

IDEOLOGY AND THE NEWS MEDIA

Ideology Notes

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Your beliefs about human nature and the world you live in affect the way you feel about society. Society is organized in such a way that it reflects the beliefs of people and it helps them to reach their goals. These beliefs and goals are called **ideology**. **All the world's political and economic systems are explained and justified by ideology.**

Ideology colours your perception of the world you live in, and it reflects your beliefs about human nature and society. Ideology also influences your beliefs about how society should be organized and governed.

Ideology supplies the key to classifying the various types of political and economic systems. The simplest method of classification is to arrange the different systems along a **continuum** or **spectrum**. This achieves two things. It shows you where the various systems are in relation to each other. It shows you that elements of one system may blur into another as well.

Keep in mind that the concept of ideology is both abstract and complex. A spectrum provides a starting point for our understanding, but it is not a definitive tool for identifying ideology.

In reality, modern economies and political systems fit somewhere in between. There is no such thing as a "pure" economic or political system.

The end points of the continuum or spectrum are ideological opposites -- individual freedom versus government control. Political and economic systems deal with this issue on an ongoing basis.

A **continuum** is a model -- the end points are ideals. *There is no such thing as absolute freedom or absolute control.* Real political and economic systems exist somewhere in between.

The vertical line below represents a **political continuum**.

- **Systems based on freedoms are called Democracies.**
- **Dictatorships** are based on government control.

**Political Freedom
(Democracy)**



**Political Control
(Dictatorship)**

NOTE: The colours are not significant, they are merely used to help you see how one end of the continuum is different from the other.

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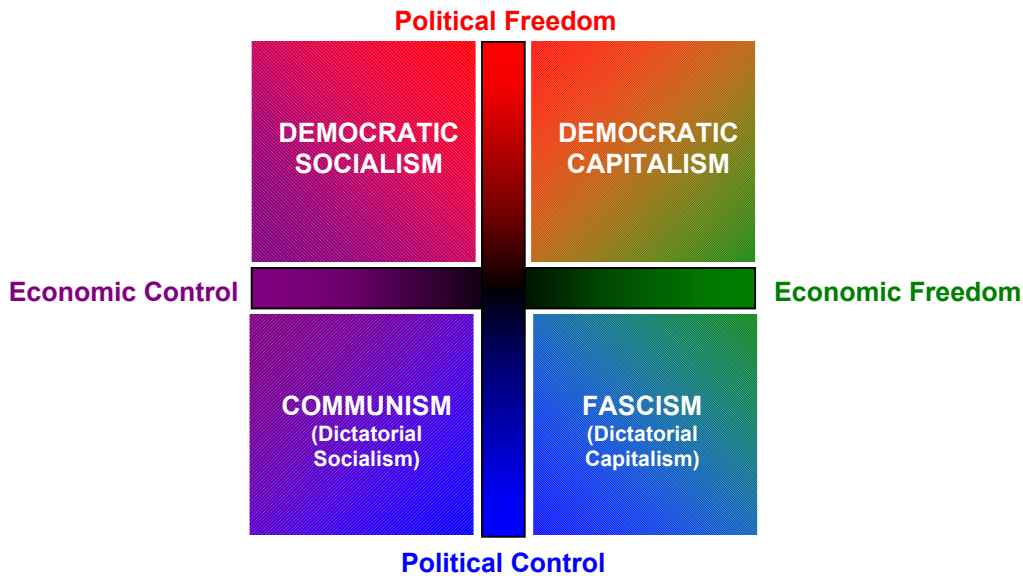
The horizontal line below represents an **economic continuum**.

- Systems based on individual freedom are called **Private Enterprise** or **Capitalism**.
- **Public Enterprise** or **Socialism** is based on government control.



Societies have both a government and an economy. *By combining the two continuums, you get a grid that can classify any combination of political and economic systems.*

When you examine this grid, please take careful note **that democracy and dictatorship are political systems, but capitalism and socialism are economic systems. They can be combined in four different ways - as represented by the four different "quadrants" in the diagram below.**



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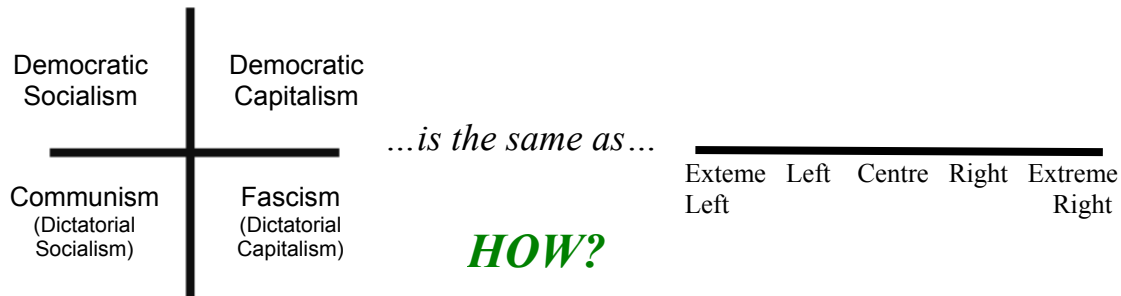
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Another method for classifying **political and economic systems** is in terms of the left-right continuum or spectrum as shown. *This type of classification is much more common -- you often hear and read about "left wing" or "right wing" politics and economics.*



How do we go from a grid that clearly shows the four combinations of political and economic systems to a flat, horizontal line that shows the same thing?



First, let's look at the economic spectrum.

This one's easy. It's easy because the line we used to represent the economic spectrum in our first grid was already flat, so it's easy to convert to our new flat-line spectrum. Check out the diagram below:



In terms of economic ideology, the left and the right represent different positions on the role of government in the economy. The left supports government control of the economy. This is called **collectivism** because government controls the economy by owning property and directing economic activity in the interest of the collective welfare rather than individual benefit. On the other end, the right supports **individualism** where property is owned by private individuals and where economic activity is the result of competition by individuals in the marketplace.

- **Collectivism:** an ideology based on the primacy of collective welfare
- **Individualism:** an ideology based on the primacy of individual freedom

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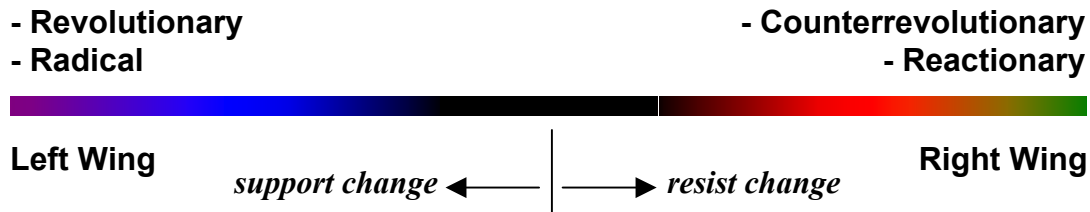
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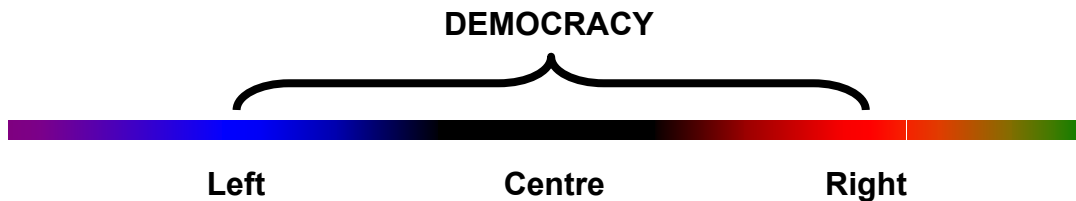
Remember, a continuum or spectrum is a model; the end points are ideals. In reality, all modern economies fit somewhere in between. Although one ideology predominates, economies often include some elements of the other. Economies that blend the two ideologies are called **mixed economies**.

Now let's look at the political spectrum.

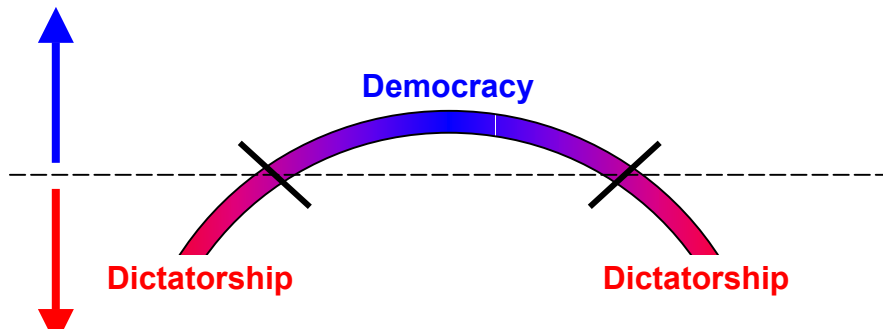
In terms of political ideology, this continuum or spectrum is based on change. The left encourages change while the right resists it. The end points represent extremes of ideology. The extreme left supports swift, sometimes violent change. The words **revolutionary** or **radical** describe this position. On the other end, the extreme right resists change, sometimes with violence if necessary. **Counterrevolutionary** or **reactionary** describe this position. The extreme right supports change when change means going back to how things were in the good old days.



The centre represents a moderate position that may range from moderate left to moderate right. Moderates may support change on some issues while resisting it on others. On this continuum or spectrum, democracy describes the moderate position.



That takes care of democracy, but where does **dictatorship** fit? On the horizontal line, communism is extreme left while fascism is extreme right. They appear to be opposites, *but both are dictatorships*. The problem is solved by bending the horizontal line to point out the similarity between the two dictatorships.



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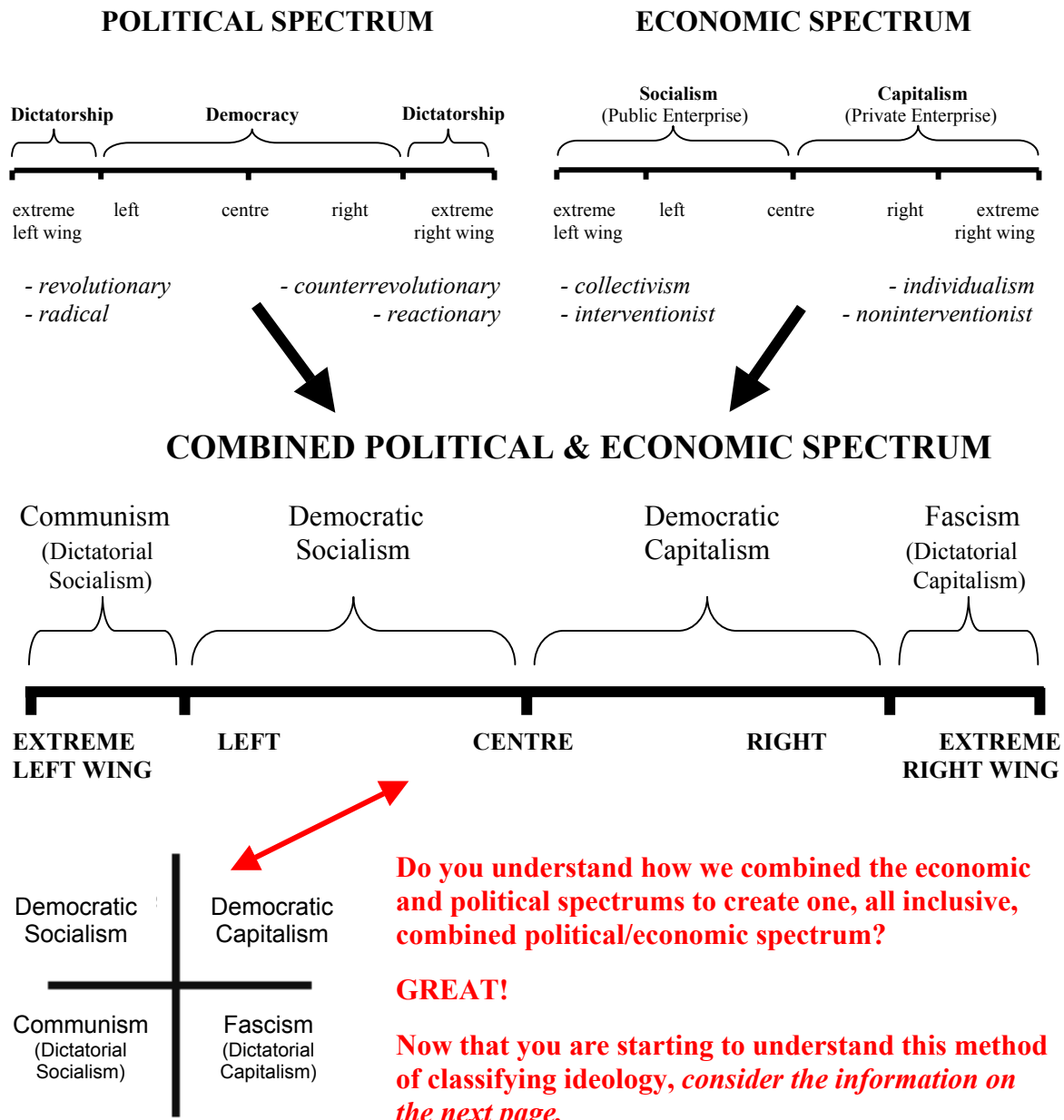
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OK, now let's put it all together.

CHECK OUT THE DIAGRAM BELOW

LEFT-RIGHT IDEOLOGICAL SPECTRUM - SUMMARY -



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Does the ideological spectrum work in the “real world”?

A spectrum is only a theoretical model; the end points are ideals -- in reality, they don't exist. We use a model like this in an attempt to help us understand the policies and relationships that drive politics and economies in the real world. The “real world,” however, rarely fits into a nice tidy package that falls at a given point on the spectrum. In fact, it has become increasingly difficult to apply a label of “left wing” or “right wing” to a modern government faced with changing influences such as globalization, nationalism, ethnicity, and technology.

The complexities and demands of the modern world require greater flexibility on the part of governments and economies. For example, a government may take a left-wing stance on one issue, but be decidedly right-wing on another; a government may migrate to a different point on the spectrum over time; or a government may have an ideological placement at one point on the spectrum, but exhibit characteristics from another. These scenarios were at times reflected in the policies and proposed legislation of the Social Credit government under William Aberhart (as depicted in the “Ideology and the News Media” learning object), thus making it difficult to find a “fit” on the spectrum.

It is also difficult to fit *individuals* on the spectrum. A person may exhibit a strong left or right wing belief on a particular issue, but take a more moderate approach to something else. In addition, it's not unusual for a person to change their ideological stance as their knowledge and experience with the world grows over time.

So, does the ideological spectrum work in the “real world”?

Yes and no.

No, in that it does not provide a “black and white” definitive kind of ideological identification tool. The concept of ideology is not that quantifiable.

Yes, in that it is important to understand that a spectrum model gives us a starting point in trying to understand the extremely abstract concept of ideology.
