

# **A Summary of the Conservative Republican Viewpoint**

## **Executive Summary**

The conservative Republican viewpoint in the United States is characterized by a commitment to individual liberty, limited government, free-market capitalism, and traditional social values often rooted in Christian principles. Economically, it advocates for lower taxes, reduced government spending, and deregulation. Socially, it emphasizes traditional family structures, supports gun rights, and opposes abortion and extensive government intervention in personal lives. In foreign policy, it generally favors a strong national defense and assertive American leadership, though historical stances have varied. This ideology is deeply influenced by the U.S. Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, and its evolution has been shaped by significant historical events and influential figures.

## **1. Introduction: Defining Conservative Republicanism**

Conservative Republicanism represents a significant ideological current within American politics, grounded in a commitment to tradition, limited government, and established institutions. Its core principles, such as liberty, adherence to the rule of law, and a belief in God, are deeply informed by the ideals of the Founding Fathers.<sup>1</sup> The Republican Party has largely served as the primary political vehicle for conservative thought in the United States, with a substantial number of conservatives aligning themselves with Republican candidates.<sup>1</sup> However, it is important to acknowledge that the relationship is not absolute; not all conservatives identify as Republicans, nor are all Republicans necessarily conservative, reflecting a degree of internal diversity within the party.<sup>1</sup>

The modern conservative movement, as it is understood today, gained considerable prominence in the aftermath of World War II. Its rise was largely a direct response to the substantial expansion of the federal government under Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal policies during the 1930s.<sup>1</sup> This historical genesis suggests that modern conservative Republicanism is not merely a static set of principles but a dynamic ideology significantly shaped by its opposition to perceived governmental overreach, particularly the expansion of federal power during the New Deal era. This foundational characteristic continues to inform its skepticism toward large-scale government programs and intervention, often framing policy positions as a counter-movement to

liberal or progressive initiatives rather than solely as proactive proposals. Such a stance can lead to a consistent emphasis on limiting or dismantling existing governmental structures.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Foundational Principles and Core Ideology**

The bedrock of conservative Republicanism rests upon several interconnected philosophical tenets that guide its approach to governance and societal organization. These principles are deeply embedded in American historical documents and cultural norms.

### **Emphasis on Individualism and Limited Government**

A central tenet of conservative Republicanism is the profound belief that individual achievement and free markets are the primary engines of economic prosperity.<sup>2</sup> This conviction translates into a strong advocacy for limited government intervention in the daily lives of citizens and the broader economy. The underlying assumption is that individuals are better equipped to address their own challenges without extensive governmental involvement.<sup>1</sup> At its core, this perspective values the freedoms of individual Americans, seeking to maximize these liberties within a constitutional framework of representative government.<sup>6</sup> From this viewpoint, the fundamental role of a centralized government, particularly in peacetime, is confined to protecting citizens' lives, liberty, and property, with any additional governmental activities seen as inherently diminishing freedom and impeding progress.<sup>5</sup>

### **Role of the U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence**

American conservatism is firmly rooted in the principle of republicanism, a system that fundamentally rejects aristocratic and monarchical forms of government.<sup>5</sup> The Declaration of Independence serves as a foundational ideological document, with particular emphasis placed on its assertion that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness".<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the U.S. Constitution, which established a federal republic under the rule of law, is regarded as a guiding doctrine and principle.<sup>1</sup> This constitutional conservatism stresses the preservation of the Constitution's original principles, including enumerated powers and the defense of liberty, often aligning with a judicial philosophy of originalism, which interprets the Constitution based on its meaning at the time of its adoption.<sup>5</sup>

## **Importance of Traditional Values, Often Rooted in Christian Beliefs**

A significant component of American conservatism draws support from the Christian right, interpreting Christian values and moral absolutism as guiding principles for society.<sup>5</sup> This perspective generally champions "traditional family values" and advocates for what is perceived as a moral lifestyle, frequently rooted in Christian religious beliefs.<sup>1</sup> The family unit is often considered the fundamental bedrock of a successful civilization, with marriage and fidelity viewed as divinely commanded and essential for a thriving society.<sup>6</sup>

While a central tenet of conservative Republicanism is the championing of individual liberty and the maximization of personal freedoms, this liberty is frequently understood and applied within the confines of a specific, pre-defined set of "conservative values".<sup>6</sup> These values are often rooted in Judeo-Christian ethics, leading to positions that advocate for restrictions on certain expressions of freedom, such as opposition to abortion, same-sex marriage, and gender-affirming treatments for minors.<sup>2</sup> This creates a discernible tension, where the freedom to act in accordance with traditional moral or religious principles may, in practice, take precedence over other individual liberties. This hierarchical understanding of rights and freedoms is a defining characteristic of many contemporary "culture war" debates.

## **Belief in States' Rights and Opposition to Excessive Federal Intervention**

Conservative Republicans typically advocate for a balance of power between the federal government and individual states, emphasizing states' rights.<sup>5</sup> They tend to support robust governmental action in areas considered within the legitimate jurisdiction of government, such as national defense and law enforcement. Conversely, they generally oppose extensive federal intervention in social issues like healthcare and environmental regulation.<sup>5</sup>

American conservatism is not a monolithic ideology; rather, it draws from two distinct, yet often interwoven, philosophical traditions. On one hand, fiscal conservatism is deeply rooted in classical liberalism, emphasizing individual economic liberty, *laissez-faire* economics, and limited government intervention in the marketplace.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, a strong current of traditionalism emphasizes inherited wisdom, established social order, and a morality frequently derived from religious beliefs.<sup>1</sup> This dual heritage helps to explain the varied emphasis seen within the conservative movement, ranging from libertarian-leaning fiscal conservatives to deeply socially

conservative religious fundamentalists, and is crucial for comprehending the internal debates and coalition-building dynamics within the Republican Party.

### **3. Economic Policies: Fiscal Conservatism in Practice**

The Republican Party's economic platform is firmly anchored in the principles of fiscal conservatism, advocating for policies that promote free markets, individual enterprise, and limited government involvement in economic affairs.

#### **Advocacy for Lower Taxes**

A cornerstone of Republican economic policy is the consistent advocacy for lower taxes. This stance is predicated on the belief that free markets and individual achievement are the primary drivers of economic prosperity.<sup>2</sup> Republicans often favor supply-side economic policies, which posit that reducing marginal tax rates stimulates overall economic activity, leading to increased GDP growth and potentially generating equivalent or even higher government revenues in the long term due to expanded economic output.<sup>2</sup> This perspective often leads to opposition against graduated tax rates, which are viewed as unfairly burdening "job and wealth creators," and a general stance against the estate tax.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond simply advocating for lower taxes to stimulate economic activity, a notable strategy within fiscal conservatism is the concept of "starve the beast".<sup>8</sup> This approach posits that tax cuts, even if they lead to short-term budget deficits, are a deliberate mechanism to reduce government revenue, thereby creating pressure for future spending cuts and ultimately leading to a smaller overall government. This reveals a more aggressive and intentional approach to shrinking the size and scope of the state. This strategy can result in increased national debt in the near term, which then often becomes a political argument for further expenditure reductions, highlighting a fundamental disagreement on the fundamental role of government – whether it is primarily a revenue generator or a service provider.

#### **Support for Reduced Government Spending and National Debt**

Fiscal conservatism is fundamentally rooted in the principle of prudence regarding government spending and debt.<sup>8</sup> Republicans consistently advocate for reduced government spending and a lower national debt, with the ultimate aim of achieving balanced budgets.<sup>2</sup> This commitment extends to supporting the reduction of

government-run welfare programs, preferring instead to empower private-sector nonprofits and encourage greater personal responsibility.<sup>2</sup> In the realm of healthcare, this translates into strong opposition to government-run single-payer systems, often labeled as "socialized medicine," in favor of personal or employer-based insurance models.<sup>2</sup>

**Preference for Deregulation and Laissez-Faire Economics**

A defining characteristic of conservative Republican economic policy is a strong preference for less government regulation of the market, adhering closely to a *laissez-faire* economic philosophy.<sup>2</sup> The prevailing belief is that government should largely refrain from interfering in business affairs. While this is the general stance, some conservatives do acknowledge a limited need for regulation, viewing the government as a necessary "referee" to ensure fair private enterprise or to provide essential "safety nets" for the disadvantaged.<sup>3</sup>

**Key Economic Policy Positions of Conservative Republicans**

Policy Area	Conservative Republican Stance
Taxation	Advocate for lower taxes (e.g., marginal income, inheritance); support supply-side economics; oppose graduated tax rates. <sup>2</sup>

**4. Social and Cultural Positions**

Conservative Republicans hold distinct social and cultural positions, largely informed by their commitment to traditional values, often with a foundation in Christian beliefs. These positions influence their stances on family, education, individual freedoms, and broader societal issues.

**Emphasis on Traditional Family Values and Moral Conduct**

Social conservatives within the Republican Party strongly advocate for policies that uphold traditional family values, frequently rooted in Christian principles.<sup>1</sup> This includes a firm opposition to same-sex marriage and transgender rights, with the 2016 Republican platform explicitly defining marriage as "the union of one man and one woman".<sup>2</sup> The family is often described as the fundamental unit of a successful society, with marriage and fidelity seen as foundational to a thriving civilization.<sup>6</sup> This

perspective also extends to a broader emphasis on moral conduct and the preservation of "traditional" values, which are perceived as being threatened by secularism and moral relativism.<sup>1</sup>

### **Views on Education and School Choice**

In education policy, conservative Republicans generally support school choice initiatives, such as charter schools and school vouchers for private and parochial schools.<sup>2</sup> They frequently criticize the performance of the public school system and teachers' unions, advocating for greater accountability, as exemplified by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.<sup>2</sup> A significant aspect of their educational stance is the support for school-sanctioned prayer in public schools, arguing that judicial decisions banning it have marginalized Christianity in public education.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, they often support the right of teachers to present creationism or intelligent design alongside evolution.<sup>2</sup> A core belief is that children should not be subjected to indoctrination in schools that runs counter to family values; instead, family values should be celebrated within educational environments.<sup>6</sup>

### **Interpretation of Individual Freedoms and Social Restrictions**

While conservative Republicanism champions individual freedoms, this concept is often interpreted through the lens of traditional values, leading to support for restrictions on certain behaviors. A key example is the stance on abortion, with a majority of Republican candidates nationally and at the state level holding at least moderately anti-abortion views, often on religious or moral grounds.<sup>2</sup> While some may allow exceptions for rape, incest, or to save the mother's life, others have shifted to accepting exceptions only when the mother's life is at risk.<sup>2</sup> The 2012 party platform explicitly declared that "the unborn child has a fundamental individual right to life which cannot be infringed".<sup>2</sup>

Regarding gun ownership, Republicans generally support expansive gun rights, opposing laws that regulate firearms, including bump stocks and large-capacity magazines, citing the Second Amendment.<sup>2</sup> They have historically supported the War on Drugs and opposed drug legalization, though recent years have seen some weakening of opposition to marijuana legalization within the party.<sup>2</sup>

On issues of race and culture, conservative Republicans generally oppose programs like affirmative action and reparations for slavery, asserting that America is not a racist country and that legislation should be "colorblind".<sup>2</sup> They often embrace individualism and reject collectivism associated with identity politics.<sup>5</sup> This includes opposition to critical race theory and gender-affirming treatments and surgeries for

minors.<sup>2</sup> Concerns are also expressed regarding unchecked immigration, with a preference for assimilation into a common English-speaking American culture over multiculturalism.<sup>5</sup>

## **5. Foreign Policy and National Security**

The Republican Party has historically held a diverse range of views on foreign policy and national defense, generally advocating for a more militaristic approach, though with notable exceptions for isolationist and libertarian elements.<sup>9</sup>

### **Strong National Defense and Military Spending**

A consistent theme in conservative Republican foreign policy is the prioritization of a strong national defense and increased military spending.<sup>1</sup> This stance is rooted in the belief that a robust military is essential for protecting national interests and projecting American power globally.<sup>5</sup> Historically, Republicans have championed a strong military to counter perceived threats, notably communism during the Cold War.<sup>1</sup>

### **Approaches to International Relations**

Republican foreign policy has evolved through various phases, from periods of isolationism to assertive interventionism. In the 1920s, Republicans supported world disarmament, and in the 1930s, many favored isolationism, strongly opposing intervention in World War II until the attack on Pearl Harbor.<sup>9</sup> However, by 1945, internationalist views became dominant, leading to support for Cold War policies such as the Truman Doctrine, Marshall Plan, and NATO.<sup>9</sup>

During the Cold War, figures like Ronald Reagan reignited a more confrontational approach, rejecting détente and initiating a massive military buildup, including the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).<sup>9</sup> The Reagan Doctrine involved providing overt and covert aid to anti-communist resistance movements to "roll back" Soviet-backed governments.<sup>9</sup> Following the Cold War, Republican foreign policy saw varied approaches, from George H.W. Bush's leadership in the Gulf War to George W. Bush's post-9/11 War on Terrorism, which included invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>9</sup>

A new conservative foreign policy perspective emphasizes that governments are granted limited rights by individuals for agreed-upon purposes, and this foundational belief in individual dignity drives a commitment to freedom both domestically and internationally.<sup>10</sup> This perspective suggests that extending the model of representative governance to international behavior is a natural progression, as it has proven effective in maximizing human flourishing domestically.<sup>10</sup> This view implies a



preference for promoting democracy and American ideals globally.

## Conclusion

The conservative Republican viewpoint is a complex and evolving ideology, deeply rooted in specific interpretations of American founding principles. At its core, it champions individual liberty, limited government, and free-market capitalism, viewing these as essential for economic prosperity and societal well-being. This perspective is often intertwined with a strong commitment to traditional social values, frequently derived from Judeo-Christian ethics, which can lead to a nuanced application of individual freedoms, favoring those aligned with established moral norms.

Economically, while historically favoring free trade, the party has demonstrated a capacity for adaptation, as evidenced by the recent shift towards protectionism under specific leadership. Socially, its positions on issues like abortion, gun rights, and education reflect a desire to preserve traditional structures and values. In foreign policy, a consistent emphasis on strong national defense and American leadership has been maintained, though the specific approaches to international engagement have varied over time, reflecting internal debates and changing global dynamics.

The ongoing interplay between classical liberal ideals (economic freedom, limited government) and traditionalist impulses (social order, religious morality) continues to define the internal landscape of conservative Republicanism. This dual philosophical heritage, coupled with the party's responsiveness to historical events and influential figures, ensures that the conservative Republican viewpoint remains a dynamic force in American politics, constantly navigating its core principles amidst changing societal and global contexts.

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