
Introduction

The Left and The Right

ALTHOUGH THE DISTINCTION between the politics of the left and the right is commonly assumed in the media and in treatments of political science and history, the terms are used so loosely that the student and the general reader are often confused: What exactly are the terms *left* and *right* supposed to imply? In this two-volume encyclopedia, we have assembled over 450 articles on individuals, movements, political parties, and ideological principles, with those usually thought of as left in the left-hand volume and those considered on the right, in the right-hand volume.

The terms *left* and *right* are derived from the political divisions in the Legislative Assembly, formed during the French Revolution in 1791. Sitting on the right of the assembly were those who favored the preservation of the monarchy and a more moderate course of change, the Girondists, while on the left in the assembly sat those who wished to overthrow the existing system and establish a more egalitarian republic, the Jacobins. The terms left and right stuck, with the left usually representing the radicals of politics and the right representing the conservatives over the next century. With the rise of utopian socialism and later, Marxism, those proposing conversion of the means of production from private property to social property held in common were regarded as leftists, while those seeking to preserve

the status quo were regarded as rightists. The terms passed into common parlance and became handy labels, both for serious students of politics, and for use by publicists, politicians, and observers.

For those involved in politics, the terms soon became heavily charged with overtones. By the end of the 19th century, many followers of Karl Marx took pride in regarding themselves as further to the left and would often designate their own fractional group or wing of the party as the Left Socialists. Of course, as propaganda, such a label was not always useful, for it would suggest that those belonging to the left group were out at the fringe of opinion with only a few adherents. For this reason, V. I. Lenin designated his small wing of the Russian Socialist Party as the majority wing (even though it only held a majority at one brief meeting in 1903), or “Bolshevik” in Russian. Through most of the 20th century, with the rise of international communism, headed by the Bolshevik Party in the Soviet Union, extreme leftism tended to be associated with adherence to the international communist movement, while extreme rightism tended to be associated with politicians who made a career of denouncing the international communist movement. The Bolshevik Party officially changed its name to the Communist Party (Bolshevik) in March 1918.

In countries operating under democratic constitutions, like the United States, Canada, Great Britain,

New Zealand, and various other republics and constitutional monarchies, the terms *left* and *right* were used to describe parties and politics of the center that addressed domestic issues, rather than the role of international communism. That is, leftism became associated with liberals who endorsed a wide variety of programs designed to mitigate the harsh effects of capitalism, such as programs of social welfare, unemployment compensation, a progressive income tax (that is, one that taxed higher incomes at a higher proportion than lower incomes), provision of health services to the poor, and more equal educational opportunities. Those who were conservative, who believed that the economic status quo should not be tampered with, and that free market conditions should be allowed to operate without too much government interference, were generally regarded as rightists. Often, those on the right believed that while government should allow the free enterprise system to operate without interference, they were quick to demand that government use its authority to impose and enforce a moral code on the general population. From the point of view of those who owned property, of course, maintenance of law and order and protection of property were the major and proper role of government.

While such distinctions appear simple enough to apply to the politics and movements of many nations around the world, they often tend to over-simplify the complexities of politics. Individual political leaders and political movements often defied easy categorization. For example, in the United States, in Eastern Europe, and in Latin America, “populist” leaders arose in the late 19th and through the early and mid-20th centuries. While populism in each context and in each era was somewhat different, it usually represented an appeal for social reform and egalitarianism which seemed radical and leftist, but it also often incorporated a reactionary thrust that was opposed to modernization and was often quite nationalistic and ethnically exclusive, ideas usually associated with the right. Often a leader with a populist agenda was accused by some of his enemies of being a right-wing reactionary, and by other enemies as being a left-wing radical. And in some cases, both charges made perfect sense.

In the United States, some historians have evaluated the Progressive movement, which espoused many of the social programs usually considered as part of the left, as springing from a reactionary response to the “status revolution” of the early 20th century. That is, many of the Progressives were salaried professionals like clerics, lawyers, journalists, teachers, and govern-

ment employees who were distressed not only at the dominance of society by newly rich big-business leaders, but also upset by perceived threats to their own status posed by new immigrants, radical ideologues, city political bosses, and labor-union leaders. For such reasons, many Progressives endorsed the movement to establish Prohibition, which they saw as a moral reform designed to restore America to its moral standards, and as an attack on the habits of immigrants and the dominance of the liquor interests in politics. So Prohibition of alcohol, which was an attempt to enforce conformity to a moral code, and thus appears to be authoritarian and right-wing to many observers, was supported by many whose views sprang from reactionary motives, but who also endorsed left-leaning social programs.

One movement that grew out of populist concepts in Europe was fascism. In Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal, and other countries, popular leaders proposed a mix of ideas that were drawn from socialism, and adopted radical methods to establish a nationalistic, exclusive, elitist-operated authoritarian state. Although usually regarded and classified as parties of the right, fascist parties reflected both leftist and rightist ideas and methods. However, with their broad popular appeal and social agendas, fascist parties did not resemble the conservative, status-quo oriented parties of the traditional right. Often, the issue was one of perspective, or even more simply, one of name-calling. Thus, the Communist Party of the United States in the early 1930s often denounced advocates of pro-labor positions who did not work with the Communist Party as “social fascists” and lumped them with the right wing in their propaganda literature.

In local settings around the world, other issues cut across the clear logic of left and right distinctions. For example, in many countries, movements for ethnic autonomy, independence, or unification with a group outside of the territorial boundaries of the state confused the picture, often leading to great conflicts. Those trying to form a nation out of ethnic groups dispersed among several states were known as “irredentists” after the 19th-century Italian unification movement that sought to bring the *irridenta* or “unredeemed” Italians into a state headed by the house of Savoy out of Piedmont. Serbian irredentist nationalists in territories controlled by Austria-Hungary sought to unite with Serbia, and it was a group of such nationalists who assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914, setting off World War I.

In Spain, during the 1930s, separatists in the Basque northwest and Catalonians in the northeast of the country joined in the civil war. While they were nation-

alists, and thus might be regarded as rightists, in fact, they joined with a coalition largely consisting of parties of the left to defend the existing government, against a revolution led by the army which sought to impose a fascist regime. Spanish politics in the 1930s, while often described in terms of left and right, posed a great many problems for those who sought to understand it in those terms. The leftists and separatists were known as Loyalists or Republicans because they supported the existing republic; the fascists, monarchists, and the army officers, supported by Catholic Church leaders, were known as the Insurgents.

Elsewhere, irredentists, separatists, and nationalists used radical methods to achieve nationalistic goals. Such groups included the Irish, as well as separatists in countries as far afield as Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Kurdistan, the Caucasus regions of the Russian Federation, and the French-controlled island of Corsica. In the United States, the radicalism mixed with nationalist rhetoric of American black nationalists seemed to defy a simple classification of left or right. In South Africa, the policy of racial exclusion and imposition of a white-dominated regime adopted many ideas and principles that seemed to reflect the fascist doctrines of Germany's Nazi Party, at the same time, maintaining an electoral, republican form of government for the controlling white minority. The South African doctrine of apartheid, or separateness, was viewed by most observers as an ideology of the right.

These political, social, and ethnic complications often lead to confusion of terminology, and even to some heated debates among experts. In fact, when individual politicians and their positions are studied closely, the individual's career may defy simple categorization. For many individuals who participated in politics over several decades, their radical-populist ideas seemed increasingly dated as the world changed around them, and they appeared, in the new context, as hopelessly conservative and backward-looking. Thus, while William Randolph Hearst may have seemed a radical in 1912 when he supported municipal ownership of utilities and labor-endorsed candidates, by the 1930s, he was regularly denounced as a right-winger for his opposition to the New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt and for his strident anti-communist rhetoric.

Other leaders and politicians with populist ideas in the United States often found themselves voting with very conservative colleagues in legislatures on specific issues. The cross currents that appeared to be at work during the Progressive era, that led many otherwise left-

oriented politicians to endorse moral authoritarian views like Prohibition, continued through much of the 20th century and into the 21st century. By the late 20th century in the United States, both sides of the abortion issue cast their views in terms of liberties or personal rights. On one side were arrayed those who believed in "freedom of choice" or "a woman's right to choose," while those opposed regarded themselves as defending "the right to life." Opposite sides of this heated social debate couched their position in terms of liberty. By generally accepted convention, the right-to-life advocates were regarded as right wing; however, some of the most dedicated members of that side of the argument adopted radical means to achieve their goals, such as picketing abortion clinics, or in a few cases, even bombing them.

In this encyclopedia, we have made some decisions following the generally accepted convention of whether a movement or individual should be treated as falling on the left or right side of the political spectrum. Often, the views and positions of the individual or movement make such a classification rather clear-cut or obvious. In other cases, the placement is far more complex or problematic, and we have suggested the reasons for the complexity, reflecting among others, the ones outlined here.

Not a day goes by in the media or in a history or political science classroom that the terms *left* and *right* are employed to describe an historical or contemporary aspect of politics. Rather than assuming such terms are universally understood or acknowledged, as editors we have attempted to make the distinction clearer, albeit with the caveats mentioned above.

Although our emphasis is on the modern era, we have included many movements, political leaders, and thinkers from the 19th and early 20th centuries. And although each contributor offered his or her own interpretative slant, we have attempted to achieve a tone of balance, presenting the information with objectivity rather than advocacy. In the broad spectrum of politics, it is our hope that the articles of the *Encyclopedia of Politics: The Left and The Right*, contributed by academics and scholars from all over the world, help further the understanding of political science and historical movements.

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