

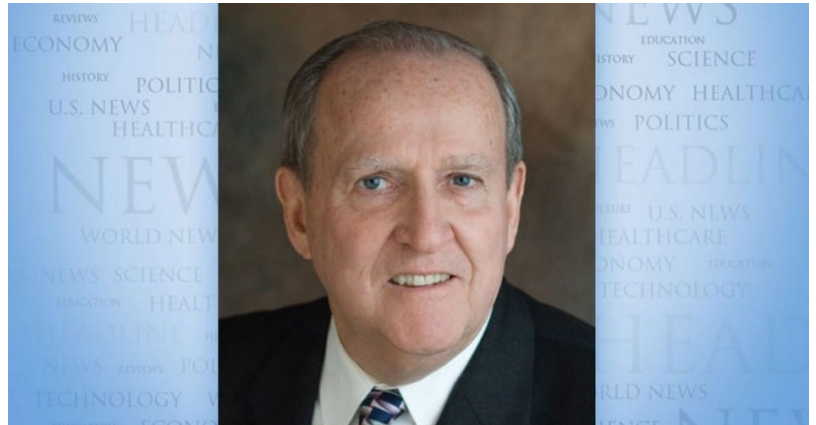


Written by [John F. McManus](#) on December 16, 2019

Forget Left vs. Right; Obey the Constitution

The terms “left versus right” and “liberal versus conservative” are commonly employed in our nation and elsewhere. But, while using such terms is a widespread practice, there exists plenty of confusion.

The *Washington Post* recently employed the word “conservative” to describe the political attitude of former President Barack Obama. That choice stimulated a rash of laughter, even anger, from numerous political purists. Obama was — and remains — an advocate of big government, which puts him on the liberal side of political thinking. Describing him as “conservative” is an absurdity.



History tells us that the terms “left” and “right” were first used during the French Revolution, which began in 1787 and tore France apart for at least 10 years. The French legislators and people who supported the revolution were deemed to be on the left. Those who preferred retaining, or returning to, the monarchy were considered to be on the right.

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From the days of the French upheaval until modern times, leftists have been considered advocates of more government power while rightists were considered advocates of individual liberty with minimal government involvement in the lives of the people. The terms have even been applied to religious attitudes, with those holding strict religious values being categorized as right-wing and those with fewer or no religious affiliations deemed left-wing.

Which label describes today’s American? Our nation has its conservatives who want less government and liberals who customarily look to government to solve every problem, even going to questionable wars. Surely, describing Barack Obama as a “conservative” muddies the water. Even his staunchest supporters must chuckle when hearing such nonsense. Obama was and remains a champion of government power and never should be deemed conservative.

Conservatives have also been viewed as those who want to *preserve* the status quo, while liberals have been viewed as wanting to change the status quo. The problem with using this approach as the basis for determining who is a liberal or a conservative is that political reforms become the new status quo when implemented, meaning that the old liberal position in support of the reforms becomes new conservative position. In the case of Obama, perhaps the new progressives in the Democratic Party are so far to the left that Obama now appears conservative by comparison, at least through the lens of the *Washington Post*.

The U.S. Constitution, which limits the federal government and specifies its powers, provides a much better yardstick for determining who falls on which side of the great political divide in America. Those who support minimal government under the Constitution are constitutionalists, and those who do not are the opposite. Labeling anyone liberal or conservative, or leftist or rightest, in these turbulent times



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misses a very important point. It is that the test of an individual's political or economic leanings in the United States is adherence or non-adherence to the U.S. Constitution.

If the Constitution were being obeyed, there would be no federal involvement in education, energy, transportation, foreign aid, undeclared wars and a host of other areas where no authorization has ever been given for federal involvement. America became great not because of what federal government did, but because of what the federal government was prevented from doing by the Constitution. And America will become greater still by adhering to the wisdom contained in the still-existing venerable document.

Though largely ignored by presidents and members of Congress, the Constitution still exists. It should be obeyed, and those powers not delegated to the national government by the Constitution should be exercised by the states or the people, as stated in the Constitution's 10th Amendment. Ending federal encroachment of state powers would enable the states to once again compete to be the one where a person would prefer to live, where there would be the fewest impediments to building a business and raising a family, etc. Competition produces excellence.

The people of this unique nation should rely on a new test for politicians and policies. Forget left or right, and discard liberal or conservative. The test should be "constitutional" or "unconstitutional." Adherence or non-adherence to the document that allowed the American people to build our nation to become the envy of mankind should replace the worn out and confusing adjectives that muddy today's waters. Not doing so will contribute to continuing the slide into total government — something very few Americans prefer. No American should want that.

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