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TO: INTERESTED PARTIES
FROM: TREVOR SMITH
SUBJECT: FREEDOM INDEX EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
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Overview

For more than 260 years, Americans have grappled with the appropriate balance between individual liberty and government acting to limit that liberty for some purpose, such as safety, economic security, or fairness. This tension underpins nearly every policy debate we have in this country. From privacy to taxes, immigration to education, the rights of individuals to act freely and in accordance with their own beliefs continually come into conflict with government priorities and obligations to keep Americans safe, secure, and prosperous.

Americans have mostly taken a “I know it when I see it” approach to how much freedom they are willing to sacrifice in the name of some greater purpose. For example, the debate over the PATRIOT Act has raged for more than a decade as policymakers seek to both protect the privacy rights of law-abiding citizens while also vigorously investigating suspected terrorists.

Until now, no one has tried to quantify this balance. This report measures and tracks Americans’ attitudes toward liberty. Using survey research and quantitative analysis, we have designed a scale, the Freedom Support Index, which gauges how Americans define freedom and whether they generally support more or less government interference in their daily lives.

Most individuals would consider more freedom “good” and less freedom “bad,” assigning a moral judgment is not what this study does. There are regulations that limit individual freedom that most people would prefer we had, such as limiting who can access dangerous weapons or preventing companies from contaminating drinking water. Most of the American public believes these regulations are “good” but they would score as less free in the Index. We hope this study becomes an integral part of an age-old debate over that proper balance and how or where Americans see themselves in this debate.

Rather, we aim to find out where that balance resides with the American people and how it may end up changing over time. And perhaps most important, to look at what future generations believe about freedom and how their attitudes shift as they become the policymakers of tomorrow.

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A decorative background featuring a network diagram with interconnected nodes and lines, primarily in the upper left and bottom corners.


What We Already Know

Our current belief systems about the relationships between political party and views of the role of government hold true. From a broad perspective, Republican and conservative-minded Americans prefer higher levels of freedom than adults on the other side of the ideological and political spectrum.

- Republican (7.9) and conservative (7.7) demographics perceive higher levels of *actual freedom* in the United States than their Democratic (6.9) and liberal (7.2) counterparts.
- 91% of Republicans fall within the Absolute Freedom range, seven points higher than Democrats (84%). A nearly identical dynamic exists between political ideologies with 90% of conservatives falling in the Absolute Freedom range compared to 87% of liberals.
- Partisan classifications have an inverse relationship regarding whether the government should adopt a more *active* or more *passive* role regarding both foreign and domestic issues.
 - A plurality of Republicans (50%) support a passive government, compared to 37% who support a more active government. A majority of Democrats (51%) support an active government, compared to 37% who support a passive government.

Some of What We Didn't Know

Millennials (ages 18-34) represent the best indication of how the upcoming generation views freedom and potential policy. They predominantly believe an active government is necessary to protect freedoms. They believe the government should be safeguarding social liberties more so than guaranteeing security.

- A plurality of Millennials (19.12%) define freedom as “Active/Same/Liberty.” This definition is followed by 12.12% who define freedom as “Passive/Less Free/Liberty.” The third largest definition (11.42%) who fall into the “Passive/Same/Liberty” definition.
 - Millennials scored approximately as high as Non-Millennials on Overall Freedom (69.92), Basic Freedom (77.35), and Economic Freedom (60.55). However, Millennials exceeded Non-Millennials in their support for Religious/Social Freedoms (78.70).
 - Millennials are more likely to support an active government (53.81%) over a passive government (39.61%). However, almost six-in-ten Millennials would choose liberty (60%) over security (40%).
 - Leading definitions of freedom for Republicans are split between an active role for government versus a passive role.
 - Pluralities of Democrats (24.17%) and liberals (23.63%) define freedom as an active government, just as free in the last ten years, and choose liberty over security.
 - Despite supporting less freedom overall, Democrats (60%) and liberals (65%) overwhelmingly support liberty over security.
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- A large, faint geometric logo in the bottom left corner, resembling a stylized diamond or a complex polygon with internal lines forming a triangular pattern.

A complex network diagram with numerous nodes and connecting lines, rendered in a light gray color, serves as a background for the top half of the page.

What We Were Wrong About

Despite Republicans scoring highest in support for all freedom archetypes except religious/social freedoms, where they scored second highest, their support for Economic Freedoms was surprisingly low relative to other forms of freedom. This indicates that protectionist and anti-free trade policy are now popular on both the left and the right.

- Republicans support security (56.99%) more than liberty (43.02%) while both Democrats and Independents choose liberty over security: with Democrats, 63.52% support liberty and 36.48% support security; with Independents, 60.48% support liberty and 39.54% support security.
- Republicans scored highest in support for Overall Freedom (70.9), Basic Freedom (79.07), and Economic Freedom (62.52). Independents scored highest in support for Religious and Social Freedom (78.24).
- Certain items show the complexity of the free market with Republicans and conservatives where they strongly support a reduction in government over property rights *and* an increase in government through regulations of industries.

Conclusion

This Freedom Index is a first of its kind study to provide quantitative insight into the complex nature of the American populace's unique relationship with the concept of freedom. The Freedom Index validated many of our long-held beliefs regarding the dialogue between the two parties on matters relating to an active vs passive government. It shed light on the Millennial generation and the potential future of American political thought. It also revealed that certain common held beliefs, such as Republican's unyielding commitment to more freedom in all forms, isn't as black and white as previously conceived.

The balance of freedom plays an integral role in all policymaking decisions and will remain a salient and powerful force in all forums of political discourse. The Freedom Index takes the first step towards cataloguing the effects of this balance and its impact on the American political theater.



Methodology

The 2017 Support for Freedom Index was designed by Trevor Smith, Research Director with WPAi, and fielded by Central Marketing Research Services from February 22-23 & 26, 2017. Telephone interviews were conducted with a representative sample of 803 adults throughout the United States (481 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone and 322 were interviewed on a cellphone). Respondents were selected using Random Digit Dialing (RDD). The respondents were asked for their name and if they were over the age of 18 to match the name on file.

The sample for this survey was stratified based on geography, age, gender, and ethnicity. This methodology allows us to avoid post-survey “weighting” which can reduce the reliability of survey results. The survey was designed to gauge perceived, actual, and preferred levels of freedom across a variety of archetypes. These archetypes include measures of Basic Freedom, Economic Freedom, Religious/Social Freedom, as well as overall Freedom Scores. Utilizing the results WPAi created the Support for Freedom Index, comparing relevant demographics and determining the composition of the American adult population regarding ideals towards liberty.

The best measure of the expected value of the population mean for a measure is the sample mean of that measure. The margin of error of a survey is a measure of the uncertainty of the estimate of the population mean based on the sample size and a worst case (50/50) distribution of opinion. It is normally distributed and reported at the 95% confidence level. Other sources of potential error due to construct, measurement, or response are not included in the margin of error. The study has a sample size of n=803 Adults nationwide (40% cell) and a margin of error equal to $\pm 3.5\%$ in 95 out of 100 cases.

