

Resurgence of conservatism

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



DBQ 15: The Resurgence of Conservatism, 1964-2005 Liberals had dominated American society for most of the 1900s. The 1960s was widely known for being the age of counterculture, social reforms, and liberals. The era witnessed many advancements like racial equality such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965, a strong advancement in political liberalism, and a significant increase in the power and influence of government-funded social programs as a result of Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society reforms.

Beginning with the election of Nixon, however, followed a gradual return to conservatism whether religiously, politically, or economically. The resurgence of conservatism in American politics and government in the years 1964-2005, was caused in reaction to 1960s liberal political, economic, and social policies as well as the rise of religious political groups and the controversy over the Vietnam War. The government's political and economic policies contributed to the rise of conservatism. Most notable of the federal reforms were initiated by liberal Democrat Lyndon B. Johnson and his Great Society schemes.

His "War on Poverty" speech, delivered on March 16, 1964, called for a war on poverty to give people a second chance by spending millions on education, job training, housing, and healthcare. Johnson's intention was in some ways a conservative one. He wanted to give people a hand-up, not a hand-out and make them dependent on the money earned from taxing the more fortunate (Document A). Reflecting the liberal mood of the 1960s, voters flocked to the polls to vote for Johnson because in part by their faith in Great Society programs. Johnson received 61.1% of the popular vote and 90.1% of the electoral college vote and captured all but six southern states,

traditionally Democratic "solid south", who were alienated by Johnson's advocacy for civil rights (Document B). The higher taxes involved in the Great Society programs, however, were resented by conservatives, who saw the social programs as a sign of the increasing government influence. Richard Nixon promised a policy of New Federalism, transferring some of the powers previously held by the federal government to the states, to counter the Great Society programs. He also appointed four conservative justices to the Supreme Court including Chief Justice Warren Burger.

Nixon and other conservatives denounced the previous court under Chief Justice Earl Warren, whose decisions drastically changed sexual freedom, the rights of criminals, and the role of religion in schools. At the representation of two Supreme Court justice nominees in 1971, Nixon stated that it is the duty of the judge to base his decisions on strict interpretation of the Constitution and not on his personal political or social views, indirectly referring to the liberal Supreme Court of Earl Warren. (Document E). By winning the presidential election of 1980, Ronald Reagan confirmed the return of modern conservatism.

He received 50.8% of the popular vote and 90.9% of the electoral college votes (Document G). Reagan applied supply-side economics, dubbed "Reaganomics", keeping the budget under control and reducing taxes, ultimately stimulating the economy and reducing the federal deficit. He distanced politics from the interventionist government of the 1960s, appealing to conservatives' belief of small government. Between 1981 and 1982, the economy suffered the deepest recession since the Great

Depression of the 1930s, unemployment reached 11%, and several bank closings occurred.

Democrats attacked Reagan's tax and spending cuts, claiming that it favored the rich and hurt the poor. However, it was actually the "tight money" policies to bring inflation under control under President Carter that caused the recession. In 1983 the recession ended, which seemed to vindicate Reaganomics. Robert Samuelson stated in "The Enigma" that Reagan's "presidency was very successful" (Document H). Built-up inflation from the Carter years was gone, the economy was in its second-longest expansion since World War II, and Reagan dealt efficiently with the Soviets.

His social agenda of challenging abortion and advocating school prayer was only pursued half-heartedly. Since the nation under Reagan was going so well, it's no surprise that many Americans turned from liberalism and began to embrace conservatism, and that his effectiveness was even able to convince some conservative southern Democrats to abandon their own party and follow the president. Consequently, the failures of the policies of liberal presidents like Carter and the success of conservatives like Reagan lead to the resurgence of conservatism.

The rise of religion in American politics also contributed to the growth of conservatism. The most prominent was a coalition of conservative, evangelical Christians known as the religious right. The Moral Majority, founded by Reverend Jerry Falwell, emerged to combat what they saw as an irreligious and corrupt society. They focused more on the social aspects of government than the economic concerns. They preached successfully

against abortion, feminism, and the spread of gay rights and had registered between 2 and 3 million voters.

By using multiple media devices like the radio and TV, televangelists were able to reach huge audiences and collect millions of dollars to support political conservative candidates. Ralph Reed stated in his book, *Active Faith: How Christians Are Changing the Soul of American Politics*, that the Republican's conservative and pro-life position is an important element of the party that garnered the support of millions of pro-life individuals and families in elections, and that they should not abandon their views (Document I).

In 1964, representation in the House of Representatives in southern states was mostly dominated by Democrats. However, by the year 2000, the seats occupied became increasingly Republican (Document J). Most Americans lived in the Bible Belt South and West, where religious Fundamentalism and suspicions of the federal government due to scandals like the Watergate scandal, thrived and so more Republicans than Democrats were elected into their respected offices because they appealed to the Southern citizens with their conservatism.

Thus, the rise of religious and moral awareness in politics prompted many Americans to become increasingly conservative and contribute to its resurgence. Another cause for the resurgence of conservatism was the controversy over the Vietnam War. During Johnson's presidency, the war had become the longest and most unpopular war in the nation. He helped escalate the war by authorities granted to him under the Tonkin Gulf

Resolution, after which he promptly sent thousands of American troops into combat. As the war wore on, many Americans became weary of it.

While Johnson dreamed of a "Great Society", his presidency was haunted by the Vietnam War (Document D). Much of the funding he hoped would expand his social reform went towards financing the war. After Nixon's Vietnamization of the war, only 30,000 American troops remained in Vietnam. The powerful federal government of Lyndon B. Johnson as depicted by the controversial Vietnam War, led many Americans to turn their support towards conservative Republicans who championed small government and contribute to the return of conservatism on

American politics and government. The resurgence of conservatism in American politics and government was chiefly a reflection of the liberal 1960s and 1970s. The Moral Majority arose to denounce the irreligious movements such as the sexual and feminist movements that advocated abortion and homosexuality. The government's political and economic policies further herded Americans into conservatives' arms as the government's influence increased and Reagan's conservatist presidency proved effective.