

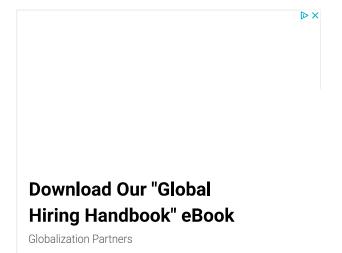
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Boundless Political Science

American Politics

Political Ideology



Conservatism

Conservatism is a social and political philosophy that supports retaining traditional social institutions and has many modern variations.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Compare and contrast the various strands of conservatism

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Points

- Variants of conservatism include: liberal conservatism, libertarian conservatism, fiscal conservatism, national conservatism, cultural conservatism, social conservatism, and religious conservatism.
- The meaning of "conservatism" in America has little in common with the way the word is used elsewhere.
- Major movements within American conservatism include economic conservatism, social conservatism, neoconservatism, and paleoconservatism.

Key Terms

- **Fiscal conservatism**: the economic philosophy of prudence in government spending and debt
- Liberal conservatism: Ideologies that combine the advocacy of laissez-faire economic principles, such as respect for contracts, defense of private property and free markets with the belief in notions such as natural inequality, the importance of religion and the value of traditional morality through a framework of limited, constitutional, representative government.
- Iibertarian conservatism: Describes certain political ideologies within the United States and Canada which combine libertarian economic issues with aspects of conservatism

Conservatism, taken from the Latin word *conservare* ("to retain") is a political and social philosophy that promotes retaining traditional social institutions. Edmund Burke, an Anglo-Irish politician who served in the British House of Commons and opposed the French Revolution, is credited as one of the founders of conservatism in Great Britain and is generally viewed as the philosophical founder of modern conservatism.



Edmund Burke: Edmund Burke, considered to be the philosophical founder of modern conservatism.

Variants of Conservatism

Liberal conservatism is a variant of conservatism that combines conservative values and policies with classical liberal stances. Historically, the term referred to combination of economic liberalism, which champions laissez-faire markets, with the classical conservatism concern for established tradition, respect for authority, and religious values. It contrasted itself with classical liberalism, which supported freedom for the individual in both the economic and social spheres.

Libertarian conservatism describes certain political ideologies within the United States and Canada which combine libertarian economic issues with aspects of conservatism. Libertarian conservatives generally support strict laissez-faire policies such as free trade and oppose any national bank, regulations on businesses, environmental regulation, corporate subsidies, and other areas of economic intervention.

Fiscal conservatism is the economic philosophy of prudence in government spending and debt. Edmund Burke, in particular, argued that a gov-

ernment does not have the right to run up large debts and then throw the burden on the taxpayer.

National conservatism concentrates more on national interests than standard conservatism, and it upholds cultural and ethnic identity. It is heavily oriented towards the traditional family and social stability, and it is in favour of limiting immigration. As such, national conservatives can be distinguished from economic conservatives, for whom free market economic policies, deregulation, and fiscal conservatism are the main priorities.

Cultural conservativism the preservation of the heritage of one nation, or of a shared culture that is not defined by national boundaries. Cultural conservatives hold fast to traditional ways of thinking even in the face of monumental change. They believe strongly in traditional values and politics, and often have an urgent sense of nationalism.

Social conservatism is distinct from cultural conservatism, although there are some overlaps. Social conservatives believe that the government has a role in encouraging or enforcing what they consider traditional values or behaviors. A social conservative wants to preserve traditional morality and social mores, often through civil law or regulation. Social change is generally regarded as suspect.

Religious conservatives principally seek to apply the teachings of particular religions to politics, sometimes by merely proclaiming the value of those teachings, and at other times by having those teachings influence laws.

Conservatism in the United States

The meaning of "conservatism" in America has little in common with the way the word is used elsewhere, since what most Americans consider conservatism is what much of the world considers liberalism or neoliberalism. Since the 1950s conservatism in the United States has been chiefly associated with the Republican Party. Major movements within American conservatism include support for tradition, law-and-order,

Christianity, anti-communism, and a defense of "Western civilization from the challenges of modernist culture and totalitarian governments." Economic conservatives and libertarians favor small government, low taxes, limited regulation, and free enterprise. Social conservatives see traditional social values as threatened by secularism, so they support school prayer and oppose abortion and homosexuality. Neoconservatives want to expand American ideals throughout the world and show a strong support for Israel. Paleoconservatives, in opposition to multiculturalism, press for restrictions on immigration.

Liberalism

Liberalism is a broad political ideology or worldview founded on the ideas of liberty and equality.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Discuss the central tenets and principles of liberalism as a political philosophy

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Points

- Liberalism espouses a wide array of views depending on their understanding of these principles, and can encompass ideas such as free and fair elections, free trade, private property, capitalism, constitutionalism, liberal democracy, free press, and the free exercise of religion.
- Liberalism first became a powerful force in the Age of Enlightenment, rejecting several foundational assumptions that dominated most earlier theories of govern-

- ment, such as nobility, established religion, absolute monarchy, and the Divine Right of Kings.
- John Locke, credited with the creation of liberalism, argued that the rule of law should replace both tradition and absolutism in government; that rulers were subject to the consent of the governed; and that individuals had a fundamental right to life, liberty, and property.
- With the rise of social liberalism in Europe and North America, the meaning of "liberalism" began to diverge.
 In the U.S., ideas of individualism and laissez-faire economics previously associated with classical liberalism became the basis for right wing libertarian thought.
- The revolutionaries in the American and France used liberal philosophy to justify the armed overthrow of what they saw as tyrannical rule. The nineteenth century saw governments established around liberalist political ideology in nations across Europe, Latin America, and North America.

Key Terms

- liberal internationalism: a foreign policy doctrine that argues that liberal states should intervene in other sovereign states in order to pursue liberal objectives.
- John Locke: widely known as the Father of Classical Liberalism, he was an English philosopher and physician regarded as one of the most influential of Enlightenment thinkers. His contributions to classical republicanism and liberal theory are reflected in the United States Declaration of Independence.

Sources of Liberal Thought

Liberalism, from the Latin *liberalis*, is a broad political ideology or world-view founded on the ideas of liberty and equality. Liberalism espouses a wide array of views depending on their understanding of these principles, and can encompass ideas such as free and fair elections, free

trade, private property, capitalism, constitutionalism, liberal democracy, free press, and the free exercise of religion.



John Locke: John Locke, often credited for the creation of liberalism as a philosophical tradition.

Liberalism first became a powerful force during the Enlightenment, when it became popular among philosophers and economists in the Western world. Liberalism rejected the notions, common at the time, of hereditary privilege, state religion, absolute monarchy, and the Divine Right of Kings. The early liberal thinker John Locke, who is often credited with the creation of liberalism as a distinct philosophical tradition, employed the concept of natural rights and the social contract to argue that the rule of law should replace both tradition and absolutism in government; that rulers were subject to the consent of the governed; and that private individuals had a fundamental right to life, liberty, and property.

Liberalism and Revolution

The revolutionaries in the American and France used liberal philosophy to justify the armed overthrow of what they saw as tyrannical rule. The nineteenth century saw governments established around liberalist political ideology in nations across Europe, Latin America, and North America.

Liberalist ideas spread even further in the twentieth century, when liberal democracies were on the winning side in both World Wars I and II, and when liberalism survived major ideological challenges from fascism and communism. Today, liberalism remains a political force with varying degrees of power and influence in many countries.

Classical vs. Modern Liberalism

Classical liberalism is a political philosophy and ideology belonging to liberalism in which primary emphasis is placed on securing the freedom of the individual by limiting the power of the government. The philosophy emerged as a response to the Industrial Revolution and urbanization in the 19th century in Europe and the United States. It advocates civil liberties with a limited government under the rule of law, private property, and belief in laissez-faire economic policy.

Both modern American conservatism and social liberalism split from Classical Liberalism in the early 20th century. At that time conservatives adopted the Classic Liberal beliefs in protecting economic civil liberties. Conversely social liberals adopted the Classical Liberal belief in defending social civil liberties. Neither ideology adopted the pure Classical Liberal belief that government exists to protect both social & economic civil liberties. Conservatism shares an ideological agreement on limited government in the area of preventing government restriction against economic civil liberties as embodied in the ability of people to sell their goods, services or labor to anyone they choose free from restriction except in rare cases where society's general welfare is at stake.

While many modern scholars argue that no particularly meaningful distinction between classical and modern liberalism exists, others disagree. According to William J. Novak, liberalism in the United States shifted in the late 19th and early 20th century from classical liberalism (endorsing laissez-faire economics and constitutionalism) to "democratic social-welfarism" (endorsing such government involvement as seen in the New Deal). This shift included qualified acceptance of government intervention in the economy and the collective right to equality in economic dealings. These theories came to be termed "liberal socialism", which is related with social democracy in Europe. According to the Encyclopedia

Britannica, "In the United States, liberalism is associated with the welfare-state policies of the New Deal program of the Democratic administration of Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt, whereas in Europe it is more commonly associated with a commitment to limited government and laissez-faire economic policies." Consequently in the U.S., the ideas of individualism and laissez-faire economics previously associated with classical liberalism, became the basis for the emerging school of right wing libertarian thought.

Liberalism and Socialism

Some confusion remains about the relationship between social liberalism and socialism, despite the fact that many variants of socialism distinguish themselves markedly from liberalism by opposing capitalism, hierarchy and private property. Socialism formed as a group of related yet divergent ideologies in the 19th century such as Christian socialism, Communism and Social Anarchism. These ideologies — as with liberalism — fractured into several major and minor movements in the following decades. Marx rejected the foundational aspects of liberal theory, hoping to destroy both the state and the liberal distinction between society and the individual while fusing the two into a collective whole designed to overthrow the developing capitalist order of the 19th century.

Social democracy, an ideology advocating progressive reform of capitalism, emerged in the 20th century and was influenced by socialism. Yet unlike socialism, it was not collectivist nor anti-capitalist. It was not against the state; rather it was broadly defined as a project that aims to correct, through government reformism, what it regards as the intrinsic defects of capitalism by reducing inequalities. Several commentators have noted strong similarities between social liberalism and social democracy, with one political scientist even calling American liberalism "bootleg social democracy".

American Tradition and Liberal Heritage

Many fundamental elements of modern society have liberal roots. The early waves of liberalism popularized economic individualism while expanding constitutional government and parliamentary authority. One of

the greatest liberal triumphs involved replacing the capricious nature of royalist and absolutist rule with a decision-making process encoded in written law. Liberals sought and established a constitutional order that prized important individual freedoms, such as the freedoms of speech and association, an independent judiciary and public trial by jury, and the abolition of aristocratic privileges. These sweeping changes in political authority marked the modern transition from absolutism to constitutional rule.

Later waves of liberal thought were strongly influenced by the need to expand civil rights. In the 1960s and 1970s, feminism in the United States was advanced in large part by liberal feminist organizations. Many liberals also have advocated for racial equality, and the civil rights movement in the United States during the 1960s strongly highlighted the liberal crusade for equal rights.

The Traditional Political Spectrum

The traditional political spectrum models different political positions by placing them upon a left-right geometric axis.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Compare and contrast left-wing and right-wing political ideologies

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Points

 Most long-standing spectra include a right wing and left wing, which originally referred to seating arrangements in the 18th century French parliament.

- Originally, support for laissez-faire capitalism was expressed by politicians sitting on the left, because these represented policies favorable to capitalists rather than to the aristocracy.
- As capitalist economies developed, the aristocracy became less relevant and were mostly replaced by capitalist representatives.

Key Terms

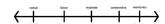
- **spectrum**: A range; a continuous, infinite, one-dimensional set, possibly bounded by extremes.
- affiliation: A club, society, or umbrella organization.
- laissez-faire: an economic environment in which transactions between private parties are free from tariffs, government subsidies, and enforced monopolies with only enough government regulations sufficient to protect property rights against theft and aggression.

Background

The traditional political spectrum is a way of modeling different political positions by placing them upon one or more geometric axes symbolizing independent political dimensions. Most long-standing spectra include a right and left, and according to the simplest left-right axis, communism and socialism are usually regarded internationally as being on the left, opposite fascism and conservatism on the right.

Origins of the Political Spectrums

Originally, the defining point on the ideological spectrum was the ancien regime ("old order"). "The Right" thus implied support for aristocratic or royal interests and the church, while "The Left" im-



Traditional political spectrum: The traditional left-right political spectrumThe terms "right" and "left"

plied support for republicanism, secularism, and civil liberties.

Support for laissez-faire capitalism was expressed by politicians sitting on the left, because these represented policies favorable to capitalists rather than to the aristocracy, but outside of parliamentary politics, these views are often characterized as being on the right.

refer to political affiliations which originated early in the French Revolutionary era of 1789–1796, and referred originally to the seating arrangements in the various legislative bodies of France. The aristocracy sat on the right of the Speaker (traditionally the seat of honor) and the commoners sat on the Left, hence the terms right-wing and left-wing politics.

As capitalist economies developed, the aristocracy became less relevant and was mostly replaced by capitalist representatives. The size of the working class increased as capitalism expanded and began to find expression partly through trade unionist, socialist, anarchist, and communist politics, rather than being confined to the capitalist policies expressed by the original left. This evolution has often pulled parliamentary politicians away from laissez-faire economic policies, although this has happened to different degrees in different countries.

Thus, the word "left" in American political parlance may refer to "liberalism" and be identified with the Democratic Party, whereas in a country such as France these positions would be regarded as relatively more right-wing, and "left" is more likely to refer to socialist positions rather than liberal ones.

Left-wing vs. Right-wing

In left-right politics, left-wing describes an outlook or specific position that accepts or supports social equality, often in opposition to social hierarchy and social inequality. It typically involves a concern for those in society who are perceived as disadvantaged relative to others and an assumption that there are unjustified inequalities that need to be reduced or abolished. In left-right politics, left-wing describes an outlook or specific position that accepts or supports social equality, often in opposition to social hierarchy and social inequality. It typically involves a concern for those in society who are perceived as disadvantaged relative to others

and an assumption that there are unjustified inequalities that need to be reduced or abolished.

In left-right politics, right-wing describes an outlook or specific position that accepts or supports social hierarchy or social inequality. Social hierarchy and social inequality is viewed by those affiliated with the Right as either inevitable, natural, normal, or desirable, whether it arises through traditional social differences or from competition in market economies. It typically accepts or justifies this position on the basis of natural law or tradition. Although the term 'right-wing' originally designated traditional conservatives and reactionaries, it has also been used to describe neoconservatives, nationalists, Christian democrats, and classical liberals.

In modern parlance, left-right has acquired the added dimension of the balance of governmental power and individual rights, wherein moving left increases the power of government and moving right the rights of individuals. In this view, "reactionary" has the aspect of "anarchy". This introduces, or exposes, a limitation in this simple binary spectrum, where by social views of left-right, fascists and totalitarian systems are on the far right; whereas by a balance of government to individual power, fascists and totalitarian systems are on the far left.

Issues with the Traditional Political Spectrum

Researchers have frequently noted that a single left-right axis is insufficient to describe the existing variation in political beliefs.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Identify some of the problems associated with the traditional spectrum of political ideologies

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Points

- The axes are split between cultural issues and economic issues, each scaling from some form of individualism (or government for the freedom of the individual) to some form of communitarianism (or government for the welfare of the community).
- One alternative spectrum, offered by the conservative American Federalist Journal, accounts for only the "degree of government control" without consideration for any other social or political variable.
- Other proposed axes include the focus of political concern, responses to conflict, the role of the church, foreign policy, and freedom.

Key Terms

• **totalitarianism**: A system of government in which the people have virtually no authority and the state wields absolute control, for example, a dictatorship.

Researchers have frequently noted that a single left-right axis is insufficient in describing the existing variation in political beliefs, and often include other axes. Though the descriptive words at polar opposites may vary, often in popular biaxial spectra the axes are split between cultural issues and economic issues, each scaling from some form of individualism (or government for the freedom of the individual) to a form of communitarianism (or government for the welfare of the community). In this context, the contemporary American on the left is often considered individualist (or libertarian) on social/cultural issues and communitarian (or populist) on economic issues, while the contemporary American on the right is often considered communitarian (or populist) on social/cultural issues and individualist (or libertarian) on economic issues.

Numerous alternatives exist, usually developed by those who feel their views are not fairly represented on the traditional right-left spectrum. One

alternative spectrum offered by the conservative *American Federalist Journal* accounts for only the "degree of government control" without consideration for any other social or political variable and, thus, places "fascism" (totalitarianism) at one extreme and "anarchy" (no government at all) at the other extreme.

Other axes include: the focus of political concern (communitarianism vs. individualism), responses to conflict (conversation vs. force), the role of the church (clericalism vs. anticlericalism), foreign policy (interven-

Personal freedom

Economic freedom

The Nolan Chart: An alternative to the traditional political spectrum, the Nolan Chart positions opinions on economic freedom and personal freedom.

tionism vs. non-interventionism), and freedom (positive liberty vs. negative liberty). The Nolan Chart, created by libertarian David Nolan, shows what he considers as "economic freedom" (issues like taxation, free trade, and free enterprise) on the horizontal axis and what he considers as "personal freedom" (issues like drug legalization, abortion, and the draft) on the vertical axis. This puts left-wingers in the left quadrant, libertarians in the top, right-wingers in the right, and what Nolan originally named "populists" at the bottom.





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