

# 1729

## Lecture 3: Descriptive Politics

And the case for optimalism over fundamentalism.

# Overview

## 1. Descriptive politics

- left and right, quantitatively
- left and right, historically
- left and right, contemporaneously

## 2. Prescriptive politics

- optimalism and the decentralized center

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## 1. Descriptive politics

- **left and right, quantitatively**
- left and right, historically
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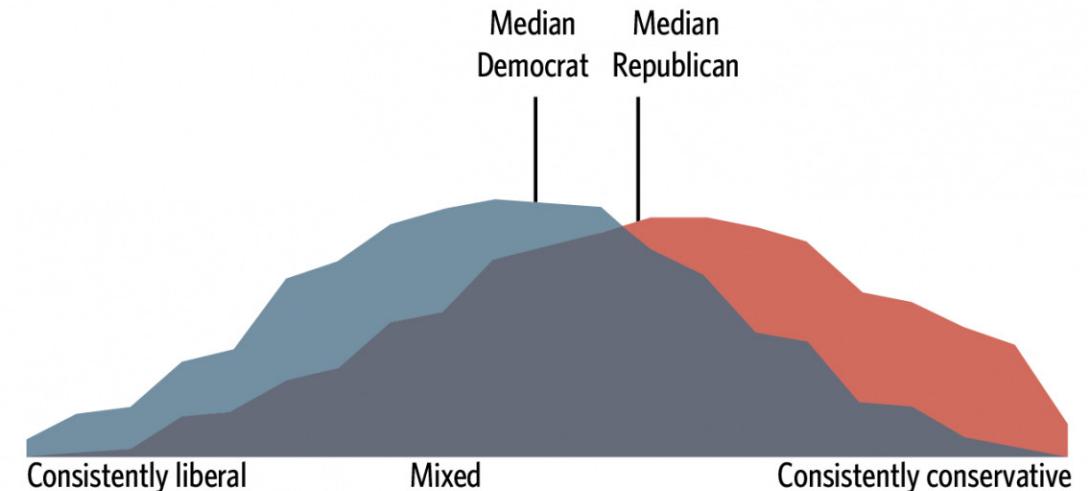
## 2. Prescriptive politics

- optimalism and the decentralized center

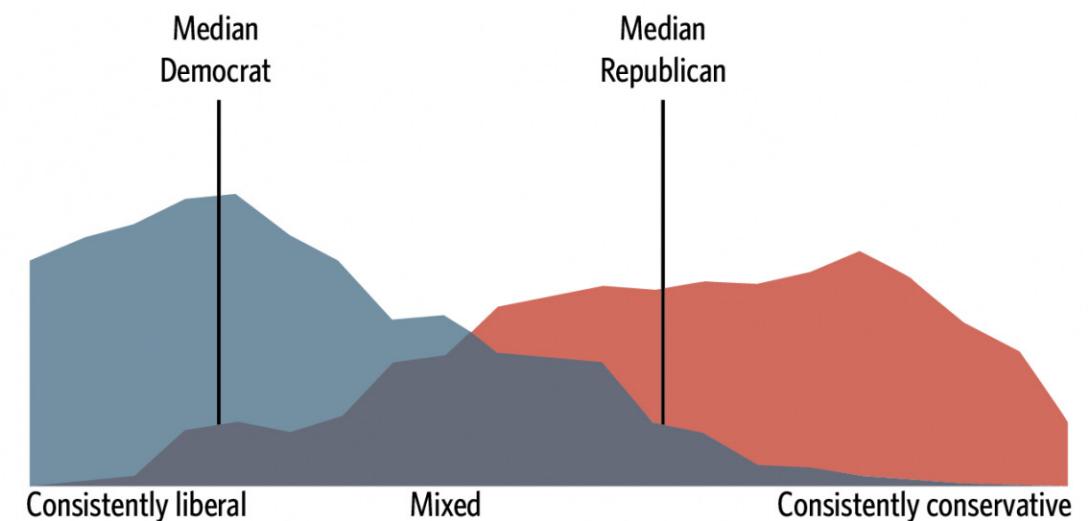
## Political polarization in 1994 and 2017

The viewpoints of the median Democrat and median Republican in 2017 have moved further apart since 1994.

1994



2017



## Motivation

Political polarization is an important part of why the US is dysfunctional.  
Can we analyze these forces?

# The Spatial Theory of Voting

The concepts of left and right can be **quantified**. The spatial theory of voting is one way to do so.

## NOMINATE (scaling method)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

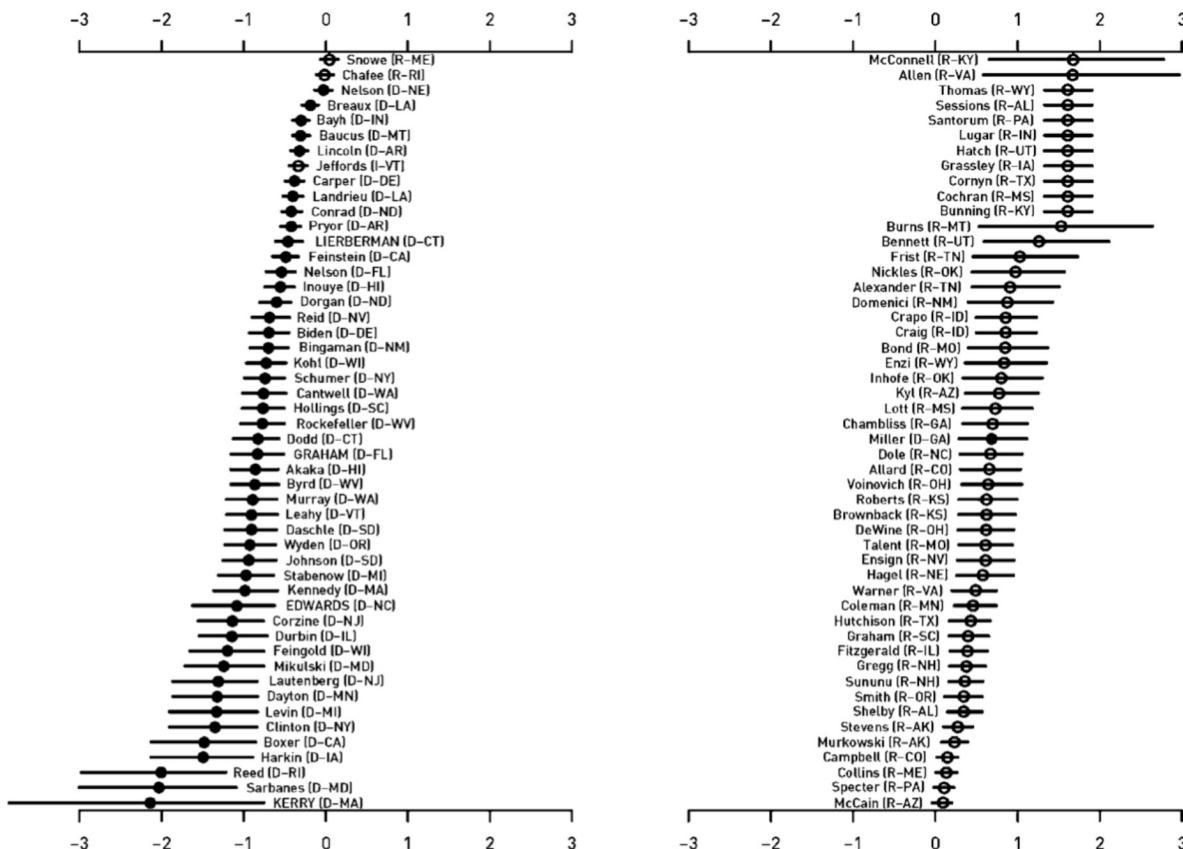
**NOMINATE** (an acronym for Nominal Three-Step Estimation) is a multidimensional scaling application developed by political scientists [Keith T. Poole](#) and [Howard Rosenthal](#) in the early 1980s to analyze preferential and choice data, such as legislative roll-call voting behavior.<sup>[1][2]</sup> As computing capabilities grew, Poole and Rosenthal developed multiple iterations of their NOMINATE procedure: the original D-NOMINATE method, W-NOMINATE, and most recently DW-NOMINATE (for dynamic, weighted NOMINATE). In 2009, Poole and Rosenthal were named the first recipients of the [Society for Political Methodology's Best Statistical Software Award](#) for their development of NOMINATE, a recognition conferred to "individual(s) for developing statistical software that makes a significant research contribution".<sup>[3]</sup> In 2016, Keith T. Poole was awarded the Society for Political Methodology's Career Achievement Award. The citation for this award reads, in part, "One can say perfectly correctly, and without any hyperbole: the modern study of the U.S. Congress would be simply unthinkable without NOMINATE legislative roll call voting scores. NOMINATE has produced data that entire bodies of our discipline—and many in the press—have relied on to understand the U.S. Congress."<sup>[4]</sup>

# The Spatial Theory of Voting

The concepts of left and right can be quantified. The spatial theory of voting is one way to do so.

## The US Congress

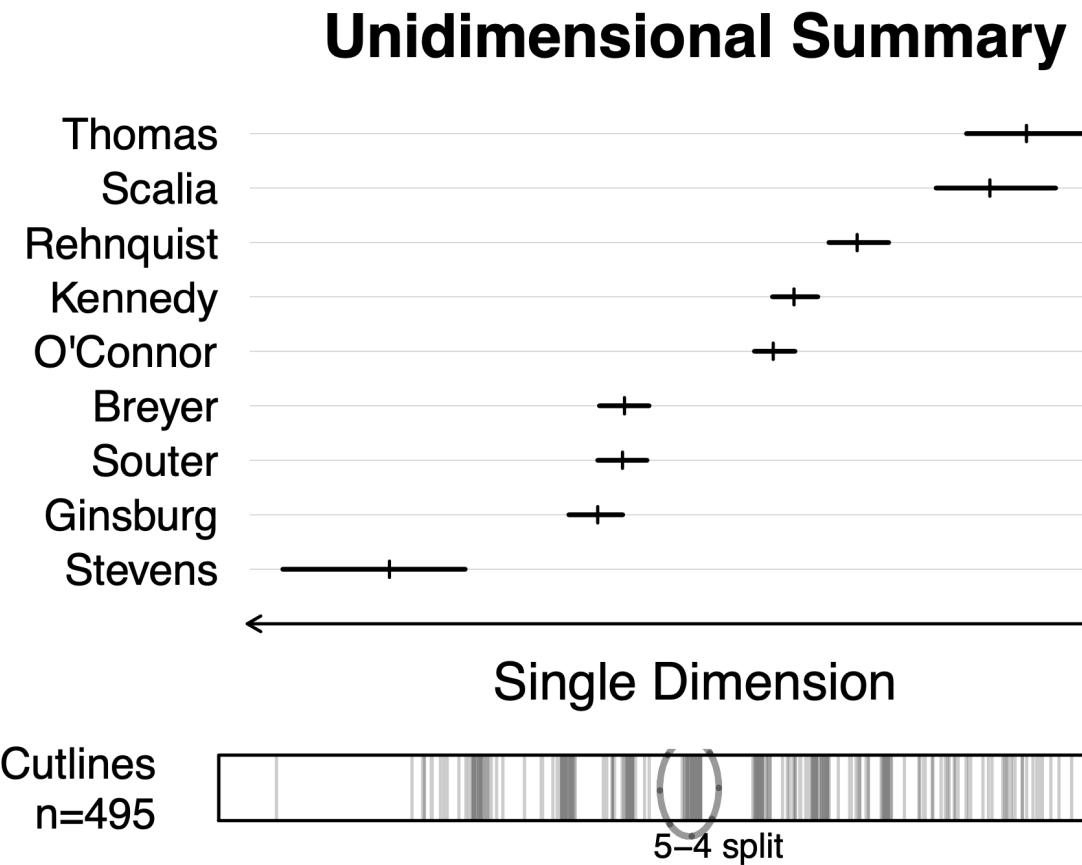
**Figure 1**  
**Point Estimates and 95% Confidence Intervals using 62 National Journal Key Votes**



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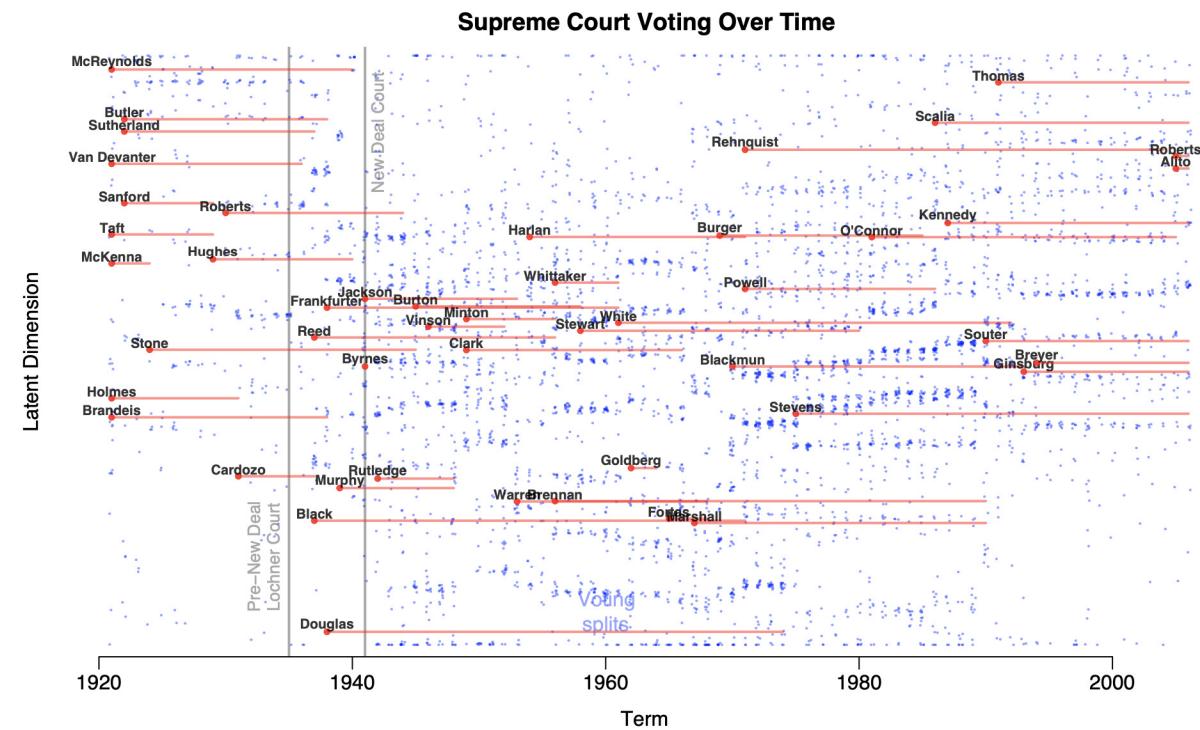
## The US Supreme Court



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## The US Supreme Court



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## The US Supreme Court

AGREEMENTS AMONG SUPREME COURT JUSTICES IN CONTROVERSIAL CASES,  
1939 AND 1940 TERMS  
(In Percentages)

<i>Justice</i>	<i>McReynolds</i>	<i>Roberts</i>	<i>Hughes</i>	<i>Stone</i>	<i>Reed</i>	<i>Frankfurter</i>	<i>Murphy</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Douglas</i>
<i>McReynolds</i>	—	64	64	41	35	31	38	24	24
<i>Roberts</i>	64	—	75	51	45	45	39	37	36
<i>Hughes</i>	64	75	—	78	63	64	53	49	49
<i>Stone</i>	41	51	78	—	81	84	75	69	68
<i>Reed</i>	35	45	63	81	—	86	80	79	79
<i>Frankfurter</i>	31	45	64	84	86	—	91	85	84
<i>Murphy</i>	38	39	53	75	80	91	—	89	89
<i>Black</i>	24	37	49	69	79	85	89	—	100
<i>Douglas</i>	24	36	49	68	79	84	89	100	—

# The Spatial Theory of Voting

The concepts of left and right can be **quantified**. The spatial theory of voting is one way to do so.

## Newspaper Editorial Boards

### Political Positions of Newspapers

- 495 Supreme Court cases from 1994-2004 terms
- 25 major newspapers
- 1500 editorial-case positions
- We personally read and checked the coding for each of the 1500 editorial positions
  - 1: clearly in favor of majority position
  - 0: clearly against majority position
  - ?: unclear but covered
- This simple coding allows a simple item response theory model to be used to compare the newspapers and justices to each other.

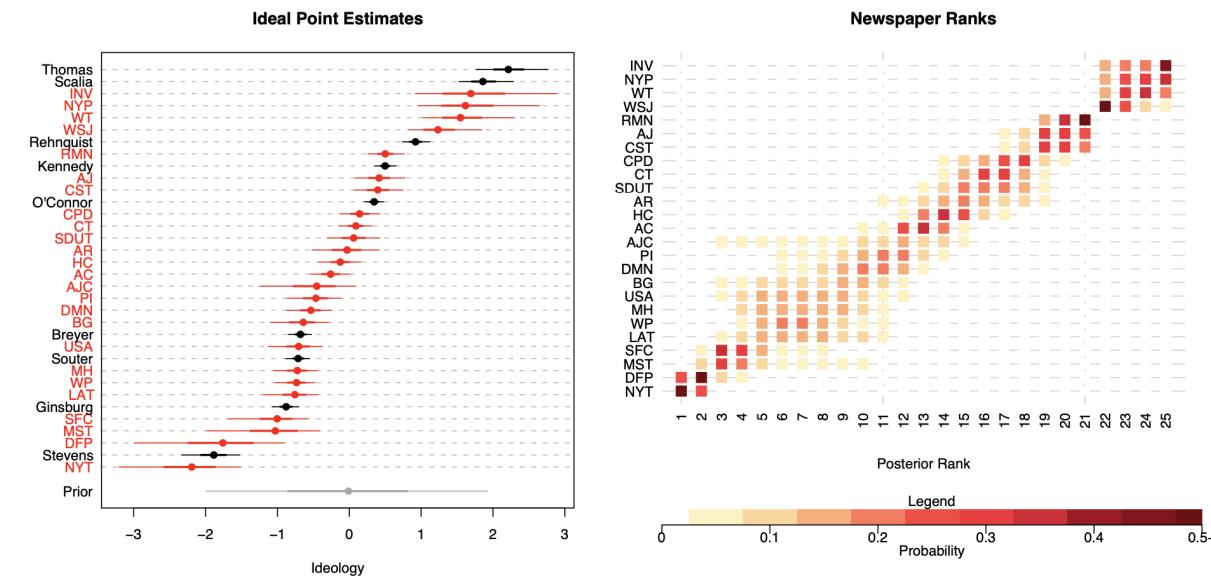
More detail in:

Ho and Quinn. 2008. "Measuring Explicit Political Positions of Media." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*. 3: 353-377.

# The Spatial Theory of Voting

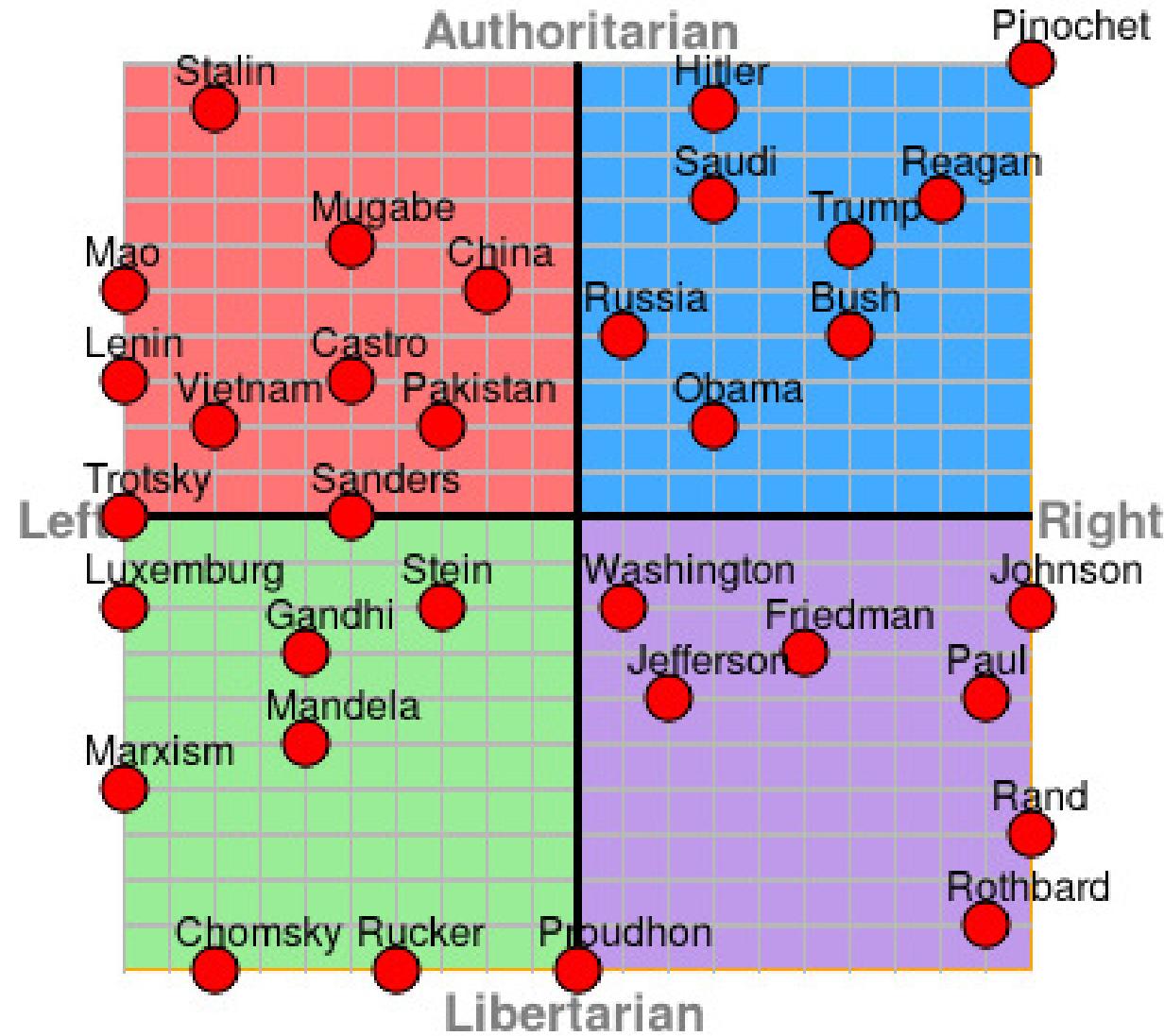
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## Newspaper Editorial Boards



# The American Political Compass

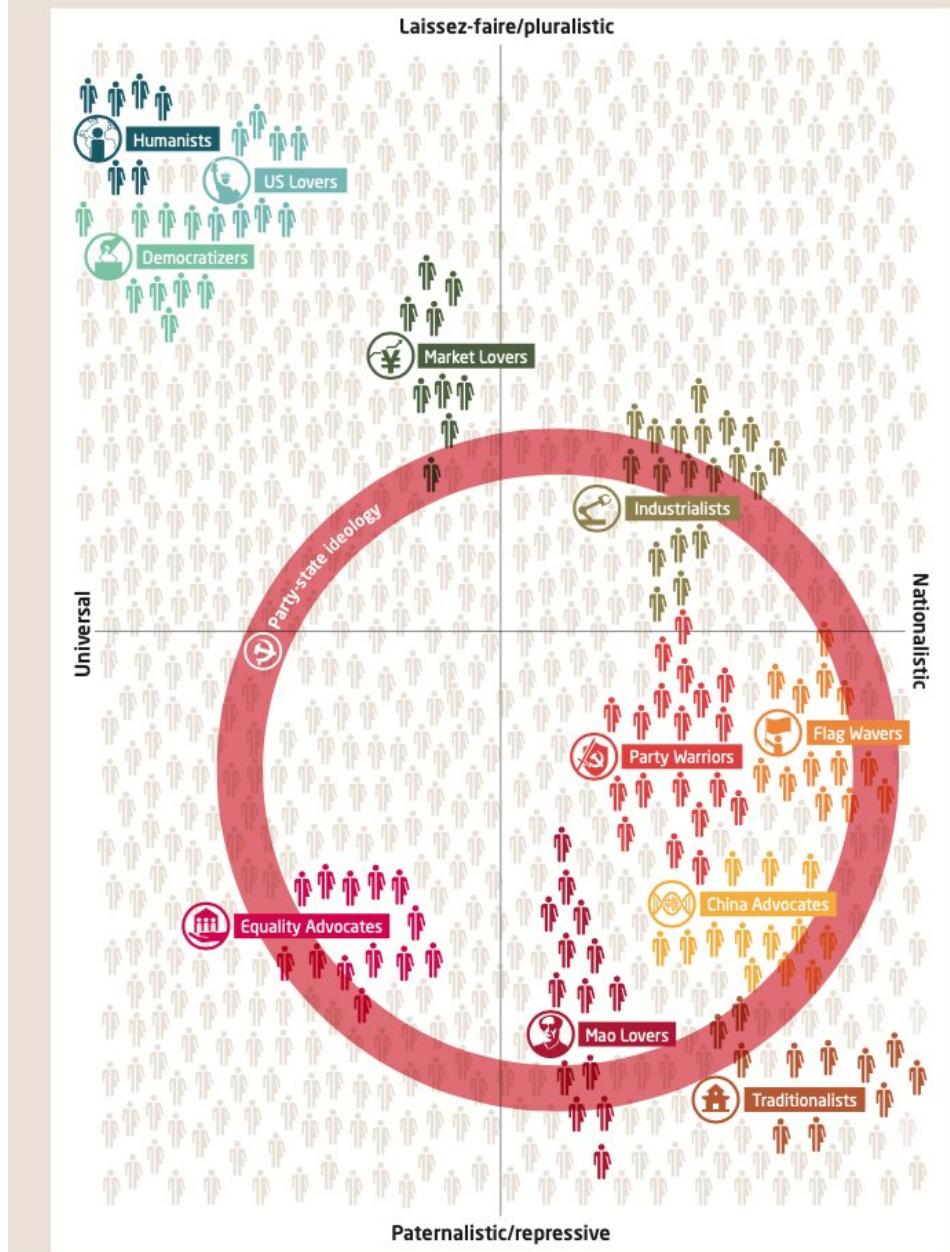
You can project people down from a high-dimensional ideology space onto a political compass, like this.





# The Chinese Political Compass

The axes of the political compass will differ by space and time. Here's a sample of the Chinese.



Source: Adapted from Pan/Xu 2016 and Veg 2014. Relative placement of clusters based on interviews with intellectuals; number of figures as approximation to visibility of clusters based on interviews, survey and literature.

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# The Left-Right Fusions

If the other side is so illogical, why is it around?

In practice, some of the most successful ideologies of all time have been left-right fusions. Not exactly "centrist", but combining elements of both. Here are seven examples.

## **The Darkening Age: The Christian Destruction of the Classical World by Catherine Nixey**

### **1. Holy Roman Empire**

Christianity started out as the original communism, tearing down the Roman Empire.

Eventually, hundreds of years later, a pope (!) awarded a king (!) the title of Roman Emperor.



Remains of the Temple of Bel in Palmyra, once a Hellenistic place of worship, converted to a Christian church in the Byzantine era. Photograph: Joseph Eid/AFP/Getty Images

# 1. Holy Roman Empire

Christianity started out as the original communism, tearing down the Roman Empire.

Eventually, hundreds of years later, a pope (!) awarded a king (!) the title of Roman Emperor.

2

## So why did it have that name?

It was not until 1254 that the title of Holy Roman Empire was applied, but the origins of the name date back to AD 800, more than 300 years after the western half of the Roman Empire had collapsed.

The Pope at that time, Leo III, was forced to flee Rome and, in desperation, he turned for help to Charlemagne, the powerful King of the Franks, who then ruled what is now roughly France and Germany. Charlemagne came to Leo's aid.

In AD 800, the grateful Pope crowned him as Roman Emperor as a gift.

## 2. Protestant Establishment

Protestantism started by tearing down the authority of the Catholic Church.

Eventually, many wars and migrations later, the WASP (White Anglo Saxon Protestant) establishment ran the US.



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### White Anglo-Saxon Protestants



From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

*"WASP" redirects here. For other uses, see [WASP \(disambiguation\)](#).*

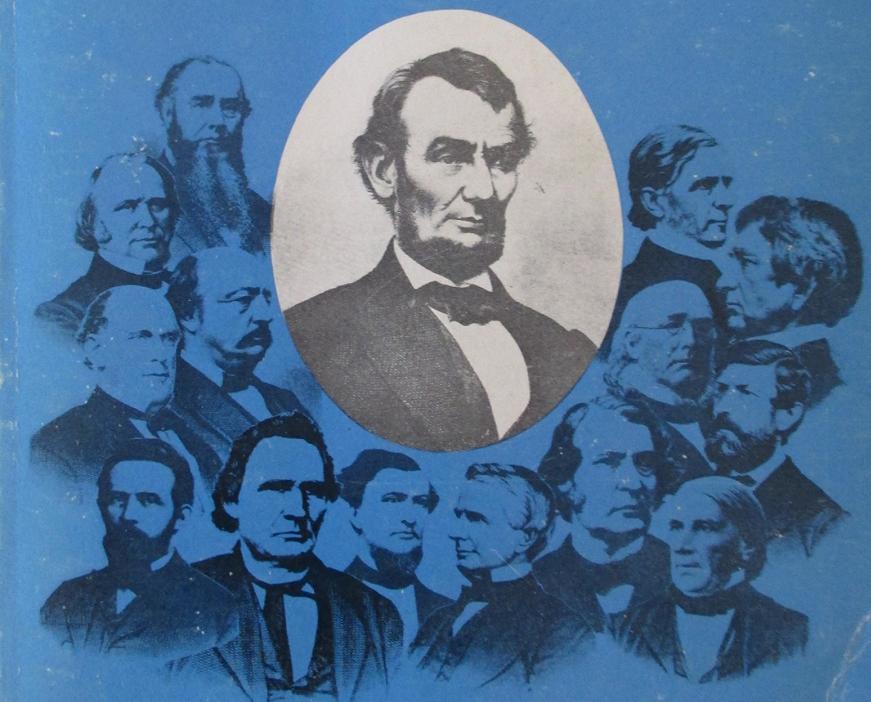
In the United States, **White Anglo-Saxon Protestants** or **WASPs** are the [white American Protestant](#) elite, typically of [British descent](#).<sup>[1]</sup> WASP elites have dominated American society, culture, and politics for most of the history of the United States. After 1945, many Americans criticized the WASP hegemony and disparaged them as part of "The Establishment".<sup>[2][3]</sup> Although the social influence of wealthy WASPs has declined since the 1940s, the group continues to play a central role in American finance, politics and [philanthropy](#).<sup>[4]</sup>

### **3. Republican Conservatives**

Radical Republicans were on the left, and tore down slavery in the South. Eventually, Republicans became the *conservatives*.

# **The Radical Republicans**

**Lincoln's Vanguard for Racial Justice**



**by HANS L. TREFOUSSE**

## 4. Soviet Nationalists

Soviet communism started as an internationalist, Trotskyist project. Eventually, under Stalin, it was fused with Russian nationalism.

# Soviet Nationalism Is Still Driving Russian Politics

By Randall D. Law

DECEMBER 22, 2011

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*Forged in World War II, the Stalin-era phenomenon has persisted into Putin's Russia today*

# 5. Democratic Capitalists

The mid-century US was democratic *and* capitalist, using its democracy to morally justify its capitalism (vis-a-vis communism).



## 6. CCP Entrepreneurs

The Chinese Communist Party defeated the nationalists and seized all the land for the state. Then, decades later, under Deng, it fused with capitalism.



Opinion

# The Rise of Woke Capital

By [Ross Douthat](#)

Feb. 28, 2018



## 7. Woke Capital

The New Left that arose in the 60s went from campus radical to tenured radical to Fortune 500 CEO and establishment ideology by 2021.

# Why Left-Right Fusions? (1/2)

Each of these began as a radical left-wing movement that tore down the establishment and then *became* the establishment.

The left provides the moral justification, the right provides the power and money.

## Why Left-Right Fusions? (2/2)

That's not to say this is the only model, or that all of these models have the same dosage of left and right.

Just that it is a common and successful model that explains why both left and right stick around.

# The Full Cycle

One cycle is as follows, particularly applicable to the Republicans from 1865 to 2020.

- a new movement gains moral authority
- moral authority (status) leads to economic authority (wealth)
- economic authority leads to loss of moral authority (to the poor)
- loss of moral authority leads to loss of economic authority

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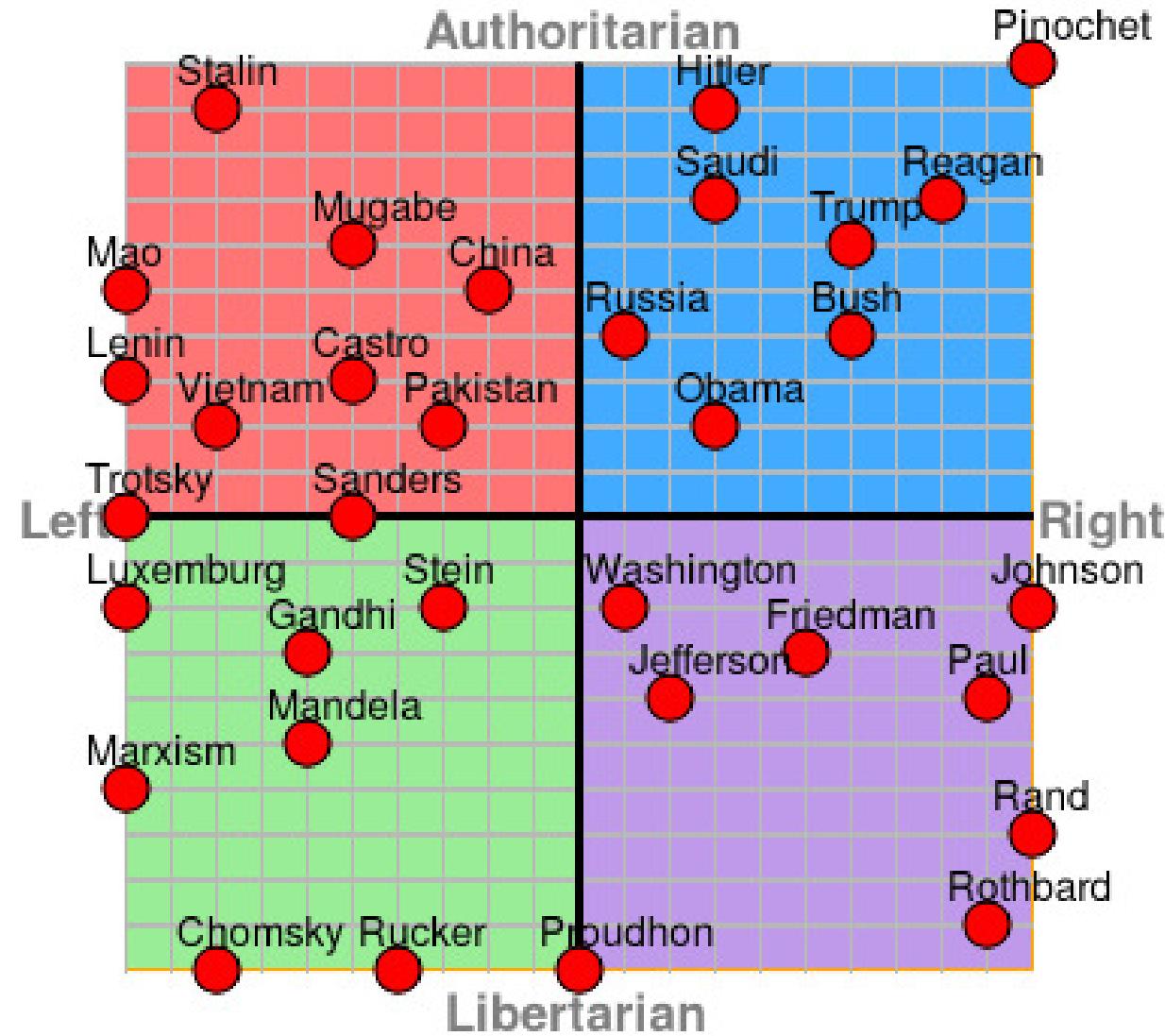
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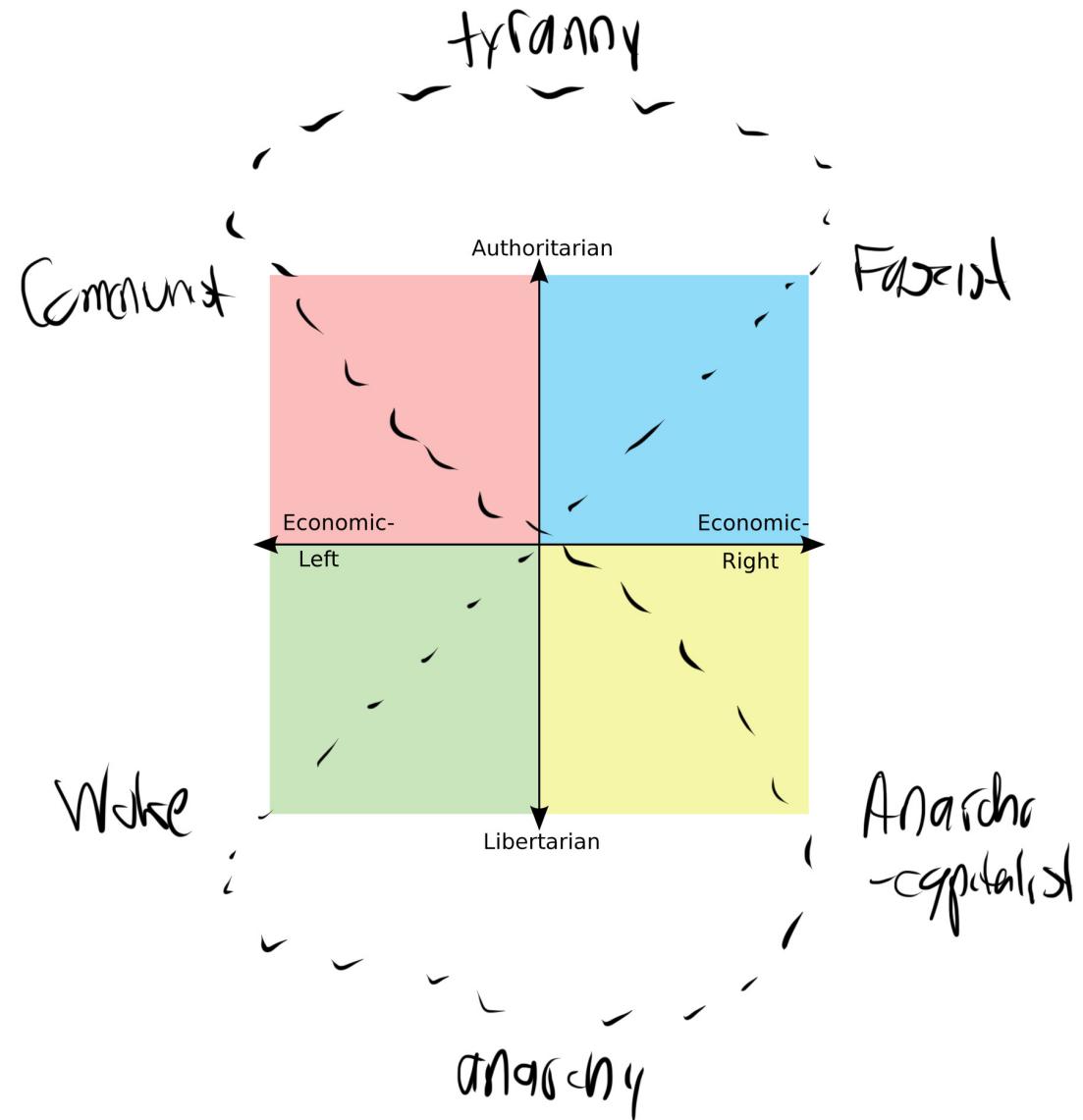
# The Western Political Compass, Again

Here's the Western political compass again.



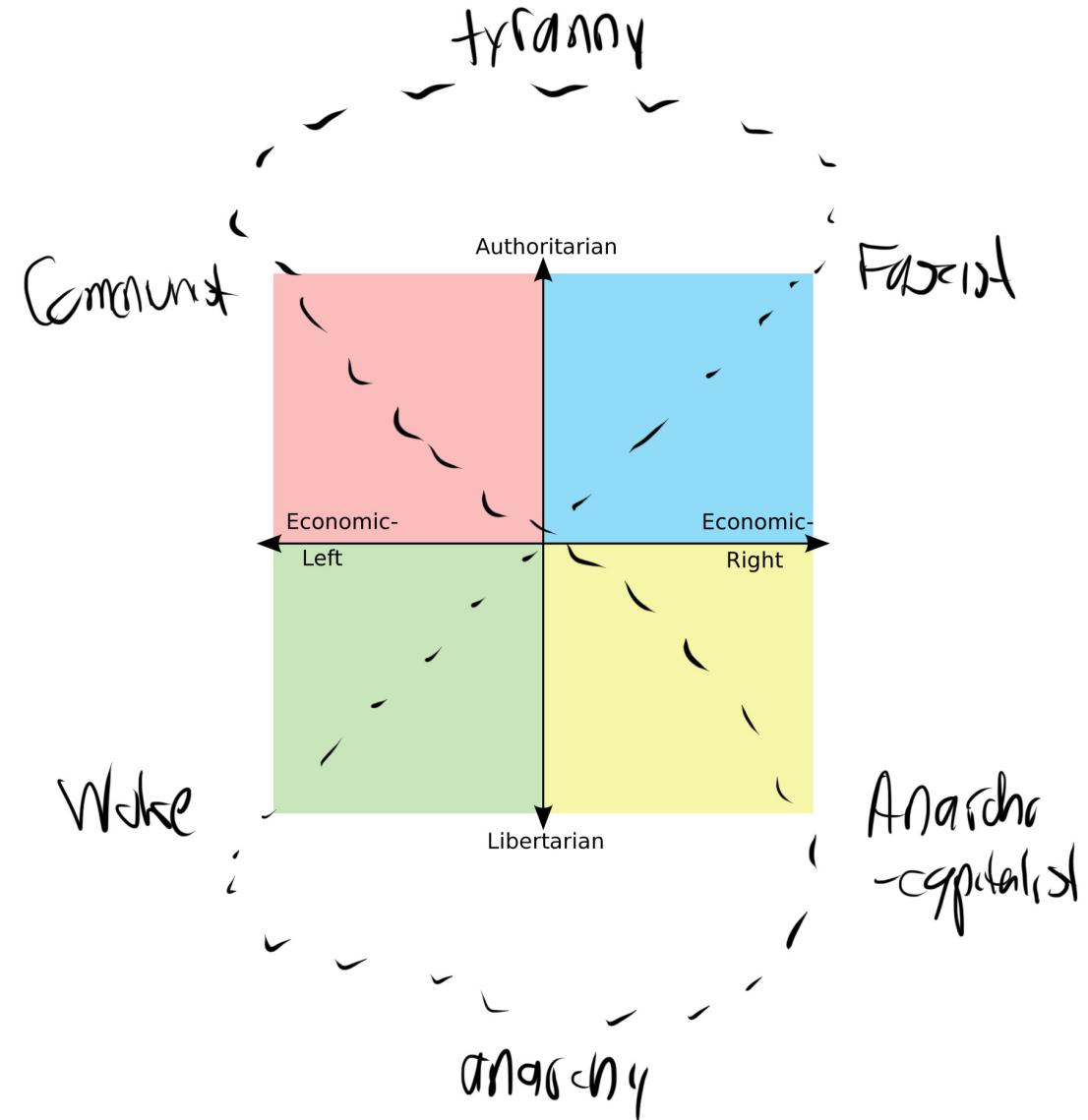
# Horseshoe theory

Horseshoe theory says that extreme left and right meet and become authoritarian.



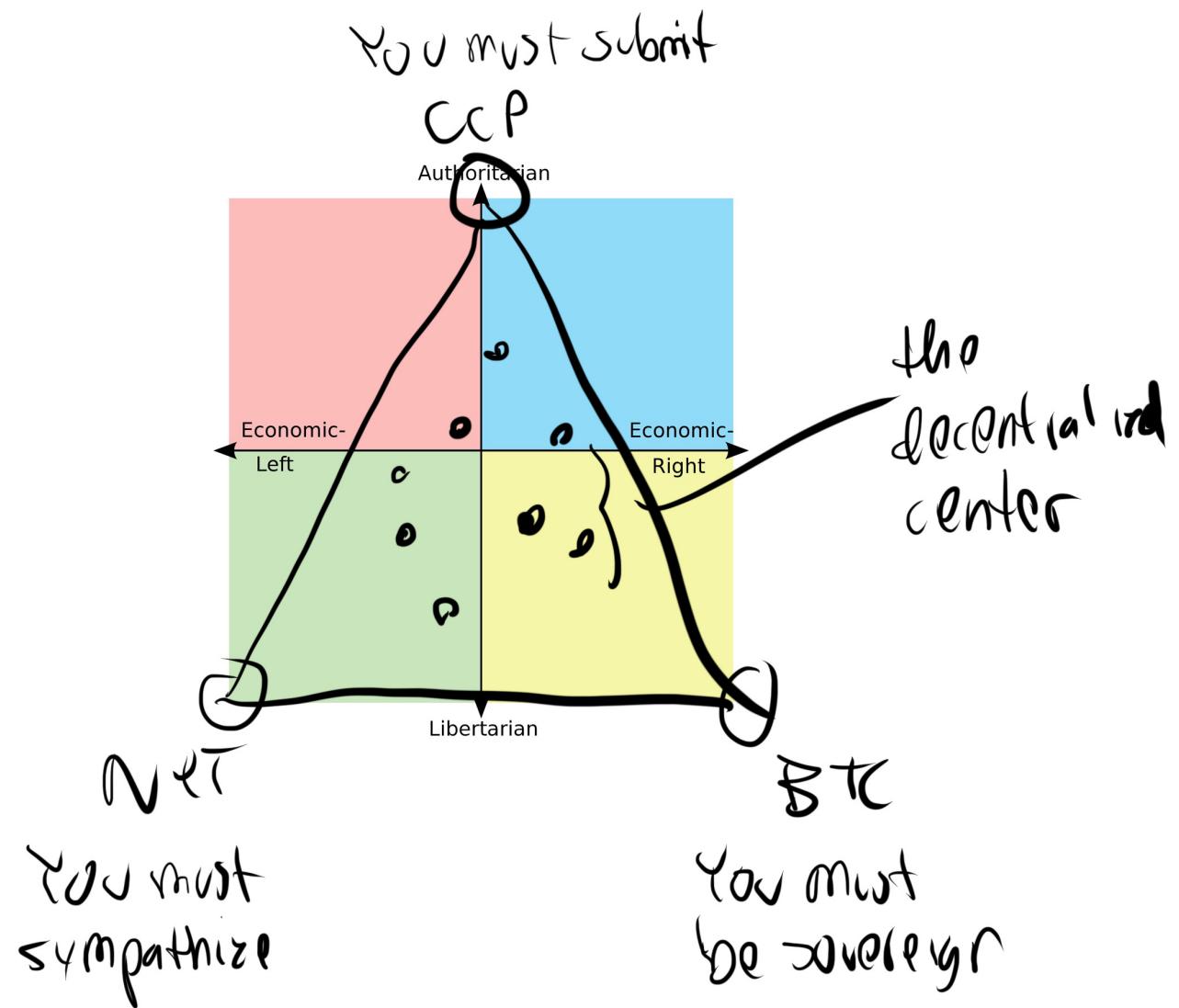
# Figure 8 Theory

We can generalize that to figure 8 theory, where extreme libertarian left and right meet and become anarchy.



# NYT vs CCP vs BTC

We can superimpose  
Woke Capital,  
Communist Capital,  
Crypto Capital on this  
diagram.

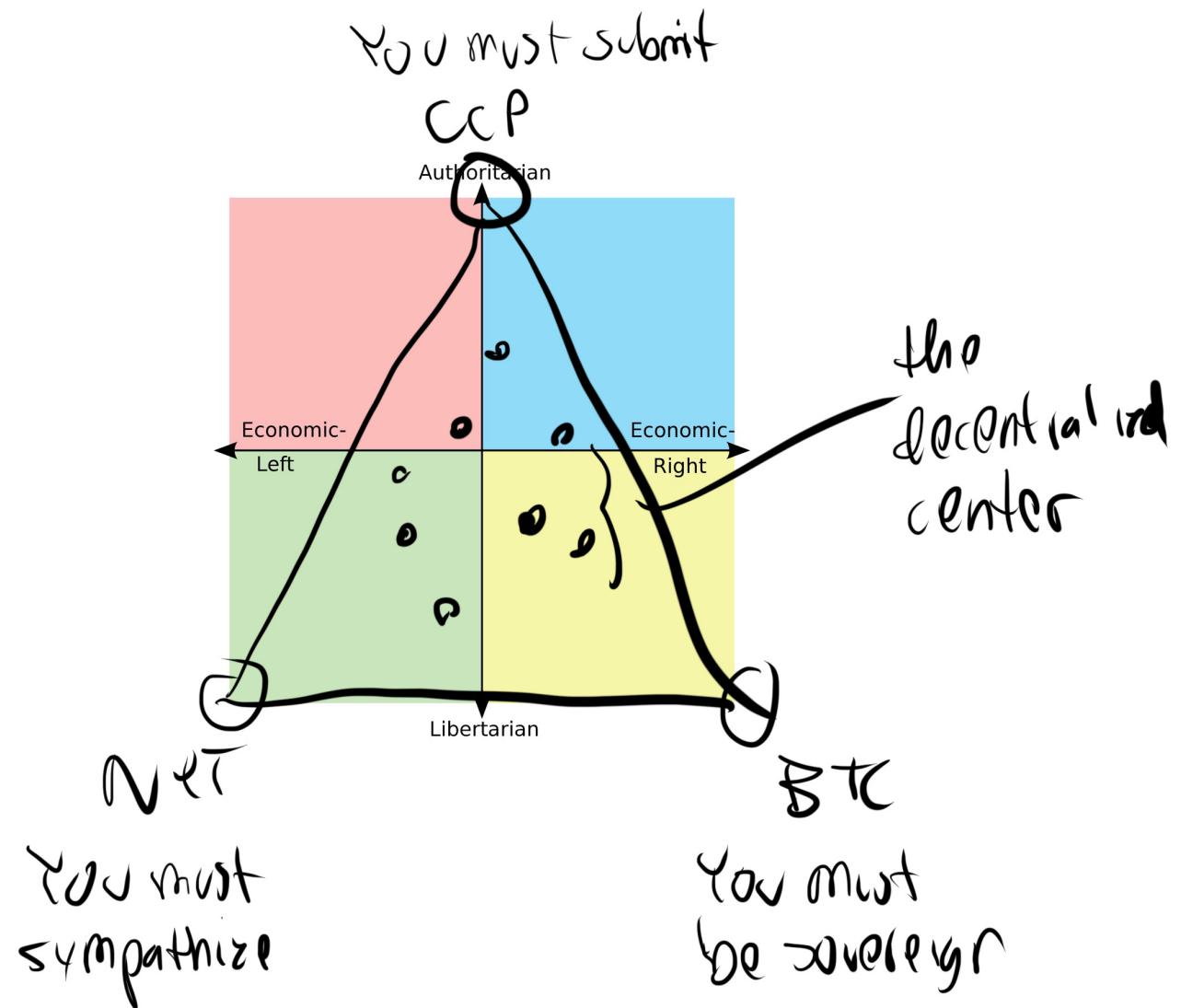


# Sympathy, Submission, Sovereignty

CCP: you must submit

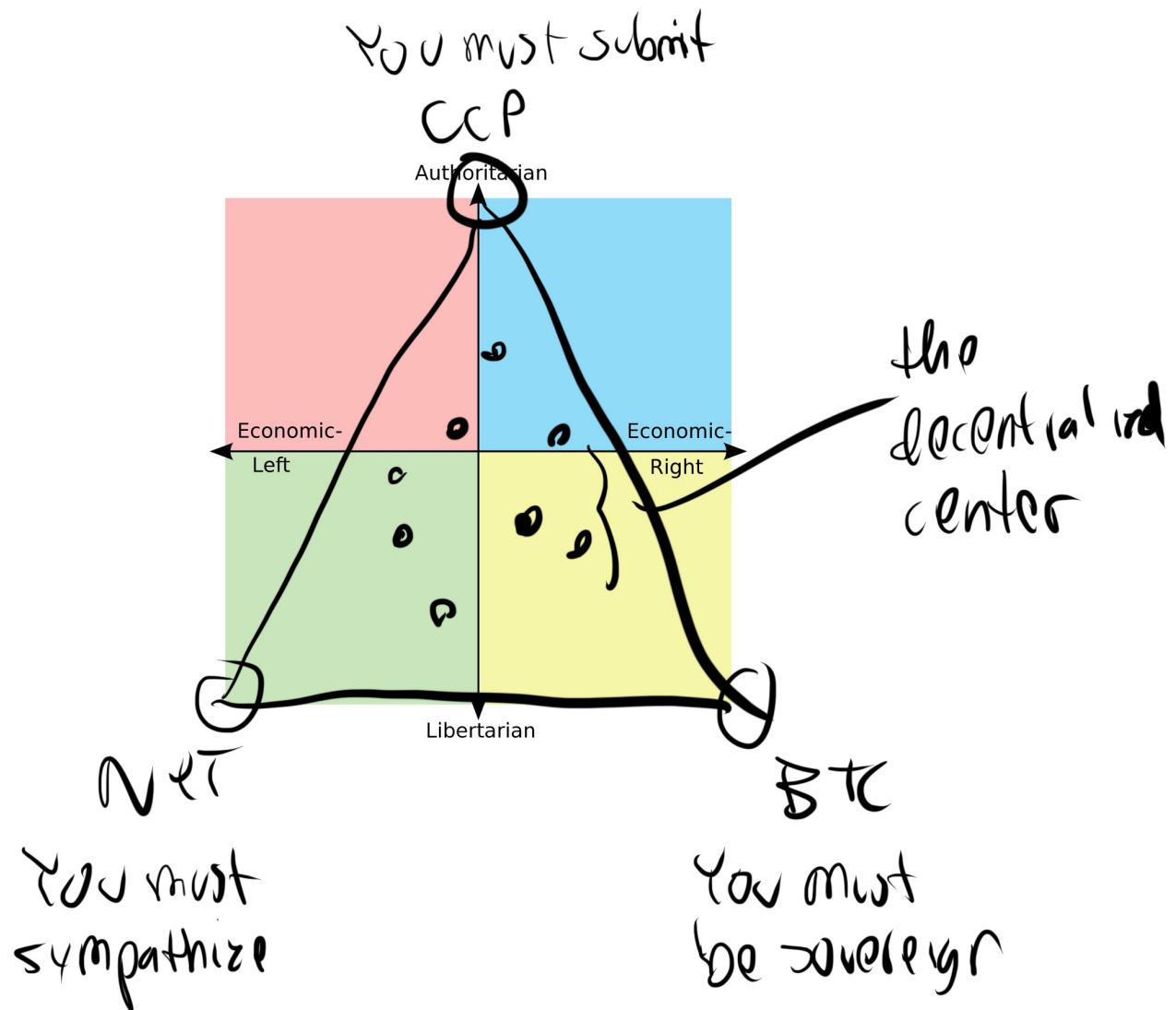
NYT: you must  
sympathize

BTC: you must be  
sovereign



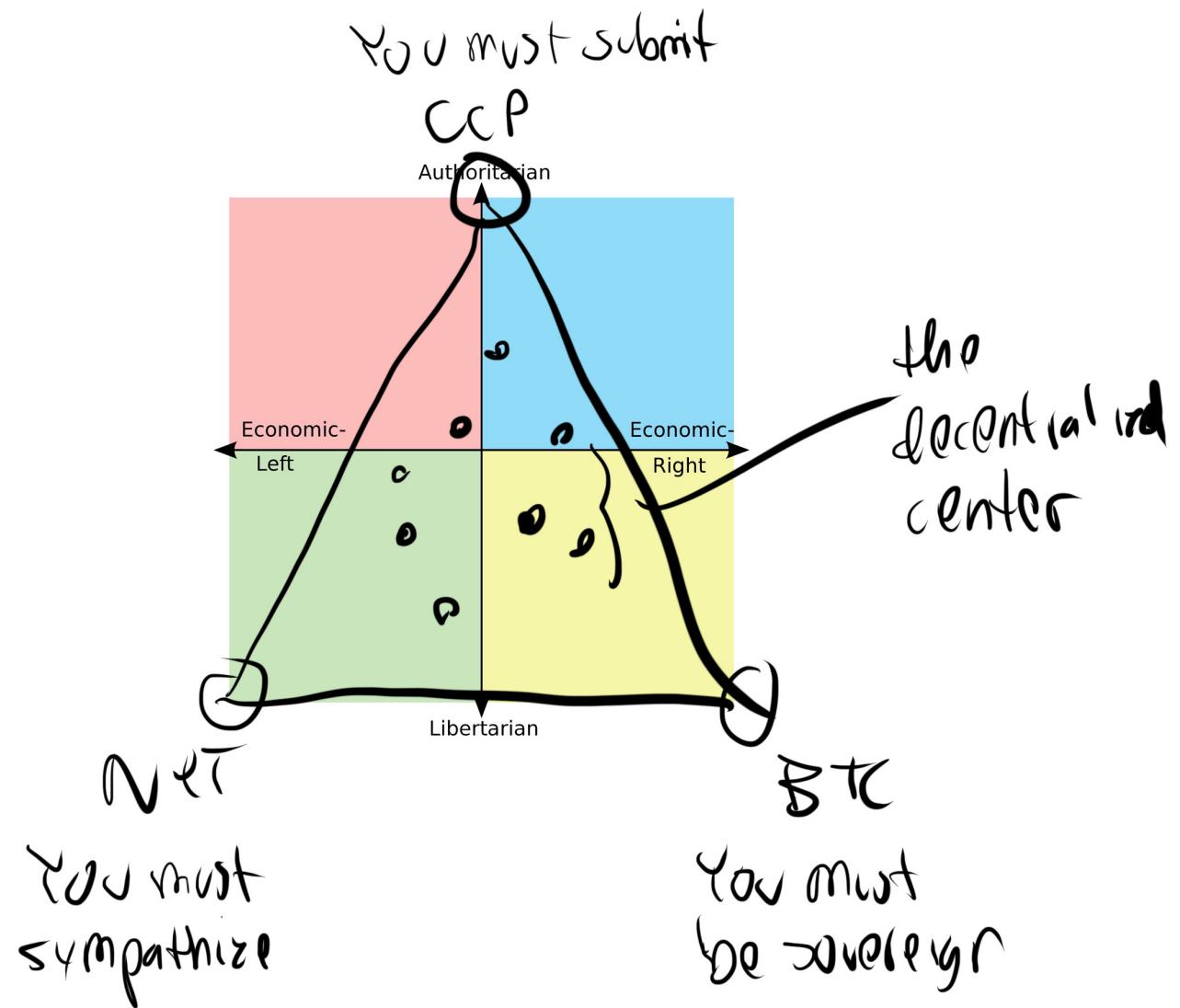
# Tyranny vs Anarchy

In a time of tyranny,  
what's scarce is  
freedom; in a time of  
anarchy, what's scarce  
is leadership.



# The Decentralized Center

We seek something in the middle of these powerful forces.



# Summary

1. Left/right can be quantified
2. Left/right can prop each other up in a fusion state
3. Anarchy may be this century's problem, not just tyranny
4. We seek a decentralized center

# Next Steps

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