**What is a Continuum?**

* A person’s views on the issues help determine where they fall on the political spectrum.
* The labels used on the spectrum are not pure categories, but they make up a continuum, or value line, and citizens and politicians fall somewhere on that line depending on what they believe.

**Factors That Determine Placement**

* Two major factors shape political views.
* The first is how much change a person is willing to have within their society and government.
* The second deals with how much government involvement in the economy a person calls for.
* Others also bring in the question of how much freedom from government authority a leader is willing to give the people.

**Political Labels:**

* To see where you stand, you would have to figure out where you stand on a number of social (people-related), economic (money-related), and political (governmental) issues.
* First you need definitions of the terms radical, liberal, conservative, and reactionary. Some authors include the terms authoritarian and libertarian.

**What is a Radical?**

* Seen as being on the far left of the political spectrum, radicals call for wide-sweeping rapid change in the basic structure of the political, social, or economic system.
* They may be willing to resort to extreme methods to bring about change, including the use of violence and revolution.

**What is a Liberal?**

* Liberals believe that the government should be actively involved in the promotion of social welfare of a nation’s citizens.
* They usually call for peaceful, gradual change within the existing political system.
* They reject violent revolution as a way of changing the way things are, often called the status quo.

**What is a Moderate?**

* Moderates may share viewpoints with both liberals and conservatives.
* They are seen as tolerant of other people’s views, and they do not hold extreme views of their own.
* They advocate a “go-slow” or “wait-and-see” approach to social or political change.

**What is a Conservative?**

* People who hold conservative ideals favor keeping things the way they are or maintaining the status quo if it is what they desire.
* Conservatives are usually hesitant or cautious about adopting new policies, especially if they involve government activism in some way.
* They feel that the less government there is, the better.
* They agree with Jefferson’s view that “the best government governs least.”

**What is a Reactionary?**

* Sitting on the far right of the ideological spectrum, reactionaries want to go back to the way things were—the “good ol’ days.”
Often reactionaries are willing to use extreme methods, such as repressive use of government power, to achieve their goals.
* The term “reactionary is generally negative. A positive way to say the same thing is “arch-conservative.”

**The Political Spectrum**

