

A comparison between britain's and germany's implementation of the neo-conservati...

[Politics](#)



There are two inter-related spheres, which this paper will explore. The first one asks what the relative appeal of Neo-conservatism was in Britain and Germany. The second determines the extent to which Neo-conservative policies were successfully implemented in the two respective countries. The perspectives chosen here try to explain Neo-conservatism with theories of social and cultural change to provide examples of its effects.

The New Right is “ conceptualized as populist Neo-conservative reactions to fundamental change in culture and values in a society. Neo-conservatism reflects a new cleavage based on value change.” Neo-conservatism still fell within the confines of traditional conservative ideologies, for example, opposition to the welfare state and the redistribution of income. In this paper the comparison between Britain, a country with long-standing democratic traditions and a civil society, and Germany, which has had strong non-democratic traditions, a fascist past and the recent establishment of a civil society will help to determine to what extent they have been ‘ socialized’.

Neo-conservative governments came to power in Britain prior to 1979, and in West Germany to 1982. Prior to their victory, there was great discontent with certain aspects of the existing social democratic politics over issues of state-influenced and state intervening economic policy. Polls taken in Britain prior to the 1979 election likewise showed “ a massive 75% of respondents in favour of a reduction in state spending.” Similarly, “ the fall of the West German Social Democratic Party (SPD) in the 1982 coincided with a dramatic collapse of public confidence in the Schmidt administration’s handling of the economy. Only 17% of voters considered the SPD the party that guaranteed job security.” The lack of faith in government to solve such economic crises <https://assignbuster.com/a-comparison-between-britains-and-germanys-implementation-of-the-neo-conservative-model-in-governance/>

reflected a more general loss of faith in the political system. This lack of faith was also evident through the widespread decline in support for the major parties in Germany and Britain. Further, a deep skepticism was expressed over the capacity of government to handle economic depression or mitigate its effects. This was most clearly evident in attitudes to mass unemployment. Surveys conducted in

“ Britain in 1984 found that 55% of respondents accepted that high unemployment was something ‘ we’ll just have to live with’. In West Germany as well as Britain, majorities were all recorded in 1984 who believed economic conditions would deteriorate rather than improve in 1985.”

This continued to deter the credibility of the social democrats and other major parties in the views of their constituents. Between 1980 and 1987 “ the SPD were seen as less competent than the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) on every question relating to the economy: unemployment, inflation, economic growth and even social security.”

In assessing the appeal of the Neo-conservatism one of the first indications would be the broad shift in social attitudes. An essential part of the strategy of politicians like Margaret Thatcher in Britain was “ to adapt their party’s ideological appeal to perceived social changes in outlook and behaviour while simultaneously seeking to direct or shape those changes in order to create a permanent majority for their brand of politics.” Thatcher had made serious inroads into the post-war political culture in Britain, which were based on full employment, state intervention, and the welfare state. Both

<https://assignbuster.com/a-comparison-between-britains-and-germanys-implementation-of-the-neo-conservative-model-in-governance/>

Britain and West Germany had noted severe changes in political behaviour in the 1980s. This suggested a growing fragmentation of the party system and the diminishing credibility of the political process as a whole in the eyes of the voters. Along with economic issues, there were other public concerns such as law and order, the threat of war and racial issues. In Britain “ prior to the election of conservative governments, law and order came second only to unemployment in polls of the most pressing political issues among the voting public.” This was further supported by a poll taken in “ January 1978, which found that 61% of respondents agreed with Thatcher’s televised pronouncement that Britain was ‘ in danger of being swamped by people of different cultures’. Her personal popularity also leaped 11% in the immediate aftermath of the interview.” This behaviour of the general public indicates that the rise to power of Neo-conservative governments was preceded and accompanied by strong anti-liberal sentiments among the general voting public.

At this time there was also a deep crisis of belief in the corporate model of economic management, which was also expressed as “ marked skepticism over continued state intervention in the economy.” Initially, the Conservatives in Britain were committed to experiment with mixes of private and public sector provision in such areas as the National Health Service (NHS). The Conservatives sought to make changes to the NHS so as to allow more private intervention, but the Labor Party saw it as a threat to the NHS. However, a combination of factors pushed the privatization programme along further and faster than could have been predicted in 1979. The first term of the Thatcher administration underlined the difficulty of devising

<https://assignbuster.com/a-comparison-between-britains-and-germanys-implementation-of-the-neo-conservative-model-in-governance/>

consistent policies within the public sector for enterprises. Privatization brought together a number of features of the new blend of Conservatism fashioned under Thatcher's leadership:

" First it reduced the size of the public sector. Secondly it generated additional income for the government, which it could use to finance tax cut or a mix of tax cuts and additional public expenditures. Thirdly, it introduced the market into areas where it had hitherto not played a conspicuous part in the belief that this would generate greater economic efficiency and better value for money both for the citizen as taxpayer and the taxpayer as consumer. Thus there was a mix of pragmatic and ideological motives involved in the privatization process and it gathered a momentum of its own over the period 1979-1987."

In seeking to curb public expenditure the Neo-conservatives believed initially that it should be possible to concentrate services where they were most needed and to encourage a switch from public to private provision and many thought the tax system could have been used to encourage greater freedom of choices between the private and public sectors. Social security is a case in point. This area of spending was anticipated to attract government concern for the fact that " social security accounts for nearly 30% of public expenditures." This meant that ' any government desirous of curtailing the latter must devote considerable attention to the former'.

Germany is an organized-capitalist country that has relied on a network of small and large businesses working together. Rather than having a relationship of state versus market, the public and the private sector have

<https://assignbuster.com/a-comparison-between-britains-and-germanys-implementation-of-the-neo-conservative-model-in-governance/>

interpenetrated. This relationship is neither free-market nor state dominant. However, it is referred to as the Social Market Economy. This concept refers to “ a system of capitalism in which fundamental social benefits are essential to the workings of the market.” Market system is the major principle behind the social market economy. The reason why group-oriented outcomes were beneficial for the major social forces in the FRG was due to high wages, high social spending, and the necessity to keep German goods competitive on the world markets. Due to such methods, Germany has been able to avoid instability, unlike what was caused between the laissez-faire and the state led economic policy that have characterized Britain.

The crisis of economic growth from 1974-75 boosted the ‘ new’ Conservatism in Germany led by CDU against the SPD. Neo-conservatism offered new solutions to both the economic and the cultural crisis of capitalist democracies. In economic policy, “ it promoted a free-market-led acceleration of industrial capitalist growth towards [a] new utopia.” German conservatism underwent a remarkable change of thinking with respect to its ideological traditions. The Neo-conservative concept required a strong state not only to maintain the economic and social order, but also to dismantle the social democratic welfare state. They wanted to promote “ the coming boom by drastic cuts in business taxation, welfare expenditure, and by the removal of regulations restraining employment. This [implied] a substantial change of the relationship between the state and the economy in post-war West Germany.”

The success of economic modernization also depended on simultaneous social reforms. The family functions operated as the heart of a Neo-conservative modernization of society: "The fate of the family is decisive for the future of our society." This type of modernization recognized that "under changing economic-technological and sociocultural conditions the family could only perform its old functions in new forms." More than that, "this Neo-conservative willingness to reform might be of economic use, because the challenges confronting a modern and human industrial nation can hardly be mastered without the expertise and the creativity of women." Under the given premise, not only the distribution of roles within the family will have to change, but also its social context within which it operates. Those functions formerly:

"provided by relatives should now be executed within neighborhoods, by free associations, private initiatives, and self-help groups. They should replace the bureaucratic welfare state thereby relieving the public budgets: They help to cure the structural causes of the welfare state's fiscal crisis'."

In sum, the modernization of the economy and society were some of the keystones of Neo-conservative ideologies in West Germany in the 1980s.

The goal of the Neo-conservatives was to build something new. In general, state intervention into the economy had to be reduced and the Free Market Economy had to be strengthened. The

"Conservative-liberal coalition had planned to strengthen business profits; the consolidation of public budgets; the reorganization of the welfare state

by concentrating public social expenditure on 'the truly needy'; and the removal of 'excessive regulation' to increase the dynamics and flexibility of the capitalist market economy."

With this programme, German Neo-conservatism seemed to have gained importance, not only ideologically but also politically for the first time since World- War II.

Neo-Conservatism has concentrated on price stability and growth, even when the cost is a high level of unemployment. In general, the trade-off has proved acceptable to a majority of the electorate in Britain. The period of Thatcher's leadership of the British Conservative party had seen a number of important changes both in the general character of party politics and in their policymaking. "The political influence of the Neo-conservative project has been restricted not only by the political weakness of West German neo-conservatism but also by various institutional restrictions in the party system and state structure." Germany's political economy and development has shown that a greater degree of institutional stability has existed since World War II. Part of the reason for this stability has been the ability to dominate economic and political leaders to retain

a balance between the private and public sectors. Britain has had a tighter control over its economy than Germany. However, presently it is in a better position than it was under the Neo-conservative ideologies. I don't feel Germany has been affected much by Neo-conservatism. It has always put the people as well as the social programs first, which has seemed to operate in an orderly manner without causing any major discrepancies in its

<https://assignbuster.com/a-comparison-between-britains-and-germanys-implementation-of-the-neo-conservative-model-in-governance/>

economy. It has also managed to keep its economy stable and keep its goods competitive in the world markets. The German model of economic growth has proved remarkably durable through almost all of the postwar period and it continues to so presently.