

## Exercise 7.3. – Questionnaire on attitudes to change

Educational objectives	<p>The students can reflect their personal attitudes and express them freely.</p> <p>The students can listen to other students, regardless of whether they agree with each other or not.</p>
Resources	Set of student handouts: “Questionnaire on attitudes to change”.

*Note for the teacher*

### Information on basic political attitudes

An *attitude* is a tendency to express an opinion or adopt a certain form of behaviour. It results from social integration and personal history and is therefore less conscious than ideology. Attitudes guide our perceptions, our judgments and our actions.

The purpose of the exercise is to see, on the basis of the expression of opinions, to what extent a person is, or is not, in favour of social change. Change in itself is neither a good nor a bad thing, and the purpose is not to pass judgment on the students, much less to evaluate them. It should also be borne in mind that the results of such a “political litmus test” should not be taken too seriously, particularly if the students are not fully aware of the implications involved in a statement in the questionnaire.

The real question is: why, what, when and how to change. The models of political thought serving as guidelines for political attitudes have developed since the era of the French and American revolutions. The following sketch can serve as a rough guideline but cannot replace the reading of the original sources.

A *progressive* attitude leads to a belief that changes are desirable. It may be revolutionary or *reformist*, depending on the perceived urgency and on the means employed. For the *revolutionary*, if necessary, even violence is not ruled out. For a reformist too, change is desirable, but without radical rupture with the past.

A *conservative* attitude, on the other hand, values tradition and prefers experience to theory. It may favour the status quo or be reactionary. To favour the status quo means to hold that although it is imperfect, the present state is acceptable. Organic growth may be advocated as the mode of change (Edmund Burke). A fundamental concern is to keep the state strong and agile lest it be overburdened by partial interests and excessive participation. The reactionary, however, refuses the present state of things: he/she holds that it was a mistake to carry out changes in the first place and wishes to return to an earlier state.

The *revolutionary* and the *reactionary* tend to be doctrinaire, that is, fundamentalist, which means that they defend a position on an ideological basis, without taking present reality into account.

The others are more pragmatic and define their positions by an analysis of immediate consequences.

This exercise may serve as a rough guideline to make students realise the existence of different models of political thinking and to become aware of their personal preferences and leanings. In political life, political attitudes will often be found to resemble a policy mix between different basic models of political thinking, for example when arguing along neo-liberal, ecologist, or technocrat lines.

**Procedure**

1. The students answer the questions. Before each statement they write a number to indicate their attitude. The code they use is as follows:
  - 5 – They are fully in favour of the statement.
  - 4 – They are more or less in favour of the opinion stated.
  - 3 – They are more or less neutral regarding the opinion stated.
  - 2 – They are more or less against the opinion.
  - 1 – They are fully against the statement.
2. Students draw up their total, which indicates their political attitude.
  - 100-80: revolutionary
  - 80-60: reformist
  - 60-40: in favour of the status quo
  - 40-20: reactionary.

Are there any revealing divergences between students, notably between boys and girls?

**Extension**

Working with texts: depending on how this exercise is used – as an introduction or a transfer exercise – text work is recommended to precede or follow this exercise. For advanced classes, excerpts from writers such as Locke, Burke or Marx might be selected. In addition, or as an alternative for younger students, statements by politicians or party representatives on a specific issue may be appropriate.

Also see the following exercise.

**Variation**

These questions may be formulated on the basis of more local concerns.

Any of the questions may serve as a starting point for debate.

**Materials**

(see next page)

## Student handout

### Questionnaire on attitudes to change

1. A woman should be able to get sterilisation without the permission of her husband.
2. Information on birth control should be available on request to all young girls of fourteen or over.
3. Soft drugs should be legalised.
4. In democracies referenda should be possible on popular demand.
5. Criminals need medical care rather than punishment.
6. The death sentence should be completely abolished.
7. Big companies should be nationalised.
8. Marriages between people of the same sex should be legal.
9. There should be no specification of sex in job offers.
10. Charitable institutions should be banned. It is the duty of the state to help the underprivileged.
11. The average individual does not need to be managed or controlled.
12. Students should take part in the running of their school.
13. Grades and certificates should be abolished.
14. Everyone should be guaranteed a minimum income, regardless of sex, age and profession, and even if they decide to do nothing.
15. Children should be brought up in several faiths simultaneously; they can make their choice when they are adults.
16. Political leaders should follow the advice of scientists on the use of scientific discoveries.
17. Human beings are all born with the same potential.
18. Private property should be banned and state property brought in.
19. Nobody has the right to impose their opinions on others.
20. All production of polluting products has to be prevented, whatever the immediate economic impact.