

## Recognizing Ideologies

Recognizing ideologies involves understanding the beliefs that guide a person or group. If you know a group's ideology, you know many of its values and assumptions, and you can make fairly reliable predictions about its positions on many issues.

### Explanation

To decide on the ideological orientation of an author, follow these steps:

- Read the passage carefully, then try to put the author's main points into your own words.
- Compare the author's ideas to what you know of liberal and conservative ideologies.
- If you find a close fit between the ideas expressed and a particular ideology, chances are the author holds other views associated with that ideology.

An ideology is a set of beliefs about government and society. Ideologies are important in shaping parties' platforms. Ideologies also change over time. In recent decades two major ideologies have dominated American politics: liberalism and conservatism. Liberals generally support a strong role for the federal government in promoting minority rights, social reform, and efforts to regulate the economy. Conservatives generally want to limit the role of government in solving social problems.

Read the following passage:

*To say "that government is best which governs least" is not to yearn for anarchy: it is to say that those laws are best that don't require a huge apparatus of surveillance and enforcement. The foolishness of Prohibition was that it pitted the law against deep-rooted ways of life. Socialism makes the same mistake on an even larger scale.*

—JOSEPH SOBRAN,  
NATIONAL REVIEW, DECEMBER 31, 1985

The first step in analyzing an author's ideological orientation is to restate the passage in your own words. The previous passage might be paraphrased as follows: "Laws that go against traditional ways in order to promote reform violate people's liberty."

The second step is to compare the main ideas with different ideologies. The author is concerned with preserving tradition and individual liberties and opposes social experimentation. These are conservative opinions. You can predict that the author will hold conservative views on other subjects.

Remember that such predictions can only be educated guesses. Liberal and conservative ideologies vary from time to time and from individual to individual. Many people take liberal positions on one issue and conservative positions on other issues.

### Practice

Now read the following passage, and use what you have learned about ideologies to answer the questions that follow.

*The welfare state is based, in the first place, upon acceptance of collective responsibility for providing all individuals with equality of opportunity. . . . Second . . . the welfare state assumes responsibility for the basic economic security of those who are unable . . . to provide such security for themselves. . . . Third, the welfare state assumes the responsibility for reducing great disparities [inequalities] in the distribution of wealth. . . . Finally, the welfare state assumes the responsibility for promoting the full employment of our manpower. . . .*

—HUBERT H. HUMPHREY,  
THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, AUTUMN, 1955

- 1 What does the author mean by "the welfare state"? Does he approve or disapprove of it?
- 2 State the author's main points in your own words.
- 3 Do you think that the author is liberal or conservative? Explain your answer.
- 4 What position do you think the author would take on wage and price controls to combat inflation?

### Additional Practice

To practice this skill, see **Reinforcing the Skill** on page 253.