

The Political Spectrum

Radical/Revolutionary---->Liberal---->Moderate---->Conservative---->Reactionary



A spectrum of continuum is a range of values or attitudes towards change. It indicates a range of ideas from one extreme to the other. The two extremes are very similar in their techniques and attitudes, but have very different values and goals.

Most people fit into the area from liberal to conservative. These people are satisfied with the basic system, although they may want to change some aspects of it. They are not willing to make major changes in the basic structure of how things are.

People on the right tend to like things as they are or as they used to be. In some books it states that conservatives want to “maintain the status quo” or “keep things as they are”. This does not mean conservatives do not want any change. Conservatives favor slow, careful change. They want to be sure what they are changing to is better than what they have now. Reactionaries believe that change has gone too far, and that they must move rapidly back to the way things were.

People on the left are more willing to try new solutions to problems. They are optimistic that if what you try doesn't work, you can always try something else. How much risk they are willing to take depends on how far left they are on the spectrum. A radical wants to throw the whole system out and start with something new.

The people at both ends of the spectrum want immediate change now, and are willing to use violence if necessary to achieve their ends. They do not wish to listen to other opinions, they are sure they are right.

A few words of caution must be said about these labels. Although they are used very frequently in our culture, there may be a great difference in the meaning of the terms. What is liberal on one context may be conservative in another. Just think of the clothing that high school students wear. Parents might think that a certain outfit is terrible or even obscene, while other students might think the outfit is just right, or even tame. Time frame also plays a part in what is radical or not. Many of the ideas we accept as commonplace today were major innovations fifty years ago. We do not consider women voting or holding political office as very radical today, certainly 80 years ago it was a revolutionary idea.

Another problem with these labels is that few people believe in the same way on all issues. Here in Saratoga for example, most people are conservative in politics, but liberal when it comes to environment. You cannot assume that because someone is basically conservative, s/he will believe everything according to the conservative party line

Liberal/Conservative

Liberal: One who wants to free or liberate the present system from problems that limit progress. A liberal likes our system, but wants progressive change to improve it.

Basic Beliefs of Liberalism:

1. Traditional moral values are fine, but they are not necessarily for everybody. Willing to accept variations from the normal behavior as long as they do not threaten the peace and safety of the whole.
2. Free enterprise is far superior to socialism, but business must be controlled for the public benefit.
3. We should have a strong military, but its presence should be de-emphasized. As long as we have enough to defend our country and fulfill our obligations, we have an adequate military.
4. Strong belief in the political freedoms enshrined in the US Constitution

Conservative: One who wants to conserve, save, or preserve what is best about our political system and our society. A conservative views our country and asks, "What are the values that have made this great society?" and pledges to see that those values are maintained.

Basic Beliefs of Conservatives:

1. For Traditional moral values – those things that threaten the nuclear family are to be resisted.
2. For Free enterprise capitalism without undue government restriction.
3. We must have the strongest military in the world
4. Strong belief in the political freedoms enshrined in the US Constitution.

Similarities Between Liberals and Conservatives

1. The US is the best country in the world – the most free country with a high standard of living.
2. The rule of law is superior to the rule of man. Both groups have great faith in working within the system.
3. The Constitution is a major reason for our success, but there is a tremendous disagreement over exactly what the Constitution means!!

Differences Between Liberals and Conservatives

<u>Liberal</u>	<u>Conservative</u>
Optimistic – man <u>tends</u> to be good	Pessimistic – man <u>tends</u> to be evil
Bad conditions cause crime Solution: Rehabilitate people	Bad people cause crime Punish people: including execution
Government must equalize opportunity for all people Federal government must step in at times	The best government governs least Government must be limited. State/Local government best
On moral issues the individual should win	On moral issues the group should win
On economic issues the group should win	On economic issues the individual should win