

Ideology and Democracy

Ideology is a comprehensive societal philosophy that motivates people to form mass movements with the intention of transforming the prevailing social, cultural, political and economic conditions. Mass movements are usually led by charismatic leaders who know how to communicate with the masses and mobilize them to achieve certain objectives. And due to their rigid nature, ideologies tend to produce extremists who believe in the sanctity of the principles on which their ideologies are based, and in the absolute objectivity of the goals they seek to accomplish; extremists also feel that changing the world they live in is a sacred mission they have to complete. As a consequence, ideologues and ideological leaders tend to behave in ways that reflect more irrationality than sanity, and to sacrifice human rights and lives for the sake of an ideological zeal no one can prove its validity, let alone its sanctity.

Ideologies are sociocultural or religious; sociopolitical or national; socioeconomic or Marxist. Since religion has been the most dominant ideology throughout history; it does not need to become a mass movement to survive and be effective. In contrast, nationalism and Marxism must become mass movements and control state power to be effective. Due to this fact, neither nationalism nor Marxism has been able to survive the promises and menaces of cultural and economic globalization. While Marxism was discredited years ago, nationalism is fading away and slowly becoming irrelevant. But regardless of their nature and objectives, all ideologies tend to impose their will and worldview on others, not by persuasion only but by force when necessary; ideologues believe that transforming the way people think and live dictates controlling the sources of economic and political power in society.

Since democracy is a system that derives its legitimacy from the will of people, and is based on certain principles such as equality of rights, freedom of speech, political plurality, and the rule of law, ideologues cannot function in a democratic system. In fact; ideologues tend to view democracy and the democratic principles as obstacles hindering the advancement of their objectives, and therefore must be overcome. Neither ideologies nor ideologues accept pluralism, tolerate criticism or dissent, or recognize equality of rights or freedom of speech.

When ideologies are weak, their leadership tends to show some respect for the will of people and to claim acceptance of the basic democratic principles; they may even participate in democratic processes. However, their objective has always been to gain power and use it to impose their will on others. When ideologies gain enough popular support or power to rule, they usually go for the maximum they seek to accomplish without much regard for the interests of the nation, the sensitivities of minorities, or the human rights of the people they claim to be fighting for.

If force is used to subdue extremists, or if extremists feel humiliated and their faith belittled, they are more likely to lose whatever sanity they may have had and to resort to violence. People who are strong believers in faith and fate, and others who believe in a national, largely racist ideology tend to be more willing to commit crimes and justify criminal acts in the name of the ideological zeal they believe in and are committed to realize. Since extremism is a form of madness, extremists must be regarded as people in need of compassion and long term therapy, not force or humiliation.

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