



## Laura Ingraham: The center Isn't the answer for the GOP

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**WASHINGTON**, May 1, 2013 — PBS's program Intelligence Squared pitted The New York Times writer David Brooks and former Congressman Mickey Edwards against radio host Laura Ingraham and Faith & Freedom Coalition founder and chairman Ralph Reed. They argued the motion, "The GOP Must Move to the Center or Die"; Edwards and Brooks argued for the motion with Ingraham and Reed opposing.

Brooks put forward two central arguments for moving towards the center: The first was a scenario of a little girl from the inner city, with bad public schools, no father, and little social capital — a child of "Julia," perhaps — who wants to exceed her given surroundings. Brooks argued that social mobility is the Republican Party's founding principle, dating back to Lincoln, and that social mobility is dependent on government for a large share of Americans.

The second argument is, as Brooks puts it, that "the Republican Party is losing every rising group in America." He lists Asians, Hispanics, single people and the youth. And so the Republican Party must move to the center for its own survival as a party, as well as to champion its founding principle of social mobility.

Laura Ingraham rebutted Brooks' argument, first by noting that 2012 was not just the year that candidates like Todd Akin lost, but also centrist and moderates like Tommy Thompson in Wisconsin and Scott Brown in Massachusetts. She took the "mythical center" to task: "You don't seize the center, you create the center."

Ingraham defined Brooks' ambition for a more "centered" Republican Party that rejected the Tea Party elements, "'American greatness conservatism,' what David Brooks supported back during the Bush administration, supporting a larger federal government, was tried and utterly failed." She noted the huge increase in deficit spending, the loss of the Senate, House, and presidency, and the unpopularity of the wars. Brooks fired back, stating that the Iraq war isn't really crucial in 21st century politics; Ingraham quickly responded, "Iraq is pretty important to me. Barack Obama wouldn't be president today had the war in Iraq not been fought."

Ingraham is correct on all points.

The chattering by the elite to change the Republican Party into the George W. Bush 2.0 Party — without the Evangelical Christianity — has been tried and has failed. Before Bush, Republicans had a majority in the Senate and the House as well as a majority of governors; after Bush the GOP was in the minority amongst all three areas of representative government. New England, where moderate Republicans like

Chris Shays occupied six Senate seats and five House seats in 2000, was left with half as many senators and no congressman by the time the Bush presidency ended.

On the national level, Republicans ran two moderates for president, both with similar big-government conservatism credentials.

Brooks, like many of his centrist kin, doesn't really have a problem with the policies of McCain or Romney so much as they found it difficult to be on the losing side, a point both Edwards and Brooks based much of their argument on. To many professional Republicans, principles are fine, but winning is all that matters.

The supporting side also lacked an explanation on how government can create permanent fixtures to often systemic and perennial problems. Government grants and welfare may help Brooks' example of a little girl in the inner city who wants to experience social mobility, but his solution to his fictional little girl is the same as Barack Obama's example of "Julia." Every part of the centrist argument was reactionary, they never put forward ideas or solutions to tackle the decay in social capital and traditional morals that create poverty, only examples of how to deal with it once it is already here.

The second point that Ingraham made was that Republicans and conservatives don't need to seize the center; they need to create the center. On some policies, Republicans have successfully moved the center over the past forty years: school choice, gun control and taxes. Equally, conservatives have been abysmal in other areas: immigration, traditional marriage, multiculturalism, and federal spending.

While the left slowly marched through the institutions, the right abdicated entire spheres of American life: cities, Hollywood, universities, newspapers and mass media. It is why outside the arenas that conservatives dominate, they have hardly any presence at all. To quote the late Andrew Breitbart, "you can't say that you're losing the culture war if you haven't been fighting."

Part of that fight involves bringing out the more extreme figures in any political or social cause, for often it is they who create the lines of "reasonable" discourse. It was only by Congressman Ron Paul making principled stands that were outside the "centrist" opinion of foreign policy and civil liberties that a segment felt there was enough of a voter base to move away from the Bush doctrine. Republicans shouldn't be the party of philosophical entrepreneurship. They should look to expand the party not by running to center, but by being the party that creates the entire debate.

At the end of the debate, the Upper West Side audience voted that the side for the motion — Brooks and Congressman Mickey Edwards — lost the debate, failing to sway any percentage of their opinion.