

Rise of New Right Conservatism



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HISTORY LAB

OVERVIEW

In this history lab students work in groups to examine a set of eight documents exploring the question of What issues galvanized and united the conservative movement in the 1970s and 1980s? After creating a class list of issues groups are tasked with ranking those issues and defending their rankings with evidence from the documents. The lab is completed with students individually writing a letter from the perspective of one of the groups making up the conservative coalition of the 1970s/1980s to the Republican National Committee.

ESTIMATED TIME

One to two days

RELEVANT TEKS

US History (10)

The student understands the impact of political, economic, and social factors in the U.S. from the 1970s through 1990. The student is expected to: (D) describe the causes and key organizations of the conservative resurgence of the 1980s such as the Heritage Foundation and the Moral Majority.

US History (28) Social studies skills.

The student understands how historians use historiography to interpret the past and applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including technology. The student is expected to: (A) analyze primary and secondary sources such as maps, graphs, speeches, political cartoons, and artifacts to acquire information to answer historical questions (B) analyze information by applying absolute and relative chronology through sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing and contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations, making predictions, drawing inferences, and drawing conclusions (C) apply the process of historical inquiry to research, interpret, and use multiple types of sources of evidence (D) evaluate the validity of a source based on corroboration with other sources and information about the author, including points of view, frames of reference, and historical context (E) identify bias and support with historical evidence a point of view on a social studies issue or event.

Acknowledgement: Written by Renee Blackmon.

US History (29) Social studies skills.

The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to: (A) create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information using effective communication skills, including proper citations and avoiding plagiarism

STEPS TO CONDUCTING THE LAB

Initiate the Investigation

Provide students with a copy or display a copy of the electoral election results for U.S. presidential elections. Students are instructed to examine the results from 1969-1988 overall and specifically examine the change from 1976-1980. Teachers may need to explain that the red represents electoral votes for the Republican Party candidate and blue represents the electoral votes for the Democratic Party candidate.

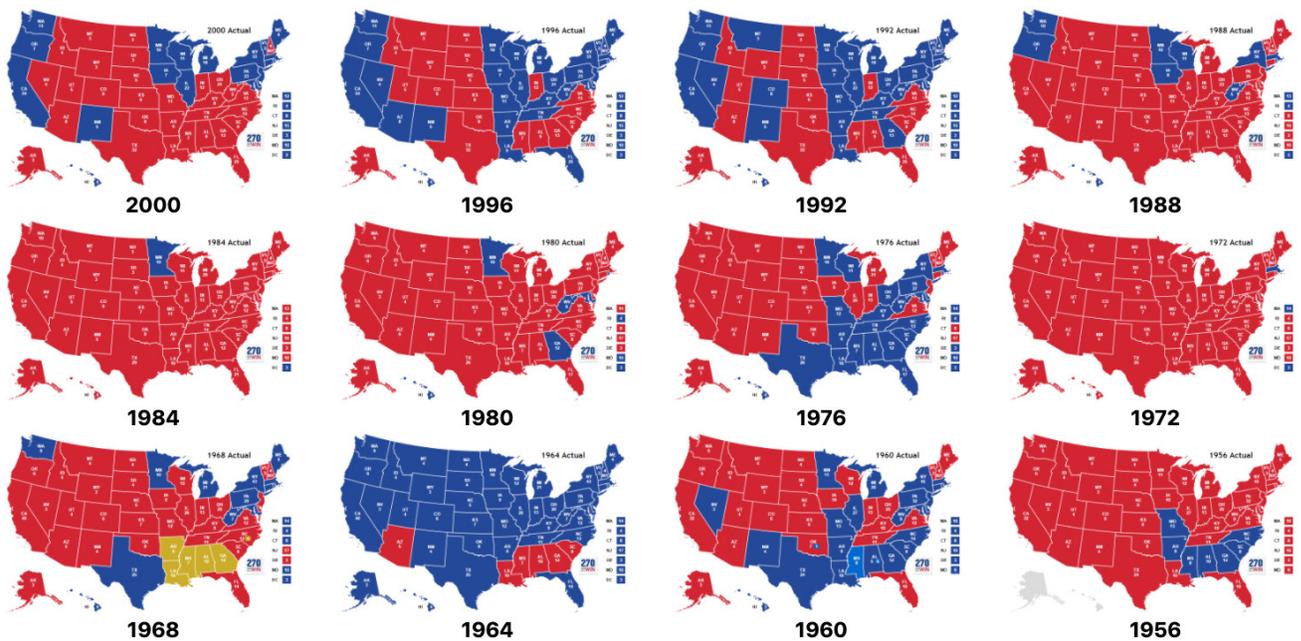
Provide students with a copy or display a copy of the Congressional Representation Table. Students are instructed to examine the table for what patterns emerge in regards to congressional control by the two major U.S. political parties during the 1960s-1980s.

Students may be prompted to respond to the following:

What patterns do you notice?

What changes/continuities do you observe over time?

Debrief student observations and relate that this history lab is about exploring the causes for the rise of a conservative movement that culminated in the 1980s and is reflected in the changing political patterns observed in the presidential election and the shift in senate leadership in the 1980s.



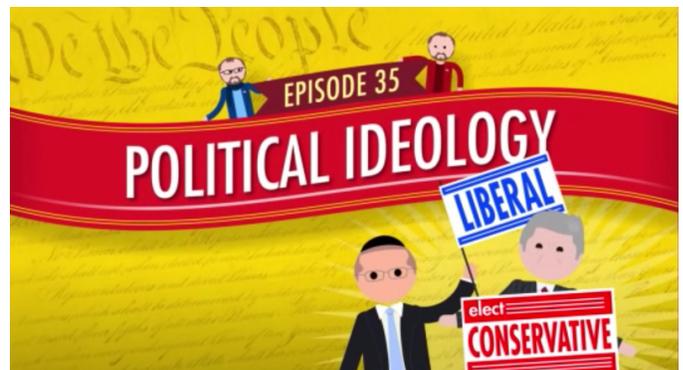
Source: <https://www.270towin.com/historical-presidential-elections/>

Congress	Years	Senate Democrats	Senate Republicans	Senate Independents	House Democrats	House Republicans
86th	1959-1961	65	35		282	153
87th	1961-1963	64	36		263	174
88th	1963-1965	66	34		258	176
89th	1965-1967	68	32		295	140
90th	1967-1969	64	36		248	187
91st	1969-1971	57	43		243	192
92nd	1971-1973	54	44		255	180
93rd	1973-1975	56	42	2	243	192
94th	1975-1977	61	37	2	291	144
95th	1977-1979	61	38	1	292	143
96th	1979-1981	58	41	1	278	157
97th	1981-1983	46	53	1	243	192
98th	1983-1985	45	55		269	166
99th	1985-1987	47	53		254	181
100th	1987-1989	55	45		258	177
101st	1989-1991	55	45		260	175

Sources: <https://history.house.gov/Institution/Party-Divisions/Party-Divisions/>
<https://www.senate.gov/history/partydiv.htm>

Build Background Knowledge

Before examining the reasons for the rise of the new right conservative movement in the 1970s it is important to understand the general distinction between liberal and conservative political ideologies. Students watch [Political Ideology: Crash Course Government and Politics #35 video on YouTube](#). Students record information during the video on the T-Chart on the following page.



Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_k_k-bHigM

Liberal Views	Conservative Views

Discuss student responses and check for understanding of what conservative and liberal mean in the context of political ideologies.

Introduce the Focus Question

What issues galvanized and united the conservative movement in the 1970s and 1980s?

Conduct Investigation

Create student groups and provide each group with a set of the sources. Instruct groups to create a list of issues that galvanized and united the conservative movement of the 1970s/1980s based on their analysis of the sources. Provide groups with resources to create lists for posting to the entire class.

- Source 1 – Inflation and Unemployment 1965-1984 chart
- Source 2 – Excerpt from “The Evolution of Divorce” by W. Bradford Wilcox, Fall 2009
- Source 3 – Excerpt from *Listen, America!*, 1980 by Jerry Falwell
- Source 4 – Excerpt from Republican party platform 1980
- Source 5 – Photo from Stop ERA protest, February 1977
- Source 6 – Excerpt from an address to the nation by President Reagan televised on February 5, 1981
- Source 7 – Excerpt from *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950–1980* by Charles Murry, 1984
- Source 8 – Excerpt from “The Real Origins of the Religious Right,” by Randall Balmer, *Politico*, May 2014

Report conclusions or interpretations

Student groups post lists around the room. Debrief what items are on the lists comparing the lists. Consolidate the lists to create one class list. Instruct groups to take the class consolidated list and rank the items from most influential to least influential.

Conduct a discussion based on groups' rankings, requiring student groups to defend their rankings with evidence from the sources. Consider adding to the list with other factors such as, big government-high taxes-urban riots- antiwar demonstrations- fear of communism asking students where those items may fall in the ranking.

Include in the discussion student responses to:

- Which source(s) provided the most reliable information? Why?
- What points of view were reflected in the sources? What evidence in the document supports your conclusion?
- What other sources would you want to have to help address the focus question?
- What can we infer about society in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s from the documents?

Debrief the investigation

Take the opportunity during this phase to provide more information about the rise of the conservative movement of the 1970s/1980s. Consider having students view [The Rise of Conservatism: Crash Course US History #41 video on YouTube](#).

Present information to students about which groups make up the new right conservative coalition and what became their causes, such as limited government, strong national defense, protection of traditional values.



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCrxD19DHA8>

Assess student comprehension of content

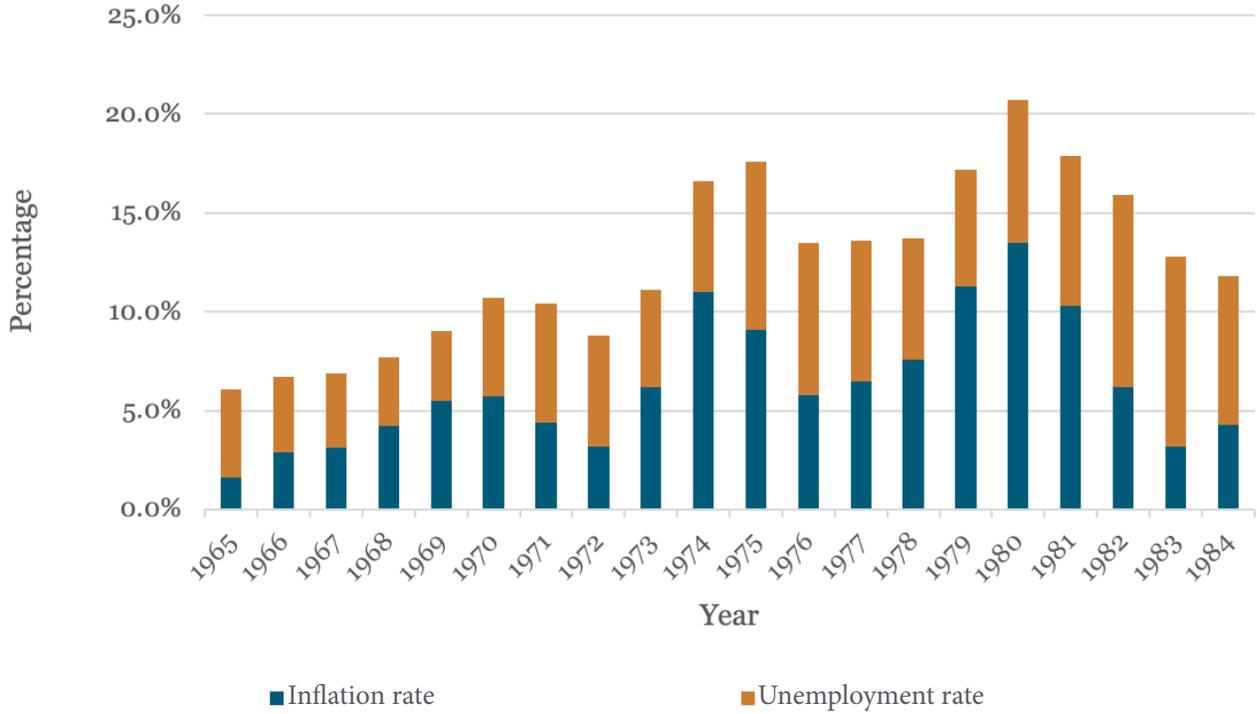
Write a letter from one of the following perspectives:

- business leader*
- middle class worker*
- disaffected Democrat*
- fundamentalist Christian*

The letter should be directed to the leadership of the Republican National Committee expressing your most pressing concerns that you want to see addressed in the election of 1980. Be sure to include in your letter the evidence you have for your concerns and explanation of why this issue should be considered a part of the campaign platform.

SOURCE 1

Inflation and Unemployment 1965-1984



Source: Inflation: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, CPI-U (1982-84=100), not seasonally adjusted, table CUUR0000SA0. Unemployment: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Series ID : lfs21000000.

SOURCE 2

This excerpt is from “The Evolution of Divorce” by W. Bradford Wilcox, Fall 2009. Wilcox is a sociologist and director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia and a senior fellow at the Institute for American Values.

The divorce revolution of the 1960s and '70s was over-determined. The nearly universal introduction of no-fault divorce helped to open the floodgates, especially because these laws facilitated unilateral divorce and lent moral legitimacy to the dissolution of marriages. The sexual revolution, too, fueled the marital tumult of the times: Spouses found it easier in the Swinging Seventies to find extramarital partners, and came to have higher, and often unrealistic, expectations of their marital relationships. Increases in women's employment as well as feminist consciousness-raising also did their part to drive up the divorce rate, as wives felt freer in the late '60s and '70s to leave marriages that were abusive or that they found unsatisfying.

SOURCE 3

This excerpt is from *Listen, America!*, 1980 by Jerry Falwell. Falwell was a conservative Southern Baptist pastor who as a conservative activist founded The Moral Majority, a lobbying group for evangelical Christians.

I believe that Americans want to see this country come back to basics, back to values, back to biblical morality, back to sensibility, and back to patriotism. Americans are looking for leadership and guidance. It is fair to ask the question, "If 84 percent of the American people still believe in morality, why is America having such internal problems?" We must look for the answer to the highest places in every level of government. We have a lack of leadership in America. But Americans have been lax in voting in and out of office the right and the wrong people.

My responsibility as a preacher of the Gospel is one of influence, not of control, and that is the responsibility of each individual citizen. Through the ballot box Americans must provide for strong moral leadership at every level. If our country will get back on the track in sensibility and moral sanity, the crises that I have herein mentioned will work out in the course of time and with God's blessings.

It is now time to take a stand on certain moral issues, and we can only stand if we have leaders. We must stand against the Equal Rights Amendment, the feminist revolution, and the homosexual revolution. We must have a revival in this country.

SOURCE 4

This excerpt is from the Republican Party Platform, 1980.

Overseas, our goal is equally simple and direct: to preserve a world at peace by keeping America strong. This philosophy once occupied a hallowed place in American diplomacy, but it was casually, even cavalierly dismissed at the outset by the Carter Administration—and the results have been shattering. Never before in modern history has the United States endured as many humiliations, insults, and defeats as it has during the past four years: our ambassadors murdered, our embassies burned, our warnings ignored, our diplomacy scorned, our diplomats kidnapped. The Carter Administration has shown that it neither understands totalitarianism nor appreciates the way tyrants take advantage of weakness. The brutal invasion of Afghanistan promises to be only the forerunner of much more serious threats to the West—and to world peace—should the Carter Administration somehow cling to power.

Republicans are united in a belief that America's international humiliation and decline can be reversed only by strong presidential leadership and a consistent, far-sighted foreign policy, supported by a major upgrading of our military forces, a strengthening of our commitments to our allies, and a resolve that our national interests be vigorously protected. Ultimately, those who practice strength and firmness truly guard the peace.

SOURCE 5

Activist Phyllis Schlafly wearing a “Stop ERA” badge, demonstrating with other women against the Equal Rights Amendment in front of the White House, Washington, D.C., February 4, 1977. Photo available at Library of Congress.



SOURCE 6

This excerpt is from an “Address to the Nation on the Economy” by President Reagan televised on February 5, 1981.

I’m speaking to you tonight to give you a report on the state of our Nation’s economy. I regret to say that we’re in the worst economic mess since the Great Depression.

A few days ago I was presented with a report I’d asked for, a comprehensive audit, if you will, of our economic condition. You won’t like it. I didn’t like it. But we have to face the truth and then go to work to turn things around. And make no mistake about it, we can turn them around.

I’m not going to subject you to the jumble of charts, figures, and economic jargon of that audit, but rather will try to explain where we are, how we got there, and how we can get back. First, however, let me just give a few “attention getters” from the audit.

The Federal budget is out of control, and we face runaway deficits of almost \$80 billion for this budget year that ends September 30th. That deficit is larger than the entire Federal budget in 1957, and so is the almost \$80 billion we will pay in interest this year on the national debt.

SOURCE 7

This excerpt is from *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950–1980*, 1984, by Charles Murry. Political scientist, Charles Murry's thesis presented in the book was controversial, yet the book is considered to have been very influential on public and social policy in the United States during the 20th century.

- Health and medical costs in 1980 were six times their 1950 cost.
- Public assistance costs in 1980 were thirteen times their 1950 cost.
- Education costs in 1980 were twenty-four times their 1950 cost.
- Social insurance costs in 1980 were twenty-seven times their 1950 cost
- Housing costs in 1980 were 129 times their 1950 cost

Overall, civilian social welfare costs increased by twenty times from 1950 to 1980, in constant dollars.¹ During the same period, the United States population increased by half.

Clearly, something went on during those three decades that reflected a fundamental change in policy. The federal government did not simply augment its expenditures; it increased them by many orders of magnitude.

It amounted to a revolution, a generous revolution. We altered a long-standing national consensus about what it means to poor, who the poor are, and what they are owed by the rest of society.

SOURCE 8

This excerpt is from “The Real Origins of the Religious Right,” by Randall Balmer, published in *Politico*, May 2014. Balmer is a professor at Dartmouth College.

In *Green v. Kennedy* (David Kennedy was secretary of the treasury at the time), decided in January 1970, the plaintiffs won a preliminary injunction, which denied the “segregation academies” tax-exempt status until further review. In the meantime, the government was solidifying its position on such schools. Later that year, President Richard Nixon ordered the Internal Revenue Service to enact a new policy denying tax exemptions to all segregated schools in the United States. . . .

On June 30, 1971, the United States District Court for the District of Columbia issued its ruling in the case, now *Green v. Connally* (John Connally had replaced David Kennedy as secretary of the Treasury). The decision upheld the new IRS policy. . .

Paul Weyrich, the late religious conservative political activist and co-founder of the Heritage Foundation, saw his opening. . . .

The *Green v. Connally* ruling provided a necessary first step: It captured the attention of evangelical leaders, especially as the IRS began sending questionnaires to church-related “segregation academies,” including Falwell’s own Lynchburg Christian School, inquiring about their racial policies. Falwell was furious. . . .

One such school, Bob Jones University—a fundamentalist college in Greenville, South Carolina—was especially obdurate. The IRS had sent its first letter to Bob Jones University in November 1970 to ascertain whether or not it discriminated on the basis of race. The school responded defiantly: It did not admit African Americans.

Although Bob Jones Jr., the school’s founder, argued that racial segregation was mandated by the Bible, Falwell and Weyrich quickly sought to shift the grounds of the debate, framing their opposition in terms of religious freedom rather than in defense of racial segregation. . . .

For many evangelical leaders, who had been following the issue since *Green v. Connally*, Bob Jones University was the final straw. As Elmer L. Rumminger, longtime administrator at Bob Jones University, told me in an interview, the IRS actions against his school “alerted the Christian school community about what could happen with government interference” in the affairs of evangelical institutions. “That was really the major issue that got us all involved.”