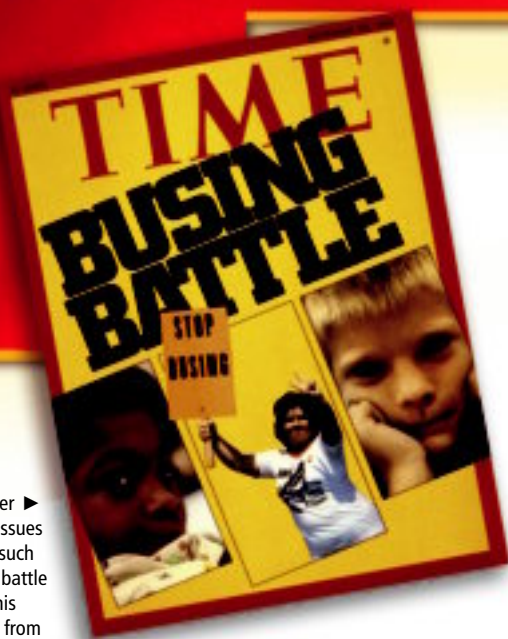


Frustration over ► controversial issues in the 1970s, such as the busing battle featured on this cover of *Time* from 1975, lingered into the 1980s.



WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

Backlash Against Liberal Programs

By 1980, public discontent with liberal programs, from welfare to school busing, had grown considerably. Many middle- and working-class Americans, in particular, felt that the reforms enacted during the 1960s and carried out in the 1970s threatened the American dream.

“If, during the 1960s and 1970s, there was an elite wisdom that shaped the directions of social policy, there was also a popular wisdom that explained why things were falling apart. . . . The popular wisdom is characterized by hostility toward welfare (it makes people lazy), toward lenient judges (they encourage crime), and toward socially conscious schools (too busy busing kids to teach them to read).”

—Charles Murray, *Losing Ground*, 1984

The Conservative Movement Grows

Objectives

- Describe the differences between liberal and conservative viewpoints.
- Analyze the reasons behind the rise of conservatism in the early 1980s.
- Explain why Ronald Reagan won the presidency in 1980.

Terms and People

liberal	unfunded mandate
conservative	Moral Majority
New Right	Ronald Reagan

NoteTaking

Reading Skill: Summarize As you read, summarize the rise of the conservative movement in an outline. Use the one below as a starting point.

- I. Two Views: Liberal and Conservative
 - A. Liberal ideas and goals
 - 1.
 - 2.

Why It Matters The 1964 election marked a low point for conservatives in the post–World War II era. Barry Goldwater, favorite of the conservative movement, lost the election in a landslide. Nonetheless, conservatives were not defeated by this loss at the polls. On the contrary, they set out to build an organization and to put forth a clear vision of their goals and values that would enable them to win in the future. By 1980, their plan had worked: Ronald Reagan, the new hero of the conservatives, was elected President. The modern conservative movement spearheaded by Ronald Reagan deeply affected the nation’s policies for decades. **Section Focus Question: What spurred the rise of conservatism in the late 1970s and early 1980s?**

Two Views: Liberal and Conservative


The two major political parties in the United States in the late twentieth century were the Democrats, many of whom were “liberals,” and the Republicans, who were often labeled “conservatives.” **Liberals** generally favored government intervention to help the needy, whereas **conservatives** generally favored allowing the free market, private organizations, and individuals to do that. Although the two parties did agree on many basic issues, including core American values such as freedom and equality, they diverged on many others. In addition, individual members within both parties did not always conform to their party’s majority.

The Ideas and Goals of Liberalism In the late 1970s, liberals tended to believe that the federal government should play a significant role in improving the lives of all Americans. They valued social programs that helped the poor, unemployed, elderly, and others. They also sponsored laws that protected the rights of minorities and women, especially in the post–World War II period. They supported greater government regulation of industry. In the foreign policy realm, liberals tended to favor cooperating with international organizations like the United Nations.

The Ideas and Goals of Conservatism In contrast, some conservatives felt that a large central government endangered economic growth and individual choice. They felt the liberal policies of the 1960s and 1970s left a legacy of rising inflation and enormous waste. Furthermore, some conservatives criticized the liberal solution of “throwing money” at social problems. They sought to reduce taxes and limit government regulation of industry in order to promote economic growth. As conservative economist Milton Friedman and his wife Rose Friedman wrote in their book *Free to Choose*, “The story of the United States is the story of an economic miracle. . . . What produced this miracle? Clearly not central direction by government.”

Other conservatives, neoconservatives or traditionalists, warned about the dangers posed to society by abandoning traditional values in favor of the new freedoms exemplified by the counterculture and advertised by the mass media. This concern with the perceived degeneration of modern youth dovetailed with many conservatives’ religious beliefs.


Anticommunism formed the third leg of modern conservatism. Most anticommunists focused on the dangers posed to the United States by the Soviet Union. They questioned the wisdom of the détente policy followed by Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter. They also fought against the SALT II treaty in the Senate.

 **Checkpoint** How was conservatism different from liberalism in the early 1980s?

Vocabulary Builder
degeneration—(dee jehn er AY shuhn) *n.* declining in quality

The Conservative Movement Gains Strength

During the 1940s and 1950s, the lines separating Republicans and Democrats had blurred. The two parties had developed a bipartisan foreign policy aimed at containing communism. Both favored a relatively significant role for the government in domestic affairs. However, during the 1960s and 1970s, many Republicans became increasingly critical of the liberal policies of the Democrats. They advanced a new conservative agenda. The differences between the two major parties grew more pronounced. The **New Right**, as the resurgent conservative movement was called, grew rapidly and was a coalition of several different groups with varying ideas and goals.

Two Viewpoints: Liberal and Conservative		 Quick Study
Issue	Liberal Viewpoint	Conservative Viewpoint
Role of government in the economy	Favored more government involvement to lessen extreme economic inequalities through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social programs (often leading to higher taxes) • government regulation of industry 	Favored limited government involvement in order to stimulate economic growth by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reducing taxes • decreasing regulation of industry
Foreign policy	Favored international diplomacy to combat communism in other countries	Favored relying on our own national defense and actively fighting against communism in other countries

Liberalism Loses Its Appeal One reason for the revival of the Republican Party was the unraveling of the Democratic Party. The Vietnam War and urban riots of the 1960s divided the same people who had rallied around President Johnson's vision of the Great Society. The rise of the counterculture had alienated many midwestern Americans and white conservative Christians in the South. Watergate, the oil crises of the 1970s, and the Iran hostage crisis further weakened the public's faith in the federal government.

Just as importantly, the shifts in the economy of the 1970s, including the decline in northern industries, dampened America's optimism about the future. America had supported the Great Society, in part, because Johnson had suggested that the war on poverty and other new programs would not demand higher taxes. When the economy stagnated, liberal ideas lost their pull and conservative beliefs became more attractive.

The New Right Criticizes Liberal Programs Many conservatives believed that liberal policies were responsible for stagflation and other economic problems of the late 1970s. They believed that the government taxed citizens and businesses too heavily and spent too much on the wrong programs. They complained about **unfunded mandates**, programs required but not paid for by the federal government.

Some conservatives also criticized federal welfare programs, arguing they rewarded lack of effort. Furthermore, they thought that the Great Society had made the problem of poverty worse not better. They believed that welfare contributed to the rise in the number of children born out of wedlock and therefore encouraged the decline of the traditional family, consisting of a married father and mother and their children. They also felt that affirmative action programs went too far and contributed to reverse discrimination.

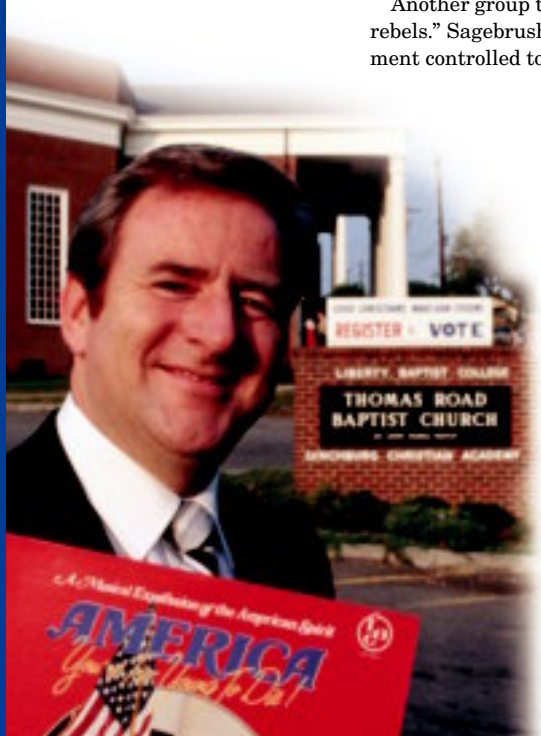
Another group that supported the conservative platform was the "sagebrush rebels." Sagebrush rebels were activists who believed that the federal government controlled too much land in the western states. They thought the federal government should give control of this land to the states, to be used to their best economic advantage. Most environmentalists opposed the movement, not wanting to expose preserved lands to possible development.

Religious Participation Rises At the same time, concern with cultural change caused more religious groups to become actively involved in politics. The **Moral Majority**, founded by Reverend Jerry Falwell in 1979, was a political organization working to fulfill religious goals. It also worried about the decline of the traditional family. The Moral Majority opposed the 1962 Supreme Court decision *Engel v. Vitale*, which forbade religious teaching in schools, as well as the historic 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, which legalized abortion. It condemned the Equal Rights Amendment and homosexuality.

The Moral Majority boosted the Republican Party's chances of winning the presidency by reaching out to Americans who had traditionally not participated in the political process. With other groups like it, the Moral Majority registered at least 2 million new voters before the 1980 presidential election. One of their tactics was to distribute Moral Majority "report cards" on candidates, which almost always favored Republicans.


Politics and Religion Meet

Reverend Jerry Falwell, founder of the Moral Majority, stands in front of his home church in Lynchburg, Virginia, in August 1980. A banner on top of the church's sign encourages members to register to vote. *How was the Moral Majority different from traditional religious groups?*



Population Trends Boost Conservatism Demographic, or population, trends also strengthened the conservative movement. Historically, northern cities stood as the stronghold of liberal Democrats. When an increasing number of Americans moved to the suburbs, their attachment to liberalism waned as they struggled financially during the tough economic days of the late 1970s. At the same time, Republicans emphasized issues that they believed would convince moderate liberals to switch their party allegiance. For instance, Republicans attacked school busing as a form of social engineering that threatened the long-cherished ideal of neighborhood schools.

Republicans also benefited from the migration from the Rust Belt to the Sunbelt, which took place in the 1970s, and a historical realignment of white voters in the Deep South. Since the Civil War, most white southerners had voted for the Democratic Party. Following the enactment of civil rights legislation in the mid-1960s, however, many white southerners began to shift their party allegiance. By the 1980s, the Republicans had become the dominant political party in the region.

 **Checkpoint** What were some of the forces that helped the Republican Party grow during the 1970s?

Reagan Wins the Presidency

The growing conservative movement swept the Republican presidential candidate, a man named **Ronald Reagan**, to victory in the 1980 election. Much more charismatic and polished than Goldwater, Reagan made clear his opposition to big government, his support for a strong military, and his faith in traditional values. Just as importantly, he radiated optimism, convincing Americans that he would usher in a new era of prosperity and patriotism.

Reagan's Path to the White House Born in Tampico, Illinois, in 1911, Reagan suffered the hardships of the Great Depression as a young adult before landing a job in Hollywood as a movie actor. Never a big star, Reagan appeared in many "B" or low-budget films. His most famous starring role was in *Knute Rockne*, a film based on the life of Notre Dame's legendary football coach.

When his acting career began to wane, Reagan became a spokesperson for General Electric and toured the nation giving speeches. Although once a staunch New Dealer, Reagan had become a Goldwater conservative. In these speeches he began to criticize big government and high taxes and warned of the dangers of communism. In 1964, near the end of Goldwater's presidential campaign, Reagan delivered a nationally televised address in which he spelled out these views:

Primary Source "This is the issue of this election, whether we believe in our capacity for self-government or whether we abandon the American Revolution and confess that a little intellectual elite in a far-distant capital can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves."

—Ronald Reagan, "A Time for Choosing," 1964

HISTORY MAKERS

Ronald Reagan (1911–2004)


Ronald Reagan's easy communication style, which appealed so much to his supporters, was rooted in his background as an entertainer. After graduating from college, he worked as a radio sports announcer until, in 1937, he signed a contract with a movie studio. In 1954, he began hosting a television show sponsored by General Electric. Soon, he was touring the country for the company, giving speeches that promoted traditional values and American business. As Reagan's views became more conservative, he switched from the Democratic to the Republican Party. He gained political fame in 1964 with a speech supporting conservative senator Barry Goldwater's run for the presidency.



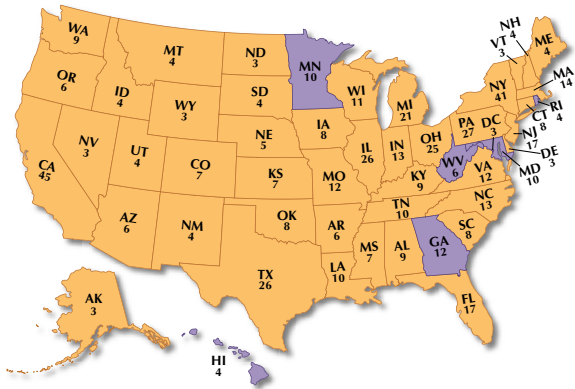
While the speech failed to bolster Goldwater's campaign, it won the admiration of many conservatives. Two years later, Reagan won the governorship of California. He served for two terms as governor and nearly won the Republican presidential nomination in 1976. In 1980, he won the nomination by a landslide. His opponent was Jimmy Carter, the Democratic incumbent.




Reagan Wins a Close Election As the election approached, Carter looked like a lame duck. Persistent inflation, the Iran hostage crisis, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan made it easy for Reagan to cast the Carter presidency in a negative light. "Are you better off than you were four years ago?" Reagan asked audiences on the campaign trail, knowing that most Americans would say, "No."

The race remained relatively close until about one week before the election, when Reagan and Carter held their only presidential debate. In this debate, Reagan's gifts as a communicator shone. He appeared friendly and even-tempered and calmed fears that he did not have enough experience to serve as President. On Election Day, Reagan won 50.6 percent of the popular vote. Because most states award electoral votes on a "winner-takes-all" basis, Reagan won an overwhelming majority of electoral college votes despite the narrow margin by which he won the popular vote. Even though the Democrats maintained control of the House of Representatives, Republicans captured the U.S. Senate for the first time since 1955. The conservatives were back.

 **Checkpoint** What did Ronald Reagan promise to do if elected to the presidency?

The Presidential Election of 1980



Candidate (Party)	Electoral Vote	Popular Vote	% Electoral Vote	% Popular Vote
 Ronald Reagan (Republican)	489	43,642,639	90.9	50.6
 James Carter (Democratic)	49	35,480,948	9.1	41.2
 John Anderson (Independent)	—	5,719,437	—	6.6

SECTION 1 Assessment

Progress Monitoring *Online*

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice
Web Code: nea-1902

Comprehension

1. Terms and People For each item below, write a sentence explaining how it related to the rise of conservatism in the late 1970s.

- liberal
- conservative
- New Right
- unfunded mandate
- Moral Majority
- Ronald Reagan

2. NoteTaking Reading Skill:

Summarize Use your outline to answer the Section Focus Question: What spurred the rise of conservatism in the late 1970s and early 1980s?

Writing About History

3. Quick Write: Choose a Topic

Choose a topic from this section, such as Ronald Reagan's path to the White House, that would suit the creation of a multimedia presentation. Keep in mind that a multimedia presentation is an oral report that is enhanced with artwork, charts, music, videos, and so on.

Critical Thinking

- 4. Compare Points of View** Describe one major difference between liberals and conservatives in the early 1980s.
- 5. Identify Central Issues** What policies did members of the New Right criticize?
- 6. Summarize** How did the Moral Majority help strengthen the Republican Party?
- 7. Draw Conclusions** Why did Americans elect Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1980?