Unpacking “Isms”
Political-Economic Systems, Ideologies, and Political Styles
Part I

John A. Booth
Professor Emeritus of Political Science
University of North Texas
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Overview

Week 1 (today)
- What are isms?
- Overview
- The golden rule of political systems
- Cultural isms
- Political style and methodology isms

Week 2 -- Philosophical arguments for systems and ideologies
- Ancient political systems
- Medieval political-economic systems
- Change and Enlightenment: Liberalism and capitalism
- New ideologies of change (Socialism, Communism, anarchism, fascism, democratic socialism)
- A puzzle: Why isn’t Liberalism liberal any more?
The “golden rule” of politics is...

Whoever has the gold makes the rules!

... but also makes critics, enemies, and isms
What are “isms”?

The suffix “ism” is widely used

• **Definition** (from various dictionaries): *a distinctive practice, system, or philosophy, often political ideology or artistic movement – a creed, doctrine, belief, theory, practice, style*

• **Examples**
  • lifestyles and popular culture (vegetarianism, nudism, sexism)
  • language (euphemism) and art (impressionism)
  • economics (capitalism, socialism)
  • political systems (feudalism, monarchism, socialism, Liberalism)
  • political practice (totalitarianism, populism)
  • social movements (racism, feminism)
The usage is still too broad to be helpful, so let’s pare it down

• To narrow our focus we’ll skip the really fun stuff like impressionism and nudism

• We will examine the origin and meaning of some political and economic terms that inform/confuse today’s vernacular among the “commentariat” of politicians, news analysts, broadcast and podcast personalities
Our focus “isms” can be classified as...

• **Cultural beliefs** – shared orientations and expectations
• **Political styles** – ways/tools of practicing politics
• **Political/economic systems** – established ways of organizing societies.
  • Systems generate political/economic philosophies that describe and justify them and go by the same names
  • In operation, such systems also generate problems that arouse critiques
• **Ideologies** – rationales for political movements that guide political action, often arising from critiques of dominant systems
Cultural beliefs

Racism

• Dogma that a group, based on its ethnicity or physical characteristics, is congenitally inferior while another group is congenitally superior (from R. Benedict 1942)

• This idea of race attributes status and capability differences to biology. (Eg., Group X ‘s members have superior intelligence and ability to Group Y’s members; therefore, group X-ers deserve and hold superior power and privileges to group Y-ers.)
However,

- Modern genetic research reveals that among humans “race” lacks a biological basis, indicating it to be a cultural artifact and social construct rather than a biological fact.

- Biology doesn’t determine inter-group inequalities and domination, but legal and political frameworks do.

- “Race” among humans is a highly reified idea (it has assumed a false concreteness).

- Racism past and present remains a major factor shaping politics and policy outcomes (inequalities) in much of the world.
Cultural beliefs

Nationalism

• Belief that an individual’s loyalty should surpass and belong to some larger social entity beyond family or community, especially to a nation-state

• Political nationalism appeared around 18\textsuperscript{th} c. when Enlightenment-driven Liberalism reduced the influence and presence of monarchism on developing nation-states – the object of patriotism shifted from one’s king to one’s country

• Later national independence movements and international wars stimulated political nationalism
• **Other types of nationalism** have developed in 20th c. and evolved into ideologies (programs seeking political change)
  
  • **Religious nationalism** – a belief that loyalty to one’s religion and co-religionaries should supersede loyalty to other social entities, or that one’s political nation-state is identical to the religious identity it prefers -- example “**Christian nationalism**” among certain US Christians
  
  • **Ethnic/racial nationalism** -- a belief that the interests of and loyalty to a particular racial or ethnic groups supersedes loyalty to other social entities, including the nation-state and its laws, or that one’s group’s political nation-state is identical to its preferred ethnic or racial makeup – eg. **white nationalists** like KKK; a form of racism
  
  • **Ethno-statist nationalism** – eg. Zionism, Azeri-, Basque-and Québécois nationalism
Cultural beliefs -- nationalism

- **Ethno-statist nationalism**

  - **Zionism**, an ideology supporting a homeland in Palestine for Jews; later support for the state of Israel

  - **Basque nationalism** an ideology and movement supporting the formation of a separate, independent state for ethnic/linguistic Basque peoples of France and Spain

  - **Québécois nationalism** an ideology supporting the formation of a separate state from the French-speaking and formerly French colony in eastern Canada
Cultural beliefs and practices

• **Sexism**
  - Definition: stereotyping, prejudice, or discrimination, typically against women, on the basis of sex or gender identity
  - In pre-agrarian societies females were likely equal to males in rights and power
  - The status inferiority of women and girls became widely established with the advent of agriculture and has persisted in law, politics, and economic practice
  - Struggles for legal, voting, economic and other human rights for females have yielded growing equality in many societies, but much inequality remains.

• **Feminism** involves ideologies and movements that promote the liberation and equality of women to men in society, especially since the 1800s.
Isms related to the distribution and exercise of political power

• **Authoritarianism**
  - A high concentration of political authority in a few hands
  - Its opposite is diffused authority (separated power, democracy)
  - Authoritarianism *per se* is not ideological
  - Many types – personalistic dictatorships, bureaucratic/military, corporatist, mobilizational, post-democratic (e.g. fascism), post-totalitarian (Russia... but Russia has become more ideological)
Totalitarianism

- Highly centralized and extreme authoritarianism
- Often ideological with a belief system to which citizens should ascribe
- Anti-liberty -- highly controlling and invasive of adherents’ and citizens’ beliefs and lifeways
- Highly controlling of broad array of institutions

Examples: Italian Fascism under Mussolini; German Nazism under Hitler; Soviet communism (USSR)
Imperialism and colonialism (kissing cousins)

• Imperialism
  • Extending a nation's power and influence through diplomacy or military force
  • Ancient antecedents in Roman Empire, many others
  • More recent examples are Spanish, British, French, Russian, American
  • Post Marxian theorists argued whether imperialism benefitted workers in capitalist countries
  • The label “imperialist” is also sometimes leveled at any undesired foreign entity (nation, company, idea) affecting a country or its people

Five major empires (juxtaposed)
Imperialism and colonialism (kissing cousins)

- Colonialism
  - Occupation and domination of foreign peoples and their territory to acquire trade, resources, cheaper labor, markets, and prestige
  - Justified by “white man’s burden” argument that the colonized were inferior, required “lifting up”
  - Heyday 1880-1950, but had antecedents in ancient times
  - Current examples – US colonies Guam, Am. Samoa, Puerto Rico, UK colonies Falklands, Gibraltar
  - Decolonization movement after WWII established many new independent states
Styles of doing politics

• Elitism
  • System of rule by a minority of highly ranked persons
  • Ranking by wealth, social class, caste, or knowledge or expertise
  • Examples:
    • Mandarins -- Chinese scholar-bureaucrats who passed rigorous tests of knowledge to qualify for administrative posts; co-existed with royal family appointees
    • France – ENA graduates populate middle and upper levels of national bureaucracy; target of critics
    • Federal Reserve System, a US technocratic elite of economists that manages the monetary system)
Styles of doing politics

• **Populism**
  • Seeking/wielding power in name of “the people” (whether “all” of them, the “real people,” or a particular majority of the people)
  • Populist leaders converse directly with “the people”
  • Populist politicians argue against established institutions (argue for change, i.e., oppose banks and railroads, the “deep state,” the Federal Reserve)
  • Ideological variants can span the left-right spectrum
    • American “prairie populists” c. 1900 advocated leftist policies
    • Juan Perón in Argentina (1946-1955) promoted public works and labor unions
    • DJT in US and V. Orban, in Hungary are right-wing populists; Bernie Sanders is a leftist populist
Styles of doing politics

• **Terrorism**
  • Tactic of seeding terror (fear) in pursuit of political ends; usually involves violence; targets can be ordinary citizens or governments
  • Governments use *state terrorism* to coerce cooperation or passivity of citizens
  • **Insurgent terrorism** involves violence (bombing, assassination, hostage taking) by weak actors opposed to the state or its policies; goal is usually to prompt overreaction by state and thus create new supporters for insurgents
  • **International terrorism** is non-state actors attacking foreign targets to alter or raise the cost of their policies; cyber-terrorism is a new technique
Conservatism has 2 interpretations

First, “conservatism 1” involves opposing change in mores or institutions

- Defense of received religion, traditional family, and morality
- Thus, it requires a context – needs a counterpoint such as a belief system, a movement, or institutions that would change existing ways and values
- For example, Latin American conservatives in the early 19th c. opposed Liberals’ desire for independence and secularism; in Mexico they also later promoted monarchism

Note that this type of conservatism can exist within any ideological movement no matter its left-right position. There are conservative communists.
Second, “Conservatism 2” has also become an ideology and partisan movement

- British thinkers David Hume, Adam Smith and Edmund Burke rejected social contract theory and embraced free trade and smaller governments
- Opposition to social welfare programs that redistribute wealth and to economic regulation
- Examples, contemporary British and Canadian Conservative (Tory) parties and U.S. Republicans
Styles of doing politics

• **Progressivism** like conservatism, has two meanings:

• First, “**Progressivism 1**” was a nonpartisan and pragmatic approach to politics. It opposed patronage-based machine politics of the Tammany Hall tradition

• Many US city governments in the late 19th c. were party- and ethnicity-based and used patronage to control power. Progressives from 1890s to WW I promoted nonpartisanship in city politics

• National-level Progressivism later became a political party led by Theo. Roosevelt which disrupted the 1912 election
“Progressivism 2” appears in US. politics many decades later.

‘Progressive’ became a defensively adopted euphemism for “liberal,” which had become widely portrayed by certain outlets and commentators as:

- treasonous
- anti-Christmas
- anti-military
- deficit-loving
- elitist
- demonic
- family-hating
- fascist
- atheistic
- Communist
- unpatriotic
- socialist

Democrats especially adopted “progressivism” to replace “liberalism” to avoid such negative associations.
Unpacking “Isms”
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A cursory review: last time we

- Defined and explained isms related to social and political culture (racism, sexism and feminism)

- Isms related to styles and methods of governance and politics (authoritarianism, totalitarianism, imperialism & colonialism, elitism, populism, terrorism of 3 types – insurgent, state, and international – conservatism, and progressivism)
Let’s recall the “golden rule” of politics...

Whoever has the gold makes the rules!

... but also makes critics and enemies
Today we’ll examine isms arising from economic and political systems

• From the Greeks and Romans (2000 BCE-500 CE)
  • Authoritarianism, imperialism, republicanism

• From the Middle Ages (500-1500 CE)
  • Feudalism
  • Monarchism

• From recent history (1500-1900 CE)
  • Liberalism
  • Capitalism
  • Ideologies critical of capitalist-liberal order – socialism, anarchism, Marxism/communism
First, some key early stages in social development

- **Pre-history** – early societies of hunter gatherers, family bands, tribes, the rise of agriculture 8000-7000 BCE); *power was dispersed*

- **Settled agrarian societies** (7000-c 2000 BCE) -- surplus food supply, property, writing and arithmetic, power inequality, classes and elites; *power began to accumulate within groups and institutions*

- **Civilization** – the rise of complex city-states, kingdoms, and empires (c 2000 BCE to CE 500) – Egyptian, Persian, Roman and other empires; *power became highly concentrated within political institutions*

- **Observers and intellectuals began to take note** – inventing 1st isms.
Terms described in ancient Greek and Roman history and philosophy

• **Monarchism** – within a community, the inherited right to rule by an individual; it deteriorates into an abusive or corrupt form *dictatorship* (*authoritarianism*)

• **Aristocracy** (rule of a community by virtuous elites – *elitism*); it deteriorates into *oligarchism* (rule by corrupt and self-serving elites) under the influence of demagogues (self-serving actors)

• **Republicanism** (right to rule comes from whole citizenry (popular sovereignty); degenerate form called “democracy”
  - important decisions about laws and justice made by a majority of citizenry;
  - election of leaders by citizens
  - subject to majority tyranny over minority
  - vulnerable to self-serving demagogues

Aristotle (384-22 BCE)
Toward feudalism and monarchism

The Roman Empire’s collapse initiated a millenium of decentralization of power and cultural decline known as the **Middle Ages (c. CE 500 to CE 1500s)**

**Early disruptive forces** in medieval Europe

- Dissolution of central authority, rise of regional landholding lords
- Bubonic plague in 6th - 7th centuries CE and again in 13th c.; population falls
- Invasions/occupations by Franks, Goths, Huns, Vikings, Slavs, Muslim Arabs
- Rise of monarchies – nation-states

**Later disruptive forces**

- Divisions within Christianity (East-West split, Catholic monasticism)
- Papal efforts to control politics
- The Crusades
Feudalism and monarchism 1

• **Feudalism** – a system of mutual obligation among three “estates” – landholding warrior nobility, peasants, and the clergy
  • land held by manorial overlords who supported/protected the serfs who worked the land
  • Serfs were not slaves, were but not free to leave or sell their labor outside the manor
  • feudal lords owed rents and levies to monarchs; also owed military service to monarchs using their serfs as soldiers
  • system justified by Church (also a landholder)
Feudalism and monarchism 2

- **Monarchism** – resurfaces after fall of Roman empire
  - feudal lords gradually united under monarchs to form new *nation-states*
  - monarchs claimed absolute political and economic power
  - monarchs claimed inheritable thrones
  - The Church justified this political system by doctrine of *divine right to rule*
Countervailing forces to feudalism and monarchism

- Feudal nobles’ increasingly resisted monarchs’ absolute right to make war and levy taxes
- **They demanded rights and representation, even rebelled** -- eventually won parliaments of lords and rights (e.g. English Magna Carta 1215-1297)
- **Cities, urban guilds of craftsmen and manufacturers** sought liberty to contract workers and to control resources
- **Merchants and traders** wanted freedom to trade across regions, freedom from excessive taxation, protection of contracts
- **Serfs, free peasants, and urban workers** also demanded rights and benefits
Philosophy of **Liberalism** embraces economic-political change

- After 1500, Enlightenment Europe produced rapid intellectual, technological, and economic change
- Feudalism waned as capitalism (manufacturing and mercantilism) boomed and colonialism created new wealth
- The new economic systems needed structural change in polities:
  - Property rights, private ownership of means of production, freer inheritance of land, competitive markets, voluntary exchange, wage labor
  - Both monarchy (rulers’ absolute powers) and feudalism (entailed land, servitude) interfered with capital
  - Adam Smith (1723-1790) – philosopher of capitalism explained and justified these needs in ... *the Wealth of Nations*
Philosophies of economic and political change

• **A philosophy of liberation** repudiated the medieval notion that God wills the arrangements of societies political and economic systems

• New idea was that *God gives sovereignty (the right to determine rulership) to the people*
  
  • **Marsilius of Padua** (1270-1342) – the people alone are the only legitimate source of authority (**popular sovereignty**)
  
  • **Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and J.J. Rousseau** (1600-1800) – argued for a **social contract under which the people have the right to replace an unsatisfactory ruler and to determine how they will be governed**
  
  • This government is the *res publica* (thing of the people) -- **republicanism**

• **Liberalism** is the broad philosophy incorporating social contract theory, republicanism, and capitalist economic liberties
Liberalism in practice

• **American Revolution**
  - Declaration of Independence of 1776 embodies republicanism (social contract’s rights to replace Britain’s bad governance
  - U.S. Constitution of 1791 provides a blueprint for a capitalist economy
  - Doesn’t establish a democracy -- many antidemocratic features including slavery, male-only suffrage, appointed life-tenured judiciary, Senate, Electoral College
  - Democratization follows gradually -- 170 years later

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**Declaration**

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government.
Further examples of Liberalism in practice

• French Revolution 1789-1799
• Latin American independence movements and Liberal constitutions
• Liberal political ideas and capitalist economics spread through much of world in 19th and 20th centuries
• Democratization of Liberal systems lagged far behind the decline of feudalism
Relative effects of capitalism on per capita income (1400-2000)
Effects of capitalism on inequality 1820-1992
Capitalism’s, colonialism’s and Liberalism’s effects

Economic
- Big boost in overall economic growth in Europe and North America after 1800
- Rest of world also grows, but much more slowly
- Inequality (concentration of wealth) grows rapidly after 1800 driven by acceleration of wealth in Europe and North America

Political
- Limited representative government didn’t provide much popular control of power or much improvement in popular living standards
- Rise of ideologies and movements critical of the new order: socialism, Communism, anarchism, fascism, democratic socialism
Socialism

- **Communitarian and utopian socialism** criticized capitalism and its private control of the means of production as inefficient and wasteful (early 19th c.)
- Recommended subordinating private property to the needs of the whole society
- Henri de St. Simon (1760-1825) invented the term “working class” and argued for state management of the economy to ensure fair resource utilization and reduce ‘parasitism’
- Robert Owen (1771-1825) advocated the formation of local collectives for production and distribution; many labor reforms (no child labor, shorter work days’; founded several utopian communities including new Harmony IN
Anarchism

• Philosophy that government per se is illegitimate and should be ignored or resisted because it is inherently coercive and violates personal moral autonomy

• Individualist anarchism argues that individuals should pursue their interests alone or through voluntary associations of mutually self-interested free persons (influenced Ayn Rand)

• Communitarian anarchism holds that cooperative communities seeking a collective good are the best way to organize societies (influenced utopian communities and certain labor unions)

• Revolutionary anarchism holds the state to be so noxious that it must be destroyed by force (contributed to revolutionary movement in Spain)
Communism

• An argument for the working class and against capitalism; would abolish private property with collective ownership

• Classic document was the *Communist Manifesto* of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, rooted in a Hegelian model of history which is neither linear nor circular, but proceeds by stages.
  • A dominant political-economic order (thesis) generates accumulating problems (antithesis) that eventually overwhelm and replaces the old order (synthesis).
  • For M&E, the liberal-capitalist order and dominant *bourgeoisie* (thesis) generated an exploited *proletariat* (antithesis) that when capitalism fulfilled itself worldwide would rebel and create a new order of *Communism* (synthesis) through joint ownership of productive means.
  • Communism would provide both wealth and democracy, and the state would disappear.
Communism (a moving target)

• Marx and Engels’ “communism” never came about anywhere, only heavily planned state-run socialism.

• Revolution had occurred in wrong place and time (Russia in 1917) – not in fully industrialized world.

• Bolsheviks led by Lenin prevailed among many factions and began adjusting Marxian theory to reality.

• The rule of the proletariat became dictatorship by the Communist Party; protecting Russia’s revolution replaced worldwide revolution.

• Third World revolutionaries like Mao (China) and Guevara (Cuba) kept changing Marxist theories about when and how to rebel and move toward communism.
Fascism

• Origin of term– Ital. *fascio* (bundle, league) – with axe inserted was symbol of strength

• Hard to define ideologically – an all-powerful state suffuses whole social order; strongman leader backed by large movement; ultra-nationalist and expansionist views

• Initially a reaction to European disorder and conflict after WWI I in seeking national unity, order under a strong leader
  • **Italy** – Mussolini, a teacher, journalist and socialist agitator founded Fighting Leagues (Fasci de Combattimento) and blackshirts; king invited him into govt in 1922 and he seized dictatorial power in 1925; expansionist (Ethiopia, Albania)
  • **Germany** – Hitler followed a similar path; he built Nazi Party in the 1920s, gained ruling power in 1933, Nazis dominated state, rebuilt economy and military; persecuted Jews and others; invaded/occupied neighboring nations
  • **Spain** – After the king’s abdication in 1933, and conflict in Republic, Franco led army insurgents to overthrow government of Republic. Falange and army won civil war in 1939 with German and Italian help; Franco ruled for 3+ decades
20th c. Fascist leaders

Mussolini and Hitler

Franco

21st c. Fascism

- Post-Communist and post-revolutionary regimes tend to devolve into Fascism

Russia under V. Putin

Belarus under A. Lukashenko
Social democracy, democratic socialism

- Originally an ideology advocating using liberal democratic institutions to institute socialism (collective ownership of the means of production) and eradicate poverty
- Failure of command socialism (in USSR) and disagreements among democratic leftists elsewhere blocked specific progress toward collectivization
- Ultimately social democrats have adopted ad hoc reforms instead
  - Social welfare programs -- public pensions, health care
  - Sectoral socialism (i.e., Denton’s municipal electric system, TVA, etc.)
  - Minimum wages
  - Public housing
  - Market regulation
- Today’s “social democrats” are leftist/liberal/progressives—NOT socialists
1. **Classical Liberalism** – (with a capital L) economic philosophy promoting capitalism

- Advocated a small, low-regulation state...
- and a political program supporting republicanism and representative government
- The Liberal ideology occupied the right side of the left-right continuum of state control of the economy (curtailed monarchical power)
- Today’s classical Liberals are – somewhat bewilderingly -- labeled “Conservatives” or “neo-Liberals”
Liberalism’s two meanings today...

2. “liberalism” (with a lowercase l) means
   • Sensitivity to social or political injustice and seeking its redress with public policy
   • “liberalism” resides on the left side of the left-right continuum of politics. It favors more rather than less & bigger rather than smaller government -- more government social-welfare programs, income redistribution, and regulation of markets, etc.)
   • Today’s democratic socialists and social democrats are liberals in this sense

   • “Wokeism” is an epithet invented by conservative propagandists to disparage liberalism.

   • Finally, liberals are not communists either in Marx’s vision of nearly utopian equality under collective ownership, or in the USSR’s command economy state ownership/management mode.
To illustrate

Communists
USSR

socialists

Liberals, social democrats

Centrists and moderates

Conservatives, classical Liberals, Neo-Liberals

Marx’s communism

anarchists

Total government control

No government control
Questions?
Thank you!