The Supreme Court’s Two Constitutions: A First Look at the “Reverse Polarity” Cases

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The Supreme Court’s Two Constitutions: A First Look at the “Reverse Polarity” Cases

Arthur D. Hellman*

Abstract

In the traditional approach to ideological classification, “liberal” judicial decisions are those that support civil liberties claims; “conservative” decisions are those that reject them. That view – particularly associated with the Warren Court era – is reflected in numerous academic writings and even an article by a prominent liberal judge. Today, however, there is mounting evidence that the traditional assumptions about the liberal-conservative divide are incorrect or at best incomplete. In at least some areas of constitutional law, the traditional characterizations have been reversed. Across a wide variety of constitutional issues, support for claims under the Bill of Rights or the Reconstruction Amendments is now regarded as the conservative position.

This article presents the first comprehensive examination of this phenomenon; it also supplies a label – “reverse polarity.” Relying on a case classification system designed to promote transparency, the article provides a detailed taxonomy of reverse-polarity issues. Three are defined by provisions of the Bill of Rights (the Second Amendment, the Takings Clause, and the Free Exercise Clause), the others by lines of precedent, primarily involving freedom of expression. The article also discusses other constitutional issues that may be evolving in the direction of reverse polarity.

Beyond taxonomy, the article explores three ways of looking at reverse polarity. It considers reverse-polarity liberalism as a throwback to the Progressive Era and as an embrace of Justice Felix Frankfurter’s vision of judicial self-restraint. It examines reverse-polarity conservatism as an application of the theory of judicial

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review associated with Justice Stone’s famous Footnote Four in United States v. Carolene Products Co. More broadly, the article calls attention to an unusual feature of the Roberts Court: conservative as well as liberal Justices support “a generous or expansive interpretation of the Bill of Rights” – but in different cases. It is almost as though each group of Justices has found its own copy of the Constitution, with some rights printed in boldface and italics and others grayed out and indistinct on the page.

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Introduction

Ideological classification of judges and judicial decisions has generated much writing by academics and other commentators over the last 60 years or so, but the judges themselves have generally given the subject a wide berth. One noteworthy exception is an article published in 1997 by the late Judge Stephen Reinhardt of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Judge Reinhardt set out to answer the question, “what is a liberal judge?” Making clear that he included himself in the category, he wrote:

Liberal judges believe in a generous or expansive interpretation of the Bill of Rights. … We believe that the Founding Fathers used broad general principles to describe our rights, terms such as “due process of law,” “life, liberty, and property,” “unreasonable search and seizure,” “freedom of speech,” because they were determined not to enact a narrow, rigid code that would bind and limit generations to come. …

Liberal judges tend to take very seriously the idea that the Constitution protects the rights of individuals against arbitrary and oppressive state action, as well as the rights of minorities against a tyrannical majority. … [Laws and voter initiatives] must be strictly tested against the limitations and guaranties contained in the Constitution.

Although Judge Reinhardt was describing liberal judges, his analysis necessarily incorporated a definition of liberal judicial decisions. Liberal decisions


3 Reinhardt, supra note 2, at 47-48. Judge Reinhardt did signal, albeit obliquely, one departure from this general approach. He said that liberal judges “sometimes have trouble interpreting [the post-Civil War constitutional] amendments as barriers to minority advancement.” The implication is that liberal judges do not apply “strict[]” tests to government programs that they regard as promoting affirmative action for minorities. For discussion, see infra Part III-B-3.
are those that reflect “a generous or expansive interpretation of the Bill of Rights” and eschew narrow or rigid readings of “broad general principles” such as “due process of law” and “freedom of speech.”

Judge Reinhardt’s characterization accords with the typology developed by political scientists in the Warren Court era and used by commentators for decades after the Warren Court ended. For example, Professor Glendon Schubert, in his landmark book *The Judicial Mind*, looked at “civil liberties” cases – primarily cases involving claims under the Bill of Rights and the Reconstruction Amendments – and applied the “liberal” label to votes that responded positively to the claim. “Conservative” votes were those that responded negatively.

Today, in the era of the Roberts Court, characterizing decisions (or judges) as “liberal” or “conservative” is not nearly as straightforward. Consider, for example, an editorial published in the *Wall Street Journal* in December 2019. The editorial predicted that a “new wave of conservative judges” was “more likely to protect such core liberties as religious freedom, political speech and assembly.” That observation reflects a view directly contrary to Judge Reinhardt’s statement in 1997 that “[l]iberal judges believe in a generous or expansive interpretation of the Bill of Rights.”

The *Journal* editorial and similar commentaries suggest that the traditional assumptions about the liberal-conservative divide reflected in Judge Reinhardt’s article and the Schubert book are incorrect or at best incomplete. In at least some areas of constitutional law, the traditional characterizations have been reversed. Across a wide variety of constitutional issues, support for the civil liberties claim is now viewed as the conservative position.

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4 Judge Reinhardt also discussed how “the liberal judge” decides cases outside the realm of constitutional law. See infra Part I-B.

5 Glendon Schubert, *The Judicial Mind* 103 (1965). Schubert excluded “property” rights cases from his definition of civil liberties. For more on Schubert’s typology, see infra Part I-B.

6 Editorial, Revitalizing the Federal Courts, Wall St. Journal, Dec. 28, 2019 (emphasis added). The editorial was comparing “the new wave of judges” appointed by President Donald J. Trump to the “Democratic appointees” who “made up a majority on nine of the 13 circuit courts” when he took office. The editorial also referred to “gun and property rights.”

7 E.g., David E. Bernstein, Liberals, Conservatives, and Individual Rights, cato.org, June 27, 2008, available at [https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/liberals-conservatives-individual-rights](https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/liberals-conservatives-individual-rights) (noting numerous instances in which conservative Justices have been more supportive than liberal Justices of “individual rights and civil liberties against assertions of government power”).
This development has not gone unnoticed, but until now there has not been a comprehensive examination of the apparent shift in the positions associated with liberal and conservative judicial ideologies. That is the purpose of this article. A label is needed; I shall use the term “reverse polarity” to characterize cases in which support for the constitutional claim is regarded as the conservative rather than the liberal position, reversing the ideological alignment that generally prevailed during the Warren Court era and for decades thereafter. The term derives from the case classification protocols that I developed for empirical studies of other aspects of the work of federal appellate courts, including the Supreme Court.

The article is in five parts. Part I examines the meaning of “liberal” and “conservative” as those terms have been used to characterize judicial decisions during three periods: the Progressive Era, the Warren Court era, and the Roberts Court era. Part II describes the method used in this article for classifying modern-day judicial positions as liberal or conservative. That method relies primarily on an examination of the ideological alignments in the Supreme Court over the past 25 years—a period in which there was a liberal bloc of four Justices that retained its unity and its position on the ideological scale. Part III provides a taxonomy of reverse-polarity issues. Three are defined by provisions of the Bill of Rights (the Second Amendment, the Takings Clause, and the Free Exercise Clause), the others by lines of precedent, primarily involving freedom of expression. Part IV discusses other cases that exemplify the phenomenon.

Part V offers provisional thoughts about three ways of looking at reverse polarity. It considers reverse-polarity liberalism as a throwback to the Progressive Era and as an embrace of Justice Felix Frankfurter’s vision of judicial self-restraint. And it examines reverse-polarity conservatism as an application of the theory of judicial review associated with Justice Stone’s famous Footnote Four in United States v. Carolene Products Co. The article concludes by noting an unusual feature of the Roberts Court: conservative as well as liberal Justices support “a generous

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8 See, e.g., Lee Epstein & Jeffrey A. Segal, Trumping the First Amendment? 21 Wash. U. J. L. & Pol’y 81 (2006); Bernstein, supra note 7; see also Jack M. Balkin, Why Liberals and Conservatives Flipped on Judicial Restraint: Judicial Review in the Cycles of Constitutional Time, 98 Tex. L. Rev. 215 (2019);

9 A more precise definition will be outlined in Part I-C and developed in Part II.

10 See infra Part II-A.

11 304 U.S. 144, 152 n. 4 (1938).
or expansive interpretation of the Bill of Rights”12 – but in different cases. It is almost as though each group of Justices has found its own copy of the Constitution, with some rights printed in boldface and italics and others grayed out and indistinct on the page.

Before turning to these matters, a cautionary note is in order – more than one, in fact. Just because decisions in a particular issue area can be characterized as liberal or conservative does not mean that the Justices will divide along liberal/conservative lines or indeed that they will divide at all. And when Justices do divide along ideological lines, that is not necessarily because they are liberal or conservative.

I do not want to overstate the cautionary notes. Although the article does not seek to explain why the Justices vote as they do, the analytical framework and the findings lay a necessary foundation for something that I think is more important: fruitful exploration of the many-faceted relationship between Supreme Court decisions and the socio-political world of which they are a part. In particular, the research reported in these pages shows that no understanding of judicial ideologies in the modern era can be complete without taking account of the complexities introduced by the phenomenon of reverse polarity and the emergence of what I have called the Supreme Court’s two Constitutions.

I. Ideology and Judicial Decisions: Three Eras

Classifying judicial decisions (and judges) as “liberal” or “conservative” goes back a long way. But the meaning of the terms has changed over time. For present purposes, it will be sufficient to consider three periods: the Progressive Era, the Warren Court era, and the Roberts Court era.

A. The Progressive Era

As early as 1929, Professor Ray A. Brown of the University of Wisconsin wrote about liberal and conservative decisions in an article in the Harvard Law Review:

[C]onservative Justices often render so-called liberal opinions, and vice versa. Mr. Justice Brewer, one of the staunchest of conservatives, wrote the Court’s opinion in Muller v. Oregon, which paved the way to the factual and scientific consideration of police power cases. On the other hand Mr. Justice Brown, whose

12 See supra text accompanying note 3.
opinion in *Holden v. Hardy* is a monument of liberalism, was found with the majority in the much criticized *Lochner v. New York*. And often the Court’s opinion is unanimous, including on one side both those denominated liberal and those conservative.\(^{13}\)

Four features of this passage are noteworthy. First, Professor Brown does not define or explain the terms “liberal” and “conservative”; he assumes that his readers will understand what he means in using them. Second, his examples are drawn from a previous generation of judges; Justice Brewer died in 1910, and Justice Brown retired in 1906. Third, Professor Brown distinguishes between liberal (or conservative) decisions and liberal (or conservative) judges. I shall return to this point later.\(^{14}\) Finally and most important, Professor Brown characterizes decisions as “liberal” or “conservative” based on whether they uphold or invalidate economic and social legislation supported by the Progressive movement. Justice Brown’s opinion in *Holden v. Hardy* “is a monument of liberalism” because it upheld a state law limiting employment in underground mines and smelters to eight hours a day. Justice Brewer is “the staunchest of conservatives” because, as Professor Brown noted in the previous paragraph of the article, in his 21 years on the bench he participated in 46 cases “involving the conflict between individual rights and the police power” and voted against the constitutionality of the state legislation in 41% of the cases.\(^{15}\) Professor Brown contrasted Justice Brewer’s record with that of Justice Holmes; the latter voted against the state law in only 10% of the cases in which he participated.

Professor Brown’s assumptions exemplify the Progressive Era’s view of what “liberal” and “conservative” mean when applied to judicial decisions. In a similar vein, a few years earlier, then-Professor Felix Frankfurter commented that “[Theodore] Roosevelt’s vigorous challenge of judicial abuses [in 1912] was mainly responsible for a temporary period of liberalism which followed in the interpretation of the due process clauses.”\(^{16}\) The context makes clear that he,


\(^{14}\) See infra Part II-B.

\(^{15}\) Brown, supra note 13, at 867-68. Here, of course, Professor Brown is characterizing the ideological position of a *judge*. But that characterization is based solely on how the judge voted in the class of case Brown is concerned with.

like Professor Brown, applied the label “liberal” to decisions upholding economic and social legislation against challenges based on the Due Process Clauses of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments.

The Progressive Era approach to ideology persisted at least until the last years of the 1930s, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Hugo Black, William O. Douglas, and Felix Frankfurter to the Supreme Court. As Professor Noah Feldman has put it, the “constitutional liberalism [of the three Justices] was defined in opposition to the property-protecting doctrines that had dominated the Court’s jurisprudence for three decades.”17 “The conservative Supreme Court,” by couching those doctrines “in terms of individual rights,” had “given judicial rights activism a bad name.”18

B. The Warren Court Era

Earl Warren took office as Chief Justice in 1953 and served until 1969. The Warren Court revolutionized American law through expansive interpretations of the Bill of Rights and the Reconstruction Amendments (particularly the Equal Protection Clause) in areas including race, reapportionment, freedom of speech, and criminal procedure.19 And the terms “liberal” and “conservative” came to have very different connotations from their use in the Progressive Era.20

The most extensive discussion of judicial ideology during this period is found in the work of political scientists. Many of the studies adopted what has been called the “attitudinal model.” Under this model, the Justices “were hypothesized to cast their judicial votes on the basis of their personal political ideologies.”21 The attitudinal model has no bearing upon the present project, but

17 Noah Feldman, Scorpions: The Battles and Triumphs of FDR’s Greatest Supreme Court Justices 177 (2020). Feldman was also describing the liberalism of Robert H. Jackson, who was appointed to the Court by Roosevelt in 1941.
18 Id. at 179.
19 Citation of authority is hardly necessary, but for a thorough and lively account, see Lucas A. Powe, Jr., The Warren Court and American Politics (2000).
20 How, and when, the shift took place are interesting questions that are beyond the scope of this article. Some clues can be found in Powe, supra note 19; Jeremy K. Kessler, The Early Years of First Amendment Lochnerism, 116 Colum. L. Rev. 1915 (2016); and Robert G. McCloskey, Economic Due Process and the Supreme Court: An Exhumation and Reburial, 1962 Sup. Ct. Rev. 34.
21 Epstein, Landes, & Posner, supra note 1, at 69.
the writings of these scholars give us a window into the meaning of “liberal” and “conservative” in the Warren Court era.

Three of the most prominent expositors of ideological classification during that period were Glendon Schubert, S. Sidney Ulmer, and Harold J. Spaeth. I begin with Professor Schubert. Rather than focusing on a single area of constitutional adjudication, as did Professor Brown, Schubert perceived a liberal/conservative divide on a wide variety of issues, both constitutional and non-constitutional. In his often-cited book *The Judicial Mind*, Schubert separately identified the characteristics of “political liberalism” and “economic liberalism.”

Writing about political liberalism, Schubert first defined “civil liberties” to encompass pretty much all claims under the Bill of Rights and the Reconstruction Amendments (excepting “property” rights). He also included “claims of personal freedom and to procedural rights” based on statutory law, such as those raised by aliens seeking to avoid deportation. In Schubert’s summary:

> [A]ny case for which the major question that the Court purported to decide related to a claim of personal freedom was classified as a civil liberties case. Such cases included … both claims to freedom as a substantive value, and claims relating to the procedures according to which claims of the substantive value were determined.

“Liberal” votes were those which responded positively to a civil liberties claim; “conservative” votes responded negatively.

To identify “economic liberalism,” Schubert “grouped together sets of cases which involved disputes between unions and employers; governmental regulation of business activities; fiscal claims of workers against employers; and disputes between small businessmen and their large corporate competitors.” Liberal decisions “would support the claims of the economically underprivileged, while

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22 See Lawrence Baum, Ideology in the Supreme Court 9 (2017) (describing Schubert’s work as “classic and influential”).
23 Schubert, supra note 5, at 99.
24 Id. at 101 (“I defined civil liberties to consist of claims to personal (as distinguished from property) rights and freedoms.”) The parenthetical exclusion of “property” rights will be discussed infra Part III.
25 Id. at 102.
26 Id. at 103.
27 Id. at 127.
the conservative would stand pat and resist economic change that would benefit the have-nots.” For example, “the economic liberal would uphold the fiscal claims of injured workers (or their widows); he would support unions …; [and] he would support government regulation of business.”

Professor S. Sidney Ulmer followed a similar approach, although he limited himself to “civil liberties” cases. His definition of the category corresponded closely to Schubert’s: “a civil liberties case is one involving a claimed right of the type covered by the Bill of Rights and Civil War Amendments to the Constitution.” Ulmer ranked the Justices “in terms of favorableness toward civil liberties claims” and found that the ranking “probably coincides with prevailing impressions regarding the relative attitudes of liberals and conservatives on the Court.” For example, in the 1961 term, Chief Justice Warren, Justice Hugo Black, and Justice William O. Douglas voted in favor of the civil liberties claim in every one of the 17 non-unanimous civil liberty decisions. Justice William J. Brennan voted in favor of the claim in 15 of 17 cases. At the other end of the spectrum, Justice Tom C. Clark cast only three “favorable” votes, and Justice John M. Harlan only five. Warren, Black, Douglas, and Brennan were the liberals; Clark and Harlan were the conservatives.

Ulmer also presented data on a narrower group of cases from the 1955 through 1960 terms – those involving “aliens, Communists, and Negroes.” His data showed that “the Justices usually identified as ‘liberals’” overwhelmingly voted in favor of the “alien, communist, or Negro claim.”

28 Id. at 128. The tendentiousness of this passage (“the conservative would stand pat …”) makes clear that Schubert’s own sympathies were with the liberals. Nevertheless, no one would disagree that economic liberals support claims of injured workers, government regulation of business, etc.

29 S. Sidney Ulmer, Supreme Court Behavior and Civil Rights, 13 Western Pol. Q. 288, 288 (1960). Like Schubert, Ulmer included statutory claims that fit within his definition, which encompassed rights “of the type covered by the Bill of Rights and the Civil War Amendments.” Id. (emphasis added).


31 Ulmer, Quantitative Analysis, supra note 30, at 169. Justice Black took no part in one case.

32 See id. at 167 (referring to “the Justices usually identified as ‘liberals’”).

33 Id. at 167.
Professor Harold J. Spaeth built on the work of Schubert and Ulmer. Like Schubert, he looked at the ideology of Supreme Court Justices by considering both “civil liberties” and “economic” cases.\textsuperscript{34} The civil liberties component included “all formally decided cases invoking the Bill of Rights or involving criminal proceedings, excepting only tax, business, or labor-union cases where criminal sanctions are employed.”\textsuperscript{35} In classifying the Justices’ votes in civil liberties cases, Spaeth used a “C scale” that he credited to Ulmer.\textsuperscript{36} Under that scale, “[a] pro-C vote is one which upholds the claims of the individual … against government.”\textsuperscript{37} Such votes are considered “liberal.”\textsuperscript{38}

Spaeth also sought to identify “economic liberalism.” He created an “E-Scale” and included “all cases involving regulation of business or business activity and labor unions, plus employee-injury suits.”\textsuperscript{39} For these cases, Spaeth defined the “pro-E vote” as “one which is pro-union, anti-business, pro-competition, pro-employee in damage suits against employers, or pro-small business in a conflict between a large and small business not concerning antitrust action.” A “pro-E vote” put a Justice in the “liberal” camp.\textsuperscript{40} That typology corresponded very closely to Schubert’s version of “economic liberalism.”

In a later article, dealing only with “the area of civil liberties,” Spaeth criticized Schubert and Ulmer (and his own earlier work) for failing to consider possible distinctions among Justices’ responses to different categories of civil liberties claims.\textsuperscript{41} But he continued to use the C scale in the same way. The article analyzed “the formally decided nonunanimous civil liberties decisions of

\textsuperscript{34} Harold J. Spaeth, Unidimensionality and Item Invariance in Judicial Scaling, 10 Behavioral Science 290, 290-91 (1965).

\textsuperscript{35} Id. at 291. It is not clear why Spaeth excluded cases invoking under the Reconstruction Amendments, but an examination of his case lists confirms that he did not include them. See, e.g., id. at 295 (listing civil liberties cases in the 1961 Term but not including Baker v. Carr, 369 U.S. 186 (1962)).

\textsuperscript{36} Id.

\textsuperscript{37} Id. at 291.

\textsuperscript{38} Id. at 296-97.

\textsuperscript{39} Id. at 291.

\textsuperscript{40} See id. at 296-97.

the Warren Court for the five terms 1960-1964.”\textsuperscript{42} Spaeth identified 11 categories of civil liberties cases; the categories included “religious freedom,” “First Amendment non-religion,”\textsuperscript{43} “race relations,” and “internal security.”\textsuperscript{44} He found that the Justices’ votes in seven of the 11 categories were “highly correlated.”\textsuperscript{45}

The Schubert/Ulmer typology\textsuperscript{46} – which I shall refer to as the “traditional” approach – retained much of its descriptive force long after the Warren Court departed the scene.\textsuperscript{47} In the late 1980s, Professor Spaeth created the original version of the widely used U.S. Supreme Court Database, which classifies each decision and each Justice’s vote as liberal or conservative.\textsuperscript{48} In a 1993 book co-authored with Jeffrey A. Segal, Spaeth explained how the Database defined “liberal” and “conservative” judicial positions.\textsuperscript{49} The authors said that their specification “accords with common usage,”\textsuperscript{50} and indeed it largely tracked the earlier works. For example, “support of those alleging deprivation of First Amendment freedoms” was a liberal position.\textsuperscript{51}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} Id. at 418.
\item \textsuperscript{43} All of the cases in this category involved freedom of expression – speech, press, assembly, and association. See Spaeth & Peterson, supra note 41, at 439.
\item \textsuperscript{44} The “internal security” category included half a dozen First Amendment cases, several involving the Due Process Clauses, and some non-constitutional cases. Id. at 440.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Id. at 434.
\item \textsuperscript{46} I shall use the term “Schubert/Ulmer” rather than “Schubert/Ulmer/Spaeth” for simplicity and to avoid confusion with the Spaeth Database discussed below.
\item \textsuperscript{47} That is not to say that there were no changes in the perception of “liberal” and “conservative” ideologies. See infra note 59.
\item \textsuperscript{48} For the current version, see \url{http://supremecourtdatabase.org/}.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Jeffrey A. Segal & Harold J. Spaeth, The Supreme Court and the Attitudinal Model 243 (1993) [hereinafter Segal & Spaeth, Attitudinal Model]. In a later book, Segal and Spaeth presented a much compressed (and slightly revised) version of this typology, limited to civil liberties issues. See Jeffrey A. Segal & Harold J. Spaeth, The Supreme Court and the Attitudinal Model Revisited 322-23 (2002) [hereinafter Segal & Spaeth, Attitudinal Model Revisited].
\item \textsuperscript{50} Segal & Spaeth, Attitudinal Model, supra note 49, at 243.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Id. Consistent with Schubert’s treatment of property claims, see supra note 24, Segal and Schubert said that in Takings Clause cases, a vote opposing government action is a conservative vote. Id. For discussion see infra Part III-A.
\end{itemize}
In 2013, three prominent scholars of judicial behavior discussed the ideological coding in the Spaeth Database. They noted that Spaeth’s classifications of Court decisions (and of the votes of individual Justices) “mostly comport with conventional understandings” of the terms “liberal” and “conservative.” And they provided examples of those “conventional understandings”:

“Liberal” votes [include] those in favor of defendants in criminal cases; of women and minorities in civil rights cases; of individuals in suits against the government in First Amendment, privacy, and due process cases; of unions and individuals over businesses; and of government over businesses. “Conservative” votes are the reverse. These “conventional understandings” reflect the approach of Schubert, Ulmer, and of course Spaeth himself during the Warren Court era.

I return now to Judge Stephen Reinhardt’s description of the “liberal judge” as of 1997. For ease of reference I will repeat the passage already quoted:

Liberal judges believe in a generous or expansive interpretation of the Bill of Rights. … We believe that the Founding Fathers used broad general principles to describe our rights, terms such as “due process of law,” “life, liberty, and property,” “unreasonable search and seizure,” “freedom of speech,” because they were determined not to enact a narrow, rigid code that would bind and limit generations to come. …

Liberal judges tend to take very seriously the idea that the Constitution protects the rights of individuals against arbitrary and oppressive state action, as well as the rights of minorities against a tyrannical majority. … [Laws and voter initiatives] must be strictly tested against the limitations and guaranties contained in the Constitution.

52 Epstein, Landes, & Posner, supra note 1, at 76.

53 Id. The authors questioned some of the Database classifications of individual cases, id. at 76-77, but they appear to have generally accepted the “conventional understandings” of what “liberal” and “conservative” mean when applied to judicial decisions or votes. However, they rejected Spaeth’s treatment of two types of civil liberties cases – those involving commercial speech and those involving requirements of “accountability in campaign spending.” Id. at 150. For discussion of these issue areas, see infra Part III.

54 Reinhardt, supra note 2, at 47-48.
As is evident, Judge Reinhardt’s description of the “liberal judge” closely tracked what Professor Schubert had written about “political liberalism” 30 years earlier. And, even more than Schubert, Judge Reinhardt declined to draw distinctions among “Bill of Rights” protections.55

Judge Reinhardt also identified some “nonconstitutional areas where you can spot the liberal judge at work.”56 The liberal judge, he said, more readily rules in favor of “the injured worker or the disabled individual” rather than the insurance company or employer or government agency. Liberal judges “are frequently a fairly soft touch” for aliens seeking asylum. “In all types of cases, including tax cases, you’re more likely to find the liberal judge voting for the individual while his conservative colleagues tend to uphold the position advocated by the government.” Here there is a close match with Schubert and Spaeth and their depiction of “economic liberalism.”

When Judge Reinhardt died in March 2018, Dean Erwin Chemerinsky of the UC Berkeley School of Law – a prominent liberal academic – summarized the judge’s jurisprudence in terms that hearkened back to the Schubert-Ulmer concept of judicial liberalism in the Warren Court era. Chemerinsky said, “Reinhardt was an unabashed liberal. He was a judge whose opinions consistently protected civil rights and civil liberties; he usually favored the individual over the government and the government over business.”57 Yet by 2018, Chemerinsky’s description of the “unabashed liberal” was, at best, incomplete.58

C. The Roberts Court Era

In the era of the Roberts Court, classifying decisions as “liberal” or “conservative” presents complications that the academic analysts of the Warren

55 Schubert excluded “property” rights, see supra note 24, but Judge Reinhardt referred to constitutional protection of “life, liberty, and property,” without distinguishing among the three. As already noted, Judge Reinhardt did signal that he took a different approach to laws and voter initiatives when affirmative action plans are challenged under the Reconstruction Amendments. For discussion, see infra Part III-C.

56 Reinhardt, supra note 2, at 48.

57 Quoted in Nicholas Sonnenberg, Reinhardt was last of the Carter court transformation, Los Angeles Daily Journal, Apr. 2, 2018, at 1.

58 I do not fault Chemerinsky; a brief comment to a reporter could not capture nuances that he would undoubtedly incorporate into a scholarly article.
Court era did not have to confront.\textsuperscript{59} To be sure, the Schubert/Ulmer typology has not become obsolete. On the contrary, it remains valid across a wide range of federal-law issues. In the area of criminal procedure, for example, a vote for the defendant’s constitutional claim is still a liberal vote.\textsuperscript{60} So is a vote in favor of an alien or class of aliens, whether the claim is based on a statute or the Constitution. No change would be required in Schubert’s classification of economic cases; for example, although Congress has vastly expanded the range of “fiscal claims” available to workers against their employers,\textsuperscript{61} a vote in favor of the claim is still a liberal decision. But in the broad realm of constitutional litigation, a more nuanced approach is required.

The difficulty comes into sharp focus in an article published shortly after the conclusion of the Roberts Court’s 2017-2018 Term by Adam Liptak, the Supreme Court correspondent of the New York Times. The online version of the article ran under the provocative and telling headline, “How Conservatives Weaponized the First Amendment.”\textsuperscript{62} Liptak wrote that “[t]he Court’s five conservative members” had given “a stunning run of victories [to] a conservative agenda that has increasingly been built on the foundation of free speech.”\textsuperscript{63} These “victories” included the two most recent cases, \textit{Janus v. AFSCME}, which held that the state’s extraction of agency fees from nonconsenting public-sector employees violates the First Amendment,\textsuperscript{64} and \textit{NIFLA v. Bercerra}, which struck down a California law requiring facilities that provide pregnancy-related services to disseminate notices with content supplied by the government.\textsuperscript{65}

\textit{Janus} and \textit{NIFLA}, like the earlier decision in \textit{Citizens United},\textsuperscript{66} would probably have been classified as “liberal” decisions in the Schubert/ Ulmer typology

\textsuperscript{59} There were of course some shifts in the “conventional understanding” of liberal and conservative ideologies between the Warren Court era and the Roberts Court. For present purposes it is unnecessary to explore that history. For a detailed and thoughtful analysis, see Baum, supra note 22. Some particular issues will be discussed in Part III.

\textsuperscript{60} For a brief discussion, see infra Part IV-E.

\textsuperscript{61} See supra text accompanying note 27.


\textsuperscript{63} Id.

\textsuperscript{64} Janus v. AFSCME, 138 S. Ct. 2448 (2018).


\textsuperscript{66} Citizens United v. FEC, 558 U.S. 310 (2010).
because the rulings supported claims under the First Amendment. But it would seem anomalous to identify them as such today, if only because all of the “liberal” Justices on the Court opposed them. It would be equally jarring to apply the term to the Court’s most recent decisions sustaining claims under the Free Exercise Clause. For example, in Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue, the Court held that the state violated the First Amendment by excluding religious schools from a program that provided tuition assistance to parents who send their children to private schools. All four members of the Court’s liberal bloc dissented. And these decisions do not stand alone. The Second Amendment, although never considered by the Warren Court Justices, is part of the Bill of Rights; but when the Court has found violations of the right “to keep and bear arms,” only the liberal Justices (indeed, all of them) have voted to reject the claims.

Janus, Espinoza, and the other decisions cited above are examples of the phenomenon that I am calling reverse polarity. They are civil rights cases in which support for the constitutional claim is regarded as the conservative position, in part because support for the claim comes primarily or entirely from Justices viewed as “conservative.” That is the reverse of the ideological alignment that prevailed during the Warren Court era and for decades thereafter, when support for civil rights claims was viewed at the liberal position.

In Parts III and IV of this article, I present a comprehensive taxonomy of reverse-polarity issues and cases. Before doing so, I outline the method that I used to characterize modern-day judicial positions as liberal or conservative.

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67 I say “probably” because recharacterizing the nature of the issue could change the ideological direction of the outcome. Janus, for example, might have been regarded as a “economic” issues case, with a liberal vote being a vote in favor of the union. But that too is questionable, because the party opposing the union was not the employer but an individual employee. In any event, as the Liptak article makes clear, Janus and Citizens United are characterized as “conservative” rather than “liberal” by today’s commentators.


69 Id. at 2278 (Ginsburg, J., joined by Kagan, J., dissenting); id. at 2281 (Breyer, J., joined in part by Kagan, J., dissenting); id. at 2292 (Sotomayor, J., dissenting). See also Masterpiece Cakeshop, Ltd v. Colo. Civil Rights Comm’n, 138 S. Ct. 1719, 1748 (Ginsburg, J., joined by Sotomayor, J., dissenting).


71 The relationship between Justices’ votes and perceptions of what constitutes a “liberal” or “conservative” position is a complex one. For a thorough discussion, see Baum, supra note 22. I address the subject in Part II-B.
II. Identifying Reverse Polarity

To study reverse polarity, it is necessary to devise a method for determining whether support for a particular kind of constitutional claim is to be characterized as “liberal” or “conservative.” For this article, I relied primarily on the identity of the Supreme Court Justices on each side of an issue, supplemented by information about what Professor Lawrence Baum has called “the broad consensus” – particularly among “political elites” – “on the identities of conservative and liberal positions on a wide range of issues.”

I was able to implement this method because I could use the database of decisions that I compiled and maintained for my studies of case selection in the Supreme Court. In that database I coded each case for (among other characteristics) issue and outcome – more precisely, how the Court ruled on the issue in question. For this study, I compiled information about the ideological scaling of the Justices who have served on the Supreme Court during the past quarter-century. That step enabled me to identify liberal and conservative blocs on the Court. I then looked at how the members of each bloc voted, both in individual decisions and in the cluster of decisions on each issue. Based on what I found, I determined whether to identify a reverse-polarity issue, a reverse-polarity case, or neither. Here I provide a brief account of the two components of the method.

A. Issue Classifications and Decisional Polarity

The case classification system I used in my Supreme Court docket studies is built upon three key elements:

- Four broad (macro) issue categories, each corresponding to one of the major functions of the Supreme Court in the life and law of America, and rank-ordered to reflect the hierarchy in the legal effect of decisions in each area.73

- Particularized (micro) issue categories defined by reference to the source of authority for the legal rule in dispute.

72 Baum, supra note 22, at 13-15.

• Plus/minus (polarity) codes that are keyed to the issue and describe case outcomes, with a “plus” generally signifying that the court ruled in favor of the claim or defense based on the source of the legal rule in dispute.

1. The macro category: civil rights

For the study of reverse polarity, only one of the four macro categories is relevant: civil rights. This category corresponds to the Supreme Court’s function of delineating the limits of governmental authority as against claims of individual liberty. It includes cases in which litigants seek redress for, or protection against, some act of government (state or federal) which they claim is depriving them of rights guaranteed by those provisions of the Constitution that directly protect individual rights – primarily the Bill of Rights and the Fourteenth Amendment, but also including provisions of the original Constitution such as the Ex post facto clauses.

The category also encompasses remedial and jurisdictional issues associated with civil rights litigation, e.g. the interpretation of section 1983 and AEDPA. It does not include cases where individuals claim that the government has violated their rights, but invoke a statute or doctrine of general applicability, not requiring a finding of state action.

2. Defining the micro categories

Within the broad category of civil rights (as with the other macro categories), particular issues or issue areas are defined by reference to the source of authority for the legal rule in dispute. This approach derives from the basic precept that the national government is a government of limited powers. Because that is so, any rule of federal law must be grounded in a specific source of authority – ordinarily, the Federal Constitution or an Act of Congress. It

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74 The other broad categories are federalism and separation of powers, general federal law, and jurisdiction and procedure. See id.

75 See id. at 1739. In this article, the terms “civil rights,” “civil liberties,” and “individual rights” will be used interchangeably to refer to the category.

76 I specify “direct” protection of individual rights because, as the Supreme Court has often noted, the principles of federalism and separation of powers embodied in the Constitution also serve to protect individual liberty. See, e.g., Bond v. United States, 564 U.S. 211, 222 (2011) (Bond I); Seila Law LLC v. Consumer Fin. Protection Bureau, 140 S. Ct. 2183, 2202-03 (2020).

77 Such cases are placed in the category of “general federal law.” E.g., Fort Bend County, Texas, v. Davis, 139 S. Ct. 1843 (2019) (Title VII).

follows that all issues of federal law can be classified in accordance with the constitutional or statutory provision that most immediately gives rise to the legal question in dispute.

In the realm of civil rights litigation, issues may be defined by a clause in the Bill of Rights (e.g. the Takings Clause) or by a line of precedent interpreting a particular provision of the Constitution (e.g. Miranda). As these examples suggest, issues can be defined at different levels of specificity. For my previous Supreme Court studies, where I sought to identify the forces that influenced the shifts in the composition of the plenary docket, the level of specificity depended primarily on the volume of decisions to be analyzed. For example, there was only one category for the Confrontation Clause, but I identified half a dozen different kinds of claims by criminal defendants asserting a denial of due process.79

For the reverse-polarity study, I broke out some additional categories where there was reason to think that ideological alignment might be in play – for example, affirmative action. But I limited the categories to those that could be justified within the Court’s doctrinal framework; thus there is no category of “abortion-related speech.”80

Every now and then there are cases in which the Justices disagree as to which line of precedents provides the controlling legal authority. When this occurred, I generally based my classifications on the view of the case taken by the Court. For example, in United States v. United Foods, Inc., the dissent argued that the case involved economic regulation or perhaps at most commercial speech.81 But the majority relied on “[o]ur precedents concerning compelled contributions to speech.”82 I therefore classified the case as one involving compelled subsidy, though I noted the overlay of the commercial speech doctrine.83

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79 See Arthur D. Hellman, The Supreme Court, the National Law, and the Selection of Cases for the Plenary Docket, 44 U. Pitt. L. Rev. 521, 534 (Table III) (1983) [hereinafter Hellman, National Law].

80 I recognize, of course, that some members of the Court believe that the Court has created “an entirely separate, abridged edition of the First Amendment applicable to speech against abortion.” McCullen v. Coakley, 573 U.S. 464, 497 (2014) (Scalia, J., concurring in judgment). But such assertions, in opinions that do not speak for the Court, do not create a doctrine-based category.


82 Id. at 410.

83 The case is discussed infra section III-F.
3. The plus/minus codes: issue polarity

After classifying the issue in a case in accordance with the principles set forth above, the next step was to assign a plus/minus or polarity code. This code depends on the nature of the issue, but for most cases, the “plus” signifies that the court ruled in favor of the claim or defense based on the source of the legal rule in dispute.

In civil rights cases, by definition, the legal rule in dispute is grounded in one of the provisions of the Constitution that directly protect individual rights against government action – most often, one of the first eight amendments. If the decision sustained the constitutional claim, the case is coded as a +C. If the decision rejected the claim, the case is a –C. The nature of the claim and the identity of the claimant are irrelevant.

Also irrelevant are the values and purposes invoked by the government in defense of its action. That is so even if, in other contexts, those values might support a different kind of civil rights claim. For example, in Espinosa, the case from Montana challenging the exclusion of religious schools from a program of tuition assistance,84 the state relied on a state constitutional provision that in some respects parallels the Establishment Clause.85 But the state did not argue that the Establishment Clause required the exclusion of religious schools.86 Only one constitutional claim was before the Court, and the Court upheld that claim. The case is therefore coded as +C.87

More generally, issue (or decisional) polarity is distinct from ideological direction, and indeed the separation of the two is a defining feature of the system that makes for greater transparency. Here, it provides the grounding for the investigation of reverse polarity. In the traditional typology of civil rights litigation, liberal decisions are those that support claims under the Bill of Rights and the Reconstruction Amendments (with a possible exception for “property” rights).88 That approach remains valid today across a wide spectrum of constitutional

84 Espinoza v. Montana Dept. of Revenue, 140 S. Ct. 2246 (2020), discussed supra Part I-C; see also infra Part III-H.
85 See id. at 2264 (Breyer, J., dissenting) (noting “Montana’s antiestablishment interests”).
86 See id. at 2254 (Court opinion) (stating that “the parties do not dispute that the scholarship program is permissible under the Establishment Clause.”).
87 In rare instances, both sides may argue that the Constitution requires a decision in their favor. For discussion see infra Part IV-A.
88 For discussion of the property rights cases see infra Part III-A.
issues, and in those cases the plus code corresponds to a liberal decision.\textsuperscript{89} The purpose of this research is to identify the instances where a +C decision should instead be characterized as conservative.

\textbf{B. Voting Blocs and Reverse Polarity}

To identify the issues and cases that reflect reverse polarity, I relied primarily on the positions taken by the liberal and conservative blocs on the Supreme Court. That approach was facilitated by one of the most striking developments in modern constitutional law: for a full quarter-century — the 1994 through 2018 Terms — the Court was divided along ideological lines, and during the entirety of that time there was a liberal bloc of four Justices that retained its unity and its position on the ideological scale. That 25-year period is the focus of this study.\textsuperscript{90}

\textit{1. Defining the liberal and conservative blocs}

To define the two blocs, I made use of the widely cited ideological scores for Supreme Court Justices developed by Andrew Martin and Kevin Quinn.\textsuperscript{91} These scores “place each justice in each Court term on an ideological scale.”\textsuperscript{92} They “measure[] judicial ideology in terms of deviation from a median of zero, with more liberal Justices having negative scores and more conservative Justices having more positive scores.”\textsuperscript{93} As Professor Baum has explained, the scores allow “comparison of votes for one side or the other on a particular issue …


\textsuperscript{90} The same ideological division continued in the 2019 Term, but the 2018 Term was the cutoff for the study.

\textsuperscript{91} See Andrew D. Martin & Kevin M. Quinn, Dynamic Ideal Point Estimates via Markov Chain Monte Carlo for the U.S. Supreme Court, 1953-1999, 10 Political Analysis 134 (2002). The authors include only non-unanimous cases in the analysis that generates the scores. See id. at 137 & n.3. They do not examine ideology directly; rather, they consider votes to reverse or affirm the decision of the lower court. See id.; see also Carolyn Shapiro, The Context of Ideology: Law, Politics, and Empirical Legal Scholarship, 75 Mo. L. Rev. 79, 111 (2010) (explaining how the scores are calculated). For current versions of the scores, see https://mqscores.lsa.umich.edu/measures.php.

\textsuperscript{92} Baum, supra note 22, at 211.

\textsuperscript{93} Eduardo M. Penalver, Memoriam: Justice John Paul Stevens, 133 Harv. L. Rev. 765, 765 n. 74 (2019).
with the overall ideological structure of voting in the Court.”

The Martin-Quinn scores have been criticized on various grounds, but even if valid, those criticisms have little bearing on the limited purpose for which I am using the scores here. For example, Professor Baum points out that the scores’ “placement of justices on an interval scale is inexact,” in particular, it exaggerates “the distances between justices … at the far end of the ideological spectrum and their colleagues on the same side of that spectrum.” But that is problematic only if one is considering the relative positions of individual Justices, and that is not part of this study.

More generally, the criticisms come from scholars who are, in one way or another, trying to understand “what led the Justices to their decisions.” That too is not part of this study. I am not trying to discover “the extent to which [cases are] decided on the basis of ideology,” nor am I comparing ideology with other possible elements of the decisional process. I am using the scores only to identify the cohorts on each side of the ideological divide during the 25-year period that is the focus of the study.

The positions of the two cohorts are vividly depicted in Figure 1. The lines at the bottom represent the liberal Justices; the lines at the top, the conservatives. Note that none of the lines in the top group ever crosses any of the lines in the bottom group, and vice versa. I.e., there was not a single Term in which any member of one bloc joined the other bloc. Here I explain the underlying data and their significance.

94 Baum, supra note 22, at 211-12.
95 For discussion of the criticisms, see Baum, supra note 22, at 211-14; Shapiro, supra note 91, at 110-20.
96 Baum, supra note 22, at 212.
97 Shapiro, supra note 91, at 120.
98 Id. at 119.
99 Of course there were individual cases in which Justices voted with the other bloc. But such cases were few and far between.
The study period began in 1994 when President Clinton made the second of his two appointments to the Court, inaugurating what turned out to be a “natural Court” that lasted for 11 Terms. The two Clinton appointees – Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Justice Stephen Breyer – served for all 25 Terms. A third position was occupied by Justice David Souter for 15 Terms; he was replaced by Justice Sonia Sotomayor. Justice John Paul Stevens served for 16 Terms; he was replaced by Justice Elena Kagan. Justice Sotomayor and Justice Kagan were both appointed by President Obama. Justice Breyer, of course, continues to serve. Justice Ginsburg died in September 2020, shortly before the start of the 2020 Term.

In every one of the 25 Terms, the Martin-Quinn scores of the four liberals put them together at one end of the ideological spectrum, generally with a sharp break between the least liberal of the four (usually Justice Breyer) and the adjoining Justice. There is not a single Term in which even one of the four had a

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100 “The term natural court refers to the Supreme Court during a period in which there are no personnel changes.” Shapiro, supra note 91, at 84 n. 9.
positive score, i.e. a score above the baseline of zero.\textsuperscript{101} After 1999, there is not a single Term in which any of the four had a score above minus 1.0.\textsuperscript{102}

All of the other Justices who served on the Court during this period can be characterized as conservatives, although the conservative bloc did not have the unity manifested by the liberal Justices. In all 25 Terms, there were always three Justices with scores above 1.0; sometimes there were four. Justice Clarence Thomas, who served during the entire period, was always in that group, and indeed he was ranked as the most conservative Justice in every Term. Justice Antonin Scalia, who died early in the 2015 Term, had a score of 2.0 or above from 1994 through 2011; in his last four Terms, his score was between 1.0 and 2.0. Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, who served through the 2004 Term, always had a score between 1.0 and 2.0. So did Justice Samuel A. Alito, who joined the Court in the middle of the 2005 Term.

Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, who served through early 2006, generally had a score between zero and 1.0. That was also the pattern with Chief Justice John G. Roberts, Jr. – but only starting in 2013; from the time he took office in 2005 through the 2012 Term, his score was between 1.0 and 2.0. Justice Anthony M. Kennedy, who served through the 2017 Term, was the only conservative Justice ever to have a score below zero, and that was for three Terms very late

\textsuperscript{101} As recommended by Martin and Quinn, I use the “posterior mean” scores for each Justice for each Term. All scores used in this article are taken from the Excel spreadsheet of the 2018 Justice Data Files as posted on the web page cited supra note 91 (visited May 4, 2020). I sorted the scores by Term and “posterior mean” and created a new file (on file with the author).

\textsuperscript{102} Or, as summarized in a recent book about ideology and the Supreme Court, “Since 1991, … all [Democratic appointees] have been liberals.” Neal Devins & Lawrence Baum, The Company They Keep: How Partisan Divisions Came to the Supreme Court 3 (2019).
in his tenure. Otherwise, his scores generally ranged between zero and 1.0. The two Trump appointees have positive scores.

2. Identifying reverse-polarity issues

The existence of these two blocs – particularly the liberal bloc – over a 25-year period provides a valuable tool for identifying reverse-polarity issues. If a particular type of constitutional claim consistently receives more support from conservative Justices than from liberal Justices, the issue can be characterized as a reverse-polarity issue. So, too, if opposition to the claim comes primarily or exclusively from liberal Justices.

In identifying reverse-polarity issues, I have also considered the “shared understandings among political elites about which positions are liberal and which are conservative.” For that information I have drawn heavily on Professor Baum’s recent book.

This description of the method calls attention to the relationship between ideological classification of judges and ideological classification of decisions. Justice Sotomayor is labeled a liberal Justice because academic and other commentators universally regard her as such, and quantitative measures like the Martin-Quinn scores reinforce that characterization. If, in a given era, a particular position consistently receives more support from liberal Justices like Justice Sotomayor than from conservative Justices, it is fair to call that the liberal position. And

103 Justice Kennedy had scores between -0.3 and zero in the three Terms 2014, 2015, and 2016. Those were the Terms in which he joined with the liberal Justices in several important cases. See, e.g., Murr v. Wisconsin, 137 S. Ct. 1933 (2017) (takings); Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstadt, 136 S. Ct. 2292 (abortion); Fisher v. University of Texas, 136 S. Ct. 2198 (affirmative action); Obergfell v. Hodges, 135 S. Ct. 2584 (same-sex marriage). In Justice Kennedy’s final Term, 2017, he again had a positive score – and he again joined the conservatives in the closely divided high-profile cases. E.g., Janus v. AFSCME, 138 S. Ct. 2448 (public-sector agency fees); Trump v. Hawaii, 138 S. Ct. 2392 (entry restrictions for aliens).

104 Justice Neil Gorsuch, who joined the Court in the middle of the 2016 Term, had a score above 1.0 in each of his three Terms. Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh had a score between 0 and 1.0 in his single completed Term during the study period.

105 Baum, supra note 22, at 13.

106 Id., passim.

107 There is something almost comic about using scores calculated to the third decimal place to show that Justice Sotomayor and the other three Democrat-appointed Justices are liberals, and that the other Justices are conservatives. Nevertheless, it is helpful that objective measures accord with universally shared assumptions.
decisions favoring that position are liberal decisions. The same can be said, mutatis mutandis, on the conservative side.

Of course, judges are not automatons. As Professor Brown noted nearly a century ago, “conservative Justices often render so-called liberal opinions, and vice versa.” But rendering an occasional liberal opinion does not turn a conservative Justice into a liberal Justice, or vice versa. Nor does a conservative opinion become liberal because rendered by a liberal Justice, or vice versa. The two classifications are separate, and they are defined in accordance with the preceding paragraph.

I believe that this method, used for this particular line of inquiry, avoids the problem of circularity that several writers have noted. If there is universal agreement among those who study the Court that a bloc of Justices is liberal – as there is – and that assessment is supported by quantitative measures like Martin-Quinn scores – as it is – then it is not circular to label the positions taken by those Justices as liberal.

Two final points. First, the principal object is to identify issues and issue positions that fall within the domain of reverse polarity. The characterization is warranted if the particular type of constitutional claim consistently receives more support from conservative Justices than from the liberals. That is a demanding standard, but given the novelty of the concept, I prefer to err on the side of caution. For example, if most of the decisions in a particular area during the 25-year period of the study reflect reverse polarity, but one or two of equal importance do not, I will refrain from identifying a reverse-polarity issue.

Second, ideological polarity is a dynamic, not a static, phenomenon. Part III provides a taxonomy of issues that warrant the characterization today. Part IV examines issues on which the evidence, at this writing, is weak or equivocal. Additional decisions over the next few years may enable a clearer picture to

108 See supra text accompanying note 13.
110 See, e.g., Fischman & Law, supra note 1, at 183 (2009).
111 The method used here might not work as well for earlier periods, in which the ideological divisions were not as clear-cut, or for studies of other aspects of ideology. I need not consider those questions here.
emerge. Even without them, readers can decide for themselves whether one or more of the issues discussed should be added to the compendium in Part III.

III. Evolution of Reverse-Polarity Issues

When Professor Schubert explained the “concept of civil liberties” that defined the domain of “political liberalism,” he recognized one exclusion explicitly and another implicitly.\textsuperscript{112} Those exclusions are reflected in the initial reverse-polarity issues. Others followed.

A. Takings Clause Claims

As noted earlier, Schubert distinguished between “property” rights and “personal” rights, and he included only the latter in his category of “civil liberties.”\textsuperscript{113} This is perhaps not surprising. In drawing the line as he did, Schubert followed a practice that was widely accepted,\textsuperscript{114} though there were also those who questioned its soundness; for example, as early as 1946, Judge Learned Hand observed: “Just why property itself was not a ‘personal right’ nobody took the time to explain.”\textsuperscript{115} A quarter-century later, the Supreme Court endorsed this view, declaring that “the dichotomy between personal liberties and property rights is a false one. Property does not have rights. People have rights.”\textsuperscript{116} Nevertheless, it remains true in the Roberts Court era that sympathy for property rights is generally not an element of political liberalism.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{112} See supra note 24; infra note 127.

\textsuperscript{113} See supra note 24.


\textsuperscript{115} Learned Hand, Chief Justice Stone’s Conception of the Judicial Function, 46 Colum. L. Rev. 696, 698 (1946). Although Judge Hand purported to be describing Justice Stone’s jurisprudence, his commentary is generally regarded as expressing his own views. Judge Hand advocated restraint by courts, whether “personal” or “property” rights were at issue. See Gerald Gunther, Learned Hand: The Man and the Judge 565 n. * (1994).


\textsuperscript{117} See Ilya Somin, Two Steps Forward for the Poor Relation of Constitutional Law: Koontz, Arkansas Game & Fish, and the Future of the Takings Clause, 2012 Cato Sup. Ct. Rev. 215, 242 (2012-2013) (stating that “most liberal jurists are unwilling to support anything more than extremely limited judicial enforcement of constitutional property rights”).
Property rights can include claims under the Due Process Clauses of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments, but more contentious today are claims under the Takings Clause of the Fifth Amendment, made applicable to the states by the Fourteenth. Professor Baum has carefully traced the treatment of Takings Clause claims by liberal and conservative members of the Supreme Court. He found that over the last several decades, “conservative justices [have] been considerably more favorable to takings claims than the Court’s liberals.”

My own review of the decisions confirms this. If anything, it is an understatement. Over a quarter-century, there were 11 Takings Clause cases in which the Court was closely divided (generally with four dissents). There was one case in which one liberal Justice supported the claim. In every one of the other cases, every liberal Justice supported the government.

The pattern was reinforced in 2019 with the decision in Knick v. Township of Scott. The conservative majority, overruling a 1985 precedent, held that “a government violates the Takings Clause when it takes property without

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118 Baum, supra note 22, at 152.
119 There were seven other Takings Clause cases during this period. Six were unanimous; one had a single dissent. Four decisions ruled in favor of the property owner; three supported the government position. Professor Somin has suggested that two of the unanimous rulings in favor of the property owner “were in part a result of the extreme nature of the positions adopted by the federal government” during the Obama administration. Somin, supra note 117, at 241-42.
120 In City of Monterey v. Del Monte Dunes, 526 U.S. 687 (1999), Justice Stevens joined a 5-4 majority in affirming a judgment in favor of the property owner. Justice O’Connor joined the dissent. The case primarily concerned the right to trial by jury.
121 This tally does not include Bennis v. Michigan, 516 U.S. 442 (1996). The majority in Bennis – four conservative Justices joined by Justice Ginsburg – rejected a due process challenge to a forfeiture order that penalized an innocent owner. The petitioner also argued that the order violated the Takings Clause, but in a single paragraph the Court held that that claim fell with rejection of the due process claim. The dissent joined by three liberal Justices did not even mention the Takings Clause. Nor did the separate dissenting opinion by Justice Kennedy. The decision thus sheds no light on the Justices’ positions on Takings Clause claims.
122 139 S. Ct. 2162 (2019).
compensation, and … pursuit of a remedy in federal court need not await any subsequent state action.”

Justice Kagan, joined by the Court’s other three liberals, delivered a sharp dissent, asserting that “today’s opinion smashes a hundred-plus years of legal rulings to smithereens.”

The division among the Justices in Knick and earlier cases accords with the ideological split outside the Court. I have no hesitation in classifying the Takings Clause as a reverse-polarity issue; a +C decision is coded as conservative.

B. Personal Jurisdiction

A century and a half ago, the Supreme Court held that the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment limits the authority of state courts to adjudicate the rights of residents of other states. The Court strongly reaffirmed this proposition in its 1958 decision in Hanson v. Denckla. Powerful arguments have been made that federalism-based limits on state-court power should be drawn from other provisions of the Constitution, but the Supreme Court remains committed to grounding the doctrine in the Due Process Clause. And the Court has emphasized that the requirement of personal jurisdiction that flows from the Due Process Clause “recognizes and protects an individual liberty interest.”

In the last decade, the Court has decided six cases on personal jurisdiction. Without exception, the decisions have held that the state courts

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123 Id. at 2177.
124 Id. at 2183 (Kagan, J., dissenting). Two years earlier, the four liberal Justices, joined by Justice Kennedy, rejected a Takings Clause claim. See Murr v. Wisconsin, 137 S. Ct. 1933 (2017).
125 See Baum, supra note 22, at 150, 158 (noting identity of groups filing amicus briefs on the two sides of takings cases).
127 357 U.S. 235 (1958) (5-4 decision). Schubert did not include this case in his list of non-unanimous civil liberties decisions in the 1957 Term. See Schubert, supra note 5, at 109.
129 See, e.g., Bristol-Myers Squibb Co. v. Superior Court, 137 S. Ct. 1773, 1781 (2017) (noting that “the Due Process Clause, acting as an instrument of interstate federalism, may sometimes act to divest the State of its power to render a valid judgment.”).
131 There were no cases from 1994 through the 2009 Term.
violated the due process rights of the out-of-state defendants. Most of the decisions have been unanimous or almost so, but to the extent there were dissents, they came from the Court’s liberals. In earlier eras, too, opposition to constitutional limits on state power came primarily from liberal judges. I classify this as a reverse-polarity issue.

For completeness, I note that there is a parallel line of cases holding that the Due Process Clause limits state powers of taxation. This line of cases is typically invoked when a state seeks in some way to tax “wealth created beyond its borders.” The Court has held that “the Due Process Clause limits States to imposing only taxes that bear fiscal relation to protection, opportunities and benefits given by the state.” Cases invoking this doctrine have rarely come to the Court in recent years, and the ideological divide seen in some of the personal jurisdiction cases plays no role.

C. Challenges to Affirmative Action Programs

When Judge Stephen Reinhardt described the “liberal judge” in his 1997 article, he said that, as a general matter, liberal judges believe that statutes and voter initiatives “must be strictly tested against the limitations and guaranties contained in the Constitution.” But in the next paragraph, he commented that liberal judges “sometimes have trouble interpreting [the post-Civil War constitutional] amendments as barriers to minority advancement.” The implication was that when litigants challenge government programs that promote

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133 For example, in World-Wide Volkswagen v. Woodson, 444 U.S. 286 (1980), the Court held that the state court violated due process by exercising jurisdiction over two out-of-state defendants, an automobile retailer and its wholesale distributor, in a products liability suit. The four dissenting Justices were the four most liberal Justices in the 1979 Term, as shown by their negative scores in the Martin-Quinn ranking.


136 The most recent case, decided in 2019, was unanimous. See id.

137 Reinhardt, supra note 2, at 46.

138 Id.
When challenges to affirmative action programs first came to the Supreme Court, the polarity of the issue was in doubt. The question arose initially in the 1973 Term in a case involving law school admissions. A 5-4 majority found that the case was moot. Only Justice Douglas – the most liberal member of the Court – expressed a view of the merits. Justice Douglas argued that “consideration of race as a measure of an applicant’s qualification normally introduces a capricious and irrelevant factor working an invidious discrimination.” The next affirmative action case did not come before the Court until 1978, after Justice Douglas had retired. The two most liberal members of the Court joined an opinion stating that “a state government may adopt race-conscious programs” under specified circumstances. But Justice Stevens, also a liberal, found the particular program invalid on statutory grounds. It was not until 1990 that the liberal Justices were unanimous in rejecting challenges to affirmative action programs.

The pattern in recent decades has been clear. In the 25 Terms starting in 1994, the Court decided six cases in which “benign” race-conscious government programs were challenged under the Equal Protection Clause. There was one case in which one member of the Court’s liberal bloc voted to strike down the

affirmative action for minorities, liberal judges do not apply “strict[] tests;” rather, their inclination is to uphold the programs.

139 That was the approach Judge Reinhardt took. See, e.g., Monterey Mechanical Co. v. Wilson, 138 F.3d 1270, 1273 (9th Cir. 1998) (Reinhardt, J., dissenting from denial of en banc rehearing) (attacking panel for “striking down a benign governmental outreach program that is intended to ensure a modicum of fairness to minorities and women”).

141 Id. at 333 (Douglas, J., dissenting).
143 Id. at 421 (opinion of Stevens, J.).
145 This tally does not include cases on race and redistricting, which have generated a separate line of precedent. For a brief discussion, see infra Part IV-C. In one additional case, the Court held that a Hawaii state constitutional provision limiting the right to vote in certain elections to “Hawaiians” was “an explicit, race-based voting qualification” that violated the Fifteenth Amendment. Rice v. Cayetano, 528 U.S. 495, 498 (2000). Two liberal Justices would have rejected the constitutional claim. See id. at 527 (Stevens, J., joined in part by Ginsburg, J., dissenting). The alignment is thus consistent with the pattern in the equal protection cases discussed in the text.
program,¹⁴⁶ and one in which two of the liberal Justices agreed to a remand.¹⁴⁷ In the remaining cases, the liberal Justices uniformly voted to reject the constitutional claims, sometimes in strong language.¹⁴⁸

The pattern in the Justices’ votes is consistent with the ideological alignment outside the Court. As Professor Baum has written, “in the world of political elites, support for affirmative action and similar programs is seen as a liberal position.”¹⁴⁹ In the judiciary, challenges to affirmative action programs fall within the domain of reverse polarity.¹⁵⁰

D. Campaign Finance Regulation

In the 1989 Term, the Supreme Court decided 11 cases on freedom of speech, nine of them by a divided vote. The cases ranged widely over First Amendment issues, including defamation,¹⁵¹ child pornography,¹⁵² political patronage,¹⁵³ public forums,¹⁵⁴ and even flag burning.¹⁵⁵ At that time, the two most liberal members of the Court were Justices William J. Brennan and

¹⁴⁷ See Fisher v. University of Texas, 570 U.S. 297 (2013). Justices Breyer and Sotomayor joined the Court’s opinion that remanded the case. One member of the liberal bloc, Justice Ginsburg, voted to uphold the plan without a remand. Id. at 334 (Ginsburg, J., dissenting). Justice Kagan was recused. When the case returned to the Court, all three participating liberals joined Justice Kennedy in rejecting the constitutional challenge. Fisher v. University of Texas, 136 S. Ct. 2198 (2016). The three conservative Justices dissented. (Justice Scalia’s seat was still vacant.)
¹⁴⁹ Baum, supra note 22, at 166 (punctuation altered).
¹⁵⁰ Although the 2002 book by Segal and Spaeth presented only a condensed version of the delineation of “liberal” and “conservative” positions included in their 1993 collaboration, the authors were careful to specify that “a pro-affirmative action outcome is defined as liberal.” Segal & Spaeth, Attitudinal Model Revisited, supra note 49, at 323 n. 40.
Consistent with what we would expect of liberal jurists, Justices Brennan and Marshall voted in favor of the free-speech claim in 11 of the 12 cases. The one exception was Austin v. Michigan Chamber of Commerce. In Austin, Justice Marshall wrote, and Justice Brennan joined, an opinion upholding a state law that prohibited corporations from using corporate treasury funds for independent expenditures supporting or opposing candidates for state office. Three of the Court’s four most conservative Justices dissented, protesting the Court’s “value-laden, content-based speech suppression.”

The alignment in Austin suggests that campaign finance regulation had become a reverse-polarity issue by 1990. But arguments can also be made for an earlier or a later date. Earlier, based on what we now know about the drafting of the seminal 1976 opinion in Buckley v. Valeo; Professor Richard Hasen’s account shows that, from the start, Justices Brennan and Marshall were sympathetic to legislation that seeks to “limit[] the role of money in politics.” Later, in that it was not until 2003 that Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, whose name is virtually synonymous with conservative ideology, unequivocally rejected the approach taken by the Austin majority.

What can be said with confidence is that in the era of the Roberts Court, campaign finance regulation is another reverse-polarity issue. Over the last decade and a half, the Court has decided six campaign finance cases on the

156 In fact, based on the Martin-Quinn scores, Justices Brennan and Marshall were the two most liberal Justices in every Term from 1976, the first after the retirement of Justice William O. Douglas, through 1989, Justice Brennan’s last.


158 Id. at 695-96 (Kennedy, J., dissenting). Justices O’Connor and Scalia joined Justice Kennedy’s dissent; Justice Scalia also dissented separately, accusing the Court of endorsing “Orwellian” censorship. Id. at 679. As discussed infra note 161, Chief Justice Rehnquist joined the majority opinion.

159 424 U.S. 1 (1976).

160 Richard Hasen, The Untold Drafting History of Buckley v. Valeo, 2 Election Law J. 241, 243 (2003). At the other end of the spectrum, Justice Rehnquist was one of the First Amendment “hawks.” Id. at 243.

161 Chief Justice Rehnquist not only joined the Austin opinion in 1990; as Chief Justice, he assigned the case to Justice Marshall, who had long been supportive of campaign finance regulation. But in McConnell v. FEC, 540 U.S. 93 (2003), the Chief Justice joined Justice Kennedy’s dissenting opinion, including an extended and emphatic denunciation of Austin. See id. at 323-20 (describing Austin as “unfaithful to our First Amendment precedents” and in “conflict … with fundamental First Amendment principles”).
merits. In every one of those cases, the five conservative Justices voted in favor of the First Amendment claim, with the result that the regulations were held unconstitutional. In five of the six cases, all four liberal Justices voted in dissent against the claim. There was one case in which one liberal Justice – Justice Breyer – found a First Amendment violation.

It is almost unnecessary to say so, but the same alignment can be seen outside the Court. As Professor Baum has observed, the division among the Justices on campaign finance regulation has “mirrored the division among political elites as a whole.” Liberals view the Court’s decisions – particularly Citizens United – as a threat to democracy, while conservatives believe that the threat to democracy comes from those who seek to overturn the decisions. Campaign finance regulation is the paradigm of a reverse-polarity issue.

E. Commercial Speech Regulation

For more than three decades the Supreme Court took the position that the First Amendment imposes “no … restraint on government as respects purely commercial advertising.” Starting in 1975, the Court repudiated that “notion” and held that the First Amendment does give some protection to commercial

162 This tally does not include the remand order in Wisconsin Right to Life, Inc., v. FEC, 546 U.S. 410 (2006).
163 See Randall v. Sorrell, 548 U.S. 230 (2006). Not surprisingly, Chief Justice Roberts assigned the opinion (a plurality opinion, as it turned out) to Justice Breyer.
164 Baum, supra note 22, at 67.
166 E.g., Ronald Dworkin, The Decision That Threatens Democracy, N.Y. Review of Books, May 13, 2010, at xx. However, outside the Court, the liberal position is not uniform. For example, the American Civil Liberties Union submitted an amicus brief in Citizens United urging the Court to strike down the “broad prohibition on ‘electioneering communications’” added by the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002, see 2009 WL 2365203 at *2 (July 31, 2009), and it has opposed legislation targeting a broadly defined category of independent expenditures relating to elections. See https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/2019-03-01_aclu_letter_to_house_rules_committee_on_h_r_1.pdf.
speech. In those initial cases, the only dissent came from the Court’s most conservative member, Justice Rehnquist. Justice Rehnquist argued that “by labeling economic regulation of business conduct as a restraint on ‘free speech,’ [the Court has] gone far to resurrect the discredited doctrine of cases such as Lochner.”

Over the next two and a half decades, the Court decided numerous commercial speech cases. Several of the decisions were unanimous, but when the Court was divided, the disagreements closely tracked traditional ideological lines, with liberal Justices supporting the First Amendment claim and conservative Justices voting to uphold the government regulation. Justice Marshall was the most consistent defender of commercial speech; Justice Brennan and Justice Blackmun were not far behind. On the other side, Justice (later Chief Justice) Rehnquist was the most consistent opponent, but he was often joined by Justice O’Connor.

Although there were no changes in the Court’s membership from 1994 through 2005, the new century brought shifts in the alignments in commercial speech cases. The turning point came with *Lorillard Tobacco Co. v. Reilly*, decided in 2001. The case involved a challenge to Massachusetts regulations governing the advertising and sale of tobacco products. A five-Justice majority held that two of


173 *Lorillard Tobacco Co. v. Reilly*, 533 U.S 525 (2001). Professors Post and Shanor argue that the “shift in the valence of commercial speech doctrine” occurred earlier, in the 1990s. See Robert Post & Amanda Shanor, Adam Smith’s First Amendment, 128 Harv. L. Rev. Forum 165, 168 (2015). They point out that “[i]n 1995, Chief Justice Rehnquist joined an opinion by Justice Thomas invalidating a statute prohibiting beer labels from displaying alcohol content.” Id., citing *Rubin v. Coors Brewing Co.*, 514 U.S. 476 (1995). But that decision was unanimous in result, as was the later decision in *44 Liquormart v. Rhode Island*, 517 U.S. 484 (1996). It was not until *Lorillard* that a claim for protection of commercial speech received more support from conservative Justices than from liberal Justices.
the regulations violated the First Amendment. Justice O'Connor wrote the Court’s opinion, joined in relevant part by Chief Justice Rehnquist and Justices Scalia, Kennedy, and Thomas. Those were the five conservative members of the Court. Three of the Court’s liberals – Justice Stevens, joined by Justices Ginsburg and Breyer – voted to uphold one of those regulations and to send the other one back to the lower court for trial. Justice Souter agreed with the other dissenters on the latter point.

The following Term brought another commercial speech case, Thompson v. Western States Medical Center. In Thompson, a group of licensed pharmacies challenged provisions of federal law that prohibited them from advertising or promoting particular “compounded drugs.” The case was in several respects a replay of Lorillard. The Court applied its commercial speech doctrine and held that the laws violated the First Amendment; the vote was 5 to 4; and Justice O’Connor wrote the Court’s opinion. But the lineup was not quite the same as in Lorillard. Justice Souter joined four conservative Justices in striking down the statutory provisions, while Chief Justice Rehnquist joined the other three liberal Justices in dissent.

Thompson was the last commercial speech case decided on the merits by the Rehnquist Court. In the 15 years of the Roberts Court, there have been

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174 The two regulations limited outdoor and point-of-sale advertising of smokeless tobacco and cigars. The state had also restricted the advertising of cigarettes, but the same five-Justice majority held that that element of the regulations was preempted by federal law.

175 In every Term of the “natural Court” from 1994 through 2004, those five Justices – and only those five – had positive scores on the Martin-Quinn scale. See supra Part II-B.

176 Lorillard, 533 U.S. at 599-605 (Stevens, J., dissenting).


178 “Drug compounding is a process by which a pharmacist or doctor combines, mixes, or alters ingredients to create a medication tailored to the needs of an individual patient.” Id. at 360-61.

179 In Nike, Inc. v. Kasky, 539 U.S. 654 (2003), the California Supreme Court, relying on the commercial speech doctrine, allowed a private citizen to sue Nike for alleged deception in communications defending the working conditions under which Nike products were manufactured. The United States Supreme Court granted certiorari, but after argument dismissed the writ as improvidently granted, without explanation. Id. at 655. Justice Stevens, joined by Justice Ginsburg and (in part) by Justice Souter, defended the dismissal without expressing a view on the merits. Id. at 656. Justice Kennedy dissented without explanation. Id. at 665. Justice Breyer, joined by Justice O’Connor, dissented. Id. He made clear that in his view, the speech in question should be treated not as commercial speech but as speech on a matter of public concern. Under that approach, the regulations would be subjected to heightened scrutiny,
only three commercial speech cases, two of which were unanimous as to result.¹⁸⁰ The one divided ruling was Sorrell v. IMS Health, Inc., decided in 2011.¹⁸¹ In Sorrell, pharmaceutical manufacturers challenged a state law that restricted the sale, disclosure, and use of pharmacy records that revealed the prescribing practices of individual doctors. A six-Justice majority held that the law was “content based and, in practice, viewpoint discriminatory,” and that it could not meet even the “special” level of scrutiny required of commercial speech.¹⁸² Justice Breyer, joined by Justices Ginsburg and Kagan, dissented strongly. He quoted the warning of then-Justice Rehnquist that applying a “heightened” First Amendment standard to regulatory programs that burden speech would risk a return to “the bygone era of Lochner.”¹⁸³

The pattern in the commercial speech cases is not as strong as the pattern in the area of campaign finance. But the evidence of reverse polarity is more than suggestive. What stands out, first, is that over the last two decades, opposition to protecting commercial speech has come overwhelmingly from the liberal Justices, while conservative Justices have been largely supportive. It is striking, too, that in 2011 three liberal Justices would endorse the admonition that protection of commercial speech risks a “return to the bygone era of Lochner”¹⁸⁴—an admonition uttered three decades earlier in a solo dissent by the Justice who was then the most conservative member of the Court.¹⁸⁵ Outside the Court, Sorrell has become Exhibit A for liberal commentators who believe that “the recent and aggressive expansion of commercial speech doctrine” is the “driving force” that has turned the First Amendment into “a powerful engine of constitutional

¹⁸² Id. at 571.
¹⁸³ Id. at 585 (Breyer, J., dissenting) See also id. at 602-03 (expressing concern about “reawaken[ing] Lochner’s pre-New Deal threat of substituting judicial for democratic decisionmaking where ordinary economic regulation is at issue”).
¹⁸⁴ See supra note 183 and accompanying text.
¹⁸⁵ The fourth liberal, Justice Sotomayor, joined the Court’s opinion in Sorrell, but she later agreed with the other liberals in criticizing the decision. See Janus v. AFSCME, 138 S. Ct. 2448, 2487 (Sotomayor, J., dissenting).
deregulation.” Putting all of this together, I conclude that commercial speech has become a reverse-polarity issue.

**F. Compelled Speech or Subsidy**

Commercial speech is not the only area of First Amendment law in which decisions finding a constitutional violation have generated accusations of a “return to Lochner.” The label has also been attached to cases involving claims of compelled speech or subsidy. Not surprisingly, these decisions are also candidates for the reverse-polarity designation.

Two landmark precedents define this area of First Amendment law. The first, of course, is the flag salute case of 1943, *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*. The Court there held that the Constitution protects the right not to speak as well as the right to express oneself, and that governments can compel “involuntary affirmation” of belief “only on even more immediate and urgent grounds” than what is required for suppression of speech. A quarter-century later came *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education*. Relying in part on *Barnette*, the Court held that the First Amendment prohibits governments from compelling individuals to contribute money to a private organization – there, a public-employee union – for the advancement of ideological causes they oppose.

Over the last 25 years, two kinds of government regulations have generated disagreement among the Justices about the scope and import of these principles.

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187 See infra text accompanying note 195; infra note 205.

188 319 U.S. 624 (1943).

189 Id. at 633.


191 Id. at 232-37; see id. at 235 (stating that the “principles” expressed in *Barnette* prohibit the school board from requiring its employees “to contribute to the support of an ideological cause [they] may oppose”). The Court also held that the First Amendment does allow states to compel public employees to pay “agency fees” to the union that represents the bargaining unit; these fees correspond to the portion of union dues attributable to activities germane to collective bargaining. That aspect of *Abood* was overruled in 2018. See infra text accompanying note 204.
In the Rehnquist Court, the issue arose in the unlikely context of challenges to marketing orders that compelled assessments for generic advertising for agricultural products. First, in *Glickman v. Wileman Bros. & Elliott, Inc.*, producers of California tree fruits argued that the enforced contributions for product advertising violated their First Amendment rights. The Court rejected the claim by a vote of 5 to 4; the majority included the Court’s three most liberal Justices, while the three most conservative joined the dissent by Justice Souter.

Four years later, in *United States v. United Foods, Inc.*, the Court distinguished *Glickman* and struck down a federal law requiring handlers of fresh mushrooms to fund advertising for the product. The vote was 6 to 3; the dissent was by Justice Breyer, joined by Justices Ginsburg and O’Connor. In a portion of his opinion joined only by Justice Ginsburg, Justice Breyer cited *Lochner* and argued that “the First Amendment [does not seek] to limit the Government’s economic regulatory choices in this way.”

Based only on these two cases, I would hesitate to classify compelled speech or subsidy as a reverse-polarity issue. But in the Roberts Court the issue generated three additional decisions, all in a context much closer to the core of the First Amendment, and these cases reveal a clear-cut ideological divide that supports the reverse-polarity characterization. The cases centered on *Abood* itself and involved challenges by objecting non-members to “agency fees” charged by public employee unions.

First, in *Knox v. SEIU*, the Court held that “when a public-sector union imposes a special assessment or dues increase, the union … may not exact any funds from nonmembers without their affirmative consent.” The Court relied

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193 Id. at 477 (Souter, J., dissenting). Justice Thomas, joined in part by Justice Scalia, also dissented separately. Id. at 504.
195 Id. at 429 (Breyer, J., dissenting).
196 In 2005, the Court decided a third case involving compulsory assessments for generic advertising for agricultural products. This was *Johanns v. Livestock Marketing Ass’n*, 544 U.S. 550 (2005). By a vote of 6 to 3 the Court held that “the generic advertising at issue [was] the Government’s own speech and therefore [was] exempt from First Amendment scrutiny.” Id. at 553. Four of the five conservative Justices joined the Court’s opinion.
197 See supra note 191.
on United Foods for the proposition that “compulsory subsidies for private speech are subject to exacting First Amendment scrutiny.” The five conservative Justices joined the Court’s opinion. Two of the liberal Justices concurred in the judgment on narrow grounds; the other two dissented.

That was in 2012. Two years later, in Harris v. Quinn, the same five-Justice majority refused to “extend Abood” to personal care providers who were “quite different from full-fledged public employees.” The Court applied “exact First Amendment scrutiny” and found that the agency fee arrangement could not satisfy that test. All four liberal Justices dissented, arguing that the state program fell “squarely within Abood’s holding” and did not violate the First Amendment.

Finally, in its 2018 decision in Janus v. AFSCME, the Court overruled Abood to the extent it upheld the state’s authority to compel non-consenting public employees to pay agency fees to a union, even for collective bargaining purposes. The four liberal Justices dissented strongly, accusing the majority of “weaponizing the First Amendment” and “using it [as a sword] against workaday economic and regulatory policy.”

As another example of the Janus majority’s “aggressive” use of the First Amendment, the dissenters cited a decision handed down the day before, NIFLA v. Becerra. That case involved a California law requiring facilities that provide pregnancy-related services to disseminate notices with content supplied by the

199 Id. at 310.
200 See id. at 323 (Sotomayor, J., joined by Ginsburg, J., concurring in judgment); id. at 328 (Breyer, J., joined by Kagan, J., dissenting).
202 Id. at 647-48.
203 Id. at 657 (Kagan, J., dissenting).
204 Janus v. AFSCME, 138 S. Ct. 2448 (2018). The Court was poised to overrule Abood two years earlier, but Justice Scalia’s death left the Court equally divided. See Friedrichs v. California Teachers Ass’n, 136 S. Ct. 245 (2016).
205 Id. at 2501 (Kagan, J., dissenting). Although Justice Kagan did not explicitly invoke Lochner, commentators have read her dissent as implicitly doing so. See, e.g., Amy Kapczynski, The Lochnerized First Amendment and the FDA: Toward a More Democratic Political Economy, 118 Colum. L. Rev. Online 179, 179 (2018).
government. The law was challenged by “pro-life pregnancy centers.” By the same 5-4 vote as in Janus, the Court held that the statute violated the First Amendment. Although the Court opinion barely mentioned the compelled-speech argument, a concurring opinion joined by four of the Justices in the majority placed heavy emphasis on the post-Barnette decision in Wooley v. Maynard, saying, “Governments must not be allowed to force persons to express a message contrary to their deepest convictions.” The dissent by the four liberals briefly distinguished Barnette.

Because the Barnette line of cases is not the basis for the Court’s opinion, I do not classify NIFLA as a compelled-speech case. Nevertheless, the positions of the Justices in NIFLA shed light on the issue’s ideological valence. Over a period of 25 years, in three disparate settings, support for claims of compelled speech or subsidy has come primarily from the conservative Justices on the Court. Opposition to the claims has come primarily from the liberals. There were no cases in which a claim of compelled speech or subsidy received more support from liberal Justices than from conservatives. Taking all of this into account, I classify this as a reverse-polarity issue.

207 Id. at 2379 (Kennedy, J., concurring).


210 NIFLA, 138 S. Ct. at 2379 (Kennedy, J., concurring).

211 Id. at 2387 (Breyer, J., dissenting).


213 In reaching this conclusion, I do not ignore the decision in Agency for Int’l Development v. Alliance for Open Society Int’l, Inc., 570 U.S. 205 (2013) (AOSI I), a case that reflects traditional polarity. Although the Court’s opinion quoted from Barnette and other compelled-speech cases, the decision rested on another line of precedent, the cases holding that the First Amendment supplies “a limit on Congress’ ability to place conditions on the receipt of funds.” Id. at 214 (quotation omitted). That line of precedent was also the basis of the disagreement between the majority and the dissent by two conservative Justices. Compare id. at 224-20 (Court opinion) with id. at 221-26 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
G. Judicial Campaign Speech

Minnesota and Florida, like many other states, select their judges through popular elections. In 2002, the Supreme Court considered the constitutionality of a Minnesota canon of judicial conduct that prohibited candidates for judicial office – incumbents and non-incumbents alike – from announcing their views on “disputed legal or political issues.”214 By a vote of 5 to 4, the Court held that this “announce clause,” by restricting “core” political speech, violated the First Amendment.215 The four dissenters were the four liberal Justices.

Thirteen years later, the Court considered a challenge to a Florida canon that prohibited candidates for judicial office from “personally solicit[ing] campaign funds.”216 The Florida Bar had imposed discipline on a lawyer-candidate who violated the canon by mailing a letter to local voters describing her qualifications and requesting financial support. By this time, the liberal bloc had been reconstituted; Justices Stevens and Souter had been replaced by Justices Sotomayor and Kagan. But once again all of the liberals voted to uphold the speech restriction. And this time they secured a fifth vote – Chief Justice Roberts, who wrote the Court’s opinion. The other four conservative Justices dissented strongly, arguing that the Court had sustained a “plain … abridgment of the freedom of speech.”217

These cases make up a small corner of First Amendment law, and I do not want to overstate their importance. But it is striking that although the cases involved very different regulations, all six liberal Justices uniformly voted to deny protection to speech in the course of a campaign for public office. The senior Justice in the group, Justice Ginsburg, went so far as to reject the application of “exactng scrutiny” to the speech restriction.218 This is another reverse-polarity issue.

H. Free Exercise of Religion

For several decades, litigants claiming violations of the right to the free exercise of religion found their strongest champions in the liberal Justices. For

215 Id. at 774, 788.
217 Id. at 1682 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
218 See id. at 1673 (Ginsburg, J., concurring).
example, in 1963, Justice Brennan wrote the landmark opinion in Sherbert v. Verner, holding that governmental actions that substantially burden a religious practice will be upheld only if justified by a “compelling state interest.” In the 1980s, when a conservative Court rejected Free Exercise claims, Justice Brennan and Justice Marshall generally dissented, usually joined by Justice Blackmun. The same three Justices protested strongly in 1990 when the Court, in Employment Division v. Smith, rejected much of its prior jurisprudence and held that the Free Exercise Clause provides no exemption from valid and neutral laws of general applicability.

In the Roberts Court, the alignment is quite different. To be sure, the number of free exercise cases is small, even if we include, as we should, decisions applying the two statutes that Congress enacted in response to Smith – the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (RFRA) and the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 (RLUIPA). And some of the rulings have unanimously upheld the religious-liberty claim. But when the Court has been divided, opposition to the claims has come exclusively from members of the liberal bloc. And in the most contentious of the cases, Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc., all four liberal Justices dissented strongly from the Court’s holding that the government’s regulation violated RFRA.

222 See Elizabeth Sepper, Free Exercise Lochnerism, 115 Colum. L. Rev. 1453, 1467-68 (2015) (noting that courts understand RFRA “as analogous to a constitutional right”). As initially enacted, RFRA applied to state as well as federal action. However, the Supreme Court held that Congress had exceeded its powers under section 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment in attempting to regulate states and their political subdivisions. City of Boerne v. Flores, 521 U.S. 507 (1997). Congress then passed RLUIPA to apply similar restrictions to a limited category of state-government actors. See Cutter v. Wilkinson, 544 U.S. 709, 715-16 (2005).
223 E.g., Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church & School v. EEOC, 565 U.S. 171 (2012).
225 Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc., 573 U.S. 682 (2014); see id. at 739 (Ginsburg, J., dissenting).
This pattern continued in rulings handed down after the conclusion of the study period. One was a plenary decision. In *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue*, the Montana Supreme Court construed the “no-aid” provision of the state constitution to require exclusion of religious schools from a state program that provided tuition assistance to parents who send their children to private schools.\(^{226}\) The United States Supreme Court held that this “discrimination” was “odious to our Constitution” and a violation of the Free Exercise Clause.\(^{227}\) All five conservative Justices joined the Court’s opinion; all four liberal Justices dissented.\(^{228}\)

Two cases on the “shadow docket”\(^{229}\) also fit the pattern. Both cases arose out of the Covid-19 pandemic. In each instance, the Court rejected applications for injunctive relief against state government directives that limited attendance at religious worship services.\(^{230}\) All four liberal Justices joined the Court’s rulings.\(^{231}\) But in both cases, four conservative Justices voted to grant the applications.\(^{232}\) The dissenting Justices argued that the directives discriminated against houses of worship in violation of the Free Exercise Clause.\(^{233}\)

A similar alignment can be seen outside the Court. Among political elites, as Professor Baum observes, “[r]eligious freedom increasingly has become a


\(^{227}\) Id. at 2262-63.

\(^{228}\) Id. at 2278 (Ginsburg, J., joined by Kagan, J., dissenting); id. at 2281 (Breyer, J., joined in part by Kagan, J., dissenting; id. at 2292 (Sotomayor, J., dissenting).

\(^{229}\) See William Baude, Foreword: The Supreme Court’s Shadow Docket, 9 NYU J. Law & Liberty 1 (2015).


\(^{231}\) None of the liberal Justices wrote or joined an opinion in either case, but their votes were necessary to the outcomes.

\(^{232}\) *South Bay*, 140 S. Ct. at 1613; *Calvary Chapel*, 140 S. Ct. at 2603 (Alito, J., joined by Thomas & Kavanaugh, J., dissenting); id. at 2609 (Gorsuch, J., dissenting). Chief Justice Roberts joined both rulings; in one, he wrote a concurring opinion. *South Bay*, 140 S. Ct. at 1613 (Roberts, C.J., concurring).

\(^{233}\) See *South Bay*, 140 S. Ct. at 1614 (Kavanaugh, J., dissenting); *Calvary Chapel*, 140 S. Ct. at 2607 (Alito, J., dissenting).
conservative cause.”234 Meanwhile, liberal commentators view cases like *Hobby Lobby* as exemplifying “Free Exercise Lochnerism.”235 In the academic world, that is not meant as a compliment. Free exercise of religion is a reverse-polarity issue.236

**I. The Second Amendment**

From 1953 through 2005, under three Chief Justices, the Supreme Court did not consider a single case challenging government regulation of firearms as a violation of the Second Amendment. But when *District of Columbia v. Heller* reached the Court in 2008, the Court divided on ideological lines, with a conservative majority holding that the Second Amendment protects an individual right to keep and bear arms; all four liberal Justices rejected that conclusion.237 Two years later, in *McDonald v. City of Chicago*, the Court considered whether the right recognized in *Heller* was made applicable to the states by the Fourteenth Amendment.238 One of the four liberals, Justice David Souter, had been replaced by Justice Sonia Sotomayor, but the lineup in the Court was the same; the four liberals voted to reject the constitutional claim.

The division within the Court, Professor Baum has written, reflects “the liberal-conservative division on gun policy questions in the elite world as a whole.”239 It is hardly necessary to elaborate the point further; the Second Amendment is another reverse-polarity issue.

**IV. Other Reverse-Polarity Cases**

In the preceding Part, I identified nine issues – three defined by provisions of the Bill of Rights, the others by lines of precedent – that exemplify the phenomenon of reverse polarity. But reverse polarity can also be found in other

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234 Baum, supra note 22, at 171. The context makes clear that Professor Baum is referring to free-exercise claims, not claims invoking the Establishment Clause. On Establishment Clause cases, see infra note 236.

235 See, e.g., Sepper, supra note 222.

236 In contrast, on Establishment Clause issues, the traditional alignment holds: when there is disagreement within the Court, conservative Justices generally oppose the constitutional claim; liberal Justices support it. See, e.g., *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, 572 U.S. 565 (2014).


239 Baum, supra note 22, at 113.
Supreme Court decisions of the last quarter century, and some of these decisions may point to additional issues that warrant the characterization. The cases fall into five groups. Two groups involve First Amendment claims, and two deal with equal protection. The final group takes us to the realm of criminal procedure.

Before turning to those cases, I will note two reverse-polarity decisions that stand by themselves in their respective areas of the law. First, in Gasperini v. Center for Humanities, Inc., three conservative Justices argued that the Reexamination Clause of the Seventh Amendment “prohibit[s] federal appellate courts from reviewing refusals by district courts to set aside civil jury awards as contrary to the weight of the evidence.”240 The majority, including all of the liberal Justices, rejected this position and held that “appellate review for abuse of discretion is reconcilable with the Seventh Amendment.”241 Gasperini was the only case in all 25 Terms in which the Court divided over any aspect of the Seventh Amendment, so the decision does not bespeak a reverse-polarity issue.242

Later, in Philip Morris USA v. Williams, the Court held by a vote of 5 to 4 that the Due Process Clause does not permit a jury to base an award of punitive damages “in part upon its desire to punish the defendant for harming persons who are not before the court.”243 The majority was composed of three conservative Justices and two liberals.244 But in the Court’s other punitive damages cases, the due process claim received more support from the liberal Justices than from the conservatives.245 Indeed, Justice Scalia and Justice Thomas consistently rejected any use of “substantive due process” to limit state punitive damages awards.246 The issue of punitive damages does not fall into the domain of reverse polarity.


241 Id. at 435 (Court opinion). Justice Stevens, although dissenting from the Court’s disposition, agreed with the Court on this point. See id. at 447 (Stevens, J., dissenting).

242 There were only two other Seventh Amendment decisions, and both were unanimous. See Feltner v. Columbia Pictures Television, Inc., 523 U.S. 340 (1998) (upholding claim); Markman v. Westview Instruments, Inc., 517 U.S. 370 (1996) (rejecting claim).


244 The conservative Justices were Chief Justice Roberts and Justices Kennedy and Alito.


A. Expressive Activity and Public Property

In a variety of contexts, First Amendment litigation often involves claims of access to public property for expressive activity. The Supreme Court has developed a “forum based approach” to such questions, recognizing three types of government-controlled spaces or facilities.247 But sometimes that typology does not even serve as framework for argument, because the dispute centers on whether there is any sort of forum at all. Several cases in the past 25 years, including some of the most contentious, reflect a reverse-polarity alignment on issues relating to the jurisprudence of forums.

Two cases grew out of expressive activity on “public sidewalks, a prototypical example of a traditional public forum,” where “speech in public areas is at its most protected.”248 The first was Schenck v. Pro-Choice Network, decided in 1997.249 A 6-3 majority, including all of the liberal Justices, rejected a First Amendment challenge to provisions of a district-court injunction establishing “fixed buffer zones” in the immediate vicinity of an abortion clinic.250 Three conservative Justices dissented, arguing that the trial court relied on an impermissible purpose of protecting listeners from unwanted speech.251

Three years later, with the same alignment of Justices, the Court decided Hill v. Colorado.252 The majority upheld a Colorado statute that made it unlawful, within 100 feet of the entrance to any health care facility, to approach another person without consent for the purpose of counseling or other specified speech-related conduct. The same three conservative Justices dissented, strongly disputing the majority’s conclusion that the statute was content-neutral.253 Justice

249 Id.
250 Id. at 386 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
251 Id. at 386 (Scalia, J., dissenting).
253 Compare id. at 742-49 (Scalia, J., dissenting), and id. at 766-70 (Kennedy, J., dissenting), with id. at 719-25 (Court opinion).
Kennedy accused the majority of “deliver[ing] a grave wound to the First Amendment.”

Two cases involved the third category of forum, the “limited public forum,” where restrictions may be imposed on speech as long as they are reasonable and viewpoint-neutral. First, in *Christian Legal Society Chapter v. Martinez*, a state law school refused to register the Christian Legal Society (CLS) as a recognized student group. The five-Judge majority, including the four liberal Justices, held that the law school validly conditioned access to a limited public forum on compliance with an “all comers” requirement that implemented the school’s non-discrimination policy. Four conservative Justices dissented, arguing that “the Court ignores strong evidence that the accept-all-comers policy is not viewpoint neutral because it was announced as a pretext to justify viewpoint discrimination.”

More recently, in *Minnesota Voters Alliance v. Mansky*, the Court held that the state violated the First Amendment by prohibiting voters from wearing political badges or other political insignia inside a polling place on Election Day. The Court classified the interior of a polling place as a “nonpublic forum” and found that although the regulation was viewpoint-neutral, it was not reasonable. The only dissent came from two liberal Justices who argued that the state court should have been given a chance to construe the statute narrowly.

*254* Id. at 791 (Kennedy, J., dissenting). In 2014, the Court struck down a Massachusetts statute that limited expressive activity in the vicinity of facilities where abortions were performed. See infra text accompanying note 275.

*255* Later cases have sometimes used the term “nonpublic forum,” but the description and the governing standards are the same. See infra note 260.


*257* Id. at 669, 687-90.

*258* Id. at 707 (Alito, J., dissenting).


*259* Id. at 1888-91. The Court’s description of the “nonpublic forum” accords with the delineation of the “limited public forum” in earlier cases. Compare id. at 1885-86 with, e.g., Christian Legal Society, 561 U.S. at 679 & n. 11.

*261* Minnesota Voters Alliance, 138 S. Ct. at 1893 (Sotomayor, joined by Ginsburg, J., dissenting).
Finally, in *Walker v. Sons of Confederate Veterans*, a Texas state agency rejected a proposal for a specialty license plate design featuring a Confederate battle flag.262 Four conservative Justices argued that “by selling space on its license plates [the state had created] a limited public forum,” and that in rejecting the Confederate flag design the state had engaged in unconstitutional viewpoint discrimination.263 But those Justices were in dissent. The majority, composed of the four liberal Justices joined by Justice Thomas, held that the specialty plate designs constituted government speech and were not subject to First Amendment limitations at all.264

On the other side of the ledger, there have been only two instances in the last 25 years in which public-forum claims have received more support from liberal Justices than from their conservative counterparts. In a 1998 case, a state-owned public television station sponsored a candidate debate and excluded an independent candidate who had little popular support.265 A six-Justice majority found that the decision to exclude satisfied the standards for regulation of speech in a nonpublic forum.266 Three liberal Justices argued that irrespective of the nature of the forum, the station failed to define the forum’s contours with sufficient specificity.267 More recently, all four liberal Justices took the position that a public-access cable channel constituted a public forum in which “viewpoint discrimination is impermissible.”268 But the five-Justice conservative majority held that the entity operating the public access channel was not a state actor and thus was not subject to First Amendment constraints at all.269

Some readers may wonder why this compilation of public forum cases does not include two decisions from the Rehnquist Court, *Good News Club v. Milford Central School*270 and *Rosenberger v. University of Virginia*.271 After all, in both cases

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263 Id. at 2262 (Alito, J., dissenting).
264 Id. at 2248-52 (Court opinion).
266 Id. at 682-83.
267 Id. at 690-95 (Stevens, J., dissenting).
269 Id. at 1926 (Court opinion).
the conservative Justices found that state educational institutions violated the First Amendment by excluding speech from a limited public forum based on viewpoint, while the liberal Justices found no denial of free speech rights.\textsuperscript{272} That alignment seems to fit the reverse-polarity model. However, in each instance the conservative Justices also rejected the argument that allowing the speech would violate the Establishment Clause.\textsuperscript{273} The cases thus reflect both traditional and reverse polarity – what one might call dual polarity. That is an anomalous outcome; it can occur only when both sides are claiming that the Constitution compels a ruling in their favor. Fortunately (from the perspective of classification), such situations are extremely rare.\textsuperscript{274}

Even when we put aside the cases implicating the Establishment Clause, the predominance of reverse polarity on issues relating to public forum jurisprudence is striking. Moreover, the analysis has looked only at outcomes. In 2014, the Court considered a challenge to a Massachusetts statute that made it a crime to knowingly stand on a public sidewalk within 35 feet of an entrance to a facility where abortions are performed.\textsuperscript{275} The Court was unanimous in holding that the statute violated the First Amendment, but four conservative Justices denounced the majority (Chief Justice Roberts and the four liberals) for holding that the statute was content-neutral and thus not subject to strict scrutiny.\textsuperscript{276}

There is no doubt that for more than two decades, litigants in the Supreme Court seeking access to public property for expressive purposes have been substantially more likely to get support from conservative Justices than from the liberals. However, the cases have arisen in a wide variety of contexts, invoking different aspects of the doctrine. And, of course, two important cases do not fit the pattern. For those reasons, and notwithstanding the strong skew in the voting

\textsuperscript{272} In Good News Club, Justice Breyer concurred in the judgment. Good News, 533 U.S. at 127.

\textsuperscript{273} Good News, 533 U.S. at 112-19; Rosenberger, 515 U.S. at 837-45.

\textsuperscript{274} For example, in Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle Sch. Dlst. No. 1, 551 U.S. 701 (2007), the dissenters invoked the spirit of Brown v. Board of Educ., 347 U.S. 483 (1954), see id. at 803-04 (Breyer, J., dissenting), but they did not argue that the Equal Protection Clause required the challenged state action. See also Espinoza v. Montana Dept. of Revenue, 140 S. Ct. 2246 (2020), discussed supra Part II-A.

\textsuperscript{275} McCullen v. Coakley, 573 U.S. 464 (2014).

\textsuperscript{276} Id. at 499-510 (Scalia, J., dissenting). The four Justices also chastised the majority for not considering whether to limit or overrule Hill v. Colorado, 530 U.S. 703 (2000), discussed supra text accompanying 252-254.
alignments, I have not identified a reverse-polarity issue here. If, over the next few years, this segment of the docket continues to be dominated by reverse-polarity cases, the characterization may well be warranted.

B. Freedom of Expressive Association

In *NAACP v. Alabama*, a landmark decision of the Civil Rights Era, the Supreme Court held that the Constitution protects “freedom to engage in association for the advancement of beliefs and ideas.”\(^\text{277}\) Thirty years later, the Court considered a series of cases in which freedom of association was asserted as a defense to compliance with state antidiscrimination laws that limited the freedom of private organizations like the Jaycees to choose their members. The Court unanimously rejected the constitutional claims.\(^\text{278}\)

That unanimity disappeared when the Court decided *Boy Scouts of America v. Dale* in 2000.\(^\text{279}\) The case arose when the Boy Scouts, upon learning that James Dale was “an avowed homosexual and gay rights activist,” revoked Dale’s adult membership in the organization.\(^\text{280}\) The state court held that the Boy Scouts had violated the state’s public accommodations law, and the court required the organization to reinstate Dale as an adult leader. The United States Supreme Court reversed. The five conservative Justices found that the state-court order constituted “a severe intrusion on the Boy Scouts’ rights to freedom of expressive association,” and that the interests embodied in the public accommodations law did not justify the intrusion.\(^\text{281}\) The four liberal Justices dissented, arguing that the state law did “not impose any serious burdens on [the Boy Scouts’] collective effort on behalf of its shared goals.”\(^\text{282}\)

Freedom of expressive association was also invoked in the *Christian Legal Society* case discussed earlier.\(^\text{283}\) The majority — four liberal Justices and Justice Kennedy — found that the limited public forum precedents provided the better “guide” for resolution of the dispute, but it also rejected the organization’s

\(^{280}\) Id. at 644.
\(^{281}\) Id. at 659.
\(^{282}\) Id. at 665 (Stevens, J., dissenting) (cleaned up).
\(^{283}\) See Part IV-A.
expressive association claims.\textsuperscript{284} Four conservative Justices, in dissent, argued that the case was “largely control[ed]” by a 1972 decision in which the Court, relying on expressive association precedents, reversed a judgment approving a college’s denial of recognition to a student group.\textsuperscript{285}

Almost simultaneously with Christian Legal Society, the Court decided Doe v. Reed.\textsuperscript{286} By an 8 to 1 vote, the Court rejected a claim that public disclosure of the names and addresses of voters who signed referendum petitions would violate First Amendment rights. Justice Thomas, the only dissenter, argued that the NAACP v. Alabama line of cases required strict scrutiny, which the disclosure required by the state did not satisfy.\textsuperscript{287} Justice Alito, although joining the Court in rejecting the facial challenge, found that “plaintiffs have a strong case that they are entitled to as-applied relief.”\textsuperscript{288} In contrast, three liberal Justices expressed deep skepticism about a potential as-applied challenge.\textsuperscript{289}

In all three cases, the only support for the First Amendment claim came from conservative Justices. But there is one major case in which support for a claim of expressive association came solely from the liberal side.\textsuperscript{290} So I would not classify freedom of expressive association, considered as a whole, as a reverse-polarity issue. However, a pending petition for certiorari may shed light on whether the characterization applies to the narrower issue addressed by NAACP v. Alabama itself – state action requiring disclosure of an organization’s supporters.\textsuperscript{291}

\textsuperscript{284} Christian Legal Society Chapter of the Univ. of California, Hastings Coll. of the Law v. Martinez, 561 U.S. 661, 683, 697 (2010).


\textsuperscript{286} 561 U.S. 186 (2010).

\textsuperscript{287} Id. at 232-40 (Thomas, J., dissenting).

\textsuperscript{288} Id. at 212 (Alito, J., concurring).

\textsuperscript{289} Id. at 215 (Sotomayor, J., dissenting). Note, though, that the strongest opposition to the plaintiffs’ constitutional claims came from Justice Scalia. See id. at 219 (Scalia, J., concurring in judgment).

\textsuperscript{290} See Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project, 561 U.S. 1 (2010); id. at 40, 43 (Breyer, J., joined by Ginsburg & Sotomayor, JJ., dissenting). This case was decided contemporaneously with Christian Legal Society and Doe v. Reed.

\textsuperscript{291} See Americans for Prosperity Fdn. v. Becerra, 919 F.3d 1177, 1187 (2019) (Ikuta, J., dissenting from denial of en banc rehearing) (arguing that the panel decision failed to follow NAACP v. Alabama and that the panel’s approach “puts anyone with controversial views at
The law on freedom of expressive association has also generated a distinct line of precedent on the associational rights of political parties.292 There were five cases during the study period in which claims of this kind were raised. The ideological alignments varied considerably. Two of the decisions reflected reverse polarity, albeit in a weak form. In the first case, two liberal Justices dissented from a decision finding a First Amendment violation;293 in the second, two conservative Justices dissented from a decision rejecting a facial challenge to a state initiative measure.294 Two other cases reflected traditional polarity; the only support for the claim came from three liberal Justices in dissent.295

The fifth case was sui generis. In Morse v. Republican Party of Virginia, the Court held that § 5 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 required the state Republican Party to “preclear” the party’s decision to impose a fee ($35 or $45) for participation in the convention that would select the party’s candidate for United States Senator.296 Four conservative Justices argued in dissent that the Court’s interpretation of § 5 raised serious questions “relating to [the party’s] freedom of political association.”297 The four liberal Justices, joined by Justice O’Connor, viewed the First Amendment claim as insubstantial and indeed barely worth mentioning.298 Thus, from a First Amendment perspective, the alignment risk”), cert. pending, No. 19-251. The Supreme Court has asked the Solicitor General to express his views on whether certiorari should be granted.


297 Id. at 283 (Thomas, J., joined by Rehnquist, C.J., & Scalia, J., dissenting); see also id. at 250 (Kennedy, J., joined by Rehnquist, C.J., dissenting) (emphasizing political party’s freedom of association). The dissenting Justices asserted that § 5 should be construed to avoid conflict with First Amendment rights.

298 See id. at 229 n. 38 (lead opinion) (characterizing the “burden on the right of association implicated in this case” as “minimal”); id. at 239 (Breyer, J., joined by O’Connor & Souter, J.J., concurring in judgment) (stating that “the practice challenged here [lies] outside the area of greatest ‘associational’ concern”).
reflects reverse polarity. But the Voting Rights Act bears such a close relationship to the Fifteenth Amendment that Morse can be viewed as a case in which both sides were asserting constitutional rights. Considered in that light, Morse is another dual polarity case.299

Even putting aside the ambivalence of Morse, the absence of any dominant pattern in the positions of the Justices in the other cases negates the possibility of identifying a reverse-polarity issue in this narrow but important corner of First Amendment law.

C. Race and Redistricting

The role of race in redistricting has generated a complex body of law – complex in no small part because the two primary sources of that law can point in opposite directions. The Supreme Court has held that the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits “racial gerrymandering,” which is defined as “intentionally assigning citizens to a district on the basis of race without sufficient justification.”300 But the Court has also acknowledged that the Voting Rights Act “often insists that districts be created precisely because of race.”301 To make matters more difficult, “a voter’s race sometimes correlates closely with political party preference.”302

In this setting, it is perhaps not surprising that some of the decisions reflect reverse polarity. Indeed, when the Court first recognized “racial gerrymandering” as a distinct equal protection claim, the liberal Justices objected strongly to the entire concept, saying that by requiring strict scrutiny for districting plans “predominantly motivated” by race, the Court was issuing an “invitation to litigate against the State” that was “neither necessary nor proper.”303 In 2001, four conservative Justices voted to affirm a judgment finding that “race not politics” explained a state’s redistricting plan, thus rendering the plan

299 See supra Part IV-A.
301 Id.
302 Id.
303 Miller v. Johnson, 515 U.S. 900, 945 (1995) (Ginsburg, J., dissenting); see also Bush v. Vera 517 U.S. 952, 1004-05 (1996) (Stevens, J., dissenting) (asserting that Court, with its jurisprudence of racial gerrymandering, has “struck out into a jurisprudential wilderness that lacks a definable constitutional core and threatens to create harms more significant than any suffered by the individual plaintiffs challenging these districts.”).
unconstitutional. But the four liberal Justices, joined by Justice O'Connor, held otherwise.

More recently, however, the Court has divided along traditional ideological lines. In one case, the liberal Justices voted to strike down a redistricting plan as an impermissible racial gerrymander, while conservative Justices, in dissent, accused the Court of ignoring the legislature’s “legitimate political explanation.” In another case, the liberal Justices, in dissent, insisted that the majority “ignore[d] the substantial amount of evidence of [the state’s] discriminatory intent.” Racial gerrymandering may have been a reverse-polarity issue in the 1990s and even in 2001, but it is not one today.

D. Other Equal Protection Claims

Two other equal protection decisions reflect reverse polarity. Both grew out of litigation in state courts. One case is quite well known, the other, quite obscure.

The well-known case is Bush v. Gore, the decision that determined the winner of the 2000 presidential election. A per curiam opinion joined by the five conservative Justices found that several aspects of the Florida recount process were “inconsistent with the minimum procedures necessary to protect the fundamental right of each voter in the special instance of a statewide recount under the authority of a single state judicial officer.” The result was “a violation of the Equal Protection Clause,” and the Court ordered a halt to the recount. The four liberal Justices dissented, with two rejecting the majority’s finding of an Equal Protection violation.

304 Easley v. Cromartie, 532 U.S. 234, 244 (2001); see id. at 259 (Thomas, J., dissenting).
305 Id. at 237 (Court opinion) (holding district court findings clearly erroneous).
306 Cooper v. Harris, 137 S. Ct. 1455, 1504 (2017) (Alito, J., dissenting). In Cooper, Justice Thomas joined the four liberal Justices to make up the majority.
309 Id. at 109.
310 Id. at 103.
311 Id. at 110.
312 See id. at 143 (Ginsburg., J., joined by Stevens, J.) (finding no “substantial equal protection claim); id. at 133-35 (Souter, J., joined by Breyer, J., dissenting) (agreeing that the
The obscure case is *Armour v. City of Indianapolis*. In *Armour*, the city changed its method for payment of sewer improvement assessments. Petitioners were lot owners who had paid their entire assessment in a lump sum. The city refused to refund any of the money they had paid, while it forgave the outstanding project debts of owners who had elected to pay on the installment plan. A six-Judge majority, including all four liberal Justices, applied rational-basis review and found no equal protection violation. Three conservative Justices dissented, arguing that where state law provided that abutting landowners are in the same class, the city’s justifications for the disparate treatment could not satisfy even the rational basis standard.

Two decisions drawing on totally different lines of precedent do not allow for any generalization. And in other equal protection cases not involving suspect categories or fundamental rights, the constitutional claim received more support from the liberal Justices than from the conservatives. No reverse-polarity issue can be identified here.

**E. Criminal Procedure**

Justice Scalia was a leading member of the Court’s conservative bloc, but he was also an originalist, and as commentators have pointed out, his originalism sometimes led him to support constitutional claims challenging police practices or asserting the rights of criminal defendants. The same can be said about Justice Thomas, albeit to a lesser degree. This pattern can be seen principally in three areas of criminal procedure: searches and seizures, the Confrontation Clause, and the right to a jury trial in sentencing.

That does not mean, however, that the cases were reverse-polarity cases. Consider, for example, the important opinions by Justice Scalia that broadly

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314 Id. at 690 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting).
317 See infra note 323.
defined the “searches” subject to the Fourth Amendment and expanded the rights of confrontation and jury trial protected by the Sixth Amendment. Justice Thomas joined each of those opinions. But all of these decisions were 5 to 4, and Justices Scalia and Thomas were the only conservative Justices to vote in favor of the constitutional claims. Justice Scalia was able to write for the Court only because he had the support of three of the four liberal Justices.

Commentators have given extensive attention to these cases, and for good reason; they appear to represent “an idiosyncratic coalition of conservative originalists and liberal Justices sympathetic toward criminal defendants.” That is a phenomenon worth studying, but it is a phenomenon distinct from reverse polarity. None of the cases discussed above are reverse-polarity cases.

In fact, among more than 300 criminal law and procedure cases in the 25 Terms of the study, I found only four in which the constitutional claim received more support from conservative Justices than from the liberals. Each involved a


320 In Kyllo, Justice Stevens parted company from the other liberal Justices and wrote the dissent. In the other cases listed, Justice Breyer wrote or joined the dissent rejecting the constitutional claim.

321 Joshua B. Fischman, Politics and Authority in the U.S. Supreme Court, 104 Cornell L. Rev. 1513, 1516 (2019); see id. at 1515-17 (listing commentaries).

322 Professor Fischman argues that the coalitions were not really idiosyncratic — that in each of the cases listed above (except for Kyllo), the majority was composed of “authority formalists,” while the dissenters were primarily the “authority functionalists.” See id. at 1517-18 (listing the Justices in the two camps); id. at 1548-64 (analyzing jury trial, confrontation, and Fourth Amendment cases).

323 In two of the Fourth Amendment cases discussed by Professor Fischman, the coalition splintered: Justice Thomas joined with the other conservatives in rejecting the constitutional claim, and Justice Scalia wrote a dissent joined by three liberal Justices. See Navarette v. California, 572 U.S. 393, 404 (2014) (Scalia, J., dissenting); Maryland v. King, 569 U.S. 435, 466 (2013) (Scalia, J., dissenting). Justice Thomas also disagreed with Justice Scalia’s pro-defendant position in a confrontation case discussed by Professor Fischman. See Williams v. Illinois, 567 U.S. 50, 103 (2012) (Thomas, J., concurring in judgment).
different area of the law – confrontation, double jeopardy, the right of self-representation, and jury trial.

The confrontation case was Giles v. California, decided in 2008.\textsuperscript{324} The issue was a narrow one involving forfeiture by wrongdoing. Justice Scalia wrote for a six-Judge majority rejecting the California Supreme Court’s broad theory of forfeiture and holding that a defendant forfeits his confrontation right only when he “engaged in conduct designed to prevent the witness from testifying.”\textsuperscript{325} The three dissenters from the +C holding included two of the Court’s liberals (Justice Breyer and Justice Stevens).

The double jeopardy case was Smith v. Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{326} Here too the issue that divided the Court was a narrow one: whether the Double Jeopardy Clause allows a judge to reconsider a mid-trial acquittal after the defendant has rested his case. The Court answered “no,” with Justice Scalia writing for himself, two other conservatives (Justice O’Connor and Justice Thomas) and two liberals (Justice Stevens and Justice Souter).

The right of self-representation, recognized by the 1975 decision in Faretta v. California,\textsuperscript{327} was at issue in Indiana v. Edwards.\textsuperscript{328} The case involved a criminal defendant who had “sufficient mental competence to stand trial” – but who, in the view of the state court, “lack[ed] the mental capacity to conduct his trial defense unless represented.”\textsuperscript{329} A 7-2 majority, including all of the liberal Justices, held that the state could insist on representation by counsel contrary to the defendant’s wishes.\textsuperscript{330} Justice Scalia, joined by Justice Thomas, dissented, arguing that “the Constitution does not permit a State to substitute its own perception of fairness for the defendant’s right to make his own case before the jury—a specific right long understood as essential to a fair trial.”\textsuperscript{331}

\textsuperscript{324} Giles v. California, 554 U.S. 353 (2008).
\textsuperscript{325} Id. at 359 (emphasis in original).
\textsuperscript{326} 543 U.S. 462 (2005).
\textsuperscript{327} 422 U.S. 806 (1975). The Court found the right to be implicit in the Sixth Amendment. See id. at 832.
\textsuperscript{328} 554 U.S. 164 (2008).
\textsuperscript{329} See id. at 174.
\textsuperscript{330} Id. at 178.
\textsuperscript{331} Id. at 180 (Scalia, J., dissenting.) Justice Scalia asserted that “the dignity at issue” in the case was “the supreme human dignity of being master of one’s fate rather than a ward of the State—the dignity of individual choice.” Id. at 186-87. “[T]he dignity of individual choice” is
Finally, in *Oregon v. Ice*, the Court held that jury-trial guarantee of the Sixth Amendment does not bar states from assigning to judges, rather than juries, the determination of facts “necessary to the imposition of consecutive, in lieu of concurrent sentences,” for multiple offenses.\(^\text{332}\) Only one of the Court’s four liberals, Justice Souter, voted in favor of the constitutional claim, but three conservative Justices did so (Chief Justice Roberts and Justices Scalia and Thomas).\(^\text{333}\)

The paucity of cases and the narrowness of the rulings tell the story. In the realm of criminal procedure, reverse-polarity issues are not to be found. There are occasional atypical alignments in individual cases, but on the broad range of issues ranging from searches and seizures to the administration of the death penalty, support for the constitutional claim remains the liberal, not the conservative, position.

**V. Observations on the Reverse-Polarity Cases**

To fully explore the phenomenon of reverse polarity would require comparing the reverse-polarity cases with those in which liberal and conservative Justices adhered to the ideological alignment associated with the Warren Court era. That is a task for future research.\(^\text{334}\) For now, I offer some preliminary observations suggested by an initial review of the cases discussed in the preceding pages. Three ways of thinking about the cases come to mind. I begin by considering reverse-polarity liberalism – first as a throwback to the Progressive Era, then as an embrace of Justice Felix Frankfurter’s vision of judicial self-restraint. Shifting perspectives, I look at reverse-polarity conservatism – as an application of the theory of judicial review associated with Justice Stone’s famous Footnote Four in *United States v. Carolene Products Co.*\(^\text{335}\) Because these ideas are speculative and provisional, I use question marks in the section titles.

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\(^\text{333}\) See id. at 173 (Scalia, J., dissenting). This was the first time in the sequence starting with *Apprendi v. New Jersey*, 530 U.S. 466 (2000), that Justice Stevens voted against the Sixth Amendment claim.

\(^\text{334}\) I offer some initial thoughts in the Conclusion infra.

\(^\text{335}\) 304 U.S. 144, 152 n. 4 (1938).
A. A Throwback to the Progressive Era?

In the reverse-polarity cases, liberal Justices are voting to reject individual rights claims and to uphold government action, while conservative Justices are on the other side. Viewed in that light, reverse-polarity liberalism can be seen as a throwback to the version of liberalism that was dominant in the Progressive Era.336

The linkage is most direct in the Takings Clause cases. As Professor Feldman has written, during the first third of the twentieth century, a “conservative Supreme Court had framed its property-protecting measures in terms of individual rights.”337 The “constitutional liberalism [of Roosevelt Justices like Black and Frankfurter] was defined in opposition to [those] doctrines.”338 Today, the “constitutional liberalism” of the Justices nominated by Presidents Clinton and Obama is defined in part by opposition to the “property-protecting measures” endorsed by the conservative Justices of the Roberts Court.339 Justice Kagan’s strongly worded dissent in Koontz v. St. Johns River Water Management District, a 2013 case on land use regulation, is a good example.340 She argued that the Court’s decision “turns a broad array of local land-use regulations into federal constitutional questions” and “deprives state and local governments of the flexibility they need to enhance their communities.”341

The parallel to the Progressive Era emerges most strongly, however, in cases that do not involve property rights. If constitutional liberalism in the 1930s was defined by opposition to decisions of a “conservative Supreme Court,” no decision aroused greater hostility than the 1905 ruling in Lochner v. New York, striking down a state law limiting the hours of work for bakers.342  

336 See supra Part I-A.
337 Feldman, supra note 17, at 179.
338 Id. at 177.
339 See supra section III-A.
341 See id. at 635-36 (Kagan, J., dissenting). See also Knick v. Township of Scott, 139 S. Ct. 2162, 2180 (2019) (Kagan, J., dissenting), discussed supra Part III-B-1. In both cases Justice Kagan’s dissent was joined by the other three liberal Justices.
of a return to the "Lochner era." Justice Kagan’s dissent in Janus v. AFSCME, although not citing Lochner by name, expressed the idea in unmistakable terms; she accused the majority of "using [the First Amendment as a sword] against workaday economic and regulatory policy." Indeed, “First Amendment Lochnerism” has become almost a cliché among liberal commentators.

Yet there are also important differences between the reverse-polarity cases of the last quarter-century and the individual rights decisions of the Lochner era. In the view of Progressive Era liberals, conservative Justices were invoking "property protecting doctrines" to strike down legitimate state efforts “to reform the relationship between workers and employers.” It was the plight of employees — “those least free” — that aroused liberal anger about decisions like Lochner. But in Janus, for example, the litigant challenging the state law was himself an employee, seeking release from state-compelled payments to a union.

The contrast can also be seen in the Takings Clause cases. In the well-known Kelo case, for example, the challenge to state action came not from an employee, but an individual who was not subject to state regulation.

For completeness, it should be noted that conservatives too can invoke Lochner — in cases reflecting the traditional ideological alignment. See, e.g., Obergefell v. Hodges, 135 S. Ct. 2584, 2617-18 (2015) (Roberts, C.J., dissenting); see Bernstein, supra, at 1027 (asserting that the Roberts dissent “repeat[s] virtually every hoary myth about Lochner and liberty of contract” and that most of what the Chief Justice writes about “Lochner and like-minded cases” “is simply false”).

For present purposes, it is unnecessary to consider whether Lochner deserves its obloquy; the question here is not what Lochner actually did but how it is being used.

Prominent scholars have argued that Lochner and its “eponymous jurisprudential era” have been misrepresented and caricatured. See David E. Bernstein, Class Legislation, Fundamental Rights, and the Origins of Lochner and Liberty of Contract, 26 Geo. Mason L. Rev. 1023, 1023 (2019); id. at 1027-28 (“Today, no serious legal historian accepts the cartoonish version of history that still has traction in some circles.”). For present purposes, it is unnecessary to consider whether Lochner deserves its obloquy; the question here is not what Lochner actually did but how it is being used.

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343 E.g., Sorrell v. IMS Health, Inc., 564 U.S. 552, 585 (2011) (Breyer, J., dissenting). Prominent scholars have argued that Lochner and its “eponymous jurisprudential era” have been misrepresented and caricatured. See David E. Bernstein, Class Legislation, Fundamental Rights, and the Origins of Lochner and Liberty of Contract, 26 Geo. Mason L. Rev. 1023, 1023 (2019); id. at 1027-28 (“Today, no serious legal historian accepts the cartoonish version of history that still has traction in some circles.”). For present purposes, it is unnecessary to consider whether Lochner deserves its obloquy; the question here is not what Lochner actually did but how it is being used.


346 Feldman, supra note 17, at 177-78. The text says “employees,” but surely that is a typo for “employers.”

347 See Frankfurter, supra note 16, at 165 (citing Lochner among other cases in which the Supreme Court used “the dogma of ‘liberty of contract’ …to slay most important social legislation and to deny the means of freedom to those least free.”).
employer seeking to impose a longer work week on his employees but (as Professor Baum puts it) from “a woman who was far from wealthy and who was in danger of losing a home that she loved;” moreover, “a large company [was] implicitly [standing] on the other side.” Other Takings Clause cases too have involved individual owners of small tracts of land.

Invocation of Lochner may carry greater force when the government relies on its authority to regulate commercial activity or protect health and safety. That is so whether the challenge to the regulation is based on the First Amendment right of free speech, the Second Amendment right to “keep and bear arms,” or other constitutional protections. But whether or not the analogy is found to be persuasive, the cases discussed in this article show that across a wide spectrum of constitutional issues, liberal Justices and commentators have gone far to revive the “doctrine” that Justice Robert H. Jackson described as one basis for “the Roosevelt fight against the old Court” – “that it had expanded the Fourteenth Amendment to take an unjustified judicial control over social and economic affairs.” Like their ideological forebears of the 1920s and 1930s, modern-day liberals “insist[] that a majority out of nine appointed life-tenure [Justices] should not settle such issues.”

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349 See, e.g., Murr v. Wisconsin, 137 S. Ct. 1933, 1940 (2017) (two lots totaling 2.5 acres); Koontz, supra, 570 U.S. at 599 (14.9-acre tract of land).
352 See, e.g., Sepper, supra note 222, at 1455 (stating that “businesses, scholars, and courts increasingly incorporate the central premises of Lochner into religious liberty doctrine”).
353 Letter from Justice Robert H. Jackson to Prof. Charles Fairman, Mar. 13, 1950, reprinted in William M. Wiecek, The Birth of the Modern Constitution 714 (2006). Jackson was writing to Fairman to seek his “informed judgment as to the constitutional questions involved in racial segregation in education” – questions that were shortly to come before the Court. Jackson emphasized that he “still … believe[d]” in the doctrine of limited judicial authority that he summarized, but, for him, that doctrine did not solve the “problem” of whether “we nine … should … decide such questions for the Nation.” Id.
In that light, one way of looking at reverse-polarity liberalism is to see it as injecting an element of the Progressive Era’s worldview into a version of liberalism that is, in other respects, more closely aligned with the outlook of the Warren Court era. Depending on how one weighs the comparative importance of the reverse-polarity and traditional-polarity issues, that may even be the dominant strain.355

B. Felix Frankfurter, Liberal Icon?

In 1943, when the Supreme Court vindicated the right of Jehovah’s Witnesses children not to salute the American flag, Justice Felix Frankfurter wrote a passionate and personal dissent arguing that the Court had assumed “a legislative responsibility that does not belong to it.”356 With that dissent, as historian Joseph Lash memorably observed, Frankfurter “uncoupled [himself] from the locomotive of history.”357 Frankfurter continued to advocate “vigilant judicial self-restraint,”358 but that approach no longer appealed to liberals, on the Court or off. For several decades, as Professor Brad Snyder has written, it became “[c]onventional historical wisdom” to assert that Frankfurter was a “jurisprudential failure.”359 In the “triumphalist … narrative” that celebrated the “Warren Court’s individual rights revolution,” Frankfurter “served as the villain.”360

With the arrival of reverse-polarity decisions, however, liberal Justices and commentators have found inspiration and wisdom in opinions of Justice

355 Any such assessment would have to take into account the fact that liberals remain committed to a robust judicial role on issues that reflect traditional polarity. See Balkin, supra note 8, at 261 (noting that liberal legal intellectuals, although deeply disillusioned with “judicial review in the hands of a conservative judiciary,” “continue to defend a large number of liberal civil rights and civil liberties precedents – for example, Roe and Lawrence”).


357 Joseph P. Lash, From the Diaries of Felix Frankfurter 73 (1975 (biographical essay)


359 Brad Snyder, Frankfurter and Popular Constitutionalism, U.C. Davis L. Rev. 343, 346, 350 (2013). Snyder provides numerous examples of scholars who derided Frankfurter’s approach to constitutional questions. Id.

360 Id.
Frankfurter rejecting constitutional claims. Three opinions by Justice Stevens stand out.

The first came in 1996. As noted earlier, when the Supreme Court initially recognized a claim for “racial gerrymandering,” the liberal Justices rejected the concept. Justice Stevens was the severest critic of the new doctrine; in addition to rejecting the claims on the merits, he argued that the plaintiffs lacked standing to pursue them. In support of his argument, he quoted “Justice Frankfurter’s memorable characterization of the suit brought in [the 1946 case of] Colegrove v. Green.” Colegrove is widely regarded as having been overruled by Baker v. Carr, a landmark decision of the Warren Court. Nevertheless, Justice Stevens did not simply cite it; he also relied on language that was part of its rationale.

A few years later, in McConnell v. FEC, all four liberal Justices joined in an opinion upholding the major provisions of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002. The opinion was co-authored by Justice Stevens and Justice O’Connor. It begins with a lengthy account of the history of campaign finance legislation drawn almost entirely from the Court’s 1957 opinion in United States v. Automobile Workers. As the Court notes, the author of that opinion was Justice Frankfurter. A careful scholar has argued that “Auto Workers contains not history but a fable.” History or fable, reliance on the Frankfurter version by liberal Justices is not what one would have expected in the decades following Frankfurter’s retirement in 1962.

Justice Stevens’ last opinion before his own retirement in July 2010 was a dissent in McDonald v. City of Chicago. The Court held in McDonald that the Second Amendment right “to keep and bear arms for self-defense,” first

361 See supra section IV-C.
363 Id. at 922, citing Colegrove v. Green, 328 U.S. 549 (1946) (plurality opinion).
368 Allison R Hayward, Revisiting the Fable of Reform, Harv. J. Legis. 422, 425 (2008).
recognized in District of Columbia v. Heller,370 “is fully applicable to the states.”371 Justice Stevens rejected the approach to “incorporation” taken by the Court, arguing that inclusion of a right in the Bill of Rights does not necessarily create an “interest” that is “judicially enforceable [against state action] under the Fourteenth Amendment.”372 In support of his argument, Justice Stevens invoked “[c]lassic opinions [of] Justice Cardozo and Justice Frankfurter;”373 he also quoted with approval the “principle” set forth in Justice Frankfurter’s opinion for the Court in Wolf v. Colorado374—a decision overruled by another landmark ruling of the Warren Court.375

In the academic world, liberal commentators have found insights in Frankfurter dissents to Court opinions by Justice William J. Brennan, one of the heroes of “the Warren Court’s individual rights revolution.”376 Two examples centering on reverse-polarity cases deserve mention. The first involves Bush v. Gore.377 As Professor Michael C. Dorf has noted, “Justice Frankfurter’s critique of judicial review of politics in Baker v. Carr was derided by liberals for nearly forty years. Then the Supreme Court decided Bush v. Gore, and Frankfurter didn’t look so bad.”378 The decision in Bush v. Gore led other scholars also “to reexamine Frankfurter’s Baker dissent.”379

A second example involves compelled union agency fees, the subject of the reverse-polarity decision in Janus v. AFSCME.380 One of the predecessor cases to Janus was Machinists v. Street, the 1961 decision in which the Court, speaking

371 McDonald, 561 U.S. at 750.
372 Id. at 866 (Stevens, J., dissenting).
373 Id. at 865 n. 10, citing Adamson v. California, 332 U.S. 46, 59-69 (1947) (Frankfurter, J., concurring).
374 338 U.S. 25, 26 (1949), quoted in McDonald, 561 U.S. 866 n.10 (Stevens, J., dissenting).
375 Justice Stevens acknowledged that “Wolf’s holding on the exclusionary rule was overruled by Mapp v. Ohio, 367 U.S. 643 (1961),” but he said that the “principle” he quoted had “never been disturbed.” Id.
376 See supra text accompanying note 360.
377 531 U.S. 98 (2000), discussed supra Part IV-D.
379 Snyder, supra note 359, at 411-13 (citing examples).
380 138 S. Ct. 2448 (2018), discussed supra Part III-F.
through Justice Brennan, construed the Railway Labor Act “to deny the unions, over an employee’s objection, the power to use his exacted funds to support political causes which he opposes.” Justice Frankfurter dissented, insisting that neither the Act nor the First Amendment barred the unions from using compelled dues for political purposes. A recent article criticizing the Janus decision quotes extensively from the Frankfurter dissent and concludes by saying that “Frankfurter’s warning about the antidemocratic effects of expanding the Court’s First Amendment jurisprudence was prescient.”

I do not want to take the point too far. Neither liberals nor conservatives today are likely to endorse the full measure of Justice Frankfurter’s brand of judicial self-restraint. Nevertheless, the fact that liberal Justices and commentators are quoting Frankfurter opinions with approval provides a useful perspective on the reverse-polarity cases. And it shows how far judicial liberalism has moved from the Warren Court era and its immediate aftermath, when Frankfurter “served as the villain.”

C. Flipping Footnote Four?

Justice (later Chief Justice) Harlan Fiske Stone was one of the liberal Justices who often dissented when the conservative Court of the 1920s and 1930s struck down economic and social legislation as a denial of due process. But he also

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381 International Ass’n of Machinists v. Street, 367 U.S. 740, 768 (1961). The Court made clear that it construed the statute in this way “to avoid serious doubt [about its] constitutionality.” Id. at 749. In fact, when the Court first heard the case, a majority was prepared to hold § 2, Eleventh, of the Railway Labor Act unconstitutional as applied. Justice Black prepared and circulated an opinion to that effect. See Bernard Schwartz, Super Chief 371-72 (1983).

382 Street, 367 U.S. at 811-18 (Frankfurter, J., dissenting).

383 Kate Andrias, Janus’s Two Faces, 2019 Sup. Ct. Rev. 21, 35-37, 42-43, 55.

384 Id. at 55; see also Jedediah Purdy, Beyond the Bosses’ Constitution: The First Amendment and Class Entrenchment, 118 Colum. L. Rev. 2161, 2185 (2018) (criticizing the Frankfurter dissent in Street, and suggesting that Frankfurter’s view of the relationship between unions and politics provides “a bridge to an alternative, democratic political economy in First Amendment doctrine”).

385 See Balkin, supra note 8, at 263-64 (“Felix Frankfurter’s star may rise again among liberal legal academics, [but] liberals today are in a very different position than progressives in the 1930s.”).

386 See supra text accompanying note 360.

believed that “the courts played a critical role in protecting noneconomic liberty and equality against overbearing majorities.”388 How could the Supreme Court “legitimate judicial activism in the service of the Bill of Rights without resurrecting the unwanted activism of the Lochner era?”389 In 1938, a year before Felix Frankfurter joined the Court, Justice Stone sought to resolve this dilemma in what became “the most celebrated footnote in constitutional law”390 – Footnote Four of United States v. Carolene Products Co.391

In the text of his opinion for the Court, Stone stated and applied what has become known as the “rational basis” test for review of economic legislation challenged as a violation of due process.392 Footnote Four, in three separate paragraphs, listed three circumstances in which courts would be less deferential to legislative judgments. These encompassed, first, challenges based on “specific prohibition[s]” of the Constitution, such as those contained in the Bill of Rights; second, challenges to “legislation which restricts those political processes which can ordinarily be expected to bring about repeal of undesirable legislation;” and third, claims that may implicate “prejudice against discrete and insular minorities.”393

Footnote Four is widely viewed as having laid the foundation for the construction of a robust jurisprudence of civil rights by the Warren Court. For example, in 1965, at the height of the Warren Court, Professor Herbert Wechsler quoted from the footnote and exclaimed, “What a change in the legal cosmos those few words portended in the quarter of a century ahead!”394 To be sure, it would be a mistake to say that the Warren Court Justices self-consciously drew inspiration from Footnote Four; there is good reason to believe that they

389 Id. at 122.
390 Lewis F. Powell, Jr., Carolene Products Revisited, 82 Colum. L. Rev. 1087, 1087 (1982).
391 304 U.S. 144, 152 n. 4 (1938).
392 Id. at 152-54.
393 Id. at 152 n. 4.
394 Herbert Wechsler, The Courts and the Constitution, 65 Colum. L. Rev. 1001, 1002 (1965); see also Owen Fiss, Foreword – The Forms of Justice, 93 Harv. L. Rev. 1, 6 (1979) (“The footnote codified the hard fought victory of the Progressives and seemed to provide a framework for the judicial activism that was about to transpire.”).
did not. Rather, the footnote provided liberal members of the legal academy with a “theoretical rationale” that could justify the “judicial activism” practiced by the Warren Court – while escaping “the ghost of Lochner.”

In the reverse-polarity cases it is the conservative Justices who are voting to uphold individual rights claims and set at naught the outcomes reached by majoritarian processes. Can the “theoretical rationale” of Footnote Four support their “judicial activism” as well? That is a large question, beyond the scope of this article. But it is possible to identify some instances in which the conservative Justices, explicitly or implicitly, have claimed the mantle of the Caroline Products footnote.

1. Enumerated rights

Of the nine reverse-polarity issues discussed in Part III, all but two (personal jurisdiction and challenges to affirmative action programs) involve rights protected by “a specific prohibition of the Constitution.” But for the most part the cases drew upon well-established lines of precedent, so it is not surprising that the conservative Justices did not rely on Justice Stone’s distinction between claims under the Due Process Clause, such as the one in Caroline Products itself, and assertions of what have been called “enumerated rights.” However, in two important reverse-polarity cases, the Court did allude to the distinction – once explicitly, once implicitly.

In District of Columbia v. Heller, the Second Amendment case, Justice Breyer asserted in dissent that the District’s ban on possession of a handgun in the home would satisfy rational basis scrutiny. The Court agreed with that proposition, but said that that standard applies only “when evaluating laws under constitutional commands that are themselves prohibitions on irrational laws.” The Court added: “Obviously, [that] test could not be used to evaluate the extent to which a legislature may regulate a specific, enumerated right,” or the

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396 Gilman, supra note 395, at 238-39.
397 Caroline Products, 304 U.S. at 152 n. 4.
398 See Kessler, supra note 20, at 1937-40 (explaining that the first paragraph of the footnote, with its reference to “specifically enumerated rights,” was added at the suggestion of Chief Justice Hughes).
400 Id. at 628 n. 27 (Court opinion).
enumerated right would be redundant. The Court quoted the first paragraph of the *Carolene Products* footnote.401

The implicit allusion came in *Sorrell v. IMS Health, Inc.*402 This too was a response to a dissent by Justice Breyer. The dissent challenged the Court’s use of a “heightened” standard of review and said that the Court’s approach risked “a return to the bygone era of *Lochner.*”403 In *Lochner* itself, Justice Holmes’ famous dissent insisted that the Fourteenth Amendment “does not enact Mr. Herbert Spencer’s Social Statics.”404 The *Sorrell* majority quoted that line and added: “[The Constitution] does enact the First Amendment.”405 The Court thus sought to invoke the distinction drawn in the first paragraph of Footnote Four.406

2. Distortion of political processes

The second paragraph of Footnote Four probably had its greatest influence through the writings of Professor John Hart Ely, who built upon that paragraph in developing his “representation-reinforcing theory of judicial review.”407 In characteristically pungent prose, Ely explained why his theory required courts to “strenuously” protect freedom of speech and association:408 “Courts must police inhibitions on expression and other political activity because we cannot trust elected officials to do so: ins have a way of wanting to make sure the outs stay out.”409 Opinions by conservative Justices in two of the most controversial reverse-polarity areas recognize the concern that underlay Ely’s prescription.

In *Citizens United v. FEC*, the conservative majority struck down section 441b of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (BCRA), which prohibited corporations and unions from making certain independent expenditures to

401 Id.
403 Id. at 585 (Breyer, J., dissenting) (cleaned up).
405 *Sorrell*, 564 U.S. at 567.
408 Id. at 105.
409 Id. at 106.
support or oppose political candidates.\textsuperscript{410} Much of the opinion suggests that the Court viewed the law as reflecting an effort by “ins … wanting to make sure the outs stay out.” For example, the Court said: “By suppressing the speech of manifold corporations, both for-profit and nonprofit, the Government prevents their voices and viewpoints from reaching the public and advising voters on which persons or entities are hostile to their interests.”\textsuperscript{411} The Court also noted that government officials may use their “authority, influence, and power to threaten corporations to support the Government’s policies.” These efforts “are often unknown and unseen.”\textsuperscript{412} The Court viewed the “public” speech that was the target of the BCRA prohibition as a potential counter to this kind of behind-the-scenes pressure.

Other opinions by members of the \textit{Citizens United} majority also echo Professor Ely’s warning. \textit{Citizens United} overruled in part the 2003 decision in \textit{McConnell v. FEC}.\textsuperscript{413} Justice Scalia, dissenting in \textit{McConnell}, said that “\textit{any} restriction upon a type of campaign speech that is equally available to challengers and incumbents tends to favor incumbents.”\textsuperscript{414} In a later case, Chief Justice Roberts made the same point in more general terms, asserting that “those who govern should be the \textit{last} people to help decide who \textit{should} govern.”\textsuperscript{415} And Justice Thomas, in a separate opinion addressing a different kind of campaign finance regulation, rejected an argument for deferring to Congress by quoting Ely’s \textit{Democracy and Distrust} and emphasizing “the potential for legislators to set the rules of the electoral game so as to keep themselves in power and to keep potential challengers out of it.”\textsuperscript{416}

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\textsuperscript{410} \textit{Citizens United v. FEC}, 558 U.S. 310 (2010). The Court treated the law as a “ban,” see, e.g., id. at 337; the dissent strenuously disputed this characterization, see, id. at 415-19 (Stevens, J., dissenting).
\textsuperscript{411} Id. at 354 (Court opinion).
\textsuperscript{412} Id. at 355.
\textsuperscript{413} 540 U.S. 93 (2003).
\textsuperscript{414} Id. at 249 (Scalia, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part) (emphasis in original). Justice Scalia added that “the present legislation \textit{targets} for prohibition certain categories of campaign speech that are particularly harmful to incumbents.” Id. (emphasis in original). This latter comment was addressed to BCRA as a whole, not just the provision that was struck down in \textit{Citizens United}. For discussion of a contrary view, see infra Part V-D.
\textsuperscript{415} \textit{McCutcheon v. FEC}, 572 U.S. 185, 192 (2014) (plurality opinion) (emphasis in original).
\end{flushleft}
Concern about legislation that distorts the political process can also be seen in Janus v. AFSCME, the public-sector agency fees case.\(^{417}\) A major theme of the Court's opinion is that “union speech in collective bargaining, including speech about wages and benefits,” is a “matter of public concern,” thus imposing a heavy burden on the state to justify what the Court viewed as a compelled subsidy.\(^{418}\) To support that conclusion, the Court noted that a quarter of the state's budget was devoted to paying down enormous “unfunded pension and retirement healthcare liabilities.”\(^{419}\) That assertion in turn drew on an amicus brief by the former general counsel to the Illinois governor who initiated the Janus litigation.\(^{420}\)

One might wonder why the Court's opinion devotes so much space to the state's “severe budget problems.”\(^{421}\) Although the opinion does not connect the dots, the amicus brief does. It states that “Illinois government management and labor have had a “long and largely uneventful bargaining history,” and it explains why: “That is largely because management bargains with the taxpayers’ money, and management's incentive is to get re-elected in a State in which unions carry heavy clout and make significant contributions to the political leaders to whom the individuals negotiating these contracts report.”\(^{422}\)

That is probably not the kind of situation that either Justice Stone or Professor Ely had in mind. But given the Janus Court's focus on the “severe budget problems” experienced by the state of Illinois, there is good reason to believe that the account in the amicus brief suggested to the Justices that the agency-fee requirement constituted part of a process by which “the ins [were] choking off the channels of political change” in a way that justified judicial intervention.\(^{423}\)

\(^{417}\) Janus v. AFSCME, 138 S. Ct. 2448 (2018), discussed supra Part III-F.

\(^{418}\) Id. at 2474; see generally id. at 2474-77.

\(^{419}\) Id. at 2474.

\(^{420}\) Id. at 2475, citing Brief for Jason R. Barclay et al. as Amici Curiae 9, 2017 WL 6311777 at *9-*10 [hereinafter Barclay Brief]. For a description of Governor Rauner’s role in the litigation, see Janus, 138 S. Ct. at 2461-62.

\(^{421}\) Janus, 138 S. Ct. at 2474.

\(^{422}\) Barclay Brief, supra note 420, at 11, 2017 WL 6311777 at 11 (punctuation altered).

\(^{423}\) See Ely, supra note 407, at 103. Professor Purdy too, although not citing Carolene Products, reads the Court's opinion as “invok[ing] the dangers of entrenchment and self-dealing.” Purdy, supra note 384, at 2182. See also id. at 2183 (“The individual-rights core of the
3. Discrete and insular minorities

In the third paragraph of Footnote Four, Justice Stone suggested that “prejudice against discrete and insular minorities” may justify a more robust exercise of judicial review. As Justice Lewis F. Powell, Jr., observed more than 40 years later, “Stone’s cryptic language frames more questions than it implies answers.” I leave those questions to others; here, I note that conservative Justices have invoked the rationale of Footnote Four’s third paragraph in two reverse-polarity cases. In one case, the reference was explicit; in the other, it was implicit.

In *Kelo v. City of New London*, the Court held that the city’s use of its eminent domain power to acquire property from an unwilling owner for the purpose of economic development by private entities did not violate the “public use” requirement of the Takings Clause. Justice Thomas, in dissent, argued that “extending the concept of public purpose to encompass any economically beneficial goal guarantees that [the] losses will fall disproportionately on poor communities” that are “the least politically powerful.” He added: “If ever there were justification for intrusive judicial review of constitutional provisions that protect ‘discrete and insular minorities,’ surely that principle would apply with great force to the powerless groups and individuals the Public Use Clause protects.”

Footnote Four does not mention “poor communities,” but it does refer to “religious … minorities,” and that suggests a look at the 2018 decision in *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*. In that case, the Commission imposed sanctions against a baker under the state’s anti-discrimination law because he declined to “create” a cake for a same-sex wedding. The Supreme Court set aside the Commission order based on a finding of “a clear and impermissible hostility toward the sincere religious beliefs

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opinion is buttressed by the structural worry that the challenged regime distributes the power of political influence in a way that entrenches certain established interests, here public-sector unions.”

424 Powell, supra note 390, at 1090.
426 Id. at 521 (Thomas, J., dissenting).
427 Id., quoting Carolene Products, 304 U.S. at 152 n. 4.
429 Id. at 1726-27.
that motivated [the baker’s] objection.”430 Two Justices who concurred in the Court’s opinion emphasized that the First Amendment requires courts to protect “unpopular religious beliefs”431 – another way of referring to “religious … minorities.”

4. Other perspectives

In the preceding pages I have discussed the reverse-polarity cases from the perspective of the Justices who supported the constitutional claims. From that perspective, decisions like Janus and Citizens United can be viewed as implementing the rationale for a “legitimate judicial activism” associated with Justice Stone’s Footnote Four.432 Of course there are other ways of looking at the cases. Those who disagree with the conservative position would probably reject pretty much every one of the characterizations I have quoted.433

One example stands out. As mentioned earlier, Justice Scalia believed that campaign finance legislation like BCRA is designed to benefit incumbents at the expense of challengers.434 Chief Justice Roberts has spoken in similar terms.435 Some progressive academics are sympathetic to that view,436 but a recent article asserts that “both the Roberts Court and these academics have it wrong. In fact, most campaign finance regulations disadvantage incumbents and increase competition.”437

430 Id. at 1729.
431 Id. at 1737 (Gorsuch, J., concurring).
432 See supra text accompanying note 388.
433 More nuanced responses are also possible. For example, Professor Purdy cites Janus, Citizens United, and other reverse polarity decisions as illustrating what he views as the central aim of the Roberts Court’s First Amendment jurisprudence: “averting partisan and bureaucratic entrenchment— … preventing political elites from picking future winners from among candidates, parties, and policies.” Purdy, supra note 384, at 2162. That aligns the decisions with the second paragraph of Footnote four. But Professor Purdy does not applaud the Court’s work, because he believes that in trying to avoid partisan entrenchment, the conservative Justices have promoted class entrenchment. Id. at 2174.
434 See supra text accompanying note 414.
435 See supra text accompanying note 415.
437 Id. at 166 (emphasis in original).
I take no position on who has the better of this argument. Nor do I jump into the academic fray over whether “Ely’s (and Carolene’s) idea of pro-democratic judicial review” is itself flawed.\textsuperscript{438} My point is only that conservative Justices have, to some degree, internalized Footnote Four; they draw on its rationale when they explain why they vote in favor of individual rights claims in reverse-polarity cases.\textsuperscript{439}

\textbf{Conclusion}

In an article whose subject is reverse polarity, I have, not surprisingly, said little about cases that exemplify what I have called traditional polarity – cases in which the civil rights claim receives more support from the liberal Justices than from the conservatives. Of course there were many such cases in the 25 Supreme Court Terms that I examined, and they include some of the most important decisions of the Roberts Court.\textsuperscript{440} But the reverse-polarity cases are neither rare nor random; rather, they reveal a set of issues on which support for the constitutional claim is the conservative rather than the liberal position. A different set of issues manifests traditional polarity.

What we see in the Roberts Court, then, is that there are two kinds of constitutional claims – those that receive more support from conservatives than

\textsuperscript{438} See id. at 135-40 (summarizing the “cottage industry” of attacks on Ely and Carolene Products).

\textsuperscript{439} Arguably the conservative Justices have done more than internalize Footnote four. Arguably they have adapted its theoretical framework to a new century in which (in their view) political entrenchment and prejudice against minorities take on very different forms from those that concerned Justice Stone in the 1930s or Professor Ely in the 1970s. But that leads to a question: why did those Justices not endorse judicial intervention to limit partisan gerrymandering, which looks like an extreme form of political malfunction in any century? See Rucho v. Common Cause, 139 S. Ct. 2484, 2506-07 (2019) (stating that excessive partisanship in districting is “incompatible with democratic principles,” but holding that the claims are “beyond the reach of the federal courts”); Stephanopoulos, supra note 436, at 114 (denouncing Rucho as “an anti-Carolene decision”).

from liberals, and those that receive more support from liberals than from conservatives. It is almost as though each group of Justices has found its own

copy of the Constitution. In one copy, certain provisions — the Second Amendment, the Takings Clause, and the Free Exercise Clause — are printed in

boldface and italics, while other provisions — the Cruel and Unusual Punishments Clause, the Self-Incrimination Clause, and the Establishment Clause, among

others — are grayed out and barely discernable. In the other copy, the

typographical conventions are reversed. The two copies also differ in their

annotations, particularly to the Free Speech Clause.

Is that a novel phenomenon? Not entirely; we see something like it in the

Court of the 1920s and 1930s. The conservative Justices of that era were the

stalwarts of substantive due process when economic and social legislation came

before the Court; yet when other kinds of civil liberties claims were in dispute, it

was the liberal Justices who were more likely to support judicial intervention. For

example, the “four Horsemen” who strongly reaffirmed “freedom of contract” in

1923 dissented a few years later when the Court struck down a statute limiting

freedom of the press.441 But modern constitutional law was in its infancy at that

time, and very few Bill of Rights cases appeared on the Court’s docket.

In the Warren Court, the phenomenon I have described was almost entirely

absent.442 Evidence can be found in the scalograms prepared by the political

scientists in the 1950s and 1960s. Each scalogram lists the civil liberties cases in a

particular Term and rank-orders the Justices by the number of votes they cast in

favor of the constitutional claim.443 There are occasional plus votes by Justices at

the low end of the scale, but no clusters, and certainly no discrete issues on

which conservative Justices supply plus votes when liberal Justices do not.

My own review of the decisions points to the same conclusion. Even in the

Takings Clause cases — which the political scientists did not include in their

scalograms — there is no consistent pattern of reverse polarity, as there is in the

441 Compare Adkins v. Children’s Hospital, 261 U.S. 525, 554 (1923) (recognizing “the
general rule forbidding legislative interference with freedom of contract”), with Near v.

Minnesota, 283 U.S. 697, 633 (1931) (Butler, J., dissenting) (stating that Court’s decision “gives
to freedom of the press a meaning and a scope not heretofore recognized”). All four of the
dissenters in Near joined the Court opinion in Adkins.

442 I say “almost” out of a lawyer’s caution. In my research thus far I have not found any

eamples.

443 See, e.g., Spaeth, supra note 34, at 293-97.
last quarter-century.\textsuperscript{444} To be sure, in perhaps the most important Takings Clause case of the Warren Court, a liberal Justice wrote a unanimous opinion rejecting the claim.\textsuperscript{445} But when the Court divided, the liberal Justices could sometimes be found on the claimants’ side, with rhetoric to match.\textsuperscript{446}

What accounts for the emergence of reverse polarity as a significant phenomenon in the Roberts Court? It would be foolish to expect a single explanation, but it is possible to identify some patterns. At one end of the spectrum, some of the reverse-polarity issues were not being litigated in the Warren Court era. Prime examples are the Second Amendment and challenges to affirmative action programs.

At the other end of the spectrum, we can identify some issues on which liberals and conservatives have switched positions. Campaign finance regulation fits this pattern. In 1957, in \textit{United States v. Automobile Workers}, the Court reversed the dismissal of an indictment charging a union with violating a federal statute that prohibited corporations and labor organizations from making a “contribution or expenditure in connection with” any election for federal office.\textsuperscript{447} The indictment alleged that the union had used members’ dues to sponsor advertising supporting candidates for Congress. All of the Court’s conservatives joined the opinion by Justice Frankfurter allowing the prosecution to go forward. The three most liberal Justices of that era dissented in an opinion by Justice Douglas. The dissent said that the belief “that one group or another … is too powerful” is “not justificatio[n] for withholding First Amendment rights from any group – labor or corporate.”\textsuperscript{448}

\textsuperscript{444} See supra Part III-A.

\textsuperscript{445} See Berman v. Parker, 348 U.S. 26 (1954) (unanimously rejecting claims under Takings and Due Process Clauses); see also Goldblatt v. Town of Hempstead, 369 U.S. 590 (1962) (same).

\textsuperscript{446} E.g., Armstrong v. United States, 364 U.S. 40, 49 (1960) (Black, J., for the Court) (“The Fifth Amendment’s guarantee that private property shall not be taken for a public use without just compensation was designed to bar Government from forcing some people alone to bear public burdens which, in all fairness and justice, should be borne by the public as a whole.”). Three conservative Justices dissented. See id. (Harlan, J., dissenting).

\textsuperscript{447} United States v. Automobile Workers, 352 U.S. 588 (1957).

\textsuperscript{448} Id. at 597 (Douglas, J., dissenting). Justice Douglas acknowledged that dissenting members of the union might “need protection against the use of union funds for political speech-making,” but he said that “alternative measures” were available “to cure this evil.” Id. at 596-97 & n. 1. Four year later, Justice Douglas argued that the First Amendment requires such protection. Machinists v. Street, 367 U.S. 740, 778 (1961) (Douglas, J., concurring).
That language in Justice Douglas’ dissent was quoted by the Court in *Citizens United*. The dissent in *Citizens United*, joined by all four liberal Justices, reproached the Court for relying on the dissent in *Automobile Workers*, saying that in the past the Court had found it significant that the position taken by a separate opinion “failed to command a majority.” The contrast between the two dissents by liberal Justices in two eras speaks for itself.

Such explicit repudiation is of course rare. But Professor Baum has examined the “change in the ideological polarity of free expression decisions in the Supreme Court,” and his analysis is relevant to reverse-polarity issues generally. He notes that scholars have pointed to two explanations. First, “liberals [have come] to perceive [some constitutional rights] as frequently conflicting with other values that are important to them, especially equality.” That helps to explain why liberals vote against some civil rights claims, but it does not explain why conservatives support them.

Here is where the second explanation comes into play: civil liberties claims “increasingly have been brought on behalf of interests that conservatives favor more than liberals, such as the business community.” Especially if we add additional “interests,” such as traditional religions, this explanation carries substantial weight. Yet it also raises a question: what accounts for the proliferation of such claims? One possibility is that governments at various levels are increasingly using the coercive power of the state to implement their


450 Id. at 434-35 (Stevens, J., dissenting). Justice Stevens was also reproaching the Court for relying on a concurring opinion by Justice Rutledge. See *United States v. CIO*, 335 U.S. 106, 143 (1948) (Rutledge, J., concurring). This was especially noteworthy because Justice Stevens had clerked for Justice Rutledge, and in an opinion for the Court in 2004, he quoted with approval from a dissent by Justice Rutledge in the same volume of the United States Reports. See *Rasul v. Bush*, 542 U.S. 466, 477 (2004) (Stevens, J, for the Court) (citing *Ahrens v. Clark*, 335 U.S. 188, 209 (1948) (Rutledge, J., dissenting)).

451 Free exercise of religion is another issue on which there is substantial evidence of a switch of positions by liberals and conservatives. See supra Part III-H.

452 Baum, supra note 22, at 48.

453 Id.

454 Id. It is not clear whether Professor Baum is distinguishing between “interests” and “values.” It may well be useful to draw the distinction. “Interests” would refer to “clienteles groups” such as the labor movement or the business community. See id. at 187. Examples of “values” would be equality and individual autonomy.
preferred policies in ways that conflict with values that are important to conservatives.

This last observation suggests that to fully understand the origins and implications of reverse polarity, one must consider not only the legal environment but also the larger socio-political world out of which the decisions arise. That is an enterprise for another day. For now, what stands out is that for the first time since civil rights cases became a major component of the Supreme Court’s plenary docket, there is a wide spectrum of issues on which the constitutional claim receives more support from conservative Justices than from the liberals. At the same time, there are other issues on which traditional polarity continues to hold sway. The next step will be to compare and contrast the two sets of civil rights claims, each associated with one of the Court’s two Constitutions.