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Political Ideologies: Contemporary Liberalism vs. Conservatism

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Our political culture is separated by two different contemporary political ideologies: liberalism and conservatism. These two schools of thought have two distinct ways in which they view topics such as individualism, freedom, and equality.

For liberals, individualism means that everyone, no matter who they are, should have equal rights and be able to express themselves, especially in the arts and humanities. On the other hand, conservatives take individualism to mean that everyone is in charge of their own lives and should not have to trust the government for everything. For this reason, they strongly value work ethic and the concept of an individual’s hard work.

The concepts of freedom, liberty, and rights also set these two schools of thought apart from one another. Conservatives view rights as naturally coming from God, reinforcing their lack of trust in government. Liberals on the other hand, rely heavily on the government to protect their rights, especially when it comes to civil rights.

Three topics that polarize liberalism and conservatism the most are religion, women’s rights and civil rights. The liberal view of religion has always been an interesting one. According to a Dan Linker article written for *The New Republic*, liberals view freedom of religion as a good thing as long as the “barrier between church and state” is upheld. The article also points out religion’s decreasing relevance in American politics today.

The conservative view of religion is a much more traditional one. Conservatives view religion as one of key factors in their belief system. Conservative opposition to abortion, gay marriage, and a range of other issues stem from the strong influence that religion, specifically Christianity, has on conservative thought.

Women’s rights, especially the topic of equal pay for women, have been quite a hot topic in recent years. Liberals are most vocal about this issue. They believe that while progress has been made since the feminist movement began, equal pay is still a big issue that must be handled by the government once and for all for not only women, but also minority groups just like them.

According to a Brookings article by Jessica Lee, the solution to this problem lies in the government’s improving of access to well-paying jobs because while some women may have the same level of experience as their male peers, they still do not get paid as much as them. Lee goes on to point out that this gap is even larger for black and Latina women.

The conservative view of equal pay has always been a more traditional one, but an article written by Laura Trueman for *The Heritage Foundation* considers a different approach. Trueman argues that the pay gap between women and men is much smaller than advertised and that women already have the law behind them when it comes to equal pay. The real problem, according to Trueman, are that men have lower GPAs and less men are coming out of college with degrees. Because of this growing problem, the issue of equal pay should take a back seat while other matters such as this one are addressed. In other words, the conservative view of equal pay is much more of an issue to be brushed to the side while the liberal view of equal pay is much more assertive and determined to see the gap closed no matter how great or small it may be.

Lastly, the issue of civil rights one that is at the forefront of national conversation and one that has divided conservatives and liberals for decades. A Brookings article written by Joyce Ladner lays out the liberal view of civil rights very well. Ladner addresses the great strides that have come because of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 70s while also pointing out the current problems that we must address such as racial profiling and racial disparities, especially those in our criminal justice system.

For liberals, civil rights is not only limited to minorities, but also includes the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) communities. This inclusion emphasizes the liberal idea that freedom and equal rights should be extended to everyone no matter who they are or whom they choose to love. For this reason, the Supreme Court legalization of gay marriage was a huge win for those with a more liberal mindset.

However, once again, conservatives side with religion and traditionalism when it comes to this inclusion of the LGBTQ community into civil rights. According to a *Daily Signal* blog post written by Ryan Andersen, the conservative view of civil rights draws a line at including the LGBT community, especially regarding marriage equality. Andersen reinforces this claim, stating that while marriage should be color-blind, it cannot be gender-blind. He further separates civil rights from the marriage issue by saying that the courts should not have to redefine marriage based on what American opinion is about the definition of marriage.

From the numerous examples explained in this essay, it is clear that conservatives tend to take a traditionalistic approach on social issues while many liberals are more progressive and open-minded about many issues. These ideological differences continue to contribute to the political polarization of this nation.