

Topic Page: [Conservatism](#)

Definition: **conservatism** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

Political philosophy seeking to preserve the continuity of a society's laws, social structure, and institutions. Its modern expression derives from the response, first evident in Germany, to the liberal doctrines of the Enlightenment and French Revolution. Originally conservatives supported mercantilism in preference to laissez-faire economics, but in the 20th century they adopted the principles of the free-market and monetarism. See *also* Burke, Edmund; Christian Democrats; Conservative Party; liberalism; socialism



Image from: [A meeting of conservative minds: Margaret... in Britain and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History](#)

Summary Article: **conservatism**
from *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

in politics, the desire to maintain, or conserve, the existing order. Conservatives value the wisdom of the past and are generally opposed to widespread reform. Modern political conservatism emerged in the 19th cent. in reaction to the political and social changes associated with the eras of the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. By 1850 the term *conservatism*, probably first used by Chateaubriand, generally meant the politics of the right. The original tenets of European conservatism had already been formulated by Edmund Burke, Joseph de Maistre, and others. They emphasized preserving the power of king and aristocracy, maintaining the

influence of landholders against the rising industrial bourgeoisie, limiting suffrage, and continuing ties between church and state. The conservative view that social welfare was the responsibility of the privileged inspired passage of much humanitarian legislation, in which English conservatives usually led the way. In the late 19th cent. great conservative statesmen, notably Benjamin Disraeli, exemplified the conservative tendency to resort to moderate reform in order to preserve the foundations of the established order. By the 20th cent. conservatism was being redirected by erstwhile liberal manufacturing and professional groups who had achieved many of their political aims and had become more concerned with preserving them from attack by groups not so favored. Conservatism lost its predominantly agrarian and semifeudal bias, and accepted democratic suffrage, advocated economic laissez-faire, and opposed extension of the welfare state. This form of conservatism, which is best seen in highly industrialized nations, was exemplified by President Reagan in the United States and Prime Minister Thatcher in Great Britain. It has been flexible and receptive to moderate change, favors the maintenance of order on social issues, and actively supports deregulation and privatization in the economic sphere. Conservatism should be distinguished both from a reactionary desire for the past and the radical right-wing ideology of fascism and National Socialism.

See Kirk, R. , *The Conservative Mind* (rev. ed. 1960);
Habermas, J. , *The New Conservatism* (1989);
Honderich, T. , *Conservatism* (1991);
Robin, C. , *The Reactionary Mind* (2011).

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA

conservatism. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/conservatism>



The Columbia Encyclopedia, © Columbia University Press 2018



The Columbia Encyclopedia, © Columbia University Press 2018

APA

conservatism. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/conservatism>

Chicago

"conservatism." In *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, by Paul Lagasse, and Columbia University. 8th ed. Columbia University Press, 2018. <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/conservatism>

Harvard

conservatism. (2018). In P. Lagasse & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia*. (8th ed.). [Online]. New York: Columbia University Press. Available from: <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/conservatism> [Accessed 19 May 2019].

MLA

"conservatism." *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Paul Lagasse, and Columbia University, Columbia University Press, 8th edition, 2018. *Credo Reference*, <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/conservatism>. Accessed 19 May 2019.