

THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM

While most people can agree on things such as “children should receive free education” and “welfare good for the impoverished and unable”, it is very commonly the case that nobody can agree on things beyond the surface level, for example, what defines “unable”?

Usually, these beliefs can be placed upon a linear spectrum, ranging from liberal (left) to conservative (right). To be clear, this does not mean the parties but rather the ideologies (it is possible for the parties to switch ideologies).

On the right side of the spectrum are **conservatives**, who favor law, order, tradition, strict boundaries, smaller government, etc.

On the left side of the spectrum are **liberals**, who favor experimentation, larger government, leniency in government, etc.

POLITICAL CULTURE

DEFINITION: the set of attitudes that determine conduct in government. This includes limited government, equal opportunity, individualism, free enterprise, rule of law, etc.

Individualism is the belief that the worth and freedoms of an individual is of utmost importance. Varying interpretations exist, ranging from **self centered individualism** (individual over group) and **enlightened individualism** (the individual is still important in comparison to the group but it is agreed that they can sacrifice some rights for a certain group).

Equal opportunity is the belief that all persons should be allowed to go as far as they can carry themselves; and that people in similar situations should be treated the same nationwide. Nobody can agree necessarily on how to implement this, however, it is agreed upon that equality in opportunity is a key American value. This is reflected in things such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Committee, the Civil Rights Acts, etc.

Free enterprise is the belief that business should regulate itself through the decisions made by those in the marketplace, and that the government should not hold excessive control over business (only intervening when a market poses a potential threat to the security of the United States). This still is a large part of policy today, especially for conservatives, although it is now agreed upon that some controls such as environmental protection laws are OK.

Rule of law is the belief that the law should apply to all equally (citizens and leadership alike). This is why we have systems in place to stop corruption, ensure peaceful and efficient transfer of powers, place limits on public officials' power, protect and uphold the laws created, etc.

Limited government is the belief that government should be restrained from strong arming and taking excessive control over citizens. Almost all agree that citizens should not be subject to the heavy hand of a despotic government. The Bill of Rights is a prime example of this, with the document not only protecting the rights of citizens but also defining what the government is

forbidden to do. This can affect areas ranging from business (“can the government regulate business to this extent?”) to civil liberties (“at one point does it become unreasonable search and seizure?”).

POLITICAL EXERCISE (attempt, correct answers are not guaranteed)

1. Title 9 (attempts to curb sexism in educational institutions) is based on the value of equal opportunity.
2. The USA PATRIOT ACT (created after 9/11 in order to preserve security) is based on the value of the rule of law.
3. The 14th Amendment (contains the EQPC) is based on the value of limited government and/or equal opportunity.
4. Brown v. BOE (sets the precedent that separate but equal is not in fact equal) is based on the value of limited government and/or equal opportunity.
5. The commerce clause (which gives Congress the power “to regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian tribes.”) is based on the value of free enterprise.