

## Finding That Ever-Elusive Political Center

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Regarding William A. Galston's "[Polarized America Still Has a Big Middle](#)" (Politics & Ideas, Dec. 4): The New Center survey shows 43% say they are part of the center. There is a natural tendency to think that one's own views are in the middle—or where the middle ought to be. In the past decade the extreme left made great strides in redefining the center with regard to social issues. A centrist view on marriage in 2009 was that it should be between a man and a woman. Today that view qualifies as extremist.

The survey results are affected by what people are willing to reveal about their political beliefs. A Cato Institute "Free Speech and Tolerance Survey" during the first year of the Trump administration found that liberals were far more comfortable sharing their political beliefs than were conservatives. More than three-quarters of "strong conservatives" said that the political climate made them reluctant to talk about their beliefs, while 69% of "strong liberals" felt the climate was conducive to saying what they believe. The New Center survey found that more than 60% of Americans across the ideological spectrum believe that the right to free speech is near absolute, but a Cato survey reported that 52% of Democrats want the government to prohibit hate speech. Many young progressives deem anything coming out of a conservative's mouth to be hateful and deserving of censorship, or worse.

We moan about partisanship, extremism and gridlock but Congress is a reflection of the ideological climate in America, and the prevailing winds aren't blowing in the direction of centrism, no matter what we tell pollsters.

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