

Module 11: The End of the Cold War
Topic 2 Content: "Reagan Revolution" Notes

Introduction

Taxes	Government Reduction	Judicial Restraint
Federalism	Elections	Future Presidencies

Ronald Reagan's election as the fortieth president in 1980 marked a change in the politics of the United States of America. What would come to be called the "Reagan Revolution" would have lasting impacts on the role of government, federalism, and the political elections that followed. President Reagan's ideas are still relevant today. If you listen to today's Republican political candidates, you will hear some of them claiming to be followers of President Reagan's ideas. In this interactivity, select any of the topics to learn about the "Reagan Revolution." Make sure to visit all of the topics before closing the interactivity.

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Cutting Taxes



Reagan's economic policies were termed "Reaganomics." Reagan believed that if taxes were cut, Americans would be able to save more money. Then banks could afford to lend the money to help spur business. Businesses would produce more goods and drive down the prices of products.

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Reduction of Government



The first impact that President Reagan and his followers had was on the role of government. Specifically, they advocated for a reduction in the role of government in the lives of everyday Americans. They supported reducing government spending. By cutting funding, the government would be forced to reduce the number and scope of government programs and regulations. President Reagan and his supporters hoped that this would increase economic output, reduce inflation, and help people get back to work. The only area where President Reagan and his followers did not decrease spending was the American military. They worked to increase the strength of the military and made sure they had the money to do so.

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Judicial Restraint



President Reagan and his supporters advocated for the appointment of judges and justices who would exercise “judicial restraint.” Judicial restraint is a theory that calls for judges to not utilize their judicial power to strike down laws unless those laws are clearly unconstitutional. During President Reagan’s tenure, he nominated three Supreme Court justices, including the first female Supreme Court Justice, Sandra Day O’Connor. His other two appointments were Justices Antonin Scalia and Anthony Kennedy.

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Federalism



The “Reagan Revolution” impacted federalism. Federalism is a concept in which the same area is controlled by two different levels of government. Here in the United States, you are governed by the national government and your state government. Each level of government has different responsibilities and authority. President Reagan and his followers advocated for a transfer of national government responsibilities to state governments. This idea went along with Reagan’s policies of cutting government taxes and spending, in order to reduce government programs and regulations. President Reagan and his followers wanted more government decisions to be made at the state and local level. They felt that decisions made at those levels would be better than ones made at the national level.

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Elections



The impact of the “Reagan Revolution” extended beyond President Reagan’s time as president. The ideas of the “Reagan Revolution” played a role in subsequent national and state elections. First was the election of Reagan’s Vice President, George H. W. Bush, as the forty-first president of the United States. Bush served as president from 1989 to 1992. President Bush’s election was partly a result of President Reagan’s popularity.

In the 1990s, the Democratic Political Party lost control of Congress and many state legislatures to the Republican Party, which was promoting the ideas of the “Reagan Revolution”. Specifically, in the 1994 election for Congress, the House of Representatives switched from Democratic to Republican control for the first time since 1952. The Republicans were successful in these elections partly because they campaigned on the policies of the “Reagan Revolution,” which they outlined in a document called the “Contract for America.”

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Impacts of Future Presidents



The election of George W. Bush as president from 2000 to 2008, continued the legacy and impact of the ideas of the "Reagan Revolution." President George W. Bush was the son of the forty-first president, George H. W. Bush. The younger Bush continued the "Reagan Revolution" policies of tax cuts, strengthening the American military, and working to reduce the number and scope of government programs and regulations.