# POLSC302: Political Ideologies: A Comparison

**Background**
Political ideologies are ethical sets of ideals, principles, and/or doctrines, that explain how society should work and offer some political and cultural blueprints for a certain social order. Political ideology largely concerns itself with how to allocate power and to what ends it should be used. In the United States, political ideologies are usually represented by a political party—an alliance of like-minded people who work together to win elections and control of the government. Some parties follow a certain ideology very closely, while others may take broad inspiration from a group of related ideologies without specifically embracing any one of them.

Political party ideologies are very often consolidated into a platform. A platform is a series of positions on political issues which are used to promote a particular party or candidate to the voting population. It often comes in the form of a manifesto, a carefully worded political document which appeals to voters by touching on a number of issues that are important to them.

**Related Resources**
8.1 Neo-Liberalism
- Global Issues' version of Anup Shah's "A Primer on Neo-Liberalism"

8.2 Neo-Conservatism
- The Weekly Standard: Irving Kristol's "The Neoconservative Persuasion"

8.3 Libertarianism
- YouTube: Hoover Institute: "Take It to the Limits: Milton Friedman on Libertarianism"

**Instructions**
For this assessment, you will compare and contrast the political ideologies of Liberals, Conservatives, and Libertarians as embodied in their representative political parties. You will analyze the party platforms of the Democratic (liberalism), Republican (conservatism), and Libertarian (libertarianism) parties and use them as a guide for completing a worksheet summarizing their perspectives on a wide range of issues. The links to the Democratic and Republican platforms can be found at The American Presidency Project, at the top of the webpage (click on the PDF versions). For the Libertarian Party, go to their website and read their platform's Preamble and Statement of Principles. Then read "Issues and Positions," which goes into more detail.

When reading the party platforms, please note that some of their positions are expansive, so be sure to summarize their main points (simply writing "for" or "against" the issue is insufficient). Also, keep in mind that platforms are intended to appeal to the largest possible base within a party—a difficult task in a membership group representing millions of people—so these documents are written very carefully and with a fair amount of nuance. To that end, try to "read between the lines" to get to the

core of what is specifically being stated.  Finally, keep in mind that both parties will often have similar goals (i.e., improving education) but different viewpoints on how they should be achieved.  Being aware of this will help you to more clearly distinguish their fundamental policy positions.  Finally, platforms may not mention a particular issue if they have no specific position on it or if they have yet to find a general consensus.  If you find this is the case, just write "N/A" (not applicable) in the worksheet.

After you complete the assessment, think about the key differences among these parties and ideologies.  Which one aligns most closely with your own political beliefs?

**Worksheet**

| Issue | Conservatism | Liberalism | Libertarianism |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Election and Campaign Reform** | | | |
| **Education Reform** | | | |
| **Gay Rights** | | | |
| **Gun Control** | | | |
| **Capital Punishment** | | | |

| Issue | Conservatism | Liberalism | Libertarianism |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| Abortion | | | |
| Climate Change | | | |
| Health Care Reform | | | |
| Social Security | | | |