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978-0-521-88433-4 - Authoritarianism and Polarization in American Politics

Marc J. Hetherington and Jonathan D. Weiler

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Authoritarianism and Polarization in American Politics

Although politics at the elite level has been polarized for some time, a scholarly controversy has raged over whether ordinary Americans are polarized. This book argues that they are and that the reason is growing polarization of worldviews – what guides people’s view of right and wrong and good and evil. These differences in worldview are rooted in what Marc J. Hetherington and Jonathan D. Weiler describe as authoritarianism. They show that differences of opinion concerning the most provocative issues on the contemporary issue agenda – about race, gay marriage, illegal immigration, and the use of force to resolve security problems – reflect differences in individuals’ levels of authoritarianism. This makes authoritarianism an especially compelling explanation of contemporary American politics. Events and strategic political decisions have conspired to make all these considerations more salient. The authors demonstrate that the left and the right have coalesced around these opposing worldviews, which has provided politics with more incandescent hues than before.

Marc J. Hetherington is currently professor of political science at Vanderbilt University. In 2004 he was awarded the Emerging Scholar Award from the Public Opinion, Elections, and Voting Behavior Section of the American Political Science Association for his scholarly contribution within his first ten years in the profession. He is also the author of *Why Trust Matters: Declining Political Trust and the Demise of American Liberalism* and numerous articles that have appeared in *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, *British Journal of Political Science*, and *Public Opinion Quarterly*.

Jonathan D. Weiler is currently director of undergraduate studies and adjunct assistant professor of international and area studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His previous book, *Human Right in Russia: A Darker Side of Reform*, was published in 2004. He blogs daily about politics and sports at www.jonathanweiler.com.

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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Cambridge University Press

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521711241

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First published 2009

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data

Hetherington, Marc J., 1968–

Authoritarianism and polarization in American politics /

Marc J. Hetherington, Jonathan D. Weiler.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-0-521-88433-4 (hardback) – ISBN 978-0-521-71124-1 (pbk.)

1. Authoritarianism – United States. 2. United States – Politics and government – 2001–

3. Right and left (Political science) – Case studies. 4. Polarization (Social sciences) – Case

studies. I. Weiler, Jonathan Daniel, 1965– II. Title.

E902.H48 2009

303.3'6-dc22 2009004019

ISBN 978-0-521-88433-4 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-71124-1 Paperback

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To Mom, Dad, Suzanne, Ben, and Sammy, with all my love.

MH

*To the memory of my father, Lawrence Weiler (1919–1973),
as humane and decent a man as I have ever known.*

JW

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Acknowledgments

This work is both conventional, in its focus on polarization, and unconventional, in its focus on authoritarianism. We hope that in some way it hearkens to an earlier period when scholars attempted to appeal to a wide audience and drew on a range of different scholarly approaches. Our shared time at Bowdoin College, a small liberal arts college with an incredibly talented and broadly interested faculty, informs this hope. In various ways, Eric Chown (Computer Science), Matt Lassiter (History), Joe Bandy (Sociology), Joe Lane (Government and Legal Studies, our old home department), and Pete Coviello (English) all took an interest in this work and shaped our thinking.

We owe an especially large debt of gratitude to Jim Stimson. His scholarly work on issue evolution, co-authored with Ted Carmines, served as an important guide. Jim was also generous with his time, meeting with Jonathan in the early stages of our work. These conversations helped orient us and also helped give us confidence that we were pursuing something worthwhile. Jim also championed our project, bringing us together with the tremendous group of people at Cambridge University Press, notably Eric Crahan and Emily Spangler. In that sense, Jim both helped get us started and helped us finish.

Hetherington has an army of people to thank. Bob Luskin trained him to be a political scientist and continues to push him to be better. Many people in the Department of Political Science at Vanderbilt University read parts of the book and offered helpful feedback, including Bruce Oppenheimer, John Geer, Brooke Ackerly, Christian Grose, Pam Corley, Florence Faucher-King, Stefanie Lindquist, Neal Tate, Carol Swain, Brett Benson, Michaela Mattes, Cindy Kam, and Liz Zechmeister. James Booth, in particular, worked hard to help with the normative elements of this delicate work. Mitch Seligson was also particularly generous in his inclusion of a number of survey items that allowed us to write Chapter 9. Vanderbilt also provided the funding for a semester's leave, which helped get the project moving.

People from outside the Vanderbilt community were also helpful. Paul Sniderman introduced us to the concept of authoritarianism. Jon Hurwitz was

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central in encouraging us to think about authoritarianism in terms of cognition rather than emotion. Mike Nelson provided a painstaking reading of the manuscript, giving helpful suggestions on style and substance. Chapter 2 of this book is a much revised version of a review article on polarization that Larry Bartels and Fred Greenstein encouraged Hetherington to write. Without this encouragement, it is unclear whether we would have even pursued this book-length project. The article was ultimately published in the *British Journal of Political Science*; thanks to Cambridge Journals for its permission to use it. Larry's and Fred's interest and mentorship has always meant so much personally and been such a benefit professionally. Hetherington would also like to thank John Zaller, Mo Fiorina, Marty Gilens, Geoff Layman, Alan Abramowitz, Stanley Feldman, Howard Lavine, Mark Peffley, Harold Stanley, Markus Prior, Sunshine Hillygus, Nolan McCarty, Paul Goren, David Barker, Steve Finkel, Jane Junn, Cas Mudde, Adam Berinsky, Lynn Vavreck, Jeff Stonecash, Bill Bishop, Joe Smith, John Nugent, Jasmine Farrier, and John Cogan, all of whom provided help along the way.

Hetherington would also like to thank the institutions that invited him for talks and conferences, which provided invaluable feedback. This process started in 2006 with a visit to his alma mater, the University of Pittsburgh, and continued later that fall at the University of Texas at Austin, where he earned his Ph.D. This list also includes the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, the Hoover Institute at Stanford University, the Center for the Study of Democratic Politics at Princeton University, and the Ash Institute at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. Mike MacKuen at North Carolina was particularly generous with his time and helpful with his comments, as was David King at Harvard.

Hetherington also thanks Linda Wirth, Pete Swarr, Kimberly Bergeron, Pat Goetz, Fleeta Holt, Valerie Holzer, and Dee Moore for all their help. Terrific research assistance was provided by Jeremiah Garretson, Jason Husser, John Hudak, Grace Radcliff, Sarah Hinde, Corey Bike, Jennifer Anderson, and Matt Simpson across the many years that this project has been under way.

As always, Hetherington owes the greatest debt to his family. His mom and dad have always been his greatest supporters. These two remarkable and determined people have been an inspiration, especially when the going has gotten tough. His wife, Suzanne Globetti, did everything imaginable to make this project a success. She has always been willing to make the sacrifices that have allowed him to write his books and articles. Moreover, she always has taken the time to make his work better. This second book project has been more challenging than the first, but Suzanne, as always, managed to smooth out the bumps in the road. Finally, Ben and Sammy – the two most special little boys in the world – were always patient with their old man when he was writing. Better yet, they helped him to smile all the way through it.

Weiler has a handful of additional people to add to the list. Jay Barth provided valuable help and insight, particularly in his comments on Chapter 4. He also generously invited Jonathan to speak about the project at Hendrix

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College. Dr. Robert Jenkins, director of the Center for Slavic, Eurasian and East European Studies at UNC Chapel Hill, generously provided Weiler with conference travel funds in 2005 to co-present an early version of the current work. Anne Menkens, the best ex-wife anyone could hope to have, provided valuable editorial assistance and has always been an unwavering supporter. His mom, Alexandra, is the source of whatever moral compass and compassion he has, and his sister, Nina, has been a faithful ally in a shared worldview. And last, and always most, to his daughter, Lillian, the light of his life.