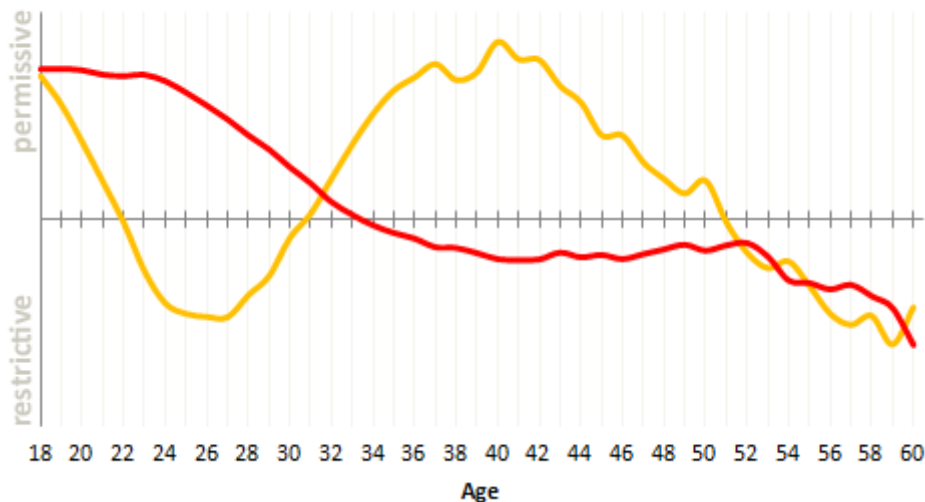


Age and Politics

Fastcompany.com has a great set of charts on [how political beliefs change over time](#). Interestingly, the graphs are created by OKCupid.com from [mining the data collected in their dating database](#).

evolution of **economic** and **social** beliefs over time



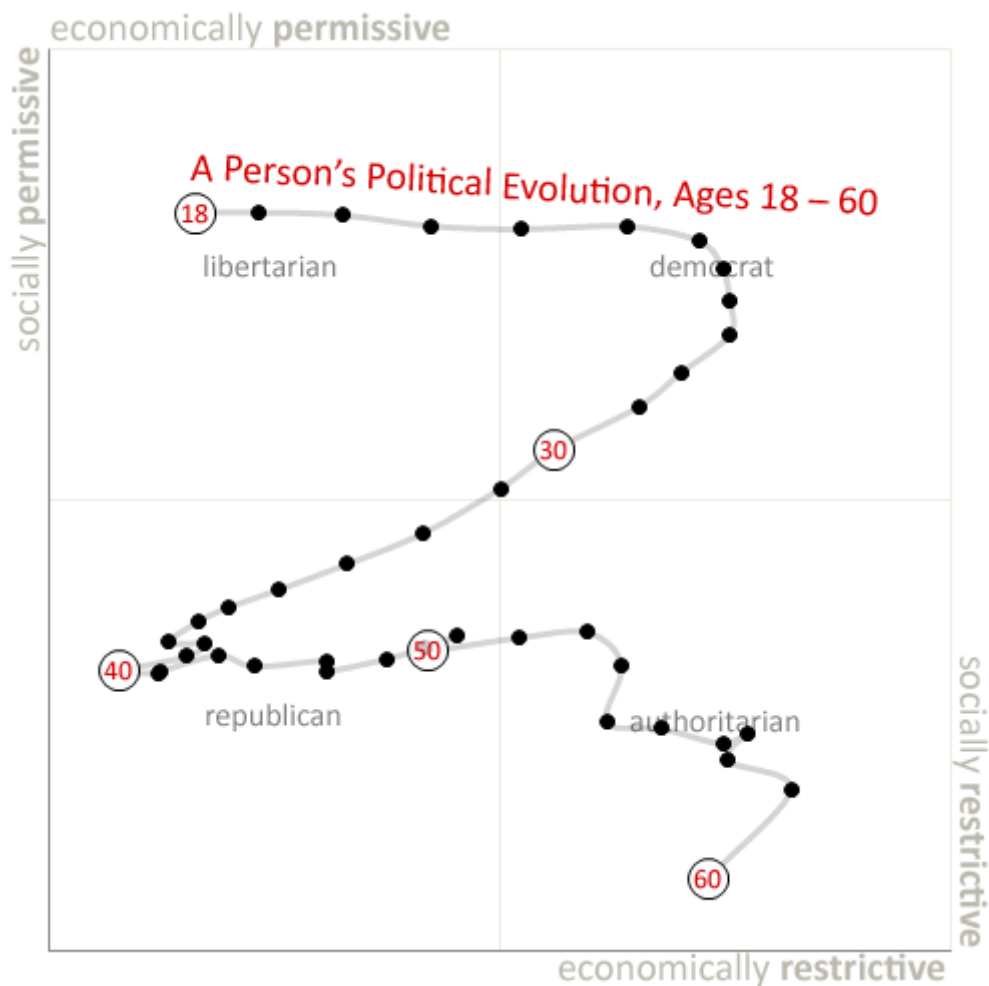
The chart tracks the following typical lifestyle. A teenager starts out loving freedom, socially and economically. When the teenagers enters the job market at the bottom of the pyramid, they quickly develop progressive economic ideas, while their youthful live-and-let-live social philosophy begins to fade.

As the teenager starts to make money, economic progressivism goes out the window, but social views don't change that much. But after the mid-40s, as retirement looms, former teenagers check their collective 401(k)s and think, you know what, let's all get checks from the government. It's hard to tell why social views take a hard turn for the more restrictive.

At the end of the journey, economic and social views are again in agreement, but opposite of what the libertarian teenager started out.

The big question that is unanswered in this post is: **to what extent is this a reflection of the beliefs of specific generations, not lifecycles?** I'm not convinced that this chart would reflect the same thing decades from now. It's also very America-centric. There are some places in the world where you could find many of the "conservative" political beliefs—whether they be nationalism, religion, ethnic nationalism, or family values—are adhered to more by younger generations.

Final note: tracking my own political leanings during the course of my life, it seems that I "turned 40 " according the graphs above at about the age of 25.



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Comments to this entry

[Lexington Green](#)

April 1, 2010
[10:35 pm](#)

"It's hard to tell why social views take a hard turn for the more restrictive."

Really? Having children does it.

ElamBend

April 1, 2010
[10:46 pm](#)

Hear, hear.

McKellar

April 2, 2010
[1:49 am](#)

I think the labels 'permissive' and 'restrictive' cloud the issue a bit with their inevitable slight bias. To balance it out a bit, image the chart relabeled with 'independent' and 'dependent'.

Young people take their social and economic dependence on their parents for granted, giving it scant value.

Young adults and the elderly both are in financially precarious positions, and so would like to feel there's an economic safety net they can depend on.

As people mature into middle age, they become increasingly dependent on their long-term social relationships (e.g. spouses, family) and so cherish the social norms that keep those relationships stable and well-defined. Teenagers and young adults, having invested little in their relationships so far, can afford to be more adventurous in their lifestyle choices.

Two questions remain, though: Where are the young republicans and old democrats? And where's the obligatory Churchill quote about not having a heart and not having a brain?

[Aaron](#)

April 2, 2010
[6:43 am](#)

I think that it would be a great error of logic and statistical analysis to infer that this static information actually represents the "lifecycle" of an individual. To me, Curzon's "big question" isn't actually a question, as much as it is an observation that one should absolutely not interpret the data as a longitudinal. For example, imagine a graph that showed how homosexuality is shows the same kind pattern as the "social" line. I think we would all clearly attribute that not to the fact that people stop becoming gay over time, but that older people are less likely to attribute that label to themselves.

Jeff

April 2, 2010
[8:11 pm](#)

Fascinating.

Although, I share Curzon's skepticism about a cohort effect vs. lifecycle of beliefs. Certainly baby boomers had a different social and political experiences (The 60s!) than their children (the 80s!) and their children (The 90s +00s).

It would be impossible from this data to sort out those effects. One would need to see longitudinal data. What would be wonderful to look at is a graph over time showing people who started out more liberal compared to people who started out more conservative and people who started out somewhere in the middle.

I hypothesize that that there is a general shift towards social restriction over time, but a cohort effect in the economic axis which leads to that interesting wave-pattern in the second graph.

[Bursting Bubbles « The World According to Me...](#)

April 2, 2010
[2:43 pm](#)

[...] Curzon @ Coming Anarchy asks some questions about a Fast Company finding that the gap between our social and economic beliefs is much the same as when we are teenagers just setting out in the world, and when we hit middle age, even though the beliefs themselves are diametrically opposed. I think the answer to his question is pretty simple and that is consequences. As young people, we are often oblivious to the concept of consequences and wreak merry havoc with our lives and often those of others. If you took the Fast Company survey further, it is likely that you would find that the same permissive approach extends to just about every aspect of a young person's life, not solely social and economic... in fact, the social and economic head line is a bit of a red herring [...]

von Kaufman-Turkestansky

April 4, 2010

[12:47 am](#)

Remember Jacques from "As You Like It?"

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages."

1) and 2) are not yet of voting age, but you can see the Lover (3), the Soldier (4), the Justice (5) and the "lean and slipper'd pantaloon" (6) in the graph. Off the graph again comes that "last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
... second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything."