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Discuss and evaluate the idea of conservatism

Conservatism, political doctrine that emphasizes the value of traditional institutions and practices.

Conservatism is a preference for the historically inherited rather than the abstract and ideal. This preference has traditionally rested on an organic conception of society—that is, on the belief that society is not merely a loose collection of individuals but a living organism compromising closely connected, interdependent members. Conservatives thus favor institutions and practices that have evolved gradually and are manifestations of continuality and stability. Government’s responsibility is to be the servant, not the master, of existing ways of life, and politicians must therefore resist the temptation to transform society and politics. This suspicion of government activism distinguishes conservatism not only from radical forms of political thought but also from liberalism , which is a modernizing, antitraditionalist movement dedicated to correcting the evils and abuses resulting from the misuse of social and political power. In ‘*the devils dictionary’* (1906), the American writer Ambrose Bierce defined the conservative as “a statesman who is enamored of existing evils, as distinguishing the Liberal, who wishes to replace them with others.” Conservatism must also be distinguished from the reactionary outlook, which favors the restoration of a previous, and usually outmoded, political or social order.

It was not until the late 18th century, in reaction to the upheavals that conservatism began to develop as a distinct political attitude and movement.

Conservatism is a political and social philosophy promoting traditional social institutions in the context of culture and civilization. The central tenets of conservatism include tradition, organic society, hierarchy, and Conservatives seek to preserve a range of institutions such as religion, parliamentary government and property rights, with the aim of emphasizing social stability and continuity. The more traditional elements reactionaries oppose modernism and seek a return to "the way things were".

A common way of distinguishing [conservatism](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conservatism) from both [liberalism](https://www.britannica.com/topic/liberalism) and radicalism is to say that [conservatives](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conservatives) reject the optimistic view that human beings can be morally improved through political and [social change](https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-change). Conservatives who are [Christians](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christianity) sometimes express this point by saying that human beings are guilty of [original sin](https://www.britannica.com/topic/original-sin). Skeptical conservatives merely observe that human history, under almost all imaginable political and social circumstances, has been filled with a great deal of evil. Far from believing that [human nature](https://www.britannica.com/topic/human-nature) is essentially good or that human beings are fundamentally rational, conservatives tend to assume that human beings are driven by their passions and desires—and are therefore naturally prone to selfishness, [anarchy](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anarchy), irrationality, and violence. Accordingly, conservatives look to traditional political and cultural institutions to curb humans’ base and destructive instincts. In Burke’s words, people need “a sufficient restraint upon their passions,” which it is the office of government “to bridle and subdue.” Families, churches, and schools must teach the value of self-[discipline](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discipline), and those who fail to learn this lesson must have discipline imposed upon them by government and [law](https://www.britannica.com/topic/law). Without the restraining power of such institutions, conservatives believe, there can be no [ethical behavior](https://www.britannica.com/topic/ethics-philosophy/Applied-ethics#ref252578) and no responsible use of liberty.

Conservatism is as much a matter of temperament as of doctrine. It may sometimes even accompany left-wing politics or economics—as it did, for example, in the late 1980s, when hard-line communists in the [Soviet Union](https://www.britannica.com/place/Soviet-Union) were often referred to as “conservatives.” Typically, however, the [conservative](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conservative) temperament displays two characteristics that are scarcely compatible with [communism](https://www.britannica.com/topic/communism). The first is a distrust of human nature, rootlessness (social disconnectedness), and untested [innovations](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/innovations), together with a corresponding trust in unbroken historical [continuity](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/continuity) and in the [traditional](https://www.britannica.com/topic/tradition) frameworks for conducting human affairs. Such frameworks may be political, cultural, or religious, or they may have no abstract or institutional expression at all.

The second characteristic of the conservative temperament, which is closely related to the first, is an [aversion](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/aversion) to abstract argument and theorizing. Attempts by philosophers and revolutionaries to plan society in advance, using political principles purportedly derived from [reason](https://www.britannica.com/topic/reason) alone, are misguided and likely to end in disaster, conservatives say. In this respect the conservative temperament contrasts markedly with that of the liberal. Whereas the liberal consciously [articulates](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/articulates) abstract theories, the conservative instinctively embraces concrete traditions. For just this reason, many authorities on conservatism have been led to deny that it is a genuine [ideology](https://www.britannica.com/topic/ideology-society), regarding it instead as a relatively inarticulate state of mind. Whatever the merits of this view, it remains true that the best insights of conservatism seldom have been developed into sustained theoretical works comparable to those of liberalism and radicalism.

In opposition to the “rationalist blueprints” of liberals and radicals, conservatives often insist that societies are so complex that there is no reliable and predictable connection between what governments try to do and what actually happens. It is therefore [futile](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/futile) and dangerous, they believe, for governments to interfere with social or economic realities—as happens, for example, in government attempts to control [wages](https://www.britannica.com/topic/wage), prices, or [rents](https://www.britannica.com/topic/rent-economics) (see [incomes policy](https://www.britannica.com/topic/incomes-policy)).

The claim that society is too complex to be improved through social engineering naturally raises the question, “What kind of understanding of society is possible?” The most common conservative answer emphasizes the idea of tradition. People are what they are because they have inherited the skills, manners, [morality](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/morality), and other cultural resources of their ancestors. An understanding of tradition—specifically, a knowledge of the history of one’s own society or country—is therefore the most valuable [cognitive](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cognitive) resource available to a political leader, not because it is a source of abstract lessons but because it puts him directly in touch with the society whose rules he may be modifying.

Conservative influences operate indirectly, other than via the programs of [political parties](https://www.britannica.com/topic/political-party)—largely by virtue of the fact that there is much in the general human temperament that is naturally or instinctively conservative, such as the fear of sudden change and the tendency to act habitually. These traits may find [collective](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/collective) expression in, for example, a resistance to imposed political change and in the entire range of [convictions](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/convictions) and preferences that contribute to the stability of a particular [culture](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture). In all societies, the existence of such cultural restraints on political [innovation](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/innovation) [constitutes](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/constitutes) a fundamental conservative bias, the [implications](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/implications) of which were aphoristically expressed by the 17th-century English statesman [Viscount Falkland](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lucius-Cary-2nd-Viscount-of-Falkland-Lord-Carye): “If it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change.” Mere inertia, however, has rarely [sufficed](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sufficed) to protect conservative values in an age dominated by rationalist [dogma](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dogma) and by social change related to continuous [technological progress](https://www.britannica.com/technology/history-of-technology).

Conservatism has often been associated with traditional and established forms of [religion](https://www.britannica.com/topic/religion). After 1789 the appeal of religion redoubled, in part because of a craving for security in an age of [chaos](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/chaos). The [Roman Catholic Church](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Roman-Catholicism), because of its roots in the [Middle Ages](https://www.britannica.com/event/Middle-Ages), has appealed to more conservatives than has any other religion. Although he was not a Catholic, Burke praised Catholicism as “the most effectual barrier” against radicalism. But conservatism has had no dearth of [Protestant](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Protestantism), [Jewish](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Judaism), [Islamic](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Islam), and strongly [anticlerical](https://www.britannica.com/topic/anticlericalism) adherents.

**Conservatism** has the characteristics of a libertarian right wing politics of the following qualities: Small government, Local accountability, low or minimal taxes, individual responsibility, rights of individuals protected against groupthink, or “the greater good. conservatism is any political philosophy that favors tradition(in the sense of various religious, cultural, or nationally-defined beliefs and customs) in the face of external forces for change, and is critical of proposals for radical social change. Some Conservatives seek to preserve the status quo or to reform society slowly, while others seek to return to the values of an earliertime.

Classical Conservatism does not reject change per se, but insists that changes be organic, rather than revolutionary, arguing that any attempt to modify the complex web of human interactions that form human society purely for the sake of some doctrine or theory runs the risk of running afoul of the law of unintendedconsequences and/or of moral hazards.

Conservatism generally refers to right-wing politics which advocate the preservation of personal wealth and private ownership and emphasize self-reliance. Conservatives in general are more punitive toward criminals, tend to hold more orthodox religious views, and are often ethnocentric and hostile toward homosexuals and other minoritygroups.

Different cultures have different established values and, in consequence, Conservatives in different cultures have differing goals. Many forms of Conservatism incorporate elements of other ideologies and philosophies, and in turn, Conservatism has influence upon them. The term "conservatism" is derived from the Latin "conservare" (meaning to "protect" or "preserve") and from the French derivative "conservateur"

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| Types: |

* Cultural Conservatism is a philosophy that supports preservation of the heritage of a nation or culture (or sometimes of language traditions), usually by the adaptation of norms handed down from the past.
* Social Conservatism is a subset of Cultural Conservatism where the norms may also be moral (e.g. opposition to homosexuality, covering of women's faces, etc). In Europe, however, it usually refers to "Liberal" Conservatives, who support modern European welfare states.
* Religious Conservatism seeks to preserve the teachings of particular religious ideologies, either by example or by law. Religious Conservatives may promote broad campaigns for a return to traditional values, or they may go the radical route, looking to preserve a belief in its original or pristine forms