

What Really Are Liberals and Conservatives?

In Australian society today we seem to be confused about the meaning of 'liberal' and 'conservative', in relation to politics. Either that, or we think we know what these terms mean, but we may be wrong. These possibilities need to be ironed out if we're going to be able to have discussions with people using the term correctly.

Liberal

There are three main meanings of 'liberal', one relates to progressiveness, one to a branch of political philosophy and the third to a political party.

1. **Progressive Liberal** – This the ideology of being permissive, of being widely open to new ideas, willing to depart from established opinions or conventions.¹ This is the basis of progressivism² (as in the 'progressive society') or modernism³ (even, post-modernism⁴), the antithesis of conservatism⁵. Known as "small 'L' liberals".
2. **Liberalism** (Liberal Philosophy) – "Liberalism is a political and moral philosophy based on the rights of the individual, liberty, consent of the governed and equality before the law. Liberals espouse a wide array of views depending on their understanding of these principles, but they generally support individual rights (including civil rights and human rights), liberal democracy, secularism, rule of law, economic and political freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, private property and a market economy."⁶ Bob Menzies⁷ was an adherent of Liberalism, and it was out of that ideological mindset that he created the Liberal Party, so that there was a focus on 'The Forgotten People'⁸. These were those who were not suburban and rich or members of organised labour (i.e. unionists). Liberals of this philosophy are not to be confused with Libertarians⁹ who originated as a form of left-wing politics such as anti-authoritarian and anti-state socialists like anarchists, especially social anarchists and Marxists.
3. **Liberal Party** – The Liberal Party of Australia¹⁰ was created by Bob Menzies in 1944 to have Liberalism as its core value.

Conservative

There are two main meanings of 'conservative', one relates to progressiveness, and the other to a branch of political thinking.

1. **Progressively Conservative** – Someone who is cautious, tending to resist change or innovation. A moderate.¹¹
2. **Politically Conservative** (Conservatism) – "Conservatism is an aesthetic, cultural, social, and political philosophy, which seeks to promote and to preserve traditional social institutions...In Western culture, conservatives seek to preserve a range of institutions such as organized religion, parliamentary government, and property rights. Adherents of conservatism often oppose progressivism¹² and seek a return to traditional values."¹³

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- 1 – en.wiktionary.org/wiki/liberal
 - 2 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progressivism
 - 3 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernism
 - 4 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernism
 - 5 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservatism
 - 6 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberalism
 - 7 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Menzies
 - 8 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Forgotten_People
 - 9 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libertarianism
 - 10 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_Party_of_Australia
 - 11 – en.wiktionary.org/wiki/conservative
 - 12 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progressivism
 - 13 – en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservatism