

How to Re-unite a Nation.

Preamble

This article was prompted by the very deep concerns expressed by several of my contacts in the USA, and also the receipt of gun violence, by members of my family there. It might be regarded by some as political in nature. So, to clarify, I am not a member of any political party, have no religion, and follow no ideology. Rather, the core ethic from which my values spring is "Quality of Life for All". I believe this can best be achieved via a balanced approach, I do my best to look at each situation dispassionately and objectively, and try to behave in a way which maximises utility. So, I am writing this in the hope that it will help my contacts to find ways of addressing their concerns.

Finally, I do not subscribe to conspiracy theories. In my opinion, people do not sit around a table, devise a wicked masterplan, swear an oath of secrecy, then disperse to implement it. Rather, cultural change is an evolutionary process. A problem is perceived by disparate individuals or groups. Solutions are trialed, sometimes on the advice of specialists in the social sciences and economics, but often not. Successful solutions propagate to others facing the same problem. Unsuccessful ones become extinguished. Unfortunately, consequences other than resolution of the immediate problem are rarely considered, and so, social, and environmental harms can also result.

Right-wing and left-wing

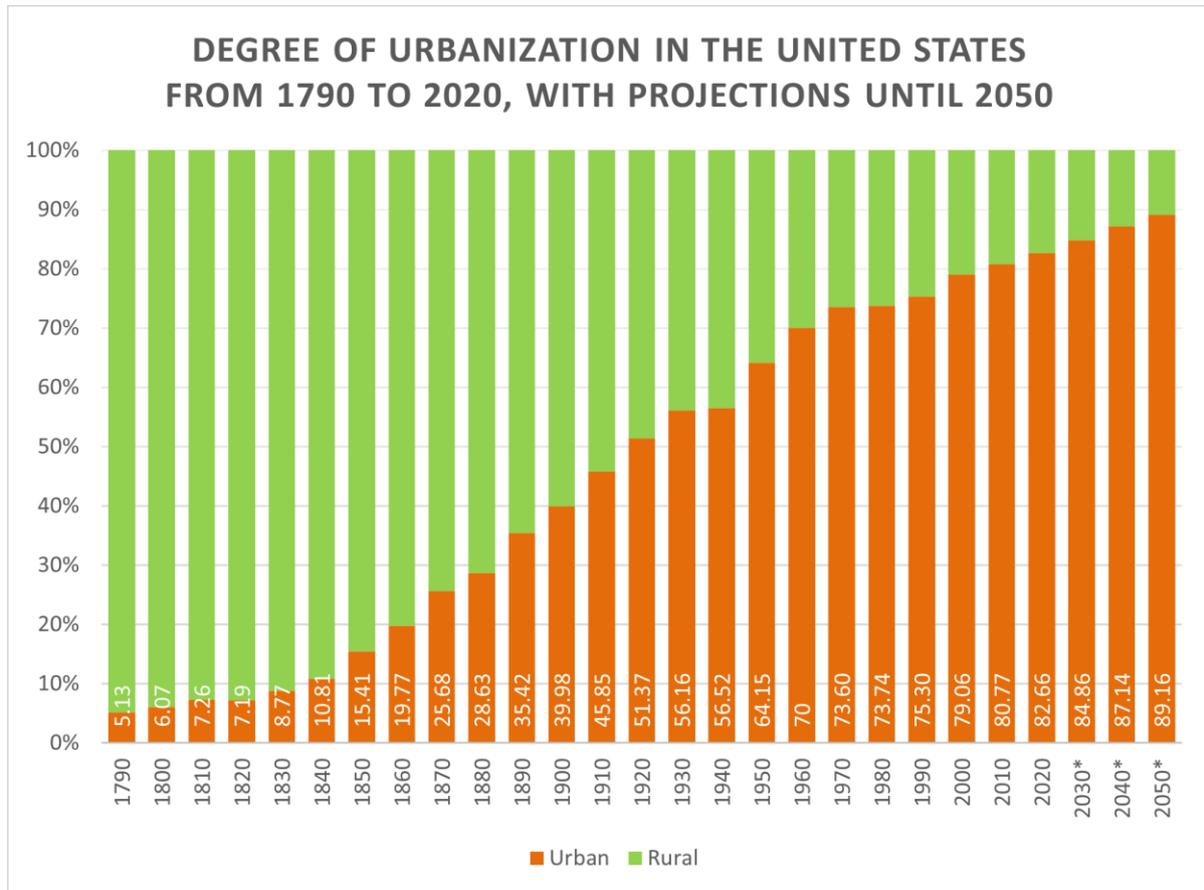
Political parties are usually regarded as holding beliefs which lie on a scale between two extremes: right-wing and left-wing. These terms originated during the French Revolution when pro-monarchists sat on the right-hand side of the National Assembly, and anti-monarchists on the left. Right-wing beliefs centre on the view that social hierarchy is natural and inevitable. Left-wing beliefs, on the other hand, centre on egalitarianism. More detailed beliefs do, of course, spring from these core beliefs. For example, right-wing politics favours low taxation and the private provision of social services, whilst left-wing politics favours higher taxation to support the provision of such services by government. Further examples are given at <https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/difference-between-left-wing-and-right-wing/> and are reproduced in Appendix B.

As a rule, therefore, those of high status in an established hierarchy will tend to support right-wing politics to maintain their position. As well as voting they provide donations, media and other forms of support. Those of lower status will tend to support left-wing politics to better their position. There are exceptions of course, such as altruistic high-status individuals, or those of lower status who aspire to climb the hierarchy. In many democracies with a first past the post system rather than proportional representation, two parties dominate. One tends to be left-wing and the other right-wing.

The Urban-Rural Divide

In US politics, much is made of the political schism between right-wing red and left-wing blue states. However, the true schism is related to population density. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_states_and_blue_states Urban populations, tend to the left, rural ones to the right. Red states merely have a greater rural population. This urban rural schism is true not only of the USA, but of many other industrialised nations, e.g., the UK, France, Hungary, Poland, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, Turkey, Thailand, and Malaysia. It seems to be a general cultural adaptation to altered circumstances, therefore. There has been much debate about the reasons for this. Certainly, industrialization is the root cause. Without it, urbanization to the extent that we see today would have been impossible. But the intermediate causes remain unclear and there are

probably very many acting together. The General Systems Theory explanation is that, as specialists, such as those we see in city populations, emerge then so too must control systems, i.e., government, to co-ordinate their activities. However, whatever the reasons, the urban/rural schism is not unique to the USA, and so, is unlikely to be the main cause of its current social divisions. We must, therefore, look elsewhere.



Data Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/269967/urbanization-in-the-united-states/#statisticContainer>

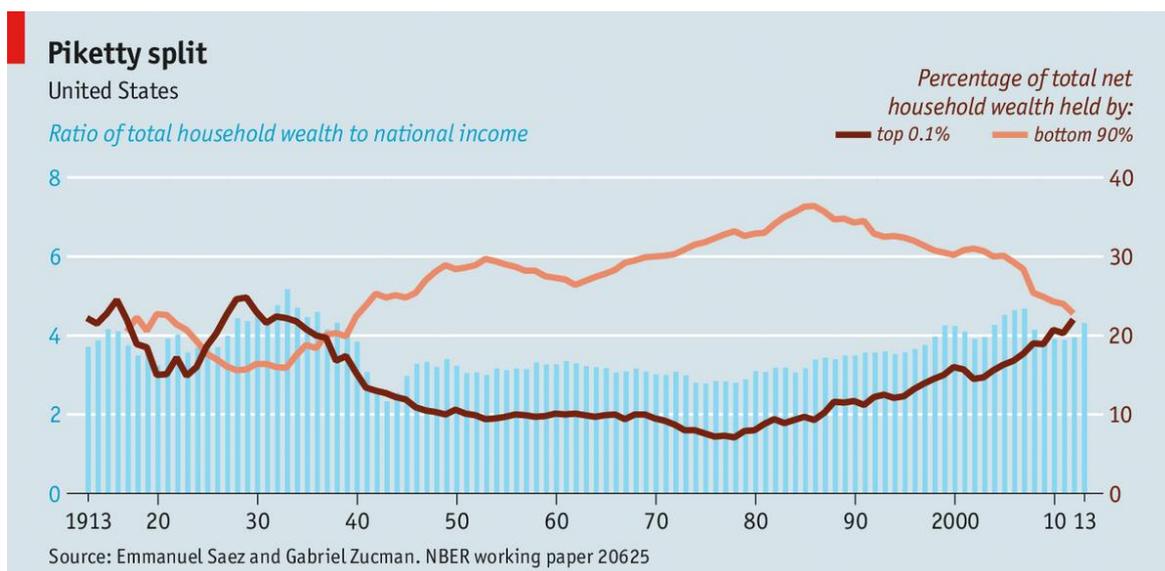
Rationales

Urbanisation is an ongoing process and there is an ever-greater concentration of population in the cities. Thus, right-wing parties are steadily losing much of their voter base. In a democracy with universal suffrage, a party which favours only a minority elite is unlikely to be elected. It must, therefore, offer a rationale which persuades less powerful ordinary citizens to vote for it too. In the USA, this rationale has developed, over time, as described below.

Rationale 1 – Threats to “Individualism”. “Individualism” means different things to different people. If it is taken in the political sense, i.e., as meaning freedom from authority and an antipathy towards hierarchy, then Americans in general are certainly more individualistic than Europeans. For example, 58% favour freedom to pursue life’s goals over a social safety net provided by government. Only 35% favour the reverse. See <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2011/11/17/the-american-western-european-values-gap/>. During the cold war, fear of threats to individualism was stoked to an extreme. Democratic socialism was conflated with communism, causing fear of those with more egalitarian views.

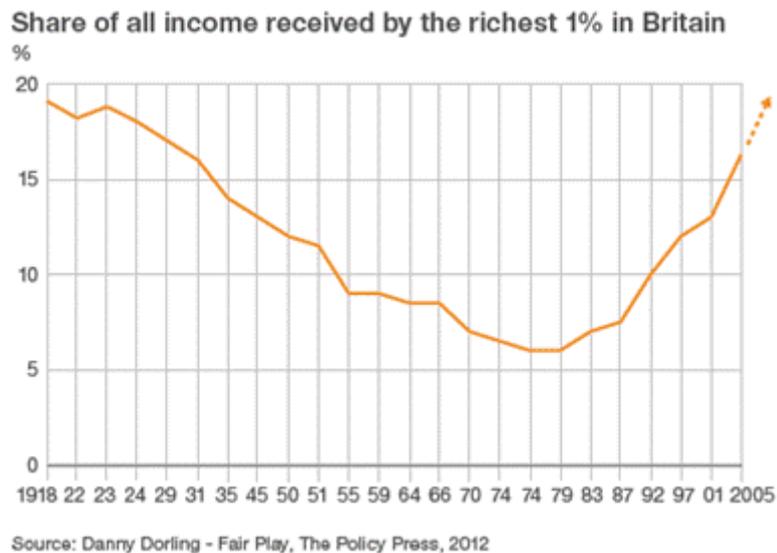
However, individualism can also be understood in the social sense, i.e., relative to the community, rather than to authority and hierarchy. We are eusocial creatures and form communities. Although our prime motivators are personal survival and the propagation of our genome, we achieve this, in part, by co-operating with others. Thus, we are faced with decisions on whether to act selfishly in our immediate interest, or for the general good in our longer-term interest. We attempt to achieve an optimal balance between the two, but this balance varies from individual to individual. At the extremes, those who favour short term interest are individualists in the social sense. Those who favour longer term interest, through the community, are collectivist. In this sense, Americans are NOT as individualistic as commonly thought. In fact, they are less individualistic than many European nations. See <https://blogs.berkeley.edu/2010/04/20/american-individualism-%E2%80%93-really/>. This aspect of individualism has been exploited by the neo-liberal movement as will be explained below.

Rationale 2 – Neo-liberalism. Following the Second World War, in the face of more egalitarian politics, the relative wealth of Western elites began a steady decline. In the late 1970's and early 1980's, a reaction emerged in the form of the neo-liberal movement. Neo-liberalism favours free market capitalism, deregulation, and low government spending. The rationale that this would benefit the general population by raising their living standards through a trickle-down process was aggressively promoted. Unsurprisingly, neo-liberalism was embraced enthusiastically in the UK by the right-wing Thatcher administration, in the USA by the Reagan administration, and even, to a limited extent, by their left-wing competitors.



However, rather than the share owning society envisaged by Margaret Thatcher, neo-liberalism has led to ever increasing extremes of wealth and poverty, poorer public services, and a reduction in opportunities for upward mobility. Unregulated consumer capitalism is now recognised as being a positive feedback loop that is out of control. Perpetual growth is necessary if investors are, on average at least, to realise a profit. Ever larger markets must be sought, therefore, and must grow irrespective of the consequences. Most of the population are working ever harder and ever longer hours for no real increase in remuneration, whilst public relations exercises attempt to hide these travails. Ubiquitous and intrusive advertising is encouraging us to outsource ever more of our day-to-day lives and to spend our income on an increasing plethora of consumer goods and services. We are encouraged to take on debt rather than to save. Fashions change at an ever-increasing rate and

we are exhorted to express “individualism” through them. The social and environmental damage being caused by this excess is becoming increasingly apparent and is undermining both the “Individualism Rationale”, and the “Neo-liberal Rationale”. Thus, a new one must be sought.



Rationale 3 – Currently Under Development. The culture of a nation is what unites it. In part, this culture comprises a set of values, i.e., those things that the population holds to be good or bad. Every individual’s belief in a value will lie at some point on a scale between two extremes: strongly held to be good or strongly held to be bad. The majority will be scattered relatively closely around a mean, and the set of all means can be regarded as the core values of the nation.

Some individuals will, however, deviate significantly from the mean in one or more values, whilst remaining close to it in others. Thus, there exist several sub-populations with extreme beliefs centred on a particular value. Extreme deviation can cause people to be fearful of the majority. Thus, the value in which they deviate becomes a significant motivator, whilst those in which they are close to the mean are taken for granted. Normally, extremists are distributed throughout the population and find it difficult to meet one another. However, improved communications, via the internet and other media, are making contact much easier, and are facilitating the formation of formal or informal organisations.

In a democracy, politicians rely on followers to gain power. If their principal motivation is personal power or the power of their peer group, they may offer to satisfy the needs of those with extreme views. This is known as populism. By appealing to a sub-population, they help to bring about the formation of an organisation. Once an organisation is formed in this way, it will attempt to promote its beliefs and grow its membership, in the same way as any other organisation.

Such sub-populations are minorities, and an appeal to just one is insufficient for a politician to gain power. To be elected, he or she must, therefore, appeal to several. However, the extreme beliefs of different sub-populations can be contradictory. For example, it is difficult to reconcile unregulated gun ownership with pro-life beliefs. Bearing in mind that extreme views act as a significant motivator, whilst other more moderate views are taken for granted, to many individuals this will not matter. What is important is that the politician is offering to deal with their most pressing concern in return for their vote.

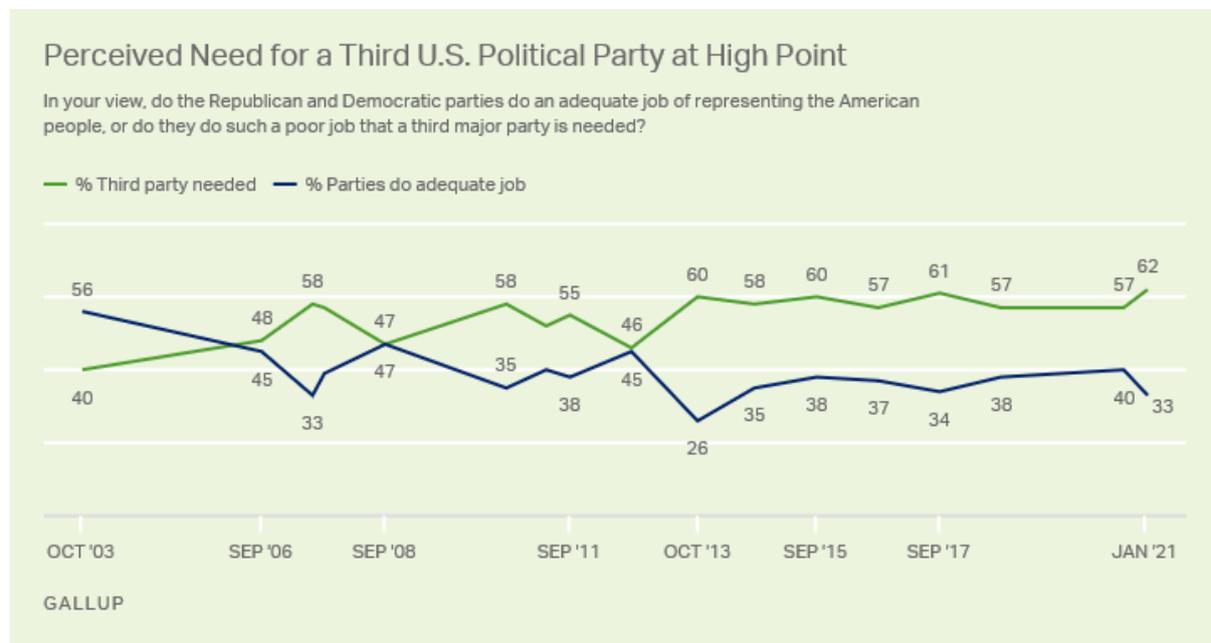
As time passes and a diverse extremist following develops, to gain acceptance its members will begin to adopt the extreme views of other members. Thus, the contradictions become more significant, and a strategy is needed to deal with them. This may take the form of a rationale (Rationale 3) which explains away the contradictions, for example the prosperity gospel, in which wealth and material success is taken to be a sign of God's favour. Alternatively, the strategy may involve diverting attention from the existence of the contradictions, e.g., by scapegoating, or a combination of the two. In this way, an alliance of those with extreme views forms and is seen as a threat by those with more moderate beliefs.

When two groups emerge which perceive one another as a threat, each will strengthen its identity and their views will become ever more entrenched. This is particularly the case when the two groups are roughly equal in number and influence, and when both are seeking political dominance. Thus, a positive feedback loop develops in which a stronger identity leads to an increased perception of threat, which leads to a stronger identity, and so on. Ultimately, unless this feedback is dampened, it can lead to violence. An example is the Northern Ireland "troubles". Unfortunately, due to the proliferation of guns and shooting incidents, the USA is particularly at risk of violent conflict.

The Way Forward

Those with extreme views will not, of course, participate in consensus building. So, it is important to marginalise them and prevent the growth of their worldviews. One possible way of doing this is a third political party and, in the USA, there appears to be growing support for this.

According to a Gallup poll, 62% of the population now believe that "...the Republican and Democratic Parties do not do an adequate job of representing the American people or they do such a poor job that a third major party is needed." This is up from 40% in 2008.



Source: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/329639/support-third-political-party-high-point.aspx>

The relative disinterest of moderates in political matters probably means that such a party will never come to power. However, that does not mean that it has no important role to play. In the UK, there are also two major parties, one left wing and one right, one or the other of which is always in

power. However, there is also a third minor, centrist party (the Liberal Democrats) who seem to have a moderating influence. Whenever one of the two main parties becomes too extreme in its political aspirations or allows its standards of behaviour to fall too low, there is an exodus of MPs and voters, not to the opposition, but to the centrist party. The latter can, and does, form alliances with the opposing main party. To counter this threat and regain support, the offending main party must then put their house in order. This moderating influence is why the UK recently lost its populist Prime Minister due to his behaviour, and why, prior to that, it lost its extreme left-wing opposition leader.

It is also notable that a new non-sectarian, centrist party, the Alliance Party, with links to the Liberal Democrats, is now gaining support in Northern Ireland.

In summary, therefore, a third, centrist party would have a moderating influence on the main parties, and its establishment would have broad support in the USA. The challenge for such a party would be to moderate the extremes of values which currently appear to have most significance, i.e.:

- 1) Political
 - a) Individualism in the political sense (R) vs greater government intervention (L).
 - b) Nationalism (R) vs. globalism (L).
- 2) Economic
 - a) Inequitable (R) vs. equitable reward (L).
- 3) Environmental
 - a) Non-green (R) vs. green (L).
- 4) Gender and sexual orientation
 - a) Inequitable (R) vs. equitable status in society (L).
- 5) Racial
 - a) Inequitable (R) vs. equitable status in society (L).
 - b) Closed borders (R) vs. free immigration (L)
- 6) Religious
 - a) Pro-life (R) vs. abortion rights (L).
 - b) Creationist (R) vs. evolutionist education (L).
- 7) Gun laws
 - a) Unregulated (R) vs. regulated (L).

To prevent these extremes from leading to harmful national divisions, each should be looked at in detail to understand:

- a) How extreme views have arisen historically;
- b) How they are currently being amplified;
- c) What social harms the extreme views are causing;
- d) What interventions would dampen their rise and encourage the return to a consensus.

Postscript

The above article was completed at 2pm on the afternoon of 27th July, 2022, British Summer Time. The same day, in the USA, the new, centrist, Forward Party was announced. I should, therefore, mention that I had no prior insider knowledge, I certainly do not have precognitive abilities, and it came to me as a very pleasant surprise. Rather, the social theory that I am developing has enabled me to successfully perceive patterns in human affairs, and this event has encouraged me to continue my work. Obviously, Forward will do their best to seek power, but even if this fails, then hopefully they will provide the moderating role described above. Experience tells me that change will not come

quickly, and it may be several years before this third party has any significant influence on the other two. However, its emergence does imply that democracy adapts and evolves, albeit rather slowly. There is, therefore, hope for the future.

Appendix A - Statistics

Statistics on these topics can be found at:

- 1) <https://blogs.berkeley.edu/2010/04/20/american-individualism-%E2%80%93-really/>
- 2) <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2011/11/17/the-american-western-european-values-gap/>
- 3) <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/07/28/americans-views-about-billionaires-have-grown-somewhat-more-negative-since-2020/>
- 4) <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/03/09/americans-largely-support-u-s-joining-international-efforts-to-address-climate-change/>
- 5) <https://www.pewresearch.org/topic/gender-lgbtq/>
- 6) <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/08/12/deep-divisions-in-americans-views-of-nations-racial-history-and-how-to-address-it/>
- 7) <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/03/18/majorities-of-americans-see-at-least-some-discrimination-against-black-hispanic-and-asian-people-in-the-u-s/>
- 8) <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/07/06/majority-of-public-disapproves-of-supreme-courts-decision-to-overturn-roe-v-wade/>
- 9) <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/05/23/like-americans-overall-catholics-vary-in-their-abortion-views-with-regular-mass-attenders-most-opposed/>
- 10) <https://www.statista.com/statistics/225975/share-of-americans-who-are-pro-life-or-pro-choice/>
- 11) <https://news.gallup.com/poll/244709/pro-choice-pro-life-2018-demographic-tables.aspx>
- 12) <https://news.gallup.com/poll/261680/americans-believe-creationism.aspx>
- 13) <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/09/13/key-facts-about-americans-and-guns/>
- 14) <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/16/share-of-americans-who-favor-stricter-gun-laws-has-increased-since-2017/>
- 15) <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/11/09/beyond-red-vs-blue-the-political-typology-2/>
- 16) <https://news.gallup.com/poll/329639/support-third-political-party-high-point.aspx>

Appendix B – Characteristics of left-wing and right-wing politics.

Left-Wing	Right-Wing
Left-wing politics is more liberal in its approach and outlook	Right-wing politics are more conservative.
Left-wing economics policies involve reducing income equality, increasing tax rates for the wealthy, and government spending on social programs and infrastructure	Its economic policies involve low taxes, less regulation on businesses by the government
Those belonging to the left-spectrum of politics believe that society will benefit from an expanded role for the government	Right-wing ideologies believe that the best outcome for society is delivered when individual rights and civil liberties are paramount with limited involvement of the government
Left-wing politics is characterized by an emphasis on equality, fraternity, progress, and reform	Right-wing politics is characterized by ideas of authority, hierarchy, tradition, and nationalism
Left-wing nationalism is based on social equality, popular sovereignty, and national-determination. It associates itself closely with national liberation movements	Right-wing nationalism is influenced by Romantic Nationalism where the state derives its legitimacy from the culture it governs, including, language, race, and custom “born” within this culture
Left-wing politics is traditionally against religious institutions and believe that state and religion must be separate from each other (Secularism)	Right-wing politics have always found supporters who believe that religion should play an expanded role in society.
Populist ideas in the left-wing do not include horizontal exclusion and will rely more on egalitarian ideals.	Populism is a recurring theme in right-wing political circles. Populism is a political approach that appeals to ordinary people who feel that their rights are ignored.
The term ‘Left-wing’ has a similar origin during the French revolution where anti-monarchy revolutionaries were seated on the left side of the hall.	The term ‘Right-wing’ has its origins during the days of the French Revolution (1789-1799) where the supporters of the Monarchy were seated on the right hall of the National Assembly

Source: <https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/difference-between-left-wing-and-right-wing/>