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CHAPTER 2

Political Ideologies

In This Chapter

- ★ American Political Ideologies
- ★ Liberalism
- ★ Conservatism
- ★ Ideological Challenges to the Status Quo

liberalism

An ideology that regards the individual as a rational being capable of overcoming obstacles to a better world and supports changes in the political and economic status quo

Chapter Objectives

Politics is about power and influence—who gets what, when, and how; but also, politics is about ideas. Political ideology is an integrated set of political ideas about what constitutes the most equitable and just political order. Political ideologies are concerned with the proper function of government, the issues of liberty and equality, and the distribution of goods and services.

All of the ideological perspectives discussed in this chapter, and given any serious attention by Americans, accept the basic ideas of democracy—representative government and individual liberty. They do not question the fundamental precepts of American political life, but they differ on matters of emphasis and degree. Although most Americans do not think in rigid ideological terms, ideology does influence how Americans think about political leaders. Politicians and policies tend to be labeled liberal, conservative, radical, or reactionary; and with some frequency we hear the terms *neoconservative* and *neoliberal* (*neo* being Greek for "new"). This chapter introduces the landscape of contemporary American political ideas and movements—liberal, conservative, neoliberal, neoconservative, socialist, and libertarian.

American Political Ideologies

Ideology "spells out what is valued and what is not, what must be maintained, and what must be changed."[1] Most political leaders and most Americans share elements of or identify with mainstream ideologies. Generally identified as *liberal* or *conservative*, these ideological positions do not challenge the existing political order. For example, neither liberals nor conservatives want to make major changes in our political and social order. They accept capitalism American-style as a successful economic system, and the economic marketplace as the chief instrument for the distribution of economic goods. At the same time, liberals and conservatives accept most of the economic reforms of the New Deal (explained later in this chapter)—Social Security, unemployment insurance, and agricultural subsidies—as a permanent part of our political system. Their differences are over matters of emphasis and degree. By contrast, radical ideologies, such as *democratic socialism* and *libertarianism*, challenge much of the existing social and political order. Democratic socialists do not accept the capitalist system or what they consider to be the inordinate power of the big corporations. Socialists want to remove most of the major economic decisions on investments, wages, and prices from the private sector and place them in the hands of government. Libertarians seek to establish an economic system free of governmental interference and regulation and to dismantle most of the existing welfare state programs. These ideologies challenge many of the existing arrangements in our political system.

Political ideology is an integrated set of political ideas that influences how Americans think about political leaders. *(AP Photo)*

Exotic as socialism or libertarianism may seem to most Americans, these ideologies and movements operate within the framework of our democratic system. Democratic socialists and libertarians believe in peaceful change and accept the rules of the game. They frequently enter candidates in elections although those candidates rarely win, and then typically just at the state and local levels. Because their ideas challenge the dominant ideologies of our time, it is important to understand their criticisms and their prescriptions for the future, just as it is important to understand beliefs that are more widely held.

Liberalism

liberalism

An ideology that regards the individual as a rational being capable of overcoming obstacles to a better world and supports changes in the political and economic status quo

contract theory

Theory holding that the state gains its legitimacy from the consent of the governed and is formed primarily to protect the rights of individuals to life, liberty, and property

classical liberalism

A view, dating from the nineteenth century, that government should play a minimal role in society and should permit maximum economic freedom for the individual

One influential American ideology is **liberalism**. Liberalism begins with the assumption that individuals are, in the main, rational beings capable of overcoming obstacles to progress without resorting to violence. The roots of liberalism can be traced to the great English philosopher John Locke (1632–1704). Locke, who believed in the natural goodness of human beings, developed the **contract theory** of the state. According to Locke's theory, the state gains its legitimacy from the consent of the governed and is formed primarily to protect individuals' rights to life, liberty, and property. Locke's ideas of limited government, resting on the consent of the governed, became the textbook of the American Revolution. Locke was an inspiration to Thomas Jefferson, one of the most important early American liberal thinkers.

Classic Liberalism: Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson

Contemporary American liberalism is vastly different from what was known in the nineteenth century as **classical liberalism** (see Table 2.1). Liberals of that time, going back to Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, believed that a government that governed least governed best. Those nineteenth-century liberals felt that government should step out of the way so that the new entrepreneurs of the young Republic—the small business owners and farmers—could have an opportunity to compete in the economic system. Jefferson shared Locke's view that government must treat property rights with particular care. Jefferson had high praise for Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776), the bible of capitalism. In his first inaugural address, Jefferson stated:

> A wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government.[2]

President Andrew Jackson's (1829–1837) struggle against the wealth and power of a national bank was a classic example of the nineteenth-century liberal creed in action. Jackson also opposed extensive government expenditures on roads and canals. He believed that such expenditures "would make the federal government a partner with

TABLE 2.1 | KEY IDEAS OF AMERICAN IDEOLOGIES

Different forms of liberalism and conservatism have defined much of the ideological debate in American politics; other ideologies challenged and influenced mainstream ideas.

IDEOLOGY	KEY IDEAS AND POLICIES
LIBERALISM	
CLASSICAL LIBERALISM	Minimal government; protection of property rights
POPULISM	Democratization of government; economic reforms
PROGRESSIVISM	Social programs to cope with problems caused by industrialization; public limits on private corporate power
CONTEMPORARY LIBERALISM	The positive state; faith in solving problems collectively through government; programs to provide for the economic well-being of the nation, including the basic material needs of each individual; tolerance of various lifestyles
NEOLIBERALISM	Creation, not redistribution, of wealth; free trade; reform of entitlement programs; a strong but economical defense
CONSERVATISM	
EARLY AMERICAN CONSERVATISM	Sanctity of private property; distrust of unchecked popular rule; duty of government to promote a healthy economic environment and a virtuous citizenry
INDUSTRIAL AGE CONSERVATISM	Laissez-faire economics; individualism; social Darwinism
CONTEMPORARY CONSERVATISM	Reduced spending on social programs; revamping tax policies to encourage economic growth; strong military defense; little positive action to redress racial and gender discrimination; duty of government to promote a virtuous citizenry
NEOCONSERVATISM	Skepticism of government's ability to solve social and economic problems; acceptance of a modest welfare state; opposition to racial and gender quotas to redress discrimination; creation, not redistribution, of wealth; assertive foreign policy
CHALLENGES TO THE STATUS QUO	
DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM	Public ownership of basic industries, banks, agricultural enterprises, and communications systems; wage and price controls; redistribution of wealth to achieve true economic equality; expanded welfare programs
LIBERTARIANISM	Minimal government; protection of property rights and freedom of individuals; no governmental regulation of the economy; noninterventionist foreign policy; drastic reduction in defense spending

business in the financial prosperity of the upper class."[3] Speaking for the liberal reformers of his day, Jackson declared that a strong central government "is calculated to raise around the administration a moneyed aristocracy dangerous to the liberties of the country."[4]

Like Jefferson, Jackson believed that liberty was the absence of government interference with the rights of all citizens to enjoy the fruits of their labor and prosperity.

Locke's contributions to American liberalism were not restricted to the idea of limited government. In *Two Treatises on Government* Locke advanced the ideas that people have rights on which the government should not intrude. Many of these, such as his "right to talk and think," "right of worship," and "sanctuary," show up almost verbatim in both the Declaration of Independence and American Constitution.

Populism and Progressivism: The Repudiation of Classic Liberalism

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, liberal attitudes toward government began to change. In the decades following the Civil War, American farmers, the backbone of support for Jeffersonian and Jacksonian liberalism, suffered through a perpetual economic crisis. Agricultural prices fell and interest rates rose. The target of liberal reform became the railroads and the banks, not the government. Out of this turmoil evolved a new liberal movement, known as populism. The populists, who formed their own political party in the 1880s, called for further democratization of government through the secret ballot, direct election of senators, and voter initiatives and referenda. They also advocated fundamental economic reforms that would strengthen government's role, including nationalization of the railroads and the telegraph, a graduated income tax, free coinage of silver, and a vastly expanded supply of paper money. The Populist Party did not supplant either of the two major parties; however, its ideas, particularly with the nomination of William Jennings Bryan as the Democratic presidential candidate in 1896, profoundly affected the Democratic Party in the twentieth century.

progressivism
An urban reform movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that called for direct primaries, restrictions on corporations, and improved public services and that was influential in the administrations of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson

In urban America, among the middle classes, there was also a growing movement for social and economic reform, known as **progressivism**. Progressives supported government programs to ease the problems of industrialization, including worker's compensation, a ban on child labor, regulation of corporations, and a minimum wage.

Progressives achieved their major successes during the presidential administrations of Theodore Roosevelt (1901–1909) and Woodrow Wilson (1913–1921). During Roosevelt's years, Congress passed the Hepburn Act, which regulated the railroads, and the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act, which eliminated many of the unhealthy practices of food and drug industries. Woodrow Wilson signed into law bills regulating the banking industry, restricting unfair business competition, and establishing an eight-hour day for railroad workers. The populist and progressive belief that government could remedy the economic ills of the nation by limiting the power and wealth of private corporations and banks had a profound effect on American liberalism. The rise of populism and progressivism signaled a decline in the faith of liberalism in laissez-faire (minimal government regulation of economic affairs) and began a new era of belief in the power and virtues of a strong central government.

Progressives supported government programs, including worker's compensation, to ease the problems of industrialization. Picketing hospital workers are shown at a rally outside Temple University Hospital in Philadelphia. *(AP Photo)*

Wilson felt that Jefferson would have understood the need for more activist government. He said,

> If Jefferson were living in our day, he would see what we see: that the individual is caught in a great confused nexus of all sorts of complicated circumstances, and that to let him alone is to leave him helpless.[5]

Contemporary Liberalism: The Welfare State and Beyond

The administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933–1945) took the concerns of the populists and progressives a step further. Roosevelt's New Deal program reflected the change in the constituency of liberalism. In contrast to the nineteenth-century liberal, who addressed the needs of the entrepreneurial class, New Deal liberals were concerned about the farmers, the unemployed, and the labor union movement. Carrying on the populist and progressive tradition, liberals no longer saw government as a threat to liberty or as the inevitable partner of the rich and powerful. In a complex industrial age, particularly one racked by the Great Depression of the 1930s, liberals believed that government action should ensure the economic well-being of the nation and should provide basic material guarantees (food, shelter, healthcare, and education) for every individual. The New Deal included programs to ensure protection for the un-

employed, pensions for the elderly, and guaranteed prices for the farmers. It symbolized the idea of the positive or interventionist state, which became the hallmark of contemporary liberalism.

In the 1960s, President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society moved beyond the New Deal. Civil rights laws protected the rights of minorities, Medicare and Medicaid laws provided health insurance for the elderly and the poor, and funds aided impoverished elementary and secondary school districts. In the 1970s, liberals proposed a broad range of programs to protect the environment, to assist consumers, and to expand welfare benefits through the food stamp program.

Liberals today believe that a strong central government is necessary to protect individuals from the inequities of a modern industrial and technological society, and that the growth of government has enhanced, not diminished, individual freedom. Although the positive state is central in the contemporary liberal creed, liberals do not believe that government should displace private enterprise. Most liberals are capitalists, if not forthrightly so. In fact, many argue that American capitalism has survived because government has humanized the industrial order, and that Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal saved capitalism from repudiation during the 1930s. Liberals argue that the positive state cushions the inequalities of power and wealth that arise in any capitalist system. They see government as correcting the injustices of the marketplace, not supplanting it. Liberals recognize that in any society there will be some inequalities of wealth and income, but they feel that government must intervene to redress the most excessive inequalities. Thus, in debates over tax laws, liberals frequently support shifting more of the burden to people in the upper income brackets.

The idea of a benevolent government that offers services to the disadvantaged (unemployment insurance) as well as to the middle class (Social Security) has been for generations the centerpiece of American liberalism. Liberal ideas fueled the administrations of Presidents Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, John Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson. Johnson, for one, saw the United States as "an endless cornucopia." His Great Society began a virtual torrent of new government programs: rent supplements for the poor, scholarships for college students, aid to the arts and humanities, higher pensions for government workers and veterans, aid to children with disabilities, and a massive food stamp program. These programs assisted the poor and the disadvantaged as well as many in the middle- and upper-income brackets.

The World's Smallest Political Quiz is a tool designed to assess one's political ideology. The quiz was created by a Libertarian organization.

Does that make it too biased, or is it useful?

Visit this site and decide for yourself.

http://www.theadvocates.org/quiz

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the growth rate of the economy declined while the demand for government services continued. Unlike his predecessors, President Carter (1977–1981) did not offer a new set of governmental programs and benefits. Hampered by the problems of inflation and an energy shortage, Carter could offer few initiatives. His administration stirred little enthusiasm among liberals.

Liberals remain wedded to the idea of affirmative government. In the early 1980s, some began to discuss the idea of an industrial policy. Championed by liberal economic thinkers such as Robert Reich and Felix Rohatyn, an **industrial policy** in-

industrial policy
Proposals for partnership in economic decision-making among government officials, corporate leaders, union officials, and public interest groups

volves a partnership in economic decision-making among government officials, labor unions, and public interest groups. President Bill Clinton (1993–2001) endorsed this approach in a slightly modified form in his 1992 election campaign and later named Reich secretary of labor.

In matters involving national security and personal morality, however, liberals seek to restrict the role of government. Liberals extend broad tolerance to different lifestyles and dispute government efforts to impose a single standard of religious practice or sexual morality. Consequently, liberals are at the forefront of opposition to constitutional amendments that might sanction prayer in schools or limit the rights of women to obtain an abortion; they support efforts to guarantee rights for women, the disabled, LGBT persons, and other minorities, and they seek to protect and expand individual privacy rights against government and even corporate intrusions.

Since the Vietnam War, liberals have backed away from an interventionist, military-oriented foreign policy. In January 1991, most Congressional liberals voted against authorizing President Bush to use military force in the Persian Gulf and preferred the continuation of economic sanctions against Iraq. Liberals are also critical of large defense budgets and became, in recent years, the most vocal critics of the Iraq War and the ongoing Afghanistan War.

In general, liberals favor government programs and budgeting priorities that put domestic social programs before those of the Pentagon. Their belief in a strong activist government concentrates primarily on domestic issues (see Table 2.2). Recently, liberals have been outspoken on the issue of universal healthcare—health insurance coverage as a right for all Americans—and have achieved at least a partial victory in 2010 with the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act.

Who are the liberals? They are usually found in the Democratic Party, although the Democrats do harbor some conservatives and the Republicans a handful of liberals. Some liberals also support third parties, such as the Green Party. The association of liberals with Democrats is in part due to the fact that the constituency of the Democratic Party—minorities, the labor movement, feminists, and the poor—supports a wide range of liberal welfare programs. **Americans for Democratic Action** (ADA) has historically been the best-known pressure group for contemporary liberalism. Founded in 1947, ADA presidents have included Senators Hubert Humphrey (D-MN)* and George McGovern (D-SD), both one-time nominees of the Democratic Party for president. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., the ADA is an advocate of legislation designed to reduce economic inequality and defense spending and to protect consumers. It opposes laws that encroach on civil rights and civil liberties. Each year it rates members of Congress on a broad spectrum of liberal issues. In recent years, the popularity of the ADA

Americans for Democratic Action
The best-known pressure group for contemporary liberalism

* "D-MN" is a journalistic designation used for members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives: "D" or "R" indicates political party, followed by the member's home state.

TABLE 2.2 | MILESTONES IN AMERICAN LIBERALISM

1690	John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* published.
1776	Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations,* Thomas Paine's *Common Sense,* and the Declaration of Independence published.
1832	President Andrew Jackson vetoes a bill to recharter the Bank of the United States.
1892	First Populist Party convention held.
1896	William Jennings Bryan wins Democratic presidential nomination; the Democratic Party adopts much of the Populist program.
1909	Herbert Croly's *Promise of American Life* published; a group of African American leaders, including W. E. B. DuBois, meets at Niagara Falls, Canada, and inaugurates the modern civil rights movement.
1913–1916	President Woodrow Wilson steers his New Freedom program through Congress.
1933–1936	President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal reforms inaugurate the modern welfare state.
1954	The Supreme Court declares racial segregation *unconstitutional* in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka.*
1964	Congress passes the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964.
1965	President Lyndon Johnson successfully pushes his Great Society programs through Congress.
1972	Liberal Democratic candidate George McGovern loses presidential election to conservative Republican incumbent Richard Nixon in a landslide.
1992	Bill Clinton wins the presidency while making universal health care a cornerstone of his campaign.
2010	President Barack Obama and a Democratic majority in Congress pass the Affordable Care Act, providing all Americans the opportunity to purchase health insurance.
2010	President Barack Obama announces plans to end the Iraq War. U.S. troops leave by end of 2011.
2012	President Barack Obama announces his support for same-sex marriage rights.

among liberals has been surpassed by the upstart progressive organization MoveOn. Founded in 1998, MoveOn now boasts a membership of over 7 million.

Neoliberalism: Adjusting Liberalism to the Twenty-First Century

During the administrations of Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and John Kennedy, liberalism focused on economic issues and emphasized government's obligation to assist those on the lower end of the income scale. In recent decades, liberalism has shifted its focus somewhat and reached into social and foreign policy issues. However, it did so at a political cost. The strong association of liberalism with the civil rights movement hurt liberals among Southerners who identified with the old, white-dominated political

order and among Northern white ethnics living in urban enclaves who also felt threatened by African American advancement. Many voters also associated liberalism with controversial Supreme Court decisions legalizing abortion and banning school prayer. After the Vietnam War, liberals were highly critical of American military intervention and the level of defense spending, alienating some voters who considered them "soft" on defense. Although liberal candidates were quite successful in congressional and state elections, such negative associations dogged them at the presidential level.

Stunned by these successive presidential defeats, a group of young journalists and elected officials attempted to sharpen and modernize the focus of contemporary liberalism. The leader of the movement was Charles Peters, the editor of the *Washington Monthly* (see Table 2.3), who adopted the label "neoliberal." **Neoliberalism** calls for a shift in the emphasis of liberalism from the redistribution of wealth to the promotion of wealth, for a far less critical attitude toward American capitalism, and for policies that promote greater government and business cooperation.

neoliberalism
A pragmatic form of liberalism that emphasizes such beliefs as the promotion of wealth rather than its redistribution and the reform of military practices rather than the simple reduction of military spending

Neoliberals do not repudiate the New Deal and Great Society legacies; they simply feel that the emphasis of liberal reform should be different. They argue that liberals must confront public distrust of government. As a writer for the *Washington Monthly* put it, "any time a liberal politician says the word 'program,' most voters hear 'bureaucracy' and right away get turned off." [6]

Neoliberals direct their attention, not to the expansion of government services, but to their effective delivery. Neoliberals criticize government unions and the size and costs of the government bureaucracy. Neoliberals also call for reform of entitlement spending programs such as Social Security that go to people who already are well protected by private pensions and their own investments. The neoliberals criticize civil

TABLE 2.3 | A GUIDE TO CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL IDEAS AND LEADERS

American ideologies are expressed through a variety of journals, writers, and political leaders.

IDEOLOGY	MAJOR JOURNAL	LEADING SPOKESPERSON	POLITICAL LEADER
Liberalism	*The American Prospect*	Robert Reich	Barack Obama
Neoliberalism	*Washington Monthly*	Charles Peters	Robert Rubin
Conservatism	*National Review*	George Will	Sarah Palin
Neoconservatism	*Weekly Standard*	William Kristol	Paul Wolfowitz
Democratic Socialism	*Dissent*	Noam Chomsky	Bernard Sanders
Libertarianism	*Reason*	Ron Paul	Gary Johnson

service and military retirement benefits for being far more generous than those in the private sector. They believe the increases in spending for these programs should be geared not to the cost of living but to the rate of real growth in the economy.

The election of Barack Obama as president in 2008 (and reelection in 2012) brought about a return to more traditional liberal positions. *(AP Photo)*

2008

Traditional liberals take issue with the neoliberal emphasis on government efficiency. They emphasize older liberal issues such as the problem of personal income inequality that has become more pronounced in recent decades. Traditional liberals would like to increase the top income tax rate, which is currently 35 percent. They unapologetically champion the cause of affirmative government and the positive state. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., a prominent liberal spokesperson for over a generation, argued for greater government investment in research and development and in education; in the rehabilitation of our bridges, dams, and highways; and in the protection against toxic waste, acid rain, and global warming. "The markets," wrote Schlesinger, "will solve none of these problems."[7]

Some traditional liberals feel that Michael Dukakis's emphasis on competency rather than ideology during the 1988 presidential campaign was, in fact, a neo-liberal theme that failed to ignite the electorate. By contrast, Bill Clinton, in 1992 and 1996, and Al Gore, in 2000, were able to blend older, more populist ideas, such as raising taxes for the rich, with neoliberal themes such as a partnership between government and business. The year 2008 saw a return to more traditional liberal positions when the Democratic Party nominated Barack Obama (D-IL) as its presidential candidate.

Conservatism

conservatism
A defense of the political and economic status quo against forces of change, holding that established customs, laws, and traditions should guide society

In contrast to liberalism's confidence in the capacity of individuals to overcome obstacles collectively, political conservatism reflects doubt and distrust. **Conservatism** emphasizes the value of tradition and established practices as guides for the future. It finds its origins in the writings of Edmund Burke (1729–1797), whose most famous work, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), is considered the first major statement of conservative principles. A leading figure in the British Parliament, Burke was appalled by the excesses of the French Revolution and by its rejection of tradition. Burke was suspi-

Members of National Nurses United labor union show their support for Occupy Wall Street in Foley Square in New York City on October 5, 2011. *(Wikipedia photo)*

cious of any generation's claim that it could remake society, believing that the experience of past generations was the most reliable guide to good government. Customs, traditions, and laws embodied the wisdom of the past and should not be carelessly discarded. Thus, argued Burke, people should act with deliberation, seeking change slowly and only when necessary. Burke believed that society grew slowly and with purpose; therefore, the past gave continuity to present and future generations. Burke was suspicious of the general public and its capacity to appreciate tradition and custom. He believed in government by the propertied class. People were not equal in ability or talent, according to Burke, and should not be so considered when it came to the governing of society. In Burke's view, a natural inequality among people meant that a ruling class of ability and property must control government.

Early American Conservatism: John Adams

It was difficult to make Burkean conservatism relevant to the American experience, which had no landed aristocracy, no established church, and no royal tradition. American conservatism, although influenced by Burke, found its own voice in John Adams, the second president of the United States, who lived from 1735 to 1826. The excesses of the French Revolution, particularly its executions and confiscation of property, repelled Adams as they did Burke. Adams agreed with Burke unreservedly about the sanctity of private property (see Table 2.1); but unlike Burke, Adams did not associate

property rights with a landed aristocracy. Adams believed that property should be widely held and that a propertied class would eventually produce a natural aristocracy of talent. Although Adams was one of the architects of the American Revolution and a passionate defender of the right of every individual to life, liberty, and property, he distrusted unchecked democratic rule as much as he did excessive power in the hands of the aristocracy. Too much democracy leads to dictatorship. Adams rejected the Jeffersonian notion of the natural goodness of humankind; he felt that people were neither totally innocent nor totally depraved. Laws and government, in Adams's view, were needed to promote public virtue and to curb private greed. By public virtue Adams meant, "a positive passion for the public good, the public interest, honor, power, and glory established in the minds of the people."[8] A properly balanced government could serve to suppress the evils of ambition, selfishness, self-indulgence, and corruption.

John Adams found this balance in the American Constitution. A popularly elected House would represent the people, an indirectly elected Senate would protect the rights of property, and the president would represent the whole. Thus the poor could not confiscate the property of the rich because the Senate would protect their interests, and the rich would not be able to exploit the poor because the House should represent them. Society would retain its balance, and liberty would be safeguarded from both the excesses of democracy and the abuses of an aristocracy. After Adams had appointed John Marshall, a conservative Federalist, to the Supreme Court in 1801, Adams looked to the judicial branch as the ultimate guarantor of property rights against any attempts by legislatures to compromise them.

In the 1820s, long after he had left the presidency, Adams joined with other American conservatives, including Chief Justice Marshall and Senator Daniel Webster, in opposing the elimination of property qualifications for voting. These conservatives considered *universal suffrage* (and in that era they debated only universal *white male suffrage*) a threat to the Republic. Men without property lacked the independence, judgment, and virtue to be voting members of a free republic.[9]

Chancellor James Kent of New York, one of the most famous legal scholars and jurists of the early nineteenth century, argued that "there is a tendency in the majority to tyrannize over the minority and trample down their rights; and in the indolent and profligate to cast the whole burden of society upon the industrious and virtuous."[10] The victory of Jacksonian democracy in the states during the 1820s brought an end to antidemocratic conservatism. Conservatives seemed to realize the finality of their defeat on that issue and concentrated in the latter part of the nineteenth century on a defense of property rights and the system of economic laissez-faire.

Conservatism and the Industrial Age: Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner

Industrialization following the Civil War brought a major change in American conservatism. Although conservatives of the early Republic fervently believed in property

rights, the belief that government should play a limited role in the economy did not necessarily follow. Conservatives such as John Adams, John Marshall, and Alexander Hamilton supported a strong central government to defend the propertied classes from the encroachments of the more radical state governments. They defended the Bank of the United States against the attacks of the Jefferson-Jackson liberals.

laissez-faire economics
French for "leave things alone"; the view in economics that government should not interfere in the workings of the economy

As America industrialized, conservatives embraced **laissez-faire economics**—an economic system that operated free of government control. Burke and Adams regarded the state as essential to the promotion of public virtue and the protection of property; in the Industrial Age, however, the state became the object of conservative scorn. In stressing individualism, economic growth, and the limited role of government, conservatives seemed closer to Jefferson and Jackson in this regard than to Burke and Adams.

social Darwinism
A set of ideas applying Charles Darwin's theory of biological evolution to society and holding that social relationships occur within a struggle for survival in which only the fittest survive

Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), an English social scientist, and William Graham Sumner (1840–1910), an American sociologist, developed the theory of economic individualism that became the keystone of late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century conservatism. The theory was popularly known as **social Darwinism**. Sumner stated the case in a somewhat extreme form. People, Sumner argued, should be free to compete with each other for survival. From this economic competition, the fit will survive and the weak will perish. The result will be the betterment of humankind through the survival of superior individuals. Sumner opposed governmental aid to the needy as inconsistent with his views on social and economic evolution. Government was inefficient by nature, Sumner argued, and should be limited to fundamental concerns. Sumner wrote, "At bottom there are two chief things with which government has to deal. They are, the property of men and the honor of women. These it has to defend against crime."[11]

Spencer and Sumner made a great impact on conservative thinking. Conservatives of the Industrial Age did not emphasize the individual's obligation to the state or the state's obligation to promote public virtue; instead, the emphasis was almost entirely on the individual. If people worked hard, they argued, people could become successful; and economic growth would ensue. The government need only stand out of the way. Many business leaders were attracted to this philosophy, although it did not prevent them from helping themselves to governmental favors (tariff protection or direct subsidies) when the occasion arose. These business leaders invoked conservatism to justify opposition to antitrust laws, bills regulating hours and wages, and a progressive income tax.

In short, conservatism became the ideology of America's business class. As long as most Americans shared somewhat in the growth of the American economy, they were willing to accept most of the tenets of conservatism. From the end of Reconstruction to the New Deal, Americans elected presidents (with the exceptions of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson) who reflected those values.

Contemporary Conservatism: A Response to the Welfare State

The Great Depression ended America's romance with conservatism. It brought about the election of Franklin Roosevelt and the beginning of the New Deal, with its numerous welfare state programs. The general popular acceptance of these programs placed American conservatism on the defensive for the next several generations. From 1933–1981, conservatism could be better measured by what it was against than what it was for. Conservatives opposed most major liberal domestic reforms, from the Social Security Bill of 1935 to the Medicare Bill of 1965.

Conservatism since the 1980s has taken on a more positive cast with an agenda of its own—reducing social spending, reshaping the tax code, and rebuilding national defense. In economic matters, conservatives draw on many of the ideas of nineteenth-century individualism. Conservatism still remains at its core a defense of economic individualism against the growth of the welfare state. Conservatives oppose any government involvement in the economy and contend that a vibrant private-sector economy can best create jobs for the poor, immigrants, and minorities. Echoing Spencer, conservatives argue that welfare programs only create a permanent class of the poor who are dependent on the state and have no genuine incentives to enter the working world.

Although many conservatives opposed the major civil rights laws of the 1960s on the grounds that they represented a serious encroachment on states' rights, most now accept these laws as a permanent part of our political landscape. They do, however, challenge the idea of quotas and other affirmative-action policies as a means of enforcing civil rights laws in the areas of jobs, educational opportunities, and access to federal contracts. They argue that civil rights should mean equality of treatment and not equality of results.

On social and cultural issues conservatives remain close to Burkean ideals. Contemporary conservatives believe that the state must promote virtue and social responsibility and take appropriate measures to improve the moral climate of society. They support constitutional amendments restricting abortion and permitting prayers in public schools. They oppose the concept of civil rights for homosexuals in jobs, the military, housing, and marriage. Speaking as a modern-day Burkean, conservative philosopher and syndicated columnist George Will wrote, "Traditional conservatism has not been, and proper conservatism cannot be, merely a defense of industrialism and individualist 'free market' economics. Conservatism is about the cultivation and conservation of certain values or it is nothing."[12] Like Burke, modern conservatives hold that long-held traditional culture and values are best for society.

As conservative causes have gained broader public support, conservatives no longer invoke the suspicion of the masses, as they did in John Adams's day (see Table 2.4). Nor do they talk very much about the independence of the judicial branch as a check on the excesses of legislative power. In fact, conservatives have been particularly critical of Supreme Court decisions outlawing prayers in school and legalizing abortion.[13]

Conservatives believe that the state should take a part in improving the moral climate of society such as in promoting prayer in schools. *(shutterstock)*

millennial conservatism

Conservatism in the 21st century exemplified most popularly by President George W. Bush. Millennial conservatives believe in big government but unlike liberals they use it to restore older American value and social systems. Only time will tell whether this is a new conservative form or a passing intellectual "fad."

They support efforts to have such decisions overturned by constitutional amendment or weakened by legislative action, and as such, have abandoned the traditional Conservative preference for small government and judicial restraint. So called **"millennial conservatives"** advocate using the tools of government to restore many aspects of the old American society. Direct democracy, so feared by the conservatives of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has become an important tool of contemporary conservatives. Conservatives have successfully employed the popular initiative or referendum process (a device that permits people to vote on policy questions as well as for candidates) in California and Massachusetts as a check on the power of state legislatures to tax their own citizens or enact laws supportive of gay rights, etc.

Some conservative causes have generated intense (although not broad) rank-and-file support. In part because of conservative support for reduced taxes, prayer in school, restrictions on abortion, and opposition to same-sex marriage, conservatism has been transformed from an elitist philosophy of the propertied class to a more populist cause of the working and middle classes.

Who are the conservatives? In most cases their political home is in the Republican Party. Ronald Reagan was the first president since the Great Depression to identify himself openly with conservatism and conservative causes, and every Republican president (and candidate) since has identified as a conservative. Previous Republican presidents—Eisenhower, Nixon, and Ford—were men of the center who shunned ideology and ideological labels. Perhaps the best-known conservative journal is *National Review*, founded by William F. Buckley, who was one of the most prominent conservative spokespersons for over half a century.

TABLE 2.4 | MILESTONES IN AMERICAN CONSERVATISM

1790	Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution* published; Alexander Hamilton, first U.S. Treasury secretary, introduces a report recommending a national bank.
1883	William Graham Sumner's *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* published.
1890	Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics* published.
1905	Supreme Court in *Lochner v. New York* strikes down New York law limiting working hours of bakers as a violation of freedom of contract under the Fourteenth Amendment.
1920	Warren Harding elected president, marking the beginning of a new era of conservative dominance lasting until 1932.
1955	*National Review* founded, marking the beginning of the intellectual revitalization of post-World War II conservatism.
1964	Barry Goldwater receives the Republican presidential nomination, beginning the conservative ascendancy in the party.
1981	President Ronald Reagan begins his program of tax reductions, domestic spending cuts, and defense buildup.
1994	Newt Gingrich and his "Contract with America" sweep the Republican Party into the majority in both chambers of Congress for the first time in forty years.
2000	George W. Bush and Dick Cheney win the electoral vote and embark on an agenda of tax cuts, defense spending, and environmental deregulation.
2002	The Bush Doctrine of preventive war is announced in National Security Strategy of the United States, with the country embarking on the Iraq War the following year.
2010	Bolstered in part by the Tea Party movement, voters return a Republican majority to both chambers of Congress in the midterm elections.

Neoconservatism in the Twenty-First Century

neoconservatism
A belief associated with many former liberal intellectuals that contemporary liberalism has transformed the modest New Deal welfare state into an intrusive paternalistic state

In the 1970s, a number of leading American intellectuals, many of them longtime liberals, became openly critical of the drift of contemporary liberalism; thus began the ideology labeled **neoconservatism** in the popular press. Neoconservatives feel that liberals have overestimated the ability of government to solve social problems such as industrial pollution, economic inequality, and racial discrimination. They argue that liberals have gone beyond the initial New Deal concept that government need only provide a "safety net" for the subsistence needs for society's victims—the unemployed, disabled Americans, and the elderly. Contemporary liberalism, the neoconservatives claim, transformed the New Deal's modest welfare state into a more intrusive paternalistic state. Neoconservatives disagree with such liberal ideas as the use of racial or gender preferences as a means of assuring fairness in hiring, promotion, or acceptance to professional schools. They also reject the idea of forced school busing as a means of achieving racial

balance in enrollments. They consider these ideas elitist liberal schemes not supported by the vast majority of Americans.

Neoconservatives feel that liberals no longer speak for the "average person" but rather for a "new class" of relatively affluent reformers—lawyers, social workers, educators, and city planners—with careers in the expanding public sector. This liberal new class intends "to propel the nation from that modified version of capitalism we call 'the welfare state' toward an economic system so regulated in detail as to fulfill many of the traditional anticapitalist aspirations of the left."[14]

Neoconservatives also argue that liberals emphasize policies (such as higher taxes on the upper class) that were aimed not at creating wealth but only at redistributing it. Skeptical about government's ability to erase economic inequalities, neoconservatives stress policies such as lower taxes on large incomes and less regulation of business to promote economic growth. Such growth, they feel, would more likely broaden economic opportunity and create greater social stability. Likewise, they are suspicious of policies that polarize one class or group against another, such as racial busing that pits the white working-class communities in the large cities against the poor African American community, and gender and racial laws that pit the interests of women and minorities against those of white males.

In short, neoconservatives feel that modern liberals have promised too much to too many groups and that a government that promises too much cannot deliver, becoming "overloaded." As a result, they argue, government loses its authority and cannot govern effectively. Neoconservatives differ from traditional conservatives in that neoconservatives support, in principle and practice, a modest welfare state into which citizens should make payments to prepare for future needs (Social Security, unemployment insurance, and Medicare). In fact, neoconservatives argue that a properly constructed welfare state strengthens citizens' loyalty to the existing capitalist system and is thus a stabilizing force.

Neoconservatives have engendered some resentment among many members of the Old Right, sometimes dubbed paleoconservatives (*paleo* from the Greek meaning "ancient"). They decry the neoconservative accommodation to the welfare state and remain hostile to government efforts to establish social and economic equality. The paleoconservatives believe that religious traditions embodied in the church and family should be the basis of a stable and ordered society. The welfare state philosophy of the New Deal and Great Society is, according to them, an effort to create a secular moral order. By defending the New Deal legacy, the paleoconservatives charge the neoconservatives with defending not only a misguided political idea but also a religious heresy.

The sudden collapse of communism in 1989 opened up new fissures in contemporary conservatism. With the unraveling of the Soviet Union, some paleoconservative leaders such as journalist Patrick Buchanan, who challenged President George H. W. Bush in the 1992 primaries, sounded classic conservative themes of isolationism and taking care of America first. Neoconservatives, by contrast, strongly supported continued American financial and military involvement in world affairs. George W. Bush (2001–2009) surrounded himself with a number of neoconservative advisors, such as Paul Wolfowitz.

Neoconservatism has emerged as an influential intellectual and political force. Its ideas have influenced the Reagan administration and both Bush administrations and have brought about a more respectful hearing for conservatism in general among academics and intellectuals.

CHAPTER REVIEW

Wrapping it up

1. People do not simply dispute over issues that reflect their own self-interest. They also disagree, at times sharply, about what constitutes a good society. Since the American and the French revolutions, disputes between liberals and conservatives have occupied center stage in the Western democracies and in the United States, in particular; but liberalism and conservatism have often changed colors and even exchanged attitudes.
2. Nineteenth-century liberals Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson equated the idea of a powerful state with the protection of the wealthy merchant classes, but liberalism changed in the Industrial Age. Deeply affected by the Populist and Progressive movements, liberalism saw government as an important vehicle for the protection of the many from the exploitation by the few. Liberals and neoliberals today still regard governmental programs and intervention as the key to solving our economic problems; but in matters of personal morality, liberals hark back to an earlier age. Their opposition to governmental interference in matters of abortion and school prayer is reminiscent of Jefferson's concerns.
3. Conservatives in the early days of the American republic were the supporters of a strong government. They believed that only a government of a talented and propertied elite could preserve the sacred rights of all people. As the voting franchise was extended to more and more people, conservatives lost their faith in central government and focused on the rights of property, independent of the state, and rights of individuals to be free of governmental interference. With their opposition to abortion, pornography, and LGBTQ rights, conservatives remain true in matters of moral and social policy to the old Burkean belief that the state can promote social virtue. The central controversy between liberals and conservatives today is not over whether government should be strong or weak, but when it should be strong or weak.

KEY TERMS

Readings for Further Study

A broad overview of political ideologies can be found in Leon P. Baradat, *Political Ideologies: Their Origins and Impact,* 11th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2012), and in John Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction,* 5th ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

Both David F. Ericson and Louisa Bertch Green, eds, *The Liberal Tradition in American Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1999) and Charles W. Dunn and J. David Woodard, *The Conservative Tradition in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003) provide a valuable collection of important historical readings.

Alpheus T. Mason and Gordon E. Baker, *Free Government in the Making,* 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) supplements readings on American political thought with helpful essays.

Readers interested in exploring socialist thought should consult Michael Newman, *Socialism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Those interested in a greater understanding of libertarianism should see Jacob H. Huebert, *Libertarianism Today.* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010).

For a discussion of neoliberal and neoconservative thought, consult David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) and Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

For an overview of the impact of the contemporary ideological debate on American politics, see Morris P. Fiorina, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2010) and Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter With Kansas?* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005).

For an understanding of the Tea Party movement, see Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

The Occupy movement is explored in *The Occupy Handbook,* edited by Janet Byrne (New York: Back Bay Books, 2012).

Notes

1. Roy C. Macridis, *Contemporary Political Ideologies* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983), p. 9.
2. Quoted in Walter E. Volkomer, ed., *The Liberal Tradition in American Thought* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1969), p. 104.
3. Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom,* 1822–1832, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 116.
4. Ibid., p. 33.
5. Quoted in Arthur A. Ekrich, Jr., *Progressivism in America* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974), p. 170.

6. Paul Glastris, "The Phillips Curve," *Washington Monthly* (June 1990): 54.
7. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The Liberal Opportunity," *The American Prospect* (Spring 1990): 15.
8. Quoted in James M. Burns, *The Vineyard of Liberty* (New York: Knopf, 1982), p. 225.
9. Clinton Rossiter, *Conservatism in America,* 2nd ed., rev. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 118.
10. Quoted in Jay Sigler, ed., *The Conservative Tradition in American Thought* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1969), p. 118.
11. Quoted in Rossiter, *Conservatism in America,* p. 138.
12. George Will, *Statecraft as Soulcraft: What Government Does* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), pp. 119–120.
13. *Engel v. Vitale,* 370 U.S. 421 (1962); *Roe v. Wade,* 410 U.S. 113 (1973); *Wallace v. Jaffree,* 472 U.S. 38 (1985).
14. Irving Kristol, *Reflections of a Neoconservative: Looking Back, Looking Ahead* (New York: Basic Books, 1953), p. 212.