

McElvaine: Why are Mississippians conservative?

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Most Mississippians classify themselves as "conservatives." We take this as a given and don't think much about it. We should think about it, though, because when we reflect upon it, it is a very curious circumstance.

The definition of conservative is "a person who is averse to change." That is to say, conservatives are people who want to keep things as they are.

Here is a list of things as they are in Mississippi, showing where our state ranks among the 50 states:

HEALTH

- Overall Health, 50
- Adult obesity, 1
- Infant mortality rate, 1
- Cardiovascular deaths per 100,000, 1
- % of people with health insurance, 50

ECONOMY

- Per capita income, 50
- Median Household Income, 50
- % Living in Poverty, 1
- Per capita GDP, 50
- Richest states, 50
- Unemployment rate, 1
- % of Households w Earnings <\$24,999, 1
- % of Households w Earnings >\$200,000, 50

EDUCATION

- Overall School system, 50
- % 4th graders below proficient in reading, 2 (NM is #1)
- % 4th graders below proficient in math, 1

- % of 8th graders below proficient in reading, 1
- % of 8th graders below proficient in math, 1
- Graduation Rate, 49 (NV is #50)

OTHER

- Incarceration rate (% of population in prison, 2 (LA is #1)
- Teen Pregnancy, 2 (NM is #1)

Here, then, is the question: Why do most people in a state that is last in almost every "good" category (and next-to-last in the others) and first in virtually every "bad" category (and second in the others) oppose change and want to keep things as they are?

It is said that the definition of insanity is to keep doing the same thing expecting a different result. Of course it is entirely sane for people who like the results summarized above, which the policies so long followed in this state have produced, to want to keep doing the same thing. It makes total sense for those who want Mississippi to stay at the bottom to be conservatives. But those who would like to see a different result ought to try something else.

As we enter a state election year, those voters who truly want to keep Mississippi on the bottom are genuine conservatives and should continue to vote for candidates who proudly oppose any and all policies that might improve our position. The rest of us would be better advised to begin to consider change and candidates who advocate doing things differently.

Robert S. McElvaine is Elizabeth Chisholm Professor of Arts and Letters and chair of the Department of History at Millsaps College in Jackson. Contact him at mcelvrs@millsaps.edu.

