

3.2 Conservatism

Fundamental values and ideas.

Aspect: Origins of Conservative ideas.

This unit covers the specification elements related to “Origins of Conservative ideas”. It is designed to provide a background to the topic but is not inclusive of all potential material required for examination purposes. It concentrates on both the knowledge and analytical skills required for A2. It DOES NOT seek to prepare students directly in the skills and processes required for answering the end of year examinations.

Both teachers and students will also need to undertake their own research/reading in order to provide a fully comprehensive coverage of “Origins of Conservative ideas”. This additional research is especially important in updating current material on the topic, which was not known or available when this unit was prepared.

It is important that teachers read through this unit and explore the exercises prior to commencing. The unit can then be shaped best to the timings of the teacher and class concerned.

Aims and objectives

Aim:

The critical analysis of the origins of conservative ideas.

Objectives:

1. To examine the key conservative concepts.
2. To illustrate the theoretical foundations of conservatism.
3. To determine why certain ideas are so important to conservatives.
4. To identify areas of tension within conservatism.

WJEC Government and Politics Assessment Objectives

The following WJEC learning objectives areas are addressed:

A01 – The conceptual basis of conservatism

A02 - The similarities, differences and connections between conservatism and other ideologies concerning particular concepts; the similarities, differences and connections amongst conservatives concerning particular concepts

A03 - To seek to order the importance of central reasons and arguments with respect to determining the importance of particular concepts to conservatism

Further guidance

The session commences with a general introduction.

The teacher should let the students know that this study session provides an introduction to the theoretical basis of conservatism.

The teacher should introduce the session by asking ‘what beliefs do the following politicians have in common? – Theresa May, David Cameron, Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, Winston Churchill, Bismarck, Tsar Nicholas I.’ This could be done gradually, introducing each individual at a time. The teacher should then ask ‘what beliefs do the same politicians not have in common?’

Conclusion

Session concludes by teacher reminding the students that labels like conservative, authoritarian conservative, one nation, Christian democrat, neoliberal, neoconservative are groupings that we put on individuals. While this may help us to understand and organise such thinking it may not be the case that those individuals would recognise themselves adhering to these categories. It is quite legitimate for other analysts to come up with different labels for such categories.

Exercise 1: Origins of Conservative ideas



Guidance

Students don't have to do all the terms in one go. Students can be allotted a certain group of terms to complete, for instance half the class could do terms A-N while the other half do O-T. Students should undertake this exercise individually and then in pairs. They should then agree on an answer before feeding back to the whole class.

The teacher should also let the students know that by matching the terms and definitions they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO1 – *Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant institutions, processes, political concepts, theories and issues.*

The activity can be completed on a computer or tablet or on the printable worksheet included. It can also be returned to as a revision exercise.



Activity – Origins of Conservative ideas - Key terms and definitions

[Click to open activity](#)

[See Worksheet 1](#)

Students should match the key terms and definitions:

Key Term	Definition
Authoritarianism	A belief that strict obedience to authority is more desirable or necessary than personal liberty.
Authority	The power or right to influence the actions of others in a way that is not their choice.
Elitism	A belief that a society or system should be led by an elite – either by necessity or desirability.
Hierarchy	A society where individuals are ranked according to their fixed status or authority which is unconnected to their ability.
Natural aristocracy	The belief that ability and leadership are inborn talents that cannot be acquired.

Neoconservatism	A reinterpretation of social conservatism that gives a hard line on law and order, a return to family values and an interventionist nationalist foreign policy.
Neoliberalism	A reinterpretation of classical liberal economic theory that believes in the unassailability of the free market and the minimal state.
New Right	A conservative tradition that attempts to fuse liberal economics and social conservatism.
One-nation conservatism	A conservative tradition that believes members within society have obligations to one another, particularly those who are wealthy and privileged to those who are poor.
Order	Predictable, peaceable and stable social conditions where individual safety is assured.
Organicism	A belief that society is a natural system, similar to a living entity, whose parts are intrinsically connected.
Orthodoxy	Faithfulness to an authorised theory, doctrine, or practice.
Paternalism	A belief in the right of an authority to restrict the freedom of others for their own benefit. Very much like the relationship between a father and a child.
Pragmatism	A belief that merits theories or opinions in terms of their practical application rather than ideological goals.
Property	The possession of wealth, whether by individuals, groups or the state.
Thatcherism	A series of policies including: deregulation, privatisation, maintaining a flexible labour market, marginalising trade unions and centralising power from local authorities to central government, coupled with nationalism both at home and abroad.
Toryism	A belief which upholds the supremacy of the traditional hierarchical social order.
Tradition	The passing of institutions, customs or beliefs from generation to generation.
Traditionalism	A theory that political and ethical practice is best when it is based on beliefs, customs and institutions that have been tested over time.



Notes

These terms, although not an exclusive list, are crucial to an understanding of conservatism and students must start to familiarise themselves with them. It is not enough to understand and know these concepts but students will be expected to use them.

Extension tasks can focus on sorting these terms into several categories:

- Concepts and types of conservatism
- Concepts dealing with Human Nature – State – Society – Economics
- Those beliefs that don't appear to be applicable in today's political climate and those which are more relevant

Teachers may wish to start highlighting divisions between the New Right and Traditional Conservatism. Likewise, teachers may wish to introduce the debate about conservatism's veracity and its defence of privilege.

Exercise 2: Tradition



Guidance

Students should undertake this exercise individually and then in pairs. They should then agree on an answer before feeding back to the whole class. During feedback students should be asked to expand their answer by explaining why the key words deserve to be in that particular column.

The teacher should also let the students know that by matching the key words to the correct column they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO1 – *Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant institutions, processes, political concepts, theories and issues*

The activity can be completed on a computer or tablet or on the printable worksheet included.



Activity – Tradition - Justification

[Click to open activity](#)

[See Worksheet 2](#)

Students should match the key words to the appropriate column heading.

Religious Justification	Historical Justification	Psychological Justification
God given customs and practices Edmund Burke – ‘the law of our creator’ Natural law Fundamentalists	The wisdom of the past Tested by time Institutions have survived a process of ‘natural selection’ The British monarchy embodies historical wisdom and experience	Identity Rootedness Belonging Security



Notes

The teacher should make the class aware that different conservative justifications have been given for endorsing tradition over the centuries. The teacher should elicit from the class the contemporary relevance of the psychological justification while the religious and historical justifications had more relevance in the centuries before World War Two.

The teacher should also let the students know that by discussing the relevance of these justifications they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO3 - *Analyse and evaluate the areas of government and politics studied to construct arguments, make substantiated judgements and draw conclusions.*

The teacher should explain that they are doing this by categorising the justifications and making judgements on their relevance. This makes the student familiar with the higher level demands of the WJEC specification.

Extension tasks can focus on developing writing skills:

Opening sentences of paragraphs can be suggested;

Connectives can be proposed;

Connections between paragraphs can be offered.

Exercise 3: Organic Society



Guidance

Students should undertake this exercise individually and then in pairs. They should then agree on an answer before feeding back to the whole class. During feedback students should be asked to correct the false statements.

The teacher should also let the students know that by identifying the true and false statements they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO1 – *Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant institutions, processes, political concepts, theories and issues.*

The activity can be completed on a computer or tablet or on the printable worksheet included.



Activity – Organic Society - True or false

[Click to open activity](#)

See Worksheet 3

Students should note whether the facts regarding *organic society* are true or false.

	True	False
Organicism is the belief that society is like a living entity that is greater than the sum of its parts.	X	
Organisms are merely a collection of individual parts that can be arranged or rearranged at will.		X
In an organism the whole is more than a collection of its individual parts.	X	
The organism is sustained by a fragile set of relationships between and amongst its parts, which, once damaged, can result in the organism's death.	X	
The organic society is fashioned by artificial design.		X
The individual is distinct from society.		X
Social groups provide the individual with security and meaning.	X	
Freedom is understood as the individual being left alone.		X
Freedom is understood as a willingness to accept social obligations as recognition of their value.	X	
It is the bonds of duty and obligation that bind society together.	X	



Notes

The teacher should make the class aware that the importance of society is of particular interest to traditional conservatism. This validation of society causes tension within the New Right interpretation of conservatism which has been influenced by robust individualism. The New Right analysis sees society as a product of the actions of self-seeking and largely self-reliant individuals.

The teacher should also let the students know that by discussing differences between traditional conservatism and the New Right they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO2 – *Interpret and apply political information to identify and explain relevant similarities, differences and connections.*

The teacher should explain that they are doing this by identifying differences between different strands of conservatism. This makes the student familiar with the higher level demands of the WJEC specification.

Extension tasks can focus on categorising sentences into those concerned with:

- Society (first five);
- Individual (second five).

Exercise 4: Hierarchy and authority



Guidance

Students should undertake this exercise individually and then in pairs. They should then agree on an answer before feeding back to the whole class. During feedback students should be asked to expand their answer by explaining why the key words deserve to be in that particular row.

The teacher should also let the students know that by identifying the social and psychological reasons they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO1 – *Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant institutions, processes, political concepts, theories and issues.*

The activity can be completed on a computer or tablet or on the printable worksheet included.



Activity – Hierarchy and authority – Social and psychological reasons

[Click to open activity](#)

[See Worksheet 4](#)

Students should match the key words to the box.

	Rejection of equality				
Social reasons	Inequality is a feature of organic society.	Natural aristocracy.	Inequality of wealth and social position is vindicated by an equivalent inequality of social responsibility.	Paternalism.	Authority is ingrained in the nature of society.
Psychological reasons	Everyone needs help, care and security.	People need to know their station in life.	Individuals need to know what is expected of them.	Authority rebuts rootlessness.	Authority contests anomie.



Notes

The teacher should make the class aware that the traditional conservative conception of inequality goes further than the liberal view that individuals differ according to their abilities and willingness to work. Conservatives believe that inequality is more deep rooted. The teacher should elicit from the class the contemporary relevance of the psychological justification while social justifications had more relevance in the centuries before World War Two.

The teacher should also let the students know that by discussing the relevance of these justifications they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO3 - *Analyse and evaluate the areas of government and politics studied to construct arguments, make substantiated judgements and draw conclusions.*

The teacher should explain that they are doing this by categorising the justifications and making judgements on their relevance. This makes the student familiar with the higher level demands of the WJEC specification.

Extension tasks can focus on categorising sentences into those concerned with:

- hierarchy
- authority.

Exercise 5: Property



Guidance

Students should undertake this exercise individually and then in pairs. They should then agree on an answer before feeding back to the whole class. During feedback students should be asked to expand their answer by explaining why the key words deserve to be in that particular box.

The teacher should also let the students know that by identifying the similarities and differences between liberalism and conservatism they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO2 – *Interpret and apply political information to identify and explain relevant similarities, differences and connections.*

The teacher should explain that they are doing this by categorising the advantages and making connections with liberalism. This makes the student familiar with the higher level demands of the WJEC specification.

The activity can be completed on the printable worksheet included.



Activity – Property - Similarities and differences with liberalism See Worksheet 5

Students match the key words to the correct box.

Advantages	Similarities with liberalism	Differences with liberalism
Economic	Property is earned Economic incentive.	Property offers safety, confidence and reassurance.
Psychological	Property is a reflection of an individual's character.	Property rights entail responsibilities.
Social	Individuals can use their property free from any intervention.	Property encourages respect of property of others. Property encourages respect for authority, law and order. The present generation have an obligation to preserve and defend property for future generations.



Notes

The teacher should make the class aware that the conservative belief in the advantages of property does have a lot in common with the liberal view. However, conservatism has a deeper regard for property giving it much more than merely an economic justification. As well as having psychological benefits for the individual, property is of great significance for the well-being of society as a whole.

The teacher should also let the students know that by discussing the significance of these advantages they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO3 - *Analyse and evaluate the areas of government and politics studied to construct arguments, make substantiated judgements and draw conclusions.*

The teacher should explain that they are doing this by discussing the more significant advantages of property. This makes the student familiar with the higher level demands of the WJEC specification.

Extension tasks can focus on ranking the advantages in order of significance.

Exercise 6: Strands within conservatism 1



Guidance

Students don't have to do all the thinkers in one go. Students can be allotted a certain strand to complete, for instance one group or pair could do the authoritarian strand whereas others could do one nation while others could complete Christian democrat and so on. Students should undertake this exercise individually and then in pairs. They should then agree on an answer before feeding back to the whole class. During feedback students should be asked to expand their answer by explaining why the thinkers deserve to be in that particular column.

The teacher should also let the students know that by matching the terms and definitions they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO1 – *Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant institutions, processes, political concepts, theories and issues.*

The activity can be completed on a computer or tablet or on the printable worksheet included.



Activity – Strands 1 - Matching the thinker to the conservative strand

[Click to open activity](#)

See Worksheet 6

Students to match the key thinkers to the correct box.

	Traditional Conservative			New Right	
	Authoritarian	Paternalistic		Neoliberal	Neoconservative
		One Nation	Christian Democrat		
Key thinkers	De Maistre Tsar Nicholas I Bismarck Perón	Disraeli Randolph Churchill Macmillan	Konrad Adenauer Giulio Andreotti Helmut Kohl Angela Merkel	Hayek Friedman Thatcher Nozick	George W Bush Strauss Andrew Roberts Irving Kristol



Notes

The teacher should make the class aware that many of the thinkers would disagree with their categorisation and different labels can be used to describe them. After completion of the task the teacher should then ask the students to select one thinker from each column that would best represent that particular strand of conservatism. Students should then be asked to explain their choices.

The teacher should also let the students know that by discussing the significance of these thinkers they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO3 - *Analyse and evaluate the areas of government and politics studied to construct arguments, make substantiated judgements and draw conclusions.*

The teacher should explain that they are doing this by discussing the significance of these thinkers. This makes the student familiar with the higher level demands of the WJEC specification.

Extension tasks can focus on justifications for the selection of the most important thinkers.

Exercise 7: Strands within conservatism 2



Guidance

Students don't have to do all the strands in one go. Students can be allotted a certain strand to complete, for instance one group or pair could sort the authoritarian strand, whereas others could do one nation, while others could complete Christian democrat and so on. Students should undertake this exercise individually and then in pairs. They should then agree on an answer before feeding back to the whole class. During feedback students should be asked to expand their answer by explaining why the key words deserve to be in that particular column.

The teacher should also let the students know that by matching the key words and columns they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO1 – *Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant institutions, processes, political concepts, theories and issues.*

The activity can be completed on a computer or tablet or on the printable worksheet included.



Activity – Strands 2 - Matching the key word to the conservative strand

[Click to open activity](#)

[See Worksheet 7](#)

Students match the key words to the correct box.

	Traditional Conservative			New Right	
	Authoritarian	Paternalistic		Neoliberal	Neoconservative
		One Nation	Christian Democracy		
Key words	Government 'from above'	Noblesse oblige	Catholic social theory	Free market	Public morality
	Unquestioning obedience	Tory democracy	Democratic corporatism	Negative freedom	Family values
	Repression of opposition	Middle way	Social market	Rolling back the state	Neo-reaganism
	Populism	Compassionate conservatism	Subsidiarity	Egoistical individualism	Hard Wilsonianism



Notes

The teacher should make the class aware that there may well be an argument for placing particular key words in more than one column. After completion of the task the teacher should then ask the students to select one set of key words from each column that would best represent that particular strand of conservatism. Students should then be asked to explain their choices.

The teacher should also let the students know that by discussing the significance of these key words they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO3 - *Analyse and evaluate the areas of government and politics studied to construct arguments, make substantiated judgements and draw conclusions.*

The teacher should explain that they are doing this by discussing the significance of these key words. This makes the student familiar with the higher level demands of the WJEC specification. Extension tasks can focus on making connections between strands of conservatism by outlining similarities and differences. The teacher should also let the students know that by identifying the similarities and differences between strands of conservatism they are undertaking WJEC Assessment Objective AO2 – *Interpret and apply political information to identify and explain relevant similarities, differences and connections.*