

No room for moderates in GOP

By Jim Nowlan

Political debate in America tends to be framed on cable TV by staunch conservatives like Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh and solid liberals such as Rachel Maddow. Yet most of us are neither, according to a major new poll by the Pew Center for the People and Press, which finds Americans in 2011 fall into nine distinct categories of *homo politicus*.

The parties' nominees in 2012 general elections will be vying for the votes of the 35 percent of registered voters who are grouped as either "post-moderns" (moderate but liberal on social issues), "disaffecteds" (downscale and cynical) and libertarians (free market and small government seculars). These are the three categories of independents that the Pew Center found in their survey this spring of more than 3,000 Americans.

By the Pew Center typology, Republicans included the "staunch conservatives" (highly engaged Tea Party supporters) as well as "Main Street Republicans" (conservative on most issues); the two groups totaled 25 percent of registered voters.

Democrats were split among the "solid liberals," "hard-pressed Democrats" (religious, financially struggling) and "new coalition Democrats" (upbeat, majority minority). These three mostly Democratic groups represent 40 percent of voters, according to Pew.

(If you want to find out where you fit according to Pew, go to their easy quiz at <http://people-press.org/typology/quiz>. I am a post-modern independent by their reckoning

from the quiz. Google the Pew Center for the People and the Press for the complete survey results.)

The Pew polling found that only 11 percent of registered voters are staunch conservatives, and just 14 percent are solid liberals.

According to Pew, even the core Republican groups—staunch conservatives and Main Street Republicans—differ sharply in their opinions. The latter group is much more skeptical of big business and more supportive of environment than the staunch conservatives, for example.

On the Democratic side, solid liberals are less religious and more accepting of homosexuality than the hard-pressed and new coalition Democrats.

The obvious observation is that we are a broadly diverse electorate, not easily pigeon-holed. And we appear to be somewhat balanced between those who are or who lean Republican and those who solidly back or tend to back Democrats. This makes for competitive national elections.

You would think that somewhat moderate candidates would emerge from the GOP primary nominating processes, given their core group minority status and thus their need to appeal to independents. Yet the opposite tends to occur. Staunch conservatives have an intensity, passion, and uncompromising rigidity on social issues, e.g. Pro-Life, against homosexuality and same sex marriage. Because the staunch conservatives are so intense and highly engaged, they dominate GOP presidential primaries, having influence beyond their numbers.

For example, a Pro-Choice conservative doesn't even think about running in the Republican Party for the presidential nomination. And never again will we see moderates

like Nelson Rockefeller, Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon vie to be the GOP's standard bearer.

The test of the moment swirls around successful and conservative Indiana governor Mitch Daniels, who is thinking about a presidential run. Because the Pro-Life, pro-gun Daniels once simply called for a truce on social issues, he is being vilified by some conservative pundits, including Rush Limbaugh, as out of touch with the conservative movement.

If a conservative like Daniels cannot pass muster with staunch conservatives, then the likely nominee will be a fire-breathing arch-conservative. The low-key Daniels would have to arouse the less ideologically charged Main Street Republicans to override the staunch conservatives in early primaries next year.

Middle of the road, somewhat independent voters may decide the winner in presidential contests, but they play no role in naming the candidates.

Today, a nominee from the conservative polar end of the spectrum would have to rise above his or her philosophies and positions, as Ronald Reagan did, and appeal effectively on the basis of personality and trust. Otherwise, Obama will be re-elected.

As a moderate, I wish the system had a place for moderate Republican candidates, but it has none. And there is little that can be done about it until passion for social issues subsides among the powerful staunch conservatives, which is not likely in the foreseeable future.