Ideas and Politics
The role of ideas in politics

What people think and believe about society, power, rights, etc., determines their actions.

Everything has to pass through the mind of the individual before he or she acts.

How do the ideas and beliefs appear in our minds?

Critical examination of reality – thinking for oneself
Influence of others’ opinions – family, education, mass media, etc.

Some forms of teaching imprison the mind
Others liberate the mind, enabling it to think critically

Subjugation by force is the crudest form of social control
Mind control is a much more effective method
But is it really effective?
2 main concepts about the role of ideas in politics:

Political culture – the broad pattern of political orientations shared by a large group of people (a nation, a region, a class, an ethnic group)

Political ideology – a system of political ideas, developed for the purposes of political action (governing a country, launching a social movement or a political party, organizing a revolution – or a counterrevolution, etc.)
What are political ideologies for?

To provide people with programs of political action:
  to govern societies, or
  to struggle for change

Both for integration and for conflict, you need an ideology – a coherent set of ideas for purposeful action
The earliest ideologies were religions. Many of the earliest rulers in history were priests. In the Modern Age, political ideologies become increasingly secular (non-religious, some anti-religious), but religions continue to serve as important sources for ideologies to this day. Examples: Christian democracy, Christian socialism, Protestant fundamentalism, Islamic radicalism
It is the very **essence** of political ideology to **differ** from another ideology on what to do with the **status quo** (the existing order of things):

To **keep** it – or to **change** it.

At the core of every political idea, every political action is a **choice** between **YES** and **NO**. Look at the work of the parliament… Or the UN… Or an election…

The differences between ideologies are rooted in basic assumptions about:

- **human nature** – are humans naturally peaceful, cooperative, rational?
- **individual** and **society**: which interests come first?
- **equality**: how much social inequality is acceptable?
Ideology vs. pragmatism

Does too much ideology make you narrow-minded?

Should one’s political beliefs be based on one ideology - be doctrinaire?

Shouldn’t politicians be free to borrow ideas from different ideologies if they work better in a particular situation?

At issue: orthodoxy vs. pluralism

Orthodoxy (traditionalist, pre-modern view): the rulers should maintain one ideology as dominant – to foster unity and harmony in society.

UNITY THROUGH UNIFORMITY

Can work only: in traditional, pre-modern societies – or, in societies in transition to modernity, in periods of extreme crisis. Requires generally low educational levels
Pluralism (modern view associated with liberalism): the rulers allow different ideologies in society to compete.

UNITY THROUGH TOLERATION OF DIFFERENCES

“E pluribus unum”

Works better in developed, modern and postmodern, complex societies with high educational levels

Are there limits to toleration? Should some ideologies be banned?

Is there such a thing as liberal orthodoxy?
The challenge of the liberal-democratic type of politics
To accept ideological pluralism as a normal condition of society -
And try to maintain social unity through toleration of differences and management of conflict
It is not always possible
Some ideologies can coexist with each other
Others are so strongly opposed to each other that they cannot be reconciled by means of compromise
Or can they?
Political Spectrum: From Left to Right
Political ideologies, through opposition, competition, fusion, mixing, etc. –
exist in constant interaction with each other
Together, they form a political spectrum
It is a useful tool of political analysis
The terms “Left” and “Right” originate from the seating of the members of the newly elected French Legislative Assembly in 1791 – during the French Revolution.

The Left: Advocates of radical change, republicans

The Right: Supporters of the existing order, monarchists

King Louis XVI

Legislative Assembly
It was in the interests of the King to be able to manage the conflict between Left and Right – through centrist, pragmatic policies, borrowing ideas for state policy from both sides and trying to build a consensus.

It proved impossible. France experienced a revolution – a radical change of the political and social order.

But even then, there were people in the middle between the extremes.

Extremists vs. moderates.

In normal conditions, the political spectrum includes a range of ideological “colours” between the extremes.
At least three…
Political spectrum: the standard linear model

- Far Left
- Centre-Left
- Centre
- Centre-Right
- Far Right

- Socialists
- Communists
- Radicals
- Liberals
- Liberal Conservatives
- Ultraconservatives
- Conservatives
- Reactionaries
- Fascists

Diagram showing the political spectrum with different political groups positioned along a linear model.
Ideologies associated with different fields of political spectrum
The Right:
Conservatism – preserve the status quo, oppose change
Reaction – throw back the forces of change, restore the old order
Fascism – mobilize the nation for war, suppress pluralism to achieve unity through orthodoxy
The Left:

**Radicalism** – go to the roots of problems, change the foundations of society

**Socialism** – advance the interests of society against the interests of elites

**Communism** – abolish private property to achieve equality and social harmony, suppress pluralism to achieve unity through orthodoxy
The Centre:

Liberalism – expand the scope of freedom, accept change, assert the primacy of individual rights, develop market economy and political pluralism

Borrow ideas from Left and Right
There are several dimensions here:
- Change or preservation of status quo
- Freedom or order
- Pluralism or orthodoxy
- Equality or inequality
- Market or state

Ideas interact, travel across the spectrum…
Too many possible combinations…
How can all these complexities be taken into account?
Political spectrum: a 2-dimensional model

- Market
  - Welfare state liberalism
  - Social democracy
  - Market socialism
  - Neoliberalism
  - Market authoritarianism
  - Traditional conservatism
  - Fascism

- State
  - State socialism
  - (Communism)
You may use 3 or more dimensions...
Political spectrum: the *circular* model, based on Clinton Rossiter

**THE LEFT:**
- change,
- freedom,
- equality,
- labour

**THE RIGHT:**
- status quo,
- order,
- inequality,
- capital

**LIBERALISM**
- the market, trade

**COMMUNISM**
- the state, war

**FASCISM**
- the state, war
There are several different ways to cut this pie...
White – elitist (discourage popular participation in politics)

Red – populist (mobilize the masses)

Elitism vs. populism
Three major factors which produce, shape and reshape ideologies:

TIME
CLASS
CRISIS
TIME
The flow of time – and the notion of change
The course of history
Social evolution and development
The centuries of modernization
The issue of change -
   social, technological, cultural, economic
Also: age (individuals, countries, systems) and readiness to embrace change

The influence of liberalism today is partly explained by the fact that liberalism was created as the ideology of change.
Conservatism’s main problem: how to keep order in a changing world
CLASS
Each major ideology has its main roots in the interests of a certain class, or a section of a class, or several aligned classes.
For instance, in 19th century Europe:
Conservative ideologies were rooted in the interests of landed aristocracy and clergy – classes losing power as a result of modernization.
Liberalism was rooted in the interests of the rising bourgeoisie.
Socialism was rooted in the interests of the working classes.
The special role of the intellectuals in the production of ideas.
CRISIS

A catastrophe (major war, economic collapse, ecological disaster, famine)

Major deterioration of social conditions

Breakdown of a state

A revolution or a counterrevolution

Crises create powerful demand for new ideas

And people commit themselves to ideas much more strongly (become more ideological) than in normal times
Liberalism, conservatism, socialism, and fascism have offered comprehensive political worldviews.

Other important ideologies which have not developed into comprehensive systems of thought - but have had major influence on national and global politics:
Nationalism: creating (or restoring) independent states, fostering national unity
Anarchism: rejection of the state as a social mechanism
Feminism: struggle for gender equality
Environmentalism: saving the planet
Religious fundamentalisms
Canada 2015:

http://www.politicalcompass.org/
Explore the Canadian political spectrum:
Conservatives, Liberals, NDP, PQ, the Greens

http://www.conservative.ca/
http://www.liberal.ca/
NDP | The New Democratic Party of Canada
http://www.greenparty.ca/