Different Political Ideologies and their Relationship to Different Political Parties

Chris. Livesey: www.sociology.org.uk
Political Ideologies and Political Parties

Mullins (1972): Political ideologies involve: “A program of collective action for the maintenance, alteration or transformation of society”.

Gerring (1997): “Ideologies” (a set of related beliefs and values) become political ideologies when they “specify a concrete programme of action” (such as a party manifesto).

Bjørnskov (2004): Ideology is: “Hotly disputed...difficult to define and consequently difficult to measure”.

Involves general ideas about how we think about (and behave in) the social world.

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Jones (2004): Political ideologies have the same basic features as other forms of ideology:

Beliefs
- About the nature of the world.

Political objectives
- Whatever these beliefs are designed to achieve.

Instructions
- About how these objectives can be realised.

Justifications
- For those beliefs (and about the superiority of such beliefs when compared to other ideologies).

Relate to broad (and fundamental) beliefs about the basis and general organisation of political behaviour in a society - they refer, in other words, to the idea of political systems.

Relate to the particular ways systemic beliefs are operationalised within a society.

Example: In the UK, although each party represented in Parliament has its own unique set of policies, principles and practices, all generally subscribe to the notion of a democratic political ideology.

A set of fundamental ideas and practices (a totalist ideology) that are the only permissible political ideas.

Grobman (1990): Totalist ideologies involve “Complete political, social, and cultural control over their subjects”.

Examples (20th century): Soviet Union under the control of Stalin (Communism) Nazi Germany under the control of Hitler (Fascism).

Unlike democracies, where different parties and ideologies may be in competition (pluralism), totalitarian societies are organised around a single party.

Example: Modern China

This system extends control downwards into every area of social life and the legal system is usually under the control or influence of the Party hierarchy.

A common feature is a “secret police force” whose main role is to maintain and extend the existing political order. Such policing may involve imprisonment without trial, torture or even death.

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A common feature is a “secret police force” whose main role is to maintain and extend the existing political order. Such policing may involve imprisonment without trial, torture or even death.
Government decisions are taken by elected representatives. Once elected politicians are assumed to have a mandate from the electorate to take decisions “on their behalf”, without the need for further consultation.

A delegatory version sometimes exists, whereby elected representatives are mandated to vote in ways decided by the electorate.

**State Referenda** where, in addition to voting for political representatives, people vote on a range of different propositions (concerning local taxation, criminal law and so forth) that, if passed, become legally-binding.

**Examples:** United States or Switzerland

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**Democratic Debate**

The law-making process, for example, is the result of democratic discussion and voting from within the supreme constitutional body in a democratic society - although different democracies structure their parliamentary system differently.

**Elections**

Every citizen having the right to periodically vote for the party - or individual - of their choice. In the UK, for example, a number of competing political parties exist, with the governing party (Labour, as of 2006) serving for a maximum of 5 years (although elections may be called before this by the Prime Minister).

**Accountability**

**Examples:** Interest groups (such as the media) being free to examine and criticise government policies. The ruling political party must submit to re-election and - if defeated - engage in an orderly and peaceful hand-over of power.

**Legal equality**

**Example:** The right to a fair trial, regardless of class, age, gender or ethnicity.

**Speech**

To express and debate ideas contrary to government policy.

**Example:** The media are not subject to party political control, influence or censorship.

**Action**

To demonstrate and protest peacefully.

**Association**

To form and join groups who may be fundamentally opposed to government policies and practices.
Although each party represented in the UK Parliament has its own unique set of policies, principles and practices, all generally subscribe to the notion of a democratic political ideology. We need, therefore, to examine specific forms of political ideology in the light of these systemic beliefs.

A conventional way to classify political ideologies is to view them as a continuous line (the continuum), at one end of which are “left-wing” parties (Communist and Socialist) and at the other are “right wing” parties (Conservative and Fascist).

I ideological positions (and the parties that hold them) are fragmented in contemporary societies. Example: Labour policies have embraced both ideas and issues (social inclusion, welfare, child poverty and the like) conventionally associated with socialism and ideas and issues (such as increased prison funding) conventionally associated with the New Right.

Dearlove and Saunders (2001): Labour has “always been a reformist party dedicated to running Capitalism, as against a socialist party dedicated to the overthrow of Capitalism”.

For much of 20th century embraced “One Nation Conservatism” - while still favouring business interests adopted policies (the Welfare State) previously the preserve of the Labour Party. In the 1980’s, under Thatcher, Conservative ideology took on a “New Right” economic agenda.

David Cameron (2005) new leader of Conservative Party. Ideological shift that spoke of the need for “…a more compassionate Conservatism”.

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A “top down” approach to understanding dictatorships (a ruler or dominant group simply imposes their will on the masses) doesn’t accord with the reality of life in such societies - a substantial proportion of the population may be broadly supportive of the actions and behaviours of elite groups.

Wintrobe (2002): Problem with the concept of “totalitarian ideologies”. Over-emphasis on the idea of societies being dominated by “dictators wielding absolute power” and “ruling on the basis of terror and propaganda”.

Wintrobe: “The general population may be repressed…but other aspects of the regime may compensate for this as far as they are concerned…The use of repression doesn’t mean dictators aren’t popular. Indeed, it sometimes appears from the historical record that the more repressive they were, the more popular they became!”.


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Synoptic Link
Stratification and Differentiation
How elite self-recruitment / reproduction enhances or diminishes life chances and social mobility.
In the 1997 election campaign, Tony Blair repeatedly used the phrase "Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime". Williamson (2002): This was "...geared to appeal both to the law-and-order lobby and to those...who believe that crime takes place for a variety of complex social reasons which cannot, fundamentally, be changed simply by punishing individual perpetrators".

Differences between democratic and totalitarian forms of ideology and practice should not be overstated. Gamble (2005): Labour has governed in an “…authoritarian, centralist style, running the government through a small circle around the leader, sidelining cabinet, parliament and party”. It nevertheless has to submit itself for periodic, democratic, election.

Similarities, at the systemic level, between UK party ideologies demonstrate the difficulty of disentangling and mapping different ideological beliefs.

At the party political level we can think about different Ideological Maps that go beyond a relatively unsophisticated “Left wing - Right wing” continuum.

Categories like “Left-wing” cover a range of different ideological groups and have no easily determined boundaries (where, for example does “left-wing” end and “right-wing” begin?). Example: Libertarianism embraces elements of both right-wing (low taxation, little or no government regulation of business) and left-wing ideologies (personal tolerance, the freedom to choose lifestyles and the like).

Dearlove and Saunders: “It is a mistake to try to map political positions on a simple “left - right” continuum” in the contemporary UK and, instead, suggest we think about party ideological principles in a slightly different way. They argue that our society is characterised by three great ideological traditions:

Socialism
Concerned mainly with removing social and economic inequality.

Conservatism
Paternalistic concerns for custom, tradition and evolutionary change.

Liberalism

Traditional Liberalism is similar to what we now call the New Right, with "its commitment to private property, the free market and the liberty of the individual as against the threat posed by the modern State".

Dearlove and Saunders: Parties (and ideologies) are fluid - constantly shifting their positions as they “dip into and out of” each tradition.

Synoptic Link
Crime and Deviance
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Margaret Thatcher (1979 - 1991) mixed both Conservative and Traditional Liberal ideas with the emphasis on the latter.

John Major re-emphasised “traditional Conservative” roots at the expense of New Right radicalism.

David Cameron (2005), has signaled both modernisation (increasing the number of female MP’s, for example) and continuity with New Right policies (such as cuts in personal taxation).
The Labour Party under Tony Blair has mixed elements of all three ideological traditions to produce a new ideological alignment characterised by Giddens (1998, 2001) as neither wholly socialist, nor wholly conservative.

Rather than seeing politics as a choice between two ideological positions (State-funded or charity-funded welfare systems, for example), Third Way politics argues there is a “middle road” between these positions. Many current Labour policies reflect this idea by combining State-funded (education, the National Health Service and so forth) with privately funded institutions.

Synoptic Link
Education
Academy schools are an example of the attempt to combine public and private funding.

Lees-Marshment: Rather than seeing parties in terms of “selling products” (such as a particular set of ideological beliefs), they now act like brands - what they sell is still “ideas”, but these are related to “whatever the market wants” rather than to some fundamental ideology.

Lees-Marshment (2001, 2004): Political parties “acting like businesses” - designing their product (policies) “to suit whatever the voters want”. Conventional ways of understanding ideological principles and their relationship to political parties is out-dated - it is no longer a case of parties developing an ideological position that is then presented to the electorate to accept or reject; rather, parties change and adapt their ideological positions to suit whatever their research tells them are the policies that will get them elected (or re-elected).

Budge and Bara: Identified “ideological sentences” that correlated positively with a “Left-wing” or a “Right-wing” political position. This suggests it is possible to locate different types of political party (from extreme Left-wing to extreme Right wing and all points in between) according to their fundamental ideological principles.

Budge and Bara (2001): Alternative view to the idea it’s no longer possible to think about contemporary political parties in terms of an ideological “Left - Right” continuum.

McLean (2004): Manifesto Research Group developed a multidimensional approach to mapping political ideologies: “Parties try to “own” issues (such as immigration or law and order) that once identified can be mapped to a general “Left - Right” continuum.

Ideological Phrases: Budge and Bara (2001)

Left-wing Phrases
- Democracy
- Regulate capitalism
- Nationalisation
- Military: negative

Right-wing Phrases
- Free enterprise
- Economic incentives
- Law and order
- Military: positive
Exam Questions

12 marks
Briefly examine the view that there is now a high degree of political consensus in modern Britain.

40 marks
Assess the view that differences between British political parties have been steadily diminishing over the past thirty years.

40 marks
Analyze and evaluate the sociological arguments and evidence for the view that ideological differences between political parties have become less distinct over the last twenty years.

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