

A Quiet Resistance: The Amish and Their Rare Forays into Politics

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The Amish, renowned for their simple lifestyle and devotion to faith, typically remain apart from the political and legal systems that govern the modern world. Rooted in their Anabaptist heritage, they embrace a philosophy of separation from worldly affairs, emphasizing humility, pacifism, and community-based living. However, their quiet resistance to external pressures has occasionally led them to engage in political or legal action when their way of life is threatened. From securing exemptions to military service and Social Security taxes to defending their right to limit formal education in the landmark *Wisconsin v. Yoder* case, the Amish have demonstrated a unique approach to navigating the intersection of faith and governance. These rare forays into politics are not about seeking influence or power but preserving their religious and cultural identity. Through deliberate, principled, and focused action, the Amish provide an alternative model of engagement that prioritizes conviction over conformity. This article explores the lessons their quiet resistance offers for understanding the role of politics in safeguarding community values and religious freedoms in a pluralistic society.

Keywords: Amish, Anabaptist, non-involvement, religious freedom, conscientious objection, *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, Social Security exemption, zoning laws, political engagement, education rights, land use, cultural preservation, community autonomy, pacifism.

Introduction

The Amish are a religious community known for their commitment to simplicity, humility, and separation from the broader world. Emerging from the Anabaptist movement of the 16th century, the Amish hold steadfastly to a way of life that avoids modern conveniences, emphasizes nonviolence, and focuses on community over individualism. Their rejection of worldly pursuits extends beyond technology and cultural trends—it also encompasses political involvement. The Amish believe in living a life apart from the "kingdoms of the world," viewing politics as a domain fraught with conflict and values at odds with their spiritual beliefs. By prioritizing their allegiance to God over the state, they strive to remain uninvolved in government matters, whether at the local, national, or international level.

Historically, the Amish have avoided overt political engagement, preferring to quietly coexist with the societies around them while adhering to their own rules and traditions. However, there have been notable exceptions to this stance. When their way of life has come under threat—whether through compulsory military service, education mandates, or government regulations—the Amish have carefully entered the political arena, often out of necessity rather than choice. In these moments, their actions are not motivated by a desire for power or influence but by the need to protect their religious beliefs, cultural practices, and autonomy.

This article explores the rare but significant instances where the Amish have engaged politically to defend their way of life. It examines how they navigate these challenges while maintaining their core principles of humility and separation. Ultimately, it argues that while the Amish are not political in the conventional sense, their selective involvement in legal and political issues reveals a profound commitment to their faith and identity. These moments of engagement offer a unique perspective on how a deeply spiritual community interacts with the ever-changing dynamics of the modern world.

1. Historical Foundations of Amish Non-Political Stance

The Amish community traces its roots to the Anabaptist movement of the 16th century, a radical offshoot of the Protestant Reformation. The Anabaptists distinguished themselves by their commitment to adult baptism, a belief that true faith required a conscious and voluntary decision rather than an infant baptism dictated by state or tradition. This defiance of mainstream religious and governmental authority made Anabaptists targets of persecution across Europe. To survive, they developed a theology that emphasized a complete separation from the "kingdoms of the world," both to maintain their spiritual purity and to avoid entanglements with the powers that sought to control them. This foundational belief in separation from worldly systems remains central to the Amish worldview today.

A core tenet of Anabaptist theology—and by extension, Amish life—is **pacifism**, or the refusal to participate in violence or military activities. Rooted in the teachings of Jesus, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, the Amish interpret passages like "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9) and "Turn the other cheek" (Matthew 5:39) as directives to avoid violence in all its forms. This pacifist stance not only prohibits physical violence but also discourages participation in political systems, which the Amish often view as inherently coercive, adversarial, and rooted in worldly power struggles. For the Amish, politics and government represent human constructs that distract from the higher calling of living a life dedicated to God.

The Amish also avoid government authority due to their emphasis on **God's sovereignty** over human affairs. Drawing inspiration from Biblical passages such as "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36) and "Do not love the world or anything in the world" (1 John 2:15), the Amish strive to remain outside the systems of power that dominate secular society. They believe their primary allegiance is to God, not to any earthly government. This theological perspective has led to the Amish refusal to hold public office, vote in elections, or participate in jury duty, all of which they see as compromising their separation from worldly concerns.

Their non-political stance is also reinforced by their cultural emphasis on **humility and nonconformity**. The Amish strive to live in ways that reject pride,

individualism, and ambition—traits they associate with political systems and campaigns. Engaging in politics, with its emphasis on self-promotion, debate, and competition, runs counter to their values. Instead, they believe in maintaining a quiet and humble presence, focused on serving God and their community.

Despite these deeply ingrained principles, the Amish are not entirely disconnected from the political world. Historical circumstances have occasionally forced them to navigate legal and political systems to preserve their religious freedoms. However, their engagement is always cautious and pragmatic, guided by the same theological emphasis on humility and separation that forms the foundation of their non-political stance. Through these rare moments of interaction, the Amish reveal the delicate balance they maintain between protecting their way of life and adhering to their belief in remaining "not of this world."

2. Conscientious Objection to Military Service

Pacifism is a cornerstone of Amish beliefs, stemming from their Anabaptist roots and their commitment to living in accordance with the teachings of Jesus. This deep aversion to violence has historically placed the Amish in conflict with governments requiring military service. For centuries, the Amish and their Anabaptist predecessors have sought ways to avoid conscription, often facing persecution for their refusal to bear arms or support military efforts. These struggles, beginning in Europe, followed them to the United States, where they continued to navigate the tension between their religious convictions and societal demands.

Early Struggles in Europe to Avoid Conscription

The Anabaptist movement arose in a time of intense religious and political turmoil in 16th-century Europe. Governments, often intertwined with state churches, mandated military service as a duty of citizenship. Anabaptists, including the Amish, rejected this obligation, citing their interpretation of Christ's teachings on peace, particularly the admonition to "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44) and "turn the other cheek" (Matthew 5:39). Their refusal to serve in armies was seen

as both unpatriotic and subversive, leading to severe punishments, including imprisonment, torture, and execution.

Many Amish and Mennonites fled Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries to escape these persecutions, seeking refuge in places like Pennsylvania, where religious freedom was more widely respected. Despite this migration, their commitment to nonviolence continued to challenge them as governments in their new homelands instituted conscription policies.

Conscientious Objector Status in the U.S.

When the Amish settled in the United States, they encountered periodic conflicts over military service, particularly during major wars such as the Civil War, World War I, and World War II. These conflicts often forced the Amish to articulate and defend their pacifist principles within the framework of U.S. law.

- **Civil War:** During the Civil War, both the Union and Confederate governments demanded military service from their citizens. While there was no formal provision for conscientious objectors, many Amish avoided conscription by paying commutation fees or hiring substitutes to serve in their place. These methods were controversial within their communities, as some felt even indirect participation in war was contrary to their beliefs.
- **World War I:** The U.S. introduced the Selective Service Act of 1917 during World War I, which included provisions for conscientious objectors (COs). However, many Amish men who were drafted faced significant challenges, as they were often misunderstood and mistreated by local draft boards unfamiliar with their religious beliefs. Some Amish men were sent to military training camps, where they refused to participate in drills or handle weapons, leading to imprisonment and harsh treatment.
- **World War II:** By the time of World War II, the U.S. government had formalized conscientious objector status through the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940. This legislation allowed COs to perform alternative service, such as working in Civilian Public Service (CPS) camps. The CPS program provided Amish men with opportunities to engage in non-military service, such as farming, forestry, and hospital work, aligning with their

values of nonviolence and community contribution. While this was a significant improvement over earlier conflicts, Amish participants still faced challenges, including pressure to conform to military structures and criticism from some parts of society.

The Role of Mennonite and Amish Representatives

Throughout these struggles, Mennonite and Amish leaders worked tirelessly to advocate for the recognition of conscientious objector status and to ensure that their communities could remain true to their beliefs. Organizations such as the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) played a crucial role in lobbying for CO provisions and organizing alternative service programs. These efforts were often collaborative, with Mennonite leaders acting as intermediaries between the Amish and the government, as the Amish themselves typically avoided direct interaction with political authorities.

The Amish also benefited from legal advocacy by broader Anabaptist groups, who used their knowledge of political systems to secure exemptions and accommodations. This indirect engagement allowed the Amish to navigate conflicts without compromising their principle of separation from the world. The recognition of conscientious objector status in U.S. law represents a significant victory for the Amish and other pacifist groups, enabling them to maintain their religious convictions while fulfilling their obligations as citizens.

Legacy and Ongoing Relevance

The Amish commitment to pacifism and conscientious objection remains unwavering. While conscription is no longer active in the United States, the legacy of their struggles continues to shape their relationship with the government. The recognition of their pacifist beliefs has become a symbol of religious freedom and the ability of a pluralistic society to accommodate diverse convictions. It also underscores the delicate balance the Amish maintain between their commitment to non-involvement in worldly affairs and their occasional need to engage with political and legal systems to protect their way of life.

3. Legal Battles Over Education

The Amish's approach to education reflects their deep religious and cultural values, emphasizing practical skills and moral teachings over formal academic training. This philosophy, rooted in their desire to preserve their community's way of life, came into conflict with modern educational laws that mandated compulsory schooling. The resulting clash culminated in the landmark **Wisconsin v. Yoder (1972)** Supreme Court decision, one of the most significant legal cases involving the Amish and a defining moment in the broader debate over religious freedom and education in the United States.

Wisconsin v. Yoder: A Landmark Supreme Court Case

The conflict arose in the state of Wisconsin, which, like most states, had laws requiring children to attend school until the age of 16. The Amish, however, typically end formal education after the eighth grade, believing that further schooling exposes their children to worldly influences that could erode their faith and values. Instead, Amish children transition into vocational and community-based education, learning practical skills such as farming, carpentry, and homemaking under the guidance of their families and communities.

In 1971, three Amish parents—Jonas Yoder, Wallace Miller, and Adin Yutzy—were convicted under Wisconsin law for refusing to send their children to high school. They argued that the law violated their First Amendment rights to free exercise of religion, as further schooling would conflict with their religious beliefs and endanger the spiritual welfare of their children.

The case made its way to the Supreme Court, where the justices ultimately ruled in favor of the Amish. In a 7-0 decision, the Court held that Wisconsin's compulsory education law infringed on the religious rights of the Amish, stating that the state's interest in education was not sufficiently compelling to override the parents' First Amendment rights. Chief Justice Warren E. Burger, writing for the majority, emphasized that the Amish way of life and their educational practices were deeply rooted in their religious beliefs and cultural traditions, making them deserving of constitutional protection.

Implications for Religious Freedom and Education Laws

The decision in *Wisconsin v. Yoder* had profound implications for both religious freedom and the role of education in the United States. It established a critical precedent that religious beliefs could outweigh certain government interests, particularly when those beliefs are central to the identity and practices of a religious group.

1. **Religious Freedom:** The case expanded the interpretation of the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment, affirming that religious communities have the right to maintain practices that may diverge from mainstream societal norms. By siding with the Amish, the Court recognized that their unique way of life warranted special legal accommodations.
2. **Educational Exceptions:** The ruling carved out an exemption to compulsory education laws, allowing not only the Amish but also other religious groups with similar convictions to educate their children in ways that align with their beliefs. This decision underscored the importance of balancing the state's interest in educating citizens with the rights of parents and religious communities to raise their children according to their values.
3. **Limits on State Power:** The Court's decision reinforced the idea that government power is not absolute, particularly when it comes to regulating matters of conscience and belief. It affirmed the principle that the state must demonstrate a compelling interest before infringing on religious practices.

The Amish's Most Visible Foray into the Legal System

The *Wisconsin v. Yoder* case marked one of the Amish community's most visible and significant engagements with the legal and political system. While the Amish typically avoid courts and governmental institutions, the stakes in this case were too high for them to remain silent. The prospect of being forced to send their children to high school threatened not only their educational practices but also the very fabric of their community and faith.

Despite their reluctance to engage directly with the legal system, the Amish were supported by organizations such as the National Committee for Amish Religious Freedom, which provided legal representation and advocacy. This partnership allowed the Amish to navigate the complexities of the legal process while adhering to their principles of humility and non-resistance.

The publicity surrounding the case brought unprecedented attention to the Amish, making them a focal point in discussions about religious freedom and cultural diversity. While the decision was a victory for the Amish, it also highlighted the delicate balance they must maintain in protecting their way of life without compromising their values of separation from the world.

Legacy of *Wisconsin v. Yoder*

The legacy of *Wisconsin v. Yoder* endures as a testament to the Amish community's ability to assert their rights while remaining true to their principles. The case is frequently cited in discussions about religious freedom and parental rights, and it has influenced subsequent legal battles involving other religious and cultural minorities.

For the Amish, the ruling ensured the continued survival of their educational practices and, by extension, their cultural identity. It also reaffirmed their commitment to nonconformity and self-governance, allowing them to preserve their unique way of life in a rapidly changing world.

Ultimately, *Wisconsin v. Yoder* represents a rare but impactful instance of Amish political engagement, demonstrating that even a community as apolitical as the Amish will act decisively when their values and freedoms are at stake. It serves as a powerful example of how faith-based communities can navigate the intersection of religious conviction and legal systems to protect their traditions and beliefs.

4. Opposition to Social Security

The Amish's opposition to Social Security represents one of their most principled stands against government involvement in their lives. Rooted in their theological

and cultural commitment to self-reliance, humility, and community responsibility, the Amish view Social Security as fundamentally incompatible with their way of life. This resistance underscores the delicate balance they must strike between interacting with broader societal systems and maintaining their religious and cultural autonomy.

Resistance to Government-Mandated Social Security Enrollment

In the mid-20th century, the United States introduced Social Security as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, designed to provide financial security for retired workers, disabled individuals, and survivors. While widely accepted by most Americans as a safety net, Social Security posed unique challenges for the Amish, whose religious beliefs emphasize mutual aid and reject reliance on government programs.

The Amish community resisted enrollment in the Social Security system, viewing it as a form of insurance that conflicted with their theological values. For the Amish, reliance on God and their close-knit communities negates the need for government assistance. They believe that taking part in such programs would violate their principle of **Gelassenheit**, or submission to God's will, which calls for simplicity, humility, and a reliance on divine providence rather than human institutions.

Additionally, the Amish objected to paying into a system that they did not intend to use. They saw no need for government-provided retirement benefits because Amish elders are cared for by their families and communities, in keeping with biblical teachings such as "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12). This communal approach ensures that the elderly and those in need are supported without resorting to external assistance, a practice deeply ingrained in their culture.

The Amish Exemption from Social Security Taxes in 1965

The tension between the Amish and the federal government over Social Security reached a peak in the 1950s and 1960s. Amish farmers and small business owners

were being fined for their refusal to pay Social Security taxes, leading to significant financial and legal pressure. Recognizing the potential for broader conflict, Amish leaders worked alongside legal representatives to seek an exemption.

In 1965, Congress amended the Social Security Act to include a provision that exempts self-employed Amish individuals from paying Social Security taxes. This exemption acknowledged the unique nature of Amish religious and cultural practices, particularly their reliance on community-based support systems. It was a significant victory for the Amish, as it allowed them to continue living in accordance with their beliefs without violating federal law.

However, the exemption was narrowly tailored. It applies only to self-employed Amish individuals; Amish employees working for non-Amish employers are still required to pay into the Social Security system, a compromise that reflects the complexities of navigating the intersection between religious freedom and federal law.

Reflection on the Amish Philosophy of Self-Reliance and Community Responsibility

The Amish opposition to Social Security reflects their deeply held belief in **self-reliance** and communal care. For the Amish, life is lived in close-knit communities where members depend on one another rather than external systems. This mutual aid is not just a cultural preference but a theological imperative, rooted in passages such as Galatians 6:2, which calls on believers to “carry each other’s burdens.” When a member of the community faces hardship, whether due to illness, aging, or financial difficulties, the entire community steps in to provide support, ensuring that no one is left behind.

This system of community responsibility is both practical and spiritual. It reinforces social bonds, ensures that resources are shared equitably, and allows the Amish to maintain their separation from the broader society. By caring for their elderly and vulnerable members without government assistance, the Amish preserve their independence and demonstrate their commitment to a way of life that prioritizes faith and fellowship over material concerns.

The opposition to Social Security also underscores the Amish resistance to what they see as unnecessary entanglement with government systems. They believe that reliance on such systems could erode their community values and lead to a dependency that is contrary to their principles. This reflects a broader distrust of modernity and a desire to remain apart from the societal structures that they perceive as corrupting influences.

Legacy of the Social Security Exemption

The Social Security exemption stands as a testament to the Amish community's ability to navigate legal and political challenges without compromising their values. It also highlights the capacity of the U.S. legal system to accommodate religious diversity, balancing the government's interest in enforcing federal laws with the need to respect the rights of minority groups.

For the Amish, the exemption is more than a practical solution; it is a reaffirmation of their identity and a recognition of their unique approach to life. By resisting Social Security and securing an exemption, the Amish demonstrated their commitment to living out their faith in every aspect of their lives, from how they work to how they care for one another.

This episode in Amish history serves as a powerful example of how deeply religious convictions can shape interactions with government systems. It also illustrates the strength of the Amish commitment to their principles, even in the face of significant legal and financial pressures. Ultimately, the opposition to Social Security is a reflection of the broader Amish philosophy: a life lived in harmony with God, community, and the land, free from dependence on external systems.

5. Land Use and Environmental Advocacy

For the Amish, land is not just a resource but a sacred foundation for their way of life. Deeply rooted in agrarian traditions, the Amish view farming and self-sufficiency as central to their faith and culture. This connection to the land has brought them into conflict with modern zoning laws and land use policies, which

often prioritize suburban development, industrial agriculture, or environmental regulations that inadvertently infringe on their practices. While the Amish typically avoid direct political engagement, they have, on occasion, become involved in legal and community efforts to preserve their agricultural heritage and traditional ways of living. At the same time, their relationship with the land reflects a unique and theologically grounded perspective on environmental stewardship.

Amish Resistance to Zoning Regulations and Land Use Policies

As urban sprawl and industrialization have encroached on rural areas, local governments have implemented zoning regulations to manage land use. These regulations often conflict with the Amish lifestyle, which relies on small-scale, sustainable farming and simple, traditional housing. Zoning laws that require specific building codes, prohibit certain types of agricultural activities, or limit land use density can pose significant challenges to Amish communities.

For instance, many Amish homes and farms do not meet modern building codes, which often require features such as electrical wiring, indoor plumbing, or specific types of insulation—elements the Amish reject as unnecessary or inconsistent with their beliefs. Similarly, regulations that restrict the number of livestock per acre or impose requirements for industrial-grade waste management systems can undermine the Amish's traditional, low-impact farming practices.

In response, Amish communities have occasionally resisted zoning laws by working through local governments or legal channels. For example, in cases where building permits have been denied for Amish structures that lack electricity or plumbing, Amish families have sought exemptions or accommodations to maintain their way of life. These efforts reflect a quiet but determined form of advocacy, where the Amish seek to protect their religious and cultural autonomy while navigating the broader legal landscape.

Examples of Local Political Involvement to Preserve Traditional Farming and Housing Styles

While the Amish avoid conventional political activism, they have engaged in localized efforts to preserve their farming and housing practices. These efforts often involve negotiations with township boards, land commissions, and other local authorities to ensure that zoning regulations accommodate their needs.

1. **Negotiations Over Building Codes:** In some communities, Amish families have successfully lobbied for exemptions from modern building codes, allowing them to construct homes and barns according to their traditions. These negotiations often hinge on religious freedom arguments, emphasizing the importance of these structures to their way of life.
2. **Fighting Urban Encroachment:** As suburban development expands into rural areas, Amish communities have occasionally joined broader coalitions of farmers and rural residents to oppose large-scale developments that threaten agricultural land. For example, in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania—home to one of the largest Amish populations in the U.S.—Amish families have worked alongside non-Amish neighbors to advocate for farmland preservation programs and to resist projects that would disrupt their communities.
3. **Land Conservation Agreements:** In some cases, Amish families have partnered with land conservation organizations to place easements on their properties, ensuring that the land remains designated for agricultural use in perpetuity. These agreements allow the Amish to maintain control over their land while protecting it from future development.

These efforts, while modest in scale, demonstrate the Amish's willingness to engage with local authorities when their way of life is at risk. They also highlight the community's deep commitment to preserving their traditions and resisting pressures to conform to modern standards.

The Amish Stance on Environmental Issues as Stewards of God's Creation

The Amish approach to environmental stewardship is deeply rooted in their religious beliefs. They see the land as a gift from God, entrusted to them to use responsibly and sustainably. This theological perspective shapes their farming practices, which emphasize care for the soil, minimal use of chemicals, and reliance on natural processes.

1. **Sustainable Farming Practices:** Amish agriculture is often held up as a model of sustainability. Their use of horse-drawn plows, crop rotation, and organic fertilization reflects a commitment to working in harmony with nature. Unlike industrial farming, which prioritizes efficiency and profit, Amish farming prioritizes balance and long-term health for the land.
2. **Rejecting Wastefulness:** The Amish strive to live simply, avoiding waste and overconsumption. Their commitment to reusing and repairing items, rather than discarding them, aligns with broader environmental values. This philosophy extends to their homes and farms, where they use locally sourced materials and avoid unnecessary construction.
3. **Opposition to Pollution:** While the Amish rarely engage in broader environmental advocacy, they are deeply concerned about pollution and its impact on the land. For example, Amish farmers often avoid chemical pesticides and fertilizers, both to protect their crops and to preserve the purity of the soil and water.

Despite these environmentally friendly practices, the Amish generally refrain from participating in larger environmental movements, as doing so would involve a level of political engagement that is inconsistent with their beliefs. However, their quiet example of sustainable living has earned them respect from environmentalists and conservationists, who see parallels between Amish values and the goals of the modern environmental movement.

Balancing Tradition and Modern Challenges

The Amish's resistance to zoning laws and their commitment to environmental stewardship reflect their broader philosophy of living a life of simplicity and faith.

As modern pressures on land and resources continue to grow, the Amish face new challenges in preserving their way of life. While they remain reluctant to engage in political advocacy, their local efforts to protect farmland, secure exemptions, and maintain their traditions demonstrate a pragmatic approach to navigating these challenges.

Ultimately, the Amish approach to land use and environmental advocacy offers a unique perspective on the intersection of faith, culture, and sustainability. By prioritizing community over individualism and stewardship over exploitation, the Amish provide a quiet but powerful model of how to live in harmony with the natural world while resisting the pressures of modernization. Their efforts to preserve their agricultural practices and traditional housing styles not only safeguard their way of life but also contribute to a broader conversation about the value of simplicity and sustainability in a rapidly changing world.

6. Selective Voting Practices

The Amish, as a religious community, typically avoid political participation, including voting, as part of their broader commitment to separation from the world. Their Anabaptist roots emphasize non-involvement in worldly affairs, including politics, which they often view as contentious and contrary to their values of humility and peace. However, there have been rare instances when some Amish individuals or groups have chosen to vote, particularly in response to candidates or issues they perceive as directly affecting their religious beliefs or way of life. These moments of selective voting highlight the delicate balance the Amish maintain between protecting their values and adhering to their theological principles of nonconformity.

Rare Instances of Amish Voting

While most Amish abstain from voting, there have been documented cases of Amish participation in elections, especially at the local level and, more recently, in national elections. For example:

1. **The 2016 U.S. Presidential Election:** During the 2016 election, anecdotal evidence suggested an uptick in Amish voting in key swing states such as Pennsylvania and Ohio. Some Amish individuals were drawn to then-candidate Donald Trump's emphasis on religious freedom and conservative family values, which resonated with their own priorities. Efforts by groups such as the "Amish PAC" (Political Action Committee), which aimed to mobilize Amish voters for Trump, highlighted the increasing visibility of Amish participation in political discourse.
2. **The 2020 U.S. Presidential Election:** Similarly, the 2020 election saw isolated reports of Amish communities engaging in the political process. Again, the focus was on candidates' stances on issues such as religious liberty and the preservation of traditional values. However, participation remained minimal compared to the general population, reflecting the Amish's cautious approach to political involvement.
3. **Local Elections:** At the local level, some Amish have been known to vote on issues or candidates that directly impact their communities. For example, zoning laws, school board elections, or agricultural policies that could affect their land use and farming practices may prompt Amish individuals to cast their votes. These elections are often seen as more relevant to their day-to-day lives than national politics.

Factors Influencing Amish Participation in Voting

Several key factors influence the Amish decision to participate in elections, including the perceived impact of candidates or policies on their religious beliefs, cultural practices, and community autonomy.

1. **Religious Freedom:** The Amish are particularly sensitive to issues involving religious liberty. Candidates who promise to uphold protections for religious communities, such as exemptions from laws or policies that could conflict with Amish beliefs (e.g., Social Security mandates or zoning regulations), are more likely to gain their support.
2. **Family Values:** The Amish place a high value on traditional family structures and morality. Candidates who advocate for policies that align with

conservative views on family and marriage may resonate with Amish voters, even if their political engagement remains minimal.

3. **Community Impact:** Amish participation in local elections often revolves around practical issues rather than partisan politics. For example, a proposed development project that threatens farmland or changes to local school policies may prompt Amish communities to vote in defense of their way of life.
4. **External Encouragement:** In some cases, outside groups have sought to mobilize Amish voters by emphasizing shared values. For instance, the Amish PAC in 2016 worked to encourage Amish participation by framing voting as a way to protect their religious freedom and preserve their traditions.

The Tension Between Voting and Amish Values

Despite these occasional instances of voting, the act of participating in elections remains fraught with theological and cultural tension for the Amish. At the heart of this tension is the Amish belief in **Gelassenheit**—a spirit of yielding or submission to God’s will. This principle encourages the Amish to avoid asserting themselves in worldly matters, including politics, which they often view as divisive and contrary to their values of humility and peace.

1. **Avoiding Worldly Entanglements:** The Amish see politics as a realm dominated by pride, power struggles, and conflict—all of which are antithetical to their way of life. Engaging in the political process, even by voting, can be seen as compromising their commitment to separation from the world.
2. **Fear of Division:** The Amish place a strong emphasis on community harmony. Political involvement, particularly in polarized elections, risks creating divisions within Amish communities. By avoiding voting, the Amish seek to maintain unity and avoid the potential for discord.
3. **Trust in God’s Sovereignty:** Many Amish believe that the outcome of elections, like all worldly events, is ultimately determined by God. This

belief reinforces their reluctance to participate, as they see no need to intervene in what they perceive as God's plan for the world.

4. **Cultural Pressure:** Even within Amish communities where voting is not explicitly prohibited, there can be significant social pressure to abstain. Those who choose to vote may face subtle criticism or be viewed as stepping too far into worldly affairs.

Balancing Pragmatism and Principles

The Amish approach to voting illustrates their ability to adapt pragmatically when necessary while remaining deeply committed to their principles. For most Amish, abstaining from voting is an act of faith, reflecting their belief in God's sovereignty and their desire to remain separate from worldly conflicts. However, the rare instances of Amish voting demonstrate that their separation is not absolute; when issues arise that directly threaten their way of life or values, some Amish individuals or groups are willing to engage with the political system in limited and purposeful ways.

This selective approach allows the Amish to maintain their cultural and theological identity while navigating the challenges of living in a pluralistic society. It also reflects their broader philosophy of interacting with the modern world: engaging only when necessary to preserve their traditions and beliefs, and always striving to do so with humility and a focus on the greater good.

Legacy and Broader Implications

The Amish practice of selective voting serves as a unique case study in the intersection of religion and politics. It highlights how deeply religious communities can navigate the complexities of modern governance while adhering to their principles. For the Amish, voting is not about asserting power or influence but about defending the integrity of their way of life when it is at risk. This cautious and deliberate approach provides a powerful example of how faith-based communities can engage with political systems in a manner consistent with

their values, offering broader lessons on balancing conviction with pragmatism in an increasingly polarized world.

7. Public Health Policies and the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges for societies worldwide, and the Amish were no exception. As governments implemented sweeping public health measures, including vaccination campaigns, mask mandates, and social distancing guidelines, the Amish responded in ways that highlighted their distinct way of life and resistance to external regulation. Their reaction to the pandemic reflected their deep commitment to religious and community values, even as it intersected with broader political debates about individual freedom, public health, and government authority.

Amish Resistance to COVID-19 Mandates and Vaccinations

From the outset of the pandemic, many Amish communities resisted public health mandates, citing their long-standing beliefs in personal autonomy and reliance on God rather than government intervention. This resistance was rooted in several factors:

1. **Religious Convictions:** The Amish view illness and health as part of God's plan and are generally skeptical of medical interventions, especially those seen as intrusive or unnecessary. Vaccines, in particular, are viewed by some Amish groups as inconsistent with their belief in natural health and divine providence.
2. **Community Isolation:** The relative isolation of Amish communities allowed them to perceive the risks of COVID-19 differently from the broader population. With limited access to mainstream media and a preference for community-based knowledge, many Amish saw the pandemic as less of a threat than it was portrayed in the outside world.
3. **Resistance to Mandates:** The Amish have historically resisted government mandates that they perceive as infringing on their way of life. Mask requirements, social distancing measures, and other public health orders

conflicted with their emphasis on face-to-face community worship and their rejection of modern conveniences.

4. **Herd Immunity Approach:** In some cases, Amish communities opted to let the virus run its course, reasoning that widespread exposure would lead to natural immunity. This approach, while controversial, was consistent with their preference for natural solutions over medical interventions.

Intersection with Broader Political Debates

The Amish response to COVID-19 did not occur in a vacuum but rather intersected with broader political and cultural debates in the United States. While the Amish typically avoid direct engagement with political issues, their resistance to pandemic measures aligned with the sentiments of certain political groups emphasizing individual freedoms and skepticism toward government overreach. This alignment, while unintentional, brought the Amish into the public spotlight.

1. **Symbol of Freedom:** The Amish resistance to mandates was sometimes co-opted by political activists and commentators as a symbol of defiance against government control. Some proponents of individual rights held up the Amish as an example of a community standing firm against what they saw as government overreach.
2. **Misunderstanding of Amish Motivations:** While the Amish rejection of mandates resonated with broader political movements, their motivations were primarily religious and cultural rather than political. Unlike some anti-mandate activists, the Amish were not engaging in protests or advocating for policy changes but simply adhering to their own principles.
3. **Media Attention:** The Amish response to COVID-19 attracted significant media attention, with articles and reports highlighting their refusal to comply with mandates and their reliance on natural immunity. This visibility, while unusual for the Amish, underscored the ways in which their actions became entangled in the broader cultural discourse.

Implications of Public Health Policies on Amish Autonomy

The pandemic and the resulting public health measures tested the balance between public health priorities and the Amish's desire for autonomy. While most Amish communities did not actively resist government orders, their noncompliance raised important questions about the limits of government authority and the need to accommodate religious and cultural diversity in public health policy.

1. **Tensions with Public Health Authorities:** In some cases, Amish communities faced pressure from public health officials to comply with mandates, particularly during outbreaks. This tension highlighted the challenges of implementing one-size-fits-all policies in a pluralistic society.
2. **Impact on Worship and Community Life:** Restrictions on gatherings and social distancing measures posed significant challenges for the Amish, whose way of life revolves around close-knit community interactions. The Amish emphasized the importance of in-person worship and fellowship, which conflicted with public health directives.
3. **Legal and Ethical Considerations:** The pandemic brought renewed attention to the legal and ethical balance between public health and religious freedom. While the Amish were largely able to avoid enforcement of mandates, their response underscored the need for policies that respect religious and cultural autonomy while protecting public health.
4. **Adaptation and Resilience:** Despite their resistance to mandates, the Amish demonstrated a remarkable capacity for resilience and adaptation. For example, some communities developed their own protocols for dealing with outbreaks, such as isolation of sick individuals and adjustments to worship practices.

The Quiet Yet Significant Amish Response

While the Amish response to COVID-19 may appear to outsiders as passive or noncompliant, it was, in reality, a quiet but profound assertion of their values and way of life. Their approach highlighted the importance of maintaining community

cohesion, faith, and self-reliance in the face of external pressures. By prioritizing their beliefs and practices, the Amish reaffirmed their commitment to a life set apart from the world, even amid a global crisis.

Legacy of the Pandemic for Amish Communities

The Amish response to the pandemic has broader implications for how minority religious groups navigate public health crises in the modern world. It serves as a reminder of the importance of accommodating diverse perspectives while addressing collective challenges. For the Amish, the pandemic reaffirmed their commitment to autonomy, faith, and community, offering a powerful example of resilience in the face of external pressures.

Their actions during COVID-19 also illustrate the broader tension between individual and communal responsibilities in a public health context. The Amish approach—rooted in faith and tradition—provides an alternative lens through which to view questions of health, governance, and cultural integrity in times of crisis.

8. Lessons from Amish Political Engagement

The Amish community offers a unique perspective on political engagement, balancing a steadfast commitment to separation from the world with pragmatic involvement when necessary. Their rare forays into the political or legal realm are not motivated by ambition or partisanship but by the need to defend their religious and cultural autonomy. These moments of engagement reveal a community deeply attuned to its values, willing to act decisively when its way of life is threatened. By examining how the Amish navigate political involvement, broader society can glean valuable insights into principled resistance, the balance between compliance and autonomy, and the power of quiet advocacy.

Navigating Political Involvement While Maintaining Separation

The Amish approach to political engagement is shaped by their theological commitment to **Gelassenheit**, or yielding to God's will. This principle underpins their broader philosophy of **separation from the world**, which includes avoiding entanglement in politics. Despite this, the Amish recognize that complete isolation is neither possible nor practical in a pluralistic society. Instead, they engage selectively and purposefully, focusing on issues that directly impact their ability to live according to their faith.

1. **Selective Engagement:** The Amish approach politics as a tool of last resort. Whether in legal battles over education, land use, or conscientious objection, their involvement is always narrowly focused on protecting their religious freedoms and preserving their community practices.
2. **Relying on Allies:** The Amish often collaborate with external advocates, such as Mennonite organizations or legal representatives, to navigate complex political and legal systems. This allows them to address issues without violating their principle of separation or engaging directly in political processes.
3. **Maintaining Integrity:** Even when forced to interact with political institutions, the Amish avoid compromising their values. For example, they approach legal battles with humility and a commitment to nonviolence, ensuring their actions align with their faith.

Balancing Resistance and Compliance

The Amish's ability to balance resistance and compliance is a hallmark of their political engagement. This balance allows them to protect their way of life while maintaining a respectful relationship with the broader society.

1. **Resistance as Preservation:** The Amish resist policies or mandates that threaten their religious and cultural autonomy. Examples include their opposition to Social Security enrollment, zoning regulations, and compulsory education beyond the eighth grade. These acts of resistance

are not defiance for its own sake but a means of safeguarding their traditions.

2. **Compliance When Possible:** The Amish are not inherently antagonistic toward government authority. They comply with laws and regulations that do not conflict with their faith, such as paying taxes or participating in community-wide health measures when they align with their values. This compliance reflects their desire to live peacefully and avoid unnecessary conflict.
3. **Pragmatic Solutions:** The Amish often seek compromise rather than confrontation. For instance, their exemption from Social Security taxes was achieved through negotiations that respected both their beliefs and the government's interests. Similarly, in land use disputes, they have worked with local authorities to find mutually acceptable solutions.

What Broader Society Can Learn from the Amish Approach

The Amish approach to political engagement offers important lessons for navigating the complexities of a diverse and pluralistic society. Their actions demonstrate how deeply held beliefs can coexist with the need to participate in broader systems, offering insights into principled resistance, collaboration, and the power of focused advocacy.

1. **Principled Resistance:** The Amish show that it is possible to resist policies or practices without resorting to hostility or violence. Their commitment to nonviolence and humility serves as a model for standing firm in one's convictions while maintaining respect for others.
2. **Focus on Core Issues:** By engaging only on issues that directly impact their way of life, the Amish avoid the distractions and divisiveness of partisan politics. This focus allows them to advocate effectively without becoming entangled in broader political conflicts.
3. **Collaboration Without Compromise:** The Amish demonstrate the value of working with allies and institutions to achieve their goals. Their willingness to collaborate with legal representatives, conservation groups, and even

government officials shows that productive relationships can be built without compromising one's principles.

4. **A Model of Restraint:** In an era of hyperpolarized politics, the Amish offer a counterexample of restraint and intentionality. Their selective engagement highlights the importance of thoughtful, deliberate action over reactive or performative gestures.
5. **Community-Centered Advocacy:** The Amish remind us of the power of community-based solutions. Their reliance on mutual aid and self-governance reduces dependence on external systems, providing a compelling example of how communities can thrive while preserving their values.

Conclusion

The Amish approach to political engagement is a study in contrasts: deeply apolitical in their worldview, yet willing to act decisively when their way of life is threatened. Their ability to navigate these tensions while maintaining their principles offers valuable lessons for broader society. In a world often marked by division and conflict, the Amish model of selective, principled engagement demonstrates the power of quiet resistance, humility, and collaboration in pursuing meaningful and lasting solutions. Through their actions, the Amish show that it is possible to defend one's values while respecting others, a lesson that resonates far beyond their own communities.

Conclusion

The Amish community exemplifies a profound commitment to their philosophy of **non-involvement in worldly affairs**, rooted in centuries-old Anabaptist principles. Their deliberate separation from political systems, modern conveniences, and societal norms reflects their desire to live in accordance with their faith, prioritizing humility, simplicity, and a life centered on God and community. This non-political stance is not merely a preference but a deeply theological and

cultural choice, underscoring their belief in the transient nature of worldly power compared to the eternal sovereignty of God.

Despite their general aversion to political involvement, the Amish have, on rare occasions, engaged with political and legal systems when their way of life was directly threatened. These instances—such as securing conscientious objector status during wars, obtaining exemptions from Social Security taxes, or winning the landmark *Wisconsin v. Yoder* case—demonstrate their capacity to act decisively and effectively when necessary. Each of these moments reflects a calculated and purposeful approach to preserving their religious freedoms and cultural practices, highlighting their ability to navigate external pressures while remaining true to their values.

The Amish offer a unique perspective on the role of politics in preserving cultural and religious identity. By engaging only when absolutely necessary and focusing solely on issues that threaten their autonomy, the Amish avoid the entanglements and divisiveness often associated with political participation. Their approach serves as a powerful reminder that political engagement does not have to be all-encompassing; instead, it can be focused, intentional, and deeply principled.

Furthermore, the Amish demonstrate that resistance need not be loud to be impactful. Their quiet yet resolute actions show that meaningful change can be achieved through humility, collaboration, and an unwavering commitment to one's beliefs. In a world increasingly marked by polarization and performative activism, the Amish provide an alternative model of advocacy—one that prioritizes faith, community, and integrity above all else.

Through their rare but impactful forays into the political realm, the Amish not only defend their way of life but also offer broader lessons on the intersection of faith, culture, and governance. Their example challenges us to rethink the role of politics in our own lives and to consider how we might engage with the world in ways that are intentional, values-driven, and respectful of diverse perspectives. By staying true to their principles while navigating an ever-changing world, the Amish remind us of the enduring power of conviction and the profound influence of a life lived with purpose.

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This reference section includes a mix of academic sources, case law, and contemporary reports to support the discussion of Amish political engagement and their interactions with broader societal systems.

