An ideology is a grand idea around which people cluster, and on the basis of its ideas and ideals and promises coalitions are built and activated. Ideology functions as a social system to organize and educate people, motivating them to develop certain attitudes, adopt certain worldviews, and seek, through collective action, certain objectives. As such, ideology tends to govern a broad range of human relationships and influence the course of change in society. Since culture represents the social glue that holds society together, ideology has become the core of many cultures and the organizing principle of societies in distress.

Ideology is either particular concerned with only one people, such as nationalism, or universal concerned with humanity, such as communism, Christianity, and Islam. Since ideology represents the core of many cultures, it tends to shape the attitudes of people, causing them to feel different from others, sometimes superior to them, and sharpen their collective sense of identity. As a consequence, ideology makes its followers more committed to the welfare of their own group or nation, and less tolerant of other groups’ beliefs and convictions, giving them an excuse to be prejudiced, belittle others, and often discriminate against them.

Throughout modern history, progress has been closely associated with the ideas of freedom and social justice, which provide an environment conducive to change. Freedom facilitates individual initiative, political participation, liberal education, scientific research, and technological innovations; it also protects people’s rights, allowing them to pursue personal goals, be creative, and engage in new activities and relationships that encourage them to welcome cultural and political plurality and participate in shaping their individual and collective destinies. Social justice, meanwhile, motivates people to fight for their rights, be compassionate, and care for others and the common good.

Transformations in society are made at all times, at every level through a social process that has two sides, conflict and change. Change, by its
very nature, undermines the balance of power that governs relationships between the major social actors, creating winners and losers and causing conflict. Conflict, which tends often to be initiated by losers, causes relationships to become unstable, at times dysfunctional, thus creating a need to restructure them, which only change can do. But for change to succeed, it has to take into consideration the new reality created by the previous round of change and conflict. Therefore, the way conflict is managed tends to influence the nature and magnitude of change, and the way change is introduced and pursued in society tends to influence the magnitude and ramifications of conflict.

Because ideology is a worldview with its own values and goals, change instigated by ideology tends to influence most aspects of life. As a result, change driven by ideology tends to be predictable; the path it follows is often revolutionary, and attitudes it nurtures are often radical. Violence is sometimes promoted by ideology and accepted by its followers as a legitimate means to effect change. Societies dominated by ideology often lack the social tools to deal with conflict and manage change peacefully. Germany under Nazism, the Soviet Union under communism, Serbia under religious nationalism, and Afghanistan under religious fanaticism are examples of societies that were dominated by ideology and where violence and coercion were used widely to deal with conflict and manage change. In such societies, every deviation from the basic tenets of ideology is usually defined in extreme terms that demand swift, uncompromising action.

In contrast, open societies, where ideology is weak and political and cultural plurality exist and tolerated, tend to have flexible rules and pragmatic tools to deal with conflict and manage change. Such societies view conflict and change as social mechanisms to restructure fractured relationships and achieve desired goals. Consequently, change is encouraged, conflict is managed, and compromise solutions are sought to maximize the number of winners and minimize the number of losers. However, if compromise solutions are invented to appease a growing ideology, they usually limit the number of winners, increase the number of losers, and cause the situation to deteriorate over time.

Issues of conflict are normally divided into two general categories, value-related and interest-related. Because values are closely associated with deeply held convictions, value-related issues, such as religious convictions and collective identities, are usually viewed as existential, and therefore they are less amenable to compromise solutions. In contrast, interest-related issues, such as trade and labor disputes are normally viewed as circumstantial, and therefore they are more amenable to compromise solutions. Ideology tends to view all issues of conflict as value-related,