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Right, Left, Right On, or Left Out: New Directions for Political Road Maps?

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Abstract. This article illustrates problems for social constructions of the political right and left.

Today in the United States (US) domestic terrorism seems to be more of a rightist than leftist threat. For example, anti-abortion violence seems to be perpetrated by individuals allegedly holding conservative ideologies that are deemed rightist. Some seem to advocate an eye for an eye, eyes for an eye, an eye for eyes, primary prevention of murder through murder, and upholding the sanctity of life through the sanction of death. As another example, militia violence--usually deemed a rightist phenomenon--targets humans who somehow are less "pure," less "American," and less "human." This violence also targets symbols of the US Government, which allegedly is noxiously intrusive towards the pure, the American, the human who embrace rugged individualisms, Christian fundamentalisms, and Luddite pristineness. These rightist terrorisms seem to be logical extremes of nonviolent rightist and conservative policies and ideologies advocated by US legislators, think tanks, foundations, religious organizations, and others to the right of center.

Thirty years ago, domestic terrorism seemed to come more from the left--a New Left that might have been viewed as a peculiar mutant of the Old Left. Political violence was deemed acceptable to prevent the life taking, the soul destroying, the exploitive alienations, and spirit-deadening impediments to Love of capitalism, imperialist wars, and porcine authorities. Leftist terrorisms seemed to be logical extremes of nonviolent leftists and liberal policies and ideologies advocated by US legislators, think tanks, foundations, religious organizations, and others to the left of center. (In other parts of the world, directions seemed and still seem to be reversed. For example, it seems right to surmise that, since the Chinese communist revolution of 1949, right has been left and left has been right.)

So how similar are the violent rightists of today to the violent leftists of thirty years ago? Are there psychological differences between these rightists and leftists? Following a political psychology trailblazer like Harold Lasswell (see below), one might well assume that various psychological dynamics or dispositions might predispose an individual to a violent rightist or leftist course. Yet especially on the extremes, the theories and findings have been mixed. Some political psychologists posit that the extreme left and the extreme right are equivalently authoritarian, dogmatic, and tough-minded. Others posit that the very notion of a leftist authoritarian may be but a myth or that leftists as opposed to rightists are more neurotic and alienated. Observers of the social and cultural aspects of political action posit that the leftists have more of a sense of playfulness, of fun, of humor--does this include a gallows humor before, during, or after murder, kidnapping, assault, robbery, or the destruction of property? (This notion of playful leftists may be an inversion of the paraphrase attributed to US Presidential hopeful Barry Goldwater during the 1964 election--that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. If the rightists were disowning vice, than more of it was left for the leftists).

What to make of all this? For the last fifty years, the "L" word (liberal) has been used to tar politicians. Given the predominance of domestic rightist violence, perhaps now is the time to use the "C" (conservative) word instead. On the other hand, perhaps our 21st century may jettison the "direction" approach to politics. Perhaps the notion of politics engendering strange bedfellows both behind closed

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doors and in activities open to the public will become so frequent as to engender a restructured, directionless politics. Or perhaps a politics with new directions. No leftists, no rightists, just the ins and the outs. Hasn't it always been that way? (See Eysenck, H. (1981-1982). Left wing authoritarianism: Myth or reality? *Political Psychology*, 3, 234-238; Lasswell, H. (1930). *Psychopathology and politics*. University of Chicago Press; Rajnarain, I. (1986). Psychology of right and left. *Indian Journal of Current Psychological Research*, 11-16; Ray, J.J. (1983). Half of all authoritarians are left wing: A reply to Eysenck and Stone. *Political Psychology*, 4,, 139-143; Stone, W.F. (1983). Left and right in personality and ideology: An attempt at clarification. *Journal of Mind and Behavior*, 4, 211-220; Stone, W.F. (1980). The myth of left wing authoritarianism. *Political Psychology*, 2,, 3-19.) (Keywords: Ideology, Typology.)