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978-0-521-71124-1 - 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](http://www.jonathanweiler.com).

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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.

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