

## University of Virginia Center for Politics



### Formation of an Ideological Spectrum

**Purpose:** This lesson is intended to help students develop an advanced understanding of distinctions in political ideology in order to be able to determine where specific issue positions would fall on the ideological spectrum.

#### Objectives:

1. Students will distinguish between modern *liberals* and modern *conservatives*.
2. Students will create an ideological spectrum that will include *liberals*, *conservatives*, *libertarians*, and *moderates*.
3. Students will describe the basic ideologies of *conservatives*, *moderates*, *liberals*, *radicals* and *reactionaries*.
4. Students will examine policy statements and determine to which political ideology each belongs.

#### Key Words:

<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Independent</i>	<i>Moderate</i>
<i>Left-wing</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Libertarian</i>
<i>Radical</i>	<i>Reactionary</i>	<i>Right-wing</i>

#### Materials:

1. Overhead Projector
2. Teacher resource: transparency of *Ideological Statements*
3. Student handout: *Ideological Spectrum Graphic Organizer*
4. Student handout: *Debrief: Describing the Ideological Spectrum*
5. Chart paper and markers

#### Procedure:

1. Warm-Up/ Mind Jog: Place the following terms on the board or overhead and ask students to choose one and brainstorm a list of words that come to mind when they hear this word.
  - a. **Liberal**
  - b. **Conservative**
2. Review answers with the students. Ask them if where these terms are most often used. What beliefs do we associate with these two groups?
3. Draw a line down the center of the board or on the overhead. Ask a student volunteer to label the right or left side of the board as **liberal** or **conservative**. Students should



label the left side as **liberal** and the right side as **conservative**. This is where the terms **Left Wing**, **Right Wing** originate.

Liberal

Conservative

4. Ask students to elaborate on the major differences between these two groups. Copy the statements from the teacher resource sheet, *Ideological Statements* onto sentence strips. Distribute the strips throughout the classroom and have small groups of students decide whether the statement is **Liberal** or **Conservative**. Place the strips under the appropriate ideology. Inform students that liberals tend to belong to the Democratic Party and conservatives to the Republican Party.
5. Ask students to identify the difficulties in placing every political issue on this polarized spectrum- for instance gun control legislation. Many **liberals** and **conservatives** favor some regulation of gun ownership while others may hold that any regulation is a violation of governmental power. Still others may believe that gun ownership in any form must be prohibited. Students should understand that there are issues and positions which may fall in between the two or issues that are even more extreme.
6. Explain to students that both **Liberals** and **Conservatives** believe in Locke's idea of natural rights particularly regarding private ownership of property. The difference between liberals and conservatives comes in the way in which they envision government fulfilling this role. Conservatives tend to believe that there should be less governmental regulation in economic matters while liberals believe there should be less governmental control in issues of social and political matters. Most citizens have beliefs from both sides of the spectrum.
7. Pass out the handout- *Political Spectrum Graphic Organizer*. Explain to students that the political spectrum is similar to a Persian carpet. Most Americans make up the medallion of the carpet which lies in the center of the spectrum. This means that they will have **moderate** views on most issues and form their opinions on an issue to issue basis. What separates moderate voters are one or two issues on which they will feel strongly. This strong belief in one issue will pull them to one side of the spectrum or another. Approximately 80% of the American public falls in this area. Briefly describe the characteristics of the **radicals**, **reactionaries**, **libertarians** and **independents**. Have students take notes on the graphic organizer.
8. Divide the students into six groups. Assign each group one of the following identities from the ideological spectrum: **Radical**, **Liberal**, **Moderate**, **Conservative**, **Libertarian**, and **Reactionary**. Have the students discuss the characteristics of individuals within this identity and create a sketch of what that person might be like. Students should share their work with the class and describe the characteristics of each ideology.



9. As an assessment of the lesson ask students to comment on how each group would view a current issue (i.e. school vouchers, gun control, censorship). Hand out the worksheet, *Debriefing the Ideological Spectrum*. Have students complete the worksheet and identify how **independent** voters might view this issue. Students are also asked to comment the effects of **moderates** on the political process.

### Extension Activity:

Have students use their knowledge of the political spectrum to analyze the Democrat/Republic Party platforms. Some questions to address:

- a. How does the knowledge that 80% of Americans view themselves as moderates affect the party's strategy in an election year?
- b. How do the party platforms reach out to moderate voters?
- c. How do the fringe groups (**radicals, reactionaries**) affect an election?

or

Ask students to plan a campaign strategy that would maximize their appeal on the ideological spectrum. How would they, as a candidate, address important economic and social issues?



## **Ideological Statements**

**Directions:** Copy the following statements onto sentence strips. Have students identify whether a statement would fall under a liberal or conservative point of view.

Government should not censor speech, press, media or the internet.	<b>Liberal</b>
Repeal laws prohibiting adult possession and use of drugs.	<b>Liberal</b>
Let people control their own retirement; privatize Social Security.	<b>Conservative</b>
Replace government welfare with private charity.	<b>Conservative</b>
Government regulation of business is necessary to protect the public interest	<b>Liberal</b>
Government regulation of business usually does more harm than good.	<b>Conservative</b>
Too much power is concentrated in the hands of a few large companies.	<b>Liberal</b>
Stricter environmental laws and regulations cost too many jobs and	<b>Conservative</b>
The government should help those in need even if it has to raise taxes.	<b>Liberal</b>
Government programs like welfare discourage people from working.	<b>Conservative</b>



## **Debrief: Describing the Ideological Spectrum**

Public Policy Issue: \_\_\_\_\_

Identify each group's position on this issue. Offer supporting evidence from the lesson to defend your position. Determine how strongly each group would feel about this issue.

Political Ideology	Position/Evidence	Strength of Feeling
Liberals		
Conservatives		
Moderates		
Radicals		
Reactionaries		
Libertarians		

When asked why they don't vote many Americans respond by saying that they feel as though it doesn't make a difference because the candidates are too similar.

Comment on the following in a short essay.

- Based on your knowledge of the ideological spectrum, why would the positions of major candidates be so similar?
- Why wouldn't candidates address the entire ideological spectrum when planning their campaigns?
- What is the effect of a third party or independent candidate (i.e. Nader) on an election? Where do these candidates gain the most support?

Ideological Spectrum Graphic Organizer

Left Wing

Right Wing

Liberals

Conservatives

	Green Party	Democrats	<div>Independents</div> <div>Moderates</div>	Republicans	Isolationists	
	Independents				Independents	
<b>Radicals</b>						<b>Reactionaries</b>