrection, and the many months following and not yet concluded, will be my 'photograph' of today's Republicans.

As for the demonization of Democrats, (probably 'oxymoron' is as close as you come to stating it). I know the false mantras about Democrats spewed every day. I know lots of Democrats, and they're a lot like me. We're basically reasonable people who believe in this country and respect difference in points of view ("moderate pragmatic"). That basically still summarizes it for me.

I could go on at great length about this.