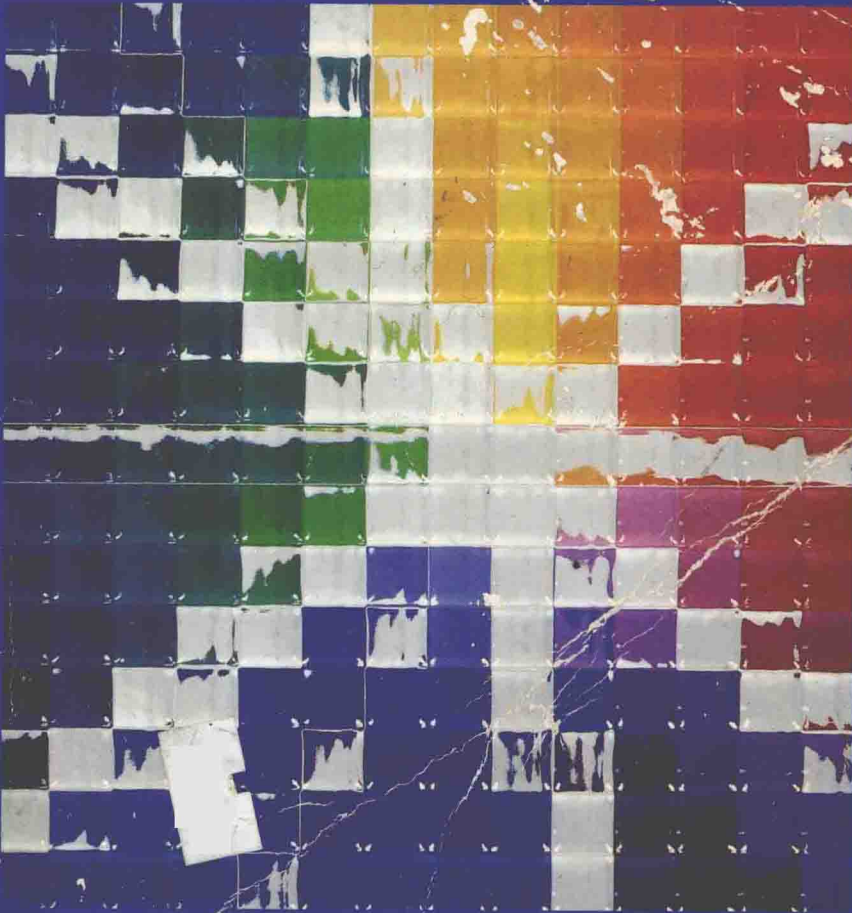


# Contemporary Political Ideologies

## A Comparative Analysis

Eighth Edition



Lyman Tower Sargent

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## A Comparative Analysis

**Eighth Edition**

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**Lyman Tower Sargent**  
University of Missouri–St. Louis



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**To Evan**



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According to a recent scholar, political ideologies in this century have replaced religion as the focus of both human liberation and human fanaticism.<sup>1</sup> Ideologies like *communism*, *democracy*, and *nationalism*, whose names are well recognized but whose contents are not well known, form the focus of this study. The essential features of certain ideologies in the world today are presented in a way that can be readily understood. To the extent possible, the ideologies are shown as they are understood by their believers, together with some of the criticisms made by their opponents. My goal is to achieve a position where readers can draw their own conclusions about each ideology based on a reasonably balanced picture of that ideology.

In this edition I have replaced a few of the photographs found in the seventh edition and added a few more. Two chapters—those on Third World ideologies and feminism—have been completely rethought and rewritten, and all the other chapters have been revised and updated.

Enhanced by these changes, the book maintains its essential character as a comparative introduction to the dominant and some of the minor ideologies of the modern world. Most chapters conclude with a “Current Trends” summary and an extensive suggested readings list, and I have tried to maintain the usefulness and flexibility of the work as a teaching tool. Having taught from this and previous editions, I wish to thank my students for helping me to improve it.

Assistance in preparing this edition was provided by reviewers Philip Abbott, Wayne State University; Michael Cummings, University of Colorado, Denver; Harlan Lewin, San Diego State University; and Hoda Zaki, Hampton University. I also wish to thank my friend Angela Miles for her helpful comments on the feminism chapter and my graduate assistant Stacey Tipp for going through the entire text with a fine-toothed comb looking for infelicities of language and lack of clarity in presentation. She has helped improve the text a great deal.

*Lyman Tower Sargent*

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# Ideologies

## What Are They and Why Study Them?

# 1

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Late in 1985 terrorists massacred people in airports in Rome and Vienna; the people killed and wounded were waiting to catch planes, drinking coffee, or seeing off friends or relatives. Why would anyone throw hand grenades at or shoot such people? The answer is ideology. The leader of one country contends that industries must be taken away from their private owners and operated under government supervision; the leader of another country contends that industries must be taken away from those that operate them under government supervision and sold to private owners. Each is convinced that this position is economically and morally correct. Why the difference? The answer is ideology.

These are but two examples of the ways in which ideology affects the behavior of people. Obviously, ideology and the specific ideologies that influence the behavior of terrorists and political leaders as well as the rest of us are important if we are to understand what happens in the world. In addition, understanding the various ideologies of the world will help us understand our own beliefs and the beliefs of our friends and associates.

Whether we are aware of it or not, most of us are influenced by ideology. Every television program, newspaper, book, or film directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally, presents an ideology. Some of these presentations are simple; others are very complex: All of them influence us. As we grow up, our family, teachers, and friends help shape our personalities and beliefs by pushing us to do or believe what they do or believe. At times we also make conscious choices among beliefs and attitudes, either because we weigh one position against another and conclude that one is better or worse according to some standard, or perhaps simply because we do or do not respect a person who holds that belief.

We gradually come to the set of beliefs and attitudes with which we will live, those we believe represent truth, even though we may not be aware of it. This set of beliefs will change throughout our lives, but it is less likely to change as we grow older. Most of us are not deeply aware of what we believe. We do not take

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our beliefs out and examine them very often, if at all. We may rethink one position or change another without really thinking about it, but we rarely look carefully or thoroughly at our beliefs.

In the development of our own beliefs and attitudes, we are affected by a variety of belief systems—religious and/or political views of the world that are, or are believed to be, internally consistent and consciously held by many people; we call these belief systems *ideologies*. We may accept parts of these ideologies simply because we have been taught to react positively or negatively to words that represent them. For example, people growing up in the United States are likely to be certain that democracy is right and communism wrong even if they have never read a book such as this that discusses democracy and communism. We react to words because they have emotional content even if they do not have intellectual content. Most people, of course, find some emotional and some intellectual content in most important words. At times each of us reacts on the basis of an ideology; at such times we are acting as though we accepted the ideology, even if we don't accept all of the attitudes and beliefs that make up that ideology.

How do we identify an ideology? The most obvious way is through the use of language in general or through the use of particular words. For example, someone influenced by capitalism will usually speak favorably of the free market, and someone influenced by Marxism will use the word *class* in specific ways. This does not necessarily mean that the person accepts all of the positions taken by a committed believer in the ideology, but paying attention to language is a good way of identifying ideological influences in a person, including oneself.

## Ideology Defined

There has been much controversy among scholars about the meaning and effect of ideology.<sup>1</sup> This section constructs a definition of ideology and shows how it relates to political philosophy and political theory. Then it illustrates the relationship between ideologies and beliefs, noting how ideologies and ideological conflicts affect people. Finally, it discusses a few of the most important theorists of ideology.

*An ideology is a value system or belief system accepted as fact or truth by some group. It is composed of sets of attitudes toward the various institutions and processes of society. It provides the believer with a picture of the world both as it is and as it should be, and, in doing so, it organizes the tremendous complexity of the world into something fairly simple and understandable.* This is the point of the word *system*; ideologies are organized or patterned beliefs. The degree of organization and the simplicity of the resulting picture vary considerably from ideology to ideology, and the ever-increasing complexity of the world tends to blur the pictures. At the same time, however, the fundamental pattern of each ideology remains fairly constant.

## Political Philosophy and Political Ideology

In order to understand ideologies, we must comprehend their theoretical or philosophical base. Various terms are used by scholars when discussing political

ideas, and it is desirable to distinguish among the most important of them. Unfortunately, the terms are often used loosely, and some of the time the uses are interchangeable. Still, the terms *political ideology*, *political theory*, and *political philosophy* are frequently used to refer to different ways of thinking about political ideas. The first term, *political ideology*, relates, as we have seen, to the beliefs of a group. It should never be used in place of either of the other two terms. The other terms are often used interchangeably, and much of the time there is nothing wrong with that. But there are times when it is important to distinguish between the two.

When used specifically, *political theory* refers to scientific theory or generalizations about politics and society based on data, just as any generalization in any science is based. There is a debate in the social sciences about whether such generalizations should or can be free of evaluative or normative content—“value-free,” as the phrase goes. *Political philosophy* is, on the other hand, explicitly evaluative or normative. It says how governments and people should behave.

The terms are connected because every political philosophy is based in part on a political theory. In other words, every statement about how people and governments should behave contains a statement about how they do behave. In addition, every political ideology contains both political theory and political philosophy, generalizations about how people and governments do behave and how they should behave. But in a political ideology these generalizations become belief systems rather than empirical or normative analyses of behavior.

## Beliefs and Ideologies

We all have beliefs; we are all influenced by ideologies, but we do not all have a coherent system of beliefs. And even those of us who do have such a system of beliefs are not all influenced by them in the same way or to the same extent. For believers an ideology provides a coordinated picture that can answer most questions about the world. Our beliefs come in large part from our identification with or membership in some group, such as a religion, and from our family background, education, and exposure to the media.

As an example of ideology in current usage, let us take an oversimplified and extreme case that will illustrate both the nature of ideology and the process of change within an ideology. In the past, movies presented viewers with a simple, clearly defined view of the clash of good and evil in the American West. The good guy and the bad guy were even identified by white clothes and a white horse for the hero and black clothes and a black horse for the villain. The good guys always won. All ideologies include definitions of who are the good guys and who are the bad guys.

Although much of the basic pattern has not changed and the identical pattern can be found in some science fiction movies, today's Westerns show the two sides dressed the same and riding the same color horses. In addition, many go so far as to present the bad guy as not entirely evil, and the good guy is not always entirely good.

These differences illustrate some of the problems in analyzing ideologies as

they change over time. In some ideologies there is the old rigid good-bad division. In others there is such a complexity of factors at work that it is difficult, or even impossible, to tell the good guys from the bad guys. In this situation a believer is often affected by more than one set of beliefs. She or he is influenced by, for example, the positions of a political party, a church, and a corporation or union. Each of these stands can constitute a partially or fully developed ideology. Although some parts of these systems may coincide perfectly or closely enough to not cause conflict within the individual, other parts may differ greatly.

## **Ideological Conflicts**

Some people may not even notice the differences, but others will be so torn apart by the conflict that they develop serious mental problems. Most of us muddle through, aware that we are not really consistent in our beliefs and behavior but not terribly bothered by that fact.

Similar situations occur within countries. In most open societies where a variety of ideologies is recognized and accepted, the conflict within the individual is unlikely to become important. But the conflicts among ideologies may become obvious, and, if the numbers of adherents are large enough and close enough in size, the stability of the country can be affected. On the other hand, in a closed system with only one official ideology, if an individual holds beliefs counter to that ideology he or she will probably be intensely aware of the difference and be affected by it. The same thing is true for the country as a whole. Ideological differences become more important, particularly differences within the official ideology, and can cause serious conflict.

The phenomenon apparent in the American movies about the Old West occurs in all societies. As a society grows more and more complex, it becomes harder to present a simple division between good and bad, between the white and black hats. Black and white are mixed and become gray. We have discovered that the world is not as simple as the older movies would have us believe; the new Western reflects this recognition.

Even with this change in the pattern of some ideologies, all ideologies attempt to organize our complex world into a pattern that will at least give some signposts to help the believer distinguish good from bad. Finally, in none of them does the ideal and reality meet, and there is a struggle to bring them together through changes in either the ideal or the reality.

In any society, different segments of the population will hold different ideologies. For example, within the United States today, the overwhelming majority, if asked, would call themselves believers in democracy. But some would call themselves anarchists, Fascists, and so forth. Every society exhibits a variety of ideologies. In no case will a given society be so completely dominated by a single ideology as to have no ideological alternatives available within the system, even though those alternatives may be actively suppressed by the regime.

Many of those willing to label themselves democrats and so forth do not know the meaning of the terms they use or act in the way the ideology would be expected to lead them. But most people build up a pattern of behavior, some

aspects of which come directly from the dominant political ideology of the country in which they live. For example, it is a bit surprising that people accept the outcome of elections rather than fighting for their side when they lose. But most people in countries with established democracies are so conditioned to accept loss in elections that they do so without ever thinking about revolt. This is not always the case, though. There are countries in most parts of the world in which elections produce violent attempts, sometimes successful, to change the results.

**Differences within ideologies.** There are differences within each ideology that make each a cluster of ideologies. Democracy is the most obvious example, being composed of at least two major categories—democratic capitalism and democratic socialism. All who place themselves in either of these categories believe themselves to be democrats and often see themselves as the only true democrats. In addition to this major division, there are numerous disagreements over the emphasis placed on certain aspects of democracy and over the tactics used in achieving desired goals. This phenomenon is not characteristic of the democratic ideology alone. As we know from reading the news from various communist countries in recent years, there are significant disagreements among Communists over what is essential to communism as an ideology and what is nonessential and can be changed, modified slightly, or discarded.

There is no ideology completely free from this sort of disagreement. When one speaks of a single, official ideology, it should be recognized that even these so-called single, official ideologies are not monolithic. A variety of differing positions and disagreements together comprise the ideology and allow it to change to meet changing conditions. Only a dead ideology is free from such differences.

To reiterate, individuals may hold a variety of beliefs that may be in conflict. Normally, people do not recognize the conflicting nature of these beliefs and apply them to different situations without ever looking at their values as a whole. A person either fails to see the problem, argues that the positions are not irreconcilable, or gradually rejects one position. This presents one of the most serious obstacles to a clear understanding of ideologies; it will remain a theme in the consideration of each ideology.

## Ideology and Practice

A central concern of all students of ideology is the extent to which and the ways in which ideology affects practice. Evidence is limited by the very nature of the question, and there has been a widespread attitude in the United States that belief does not affect the practice of politicians.

On the one hand, we have political leaders using the language of the dominant ideology of their country to justify their actions. On the other hand, it is frequently possible to question whether or not their actions are derived from their ideologies or from expediency. In addition, we have the apparent contradictions between the actions of adherents to some ideologies when they are out of power



and when they are in power. At the same time, ideological language has come to permeate politics in the last quarter of the twentieth century, and it is difficult to accept that it is all facade with no reality behind it.

The most likely effect of ideology is in the limiting of options. Except in really extraordinary circumstances, political leaders will not perceive as options policies that fall outside their ideology. In this way ideology limits but does not determine practice.

## Debates about Ideology

The word *ideology* was first used in the late nineteenth century by a group of French thinkers called the Ideologues to describe an approach to the understanding of how ideas were formed. The word was picked up by others and used mostly as a label for ways in which people block out messages that threaten them. For all these thinkers, ideologies keep people from understanding the truth about their situations. The following section discusses briefly five of these theorists and a debate in the 1950s and 1960s over the end of ideology in the West.

**Karl Marx.** Karl Marx (1818–1883) argued that ideologies blinded people to the facts about their place in society. He described as ideological any set of political *illusions* produced by the social experiences of a *class* (i.e., a social group defined by its economic role; for example, owners or workers). Marx called ideology *false consciousness*. For Marx, a person's membership in a particular class produced a picture of the world shaped by the experiences of that class. Thus it would be almost impossible for an individual class member to form an accurate conception of the world. Marx argued that the *socialization process* (i.e., the process by which an individual comes to accept the values of the society) is strongly shaped by one's place in the class system of that society. In other words, he contended that the social setting in which each of us lives determines the broad outlines of the way we think. The members of different classes are both directly and indirectly taught to think and behave in ways "appropriate" for that class.

**Georges Sorel.** A different approach to ideology, using the word *myth* rather than the word *ideology*, was proposed by Georges Sorel (1847–1922). Sorel argued that mass movements developed visions of the future that their members didn't quite believe in, but which were an essential part of what motivated them. He called these visions *myths*. Sorel focused on fairly specific myths, like the belief in the general strike prevalent among syndicalists, rather than the broader belief systems that this text calls ideologies. Also, as implied by the word *myth*, the depth of the belief is not the same. But myths can galvanize people and are clearly part of all ideologies.

**Karl Mannheim.** Karl Mannheim (1893–1947) gave a description of ideology close to Marx's, except Mannheim attempted to avoid the negative connotations that Marx intended in his definition. For Marx, ideologies were illusions that kept