

A Review of the Stouffer Civil Liberties Items on the General Social Survey

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The original Stouffer civil liberties items were asked in the 1954 study of Communism and Conformity designed by Samuel Stouffer (Stouffer, 1955). They asked about three civil liberties (making a public speech, having a book in the public library, and teaching at a college) and three groups (Communists, socialists, and anti-religionists). These nine original Stouffer items were asked on the 1972-1974 General Social Surveys. After 1974 the socialist items were dropped. Starting in 1973 the scale was expanded by the addition of new groups - homosexuals (1973+), militarists and white supremacists (1976+), and Muslim extremists (2008+). The wordings of the 18 items currently in use and the socialist items are given in Appendix 1.

As Table 1 shows, majorities back civil liberties for all groups except Muslim extremists. Across all six groups an average of 64.7% are for allowing a public speech, 66.3% for having a book in the library, and 54.9% for teaching at a college. Support for a Muslim extremist is the lowest among all groups and substantially below that of the other five groups (-28.5 percentage points for public speech, -19.9 points for library book, and -31.6 points for teaching at a college)(Table 1A). Across the three civil liberties, the mean objection score is lowest towards homosexuals (3.6) followed by anti-religionists (3.9), Communists (4.0), militarists (4.1), and white supremacists (4.1) with opposition to Muslim extremists being the greatest (4.8).

Don't Know levels are low for all groups and civil liberties ranging from 0.8% to 3.9%. Muslim extremist have the lowest DKs averaging 1.7% followed by anti-religionists and homosexuals at 1.9%, white supremacists at 2.5%, militarists at 2.7%, and Communists at 2.9%

Table 2 shows the factor loadings for the 18 Stouffer civil liberties items. Four factors emerge. The first three are centered around the three civil liberties in question: making a speech, having a book in the library, and teaching in a college. All groups except those advocating homosexuality load on these three factors. The three items address civil liberties for advocates of homosexuality form a group-based fourth factor. While the Muslim extremist group added in 2008 is distinctive in having the lowest level of approval, it shows no special pattern in how it correlates with the other measures. Of the five groups that load on the civil liberties factors, Muslim extremists are fifth highest on libraries, fourth on college teaching, and third on speaking. In no case are their loadings notably different from the others.

Table 3 examines the correlates of the Stouffer civil liberty items (see also Davis, 2008). From the three civil liberty items for each group, a scale was made that ran from 3 for someone who was tolerant on all three to a 6 for someone who opposed all three activities. In general, the associations are similar across groups. Tolerance towards all six groups is greater among the better educated, those attending religious service less often, the theologically liberal, and self-identified political liberals. Tolerance is greater among those in more recent cohorts in reference to anti-religionists, homosexuals, militarists, and Communists. Cohort is not significantly related to views on white supremacists or Muslim extremists. Except for the lower associations of two groups with cohort, the relations are similar in magnitude across groups. In particular, the new group, Muslim extremists, is not distinctive from the other five groups. Its correlations range from 2nd to 5th strongest across the six groups.

Overall, the new Muslim extremist items fit in well with the established five items and into the civil liberties constructs. Their lower level of support does indicate that socio-political tolerance has not advanced as far as the other items have suggested and underscore the point that while people may consider abstract principles when making judgments about what civil liberties should be extended, they

also consider the characteristics of and the degree of threat from specific groups in forming their attitudes (Davis, 2008).

Table 1
Stouffer Civil Liberty items on 2008 GSS

A. % for (Don't Knows in Base)	
Allow Public Speech by ...	
Anti-religionist	76.0
White Supremacist	58.3
Communist	65.9
Militarist	65.3
Homosexual	81.7
Muslin Extremist	40.9
Allow College Teacher who is...	
Anti-religionist	60.4
White Supremacist	52.0
Communist	58.8
Militarist	51.0
Homosexual	78.8
Muslin Extremist	28.6
Allow Book in Library by...	
Anti-religionist	71.3
White Supremacist	63.5
Communist	67.9
Militarist	69.4
Homosexual	75.9
Muslin Extremist	49.7

(1350-1356)

Table 1 (continued)

B. Three-item Scale Scores	Means
Homosexual	3.6
Anti-religionist	3.9
Communist	4.0
Militarist	4.1
White Supremacist	4.1
Muslim Extremist	4.8

(1278-1313)

Note: Scales run from 3 for someone for all three civil liberties to 6 for someone opposed to all three. DKs excluded.

Source: 2008 GSS

Table 2

Main Factor Loadings of Stouffer Civil Liberties Items

(Principal components; varimax rotation)

Variables	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Factor3
SPKATH	---	---	.647	---
SPKCOM	---	---	.585	---
SPKHOMO	---	---	(.313)	.817
SPKMIL	---	---	.409	---
SPKRAC	---	---	.839	---
SPKMSLM	---	---	.610	---
COLATH	---	.688	---	---
COLCOM	---	.683	---	---
COLHOMO	---	(.231)	---	.825
COLMIL	---	.829	---	---
COLRAC	---	.687	---	---
COLMSLM	---	.683	---	---
LIBATH	.745	---	---	---
LIBCOM	.748	---	---	---
LIBHOMO	(.562)	---	---	.597
LIBMIL	.770	---	---	---
LIBRAC	.679	---	---	---
LIBMSLM	.633	---	---	---
Eigenvalue	7.9	1.6	1.3	1.2

Source: 2008 GSS

Table 3
Correlates of Stouffer Civil Liberty Items
(Pearson's r/Prob.)

	Education	Age	Attend Religious Services	Theology of Ones Religion	Political Ideology
Anti-religionist	-.342/.000	.099/.000	.192/.000	-.179/.000	.148/.000
Communist	-.317/.000	.090/.001	.190/.000	-.174/.000	.175/.000
Militarist	-.293/.000	.151/.000	.132/.000	-.133/.000	.088/.002
White Supremacist	-.255/.000	.029/.299	.164/.000	-.146/.000	.123/.000
Homosexual	-.329/.000	.154/.000	.124/.000	-.133/.000	.156/.000
Muslin Extremist	-.340/.000	.035/.205	.144/.000	-.161/.000	.145/.000

Source: 2008 GSS

References

Davis, James A., "On the Seemingly Relentless Progress in Americans' Support for Free Expression, 1972-2006," GSS Social Change Report No. 52, 2008.

Davis, James A.; Smith, Tom W.; and Marsden, Peter V., General Social Survey Cumulative Codebook: 1972-2008. Chicago: NORC, 2009.

Stouffer, Samuel, Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties: A Cross Section of the Nation Speaks its Mind. New York: Doubleday, 1955.

Appendix: Question Wordings

SPKATH:

There are always some people whose ideas are considered bad or dangerous by other people. For instance, somebody who is against all churches and religion ...

If such a person wanted to make a speech in your (city/town/ community) against churches and religion, should he be allowed to speak, or not?

Categories:

{yes_allowed}	Yes, allowed
{not_allowed}	Not allowed
{dontknow}	DON'T KNOW
{refused}	REFUSED

COLATH:

Should such a person be allowed to teach in a college or university, or not?

Categories:

{yes_allowed}	Yes, allowed
{not_allowed}	Not allowed
{dontknow}	DON'T KNOW
{refused}	REFUSED

LIBATH:

If some people in your community suggested that a book he wrote against churches and religion should be taken out of your public library, would you favor removing this book, or not?

Categories:

{favor}	Favor
{not_favor}	Not favor
{dontknow}	DON'T KNOW
{refused}	REFUSED

SPKRAC:

Or, consider a person who believes that Blacks are genetically inferior.

If such a person wanted to make a speech in your community claiming that Blacks are inferior, should he be allowed to speak, or not?

Categories:

{yes_allowed}	Yes, allowed
{not_allowed}	Not allowed
{dontknow}	DON'T KNOW
{refused}	REFUSED

COLRAC:

Should such a person be allowed to teach in a college or university, or not?

Categories:

{yes_allowed}	Yes, allowed
{not_allowed}	Not allowed
{dontknow}	DON'T KNOW
{refused}	REFUSED

LIBRAC:

If some people in your community suggested that a book he wrote which said Blacks are inferior should be taken out of your public library, would you favor removing this book, or not?

Categories:

{favor}	Favor
{not_favor}	Not favor
{dontknow}	DON'T KNOW
{refused}	REFUSED

SPKCOM:

Now, I would like to ask you some questions about a man who admits he is a Communist.

Suppose this admitted Communist wanted to make a speech in your community. Should he be allowed to speak, or not?

Categories:

{yes_allowed_to_speak}	Yes, allowed
{not_allowed}	Not allowed
{dontknow}	DON'T KNOW
{refused}	REFUSED

COLCOM:

Suppose he is teaching in a college. Should he be fired, or not?

Categories:

{yes_fired}	Yes, fired
{not_fired}	Not fired
{dontknow}	DON'T KNOW
{refused}	REFUSED

LIBCOM:

Suppose he wrote a book which is in your public library. Somebody in your community suggests that the book should be removed from the library. Would you favor removing it, or not?

Categories:

{favor}	Favor
{not_favor}	Not favor
{dontknow}	DON'T KNOW
{refused}	REFUSED

SPKMIL:

Consider a person who advocates doing away with elections and letting the military run the country.

If such a person wanted to make a speech in your community, should he be allowed to speak, or not?

Categories:

{yes_allowed}	Yes, allowed
{not_allowed}	Not allowed
{dontknow}	DON'T KNOW
{refused}	REFUSED

COLMIL:

Should such a person be allowed to teach in a college or university, or not?

Categories:

{yes_allowed}	Yes, allowed
{not_allowed}	Not allowed
{dontknow}	DON'T KNOW
{refused}	REFUSED

LIBMIL:

Suppose he wrote a book advocating doing away with elections and letting the military run the country.

Somebody in your community suggests that the book be removed from the public library. Would you favor removing it, or not?

Categories:

{favor}	Favor
{not_favor}	Not favor
{dontknow}	DON'T KNOW
{refused}	REFUSED

SPKHOMO:

And what about a man who admits that he is homosexual ...

Suppose this admitted homosexual wanted to make a speech in your community. Should he be allowed to speak, or not?

Categories:

{yes_allowed}	Yes, allowed
{not_allowed}	Not allowed
{dontknow}	DON'T KNOW
{refused}	REFUSED

COLHOMO:

Should such a person be allowed to teach in a college or university or not?

Categories:

{yes_allowed}	Yes, allowed
{not_allowed}	Not allowed
{dontknow}	DON'T KNOW
{refused}	REFUSED

LIBHOMO:

If somebody in your community suggested that a book he wrote in favor of homosexuality should be taken out of your public library, would you favor removing it, or not?

Categories:

{favor}	Favor
{not_favor}	Not favor
{dontknow}	DON'T KNOW
{refused}	REFUSED

SPKMSLM:

Now consider a Muslim clergyman who preaches hatred of the United States.

If such a person wanted to make a speech in your community preaching hatred of the United States, should he be allowed to speak, or not?

Categories:

{yes_allowed}	Yes, allowed
{not_allowed}	Not allowed
{dontknow}	DON'T KNOW
{refused}	REFUSED

COLMSLM:

Should such a person be allowed to teach in a college or university, or not?

Categories:

{yes_allowed}	Yes, allowed
{not_allowed}	Not allowed
{dontknow}	DON'T KNOW
{refused}	REFUSED

LIBMSLM:

If some people in your community suggested that a book he wrote which preaches hatred of the United States should be taken out of your public library, would you favor removing this book, or not?

Categories:

{favor}	Favor
{not_favor}	Not favor
{dontknow}	DON'T KNOW
{refused}	REFUSED