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Spanking or Time Out: A Clash of Worldviews?

In September 2004, National Public Radio's late afternoon news show, *All Things Considered*, visited West Virginia to interview potential voters. The state had gone to George W. Bush in 2000, marking a departure from its typical voting pattern. Between 1932 and 1996, Republicans won West Virginia only three times (1956, 1972, and 1984), and each victory was part of an overwhelming Republican landslide. Even in 1980, when Democrat Jimmy Carter carried a mere six states, one of them was West Virginia. Democrats have dominated the state's congressional delegation for decades. In 2000, both U.S. Senators, Robert Byrd and Jay Rockefeller were Democrats, and two of the state's three congressional districts were represented by longtime Democratic incumbents. Bush's victory, moreover, was substantively important. Had West Virginia voted Democratic as was typical, Al Gore would have been elected president with 271 electoral votes.

One of reporter Brian Naylor's interviews on NPR was with a truck driver named Mark Methany. With the September 11 terrorist attacks only three years in the past, the candidates' relative ability to deal with foreign threats and terrorism was, not surprisingly, on Methany's mind. The way he talked about the issue, however, was a bit surprising. In sizing up the contest between Bush and Democratic Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts, Methany said, "I really think that [George Bush] is the man for the job to face down our enemy. He won't just give [Osama bin Laden] a time out. He'll smack him in the mouth."[1]

Bush as tough and Kerry as wimp were familiar campaign personas in 2004. Such personas fit into larger themes of the parties and their respective "manliness." MSNBC's Chris Matthews, host of the popular political talk show, *Hardball*, has dubbed the Democratic Party the "Mommy Party" and the Republican Party the "Daddy Party." Arnold Schwarzenegger, the

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[1] "Democrats Seek to Return West Virginia to the Fold," *All Things Considered*, September 21, 2004.
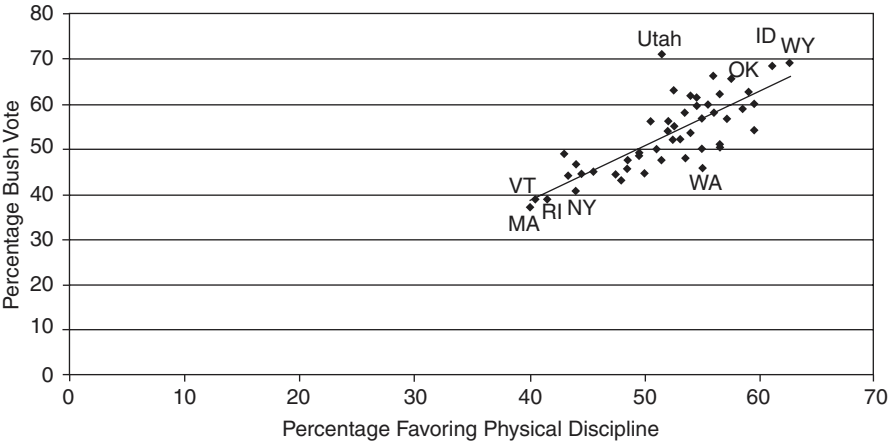
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FIGURE 1.1. Bush Vote as a Function of Willingness to Physically Discipline Children, by State

Republican governor of California, referred to his Democratic opponents in the state legislature as "girlie men" who needed to be "terminated." In a similar vein, Ann Coulter, the combative conservative commentator, told Bill O'Reilly, host of Fox News' highly rated talk show *The O'Reilly Factor*, that she "[is] more of a man than any liberal."[2] These labels suggest, of course, that Democrats are softer, providing the public things like compassion and affection, while Republicans are harder, providing things like toughness, protection, and discipline.

In Figure 1.1, we present more systematic evidence that the parental allusions of Methany, the West Virginia truck driver, and Matthews, the television pundit, have taken root in the American electorate. In the months before the 2004 election, Survey USA, a national survey firm, asked random samples of people from all fifty states whether they approved or disapproved of various forms of physical discipline for children, such as spanking them or washing out their mouths with soap.[3] In the figure, the percentage of people from each state favoring these forms of physical discipline is plotted on the *x*-axis and the percentage of people in that state who voted for George W. Bush is plotted on the *y*-axis.

The correlation between traditional parenting practices – the "spare the rod, spoil the child" approach – and voting for President Bush in 2004 is remarkably strong. Massachusetts is home to both the lowest percentage of people who endorse using physical means to discipline children and the lowest percentage of the vote for Bush. People in other states that voted strongly for Kerry, such as Vermont, Rhode Island, and New York, are also among the least likely to

[2] Coulter appeared on the *O'Reilly Factor* on June 28, 2007.
[3] These surveys were conducted August 12–14, 2005.

endorse spanking children and washing out their mouths with soap. In contrast, a higher percentage of people in states like Idaho, Wyoming, and Oklahoma both advocate a traditional approach to disciplining children and voted more heavily for Bush. Indeed, each of the top nine corporal punishment states is a Republican presidential stronghold in early twenty-first-century America. These states cluster, for the most part, in the Rocky Mountains (Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana), the South (Arkansas, Alabama, and Tennessee), and the Great Plains (Oklahoma and Kansas), with one state (Indiana) in the Midwest.[4]

Of course, we do not argue that preferences for disciplining children are *causally* related to individuals' vote choice. It is absurd to think that spanking children led people to vote Republican in 2004. Indeed, if favoring corporal punishment actually caused people to vote for the more conservative candidate, liberals never would have been elected president. It is only very recently that alternatives to spanking children have been widely employed. Instead, support for spanking likely emanates from a particular worldview that has a range of ramifications, including political ones.[5]

By worldview, we mean a set of connected beliefs animated by some fundamental, underlying value orientation that is itself connected to a visceral sense of right and wrong. Politics cleaved by a worldview has the potential for fiery disagreements because considerations about the correct way to lead a good life lie in the balance. Specifically, we demonstrate that American public opinion is increasingly divided along a cleavage that things like parenting styles and "manliness" map onto. We will call that cleavage authoritarianism.

WHAT IS AUTHORITARIANISM?

The scholarly literature on authoritarianism is vast, but we focus on a relatively small handful of considerations often associated with it, which are particularly germane to understanding political conflict in contemporary American politics. Those who score high in authoritarianism tend to have a different cognitive style than those who score low. The former tend to view the world in more concrete, black and white terms (Altemeyer 1996; Stenner 2005). This is probably because they have a greater than average need for order. In contrast, those who score lower in authoritarianism have more comfort with ambiguous shades of gray, which allow for more nuanced judgments.

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[4] The one noteworthy outlier in the figure is Utah. No state voted more loyally for Bush, but it is in the middle of the pack as far as the percentage of residents favoring physically disciplining children. This may be because the Mormon Church, a dominant force in the state, is quite conservative politically but makes it clear to members that they should not employ corporal punishment. Indeed, if we eliminate Utah from the analysis because of the influence of Mormon teachings, the correlation between preference for physical punishment and Bush vote in 2004 jumps from .79 to .83, a very strong relationship.

[5] It is also worth noting that the level of measurement is problematic. These data are measured at the state level, but individuals, not states, cast votes. Indeed, African Americans are among the most likely to endorse corporal punishment and among the least likely to vote Republican.

Perhaps because of these cognitive differences, people who are more authoritarian make stronger than average distinctions between in-groups – the groups they identify with – and out-groups – groups that they perceive challenge them. Such a tendency has the effect of imposing order and minimizing ambiguity. In addition, those who are more authoritarian embrace and work to protect existing social norms (Feldman 2003). These conventions are time-tested in their ability to maintain order. Altering norms could result in unpredictable changes with undesirable consequences.

Since the more authoritarian view the social order as fragile and under attack (Altemeyer 1996), they tend to feel negatively about, behave aggressively toward, and be intolerant of those whom they perceive violate time-honored norms or fail to adhere to established social conventions (Stenner 2005). Specifically, scholars have shown a strong relationship between authoritarianism and negative affect toward many minority groups. Over the past fifty years, these groups have included Jews (Adorno et al. 1950; but see Raden 1999), African Americans (Sniderman and Piazza 1993), gays (Barker and Tinnick 2006), and Arabs after September 11 (Huddy et al. 2005).[6]

Authoritarianism is a particularly attractive explanation for changes in contemporary American politics because it structures opinions about both domestic and foreign policy issues. In addition to having concerns about racial difference and social change, those who are more authoritarian tend to prefer more muscular responses to threats than those who are less. A proverbial punch to the mouth of an adversary results in a less ambiguous outcome than, say, negotiation or diplomacy. Not surprisingly, scholars have consistently drawn links between authoritarianism and a hawkish attitude toward foreign policy and resolution of conflict (Lipset 1959; Eckhardt and Newcombe 1969; Altemeyer 1996; Perrin 2005). Those scoring high in authoritarianism were also more likely than those scoring low to support military action after the September 11 terrorist attacks (Huddy et al. 2005). Viewed as a whole, research on authoritarianism suggests that the same disposition that might dispose people to be anti-black or anti-gay might also dispose them to favor military conflict over diplomacy and protecting security over preserving civil liberties. A preference for order and a need to minimize ambiguity connects both impulses.

The events from another time in history provide suggestive evidence that the same disposition motivates both. Particularly in the early 1950s, Senator Joseph McCarthy set his sights not only on rooting communist elements out of the State Department and other government agencies. He also focused his

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[6] Though some studies argue that there is an identifiable authoritarian personality type on the left as well as the right (Shils 1954; Rokeach 1960), most of the literature identifies authoritarianism as a conservative or right-wing phenomenon, as is clear from Jost et al.'s (2003) exhaustive review on conservatism as "motivated social cognition." Altemeyer (1996) argues, in fact, that there is no left-wing authoritarian phenomenon to speak of in contemporary North America comparable to right-wing authoritarianism.

attention, for a time, on purging homosexuals. McCarthy pointed to supposed links between communism and homosexuality, and his speeches often made passing reference to "Communists and queers" (Johnson 2004). Other conservative senators, including Styles Bridges, Kenneth Wherry, and Clyde Hoey, pressed the issue of homosexuality along with communism during the Red Scare as well.

All this suggests that preferences about many of the new issues on the American political agenda, such as gay rights, the war in Iraq, the proper response to terrorism, and immigration are likely structured by authoritarianism. These are all potentially divisive topics, characterized by deeply held, gut-level views. Although contemporary American politics is perhaps not polarized in a strict definitional sense, insofar as preferences are not clustering near the poles (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2004), it undeniably *feels* different than it has for decades. We argue that this is because preferences about an increasing number of salient issues are structured by a deeply felt worldview, specifically authoritarianism. And the colliding conceptions of right and wrong embedded in the opposite ends of this continuum make it difficult for one side of the political debate to understand (perhaps, in the extreme, even respect) how the other side thinks and feels.

THE TERM "AUTHORITARIANISM"

The term *authoritarianism* certainly sounds pejorative and has often been used pejoratively. At a minimum, it conjures negative images, and research into it is often (rightly) criticized as hopelessly value-laden. When we asked our students to identify a person who was an authoritarian, they typically named leaders of authoritarian political regimes, past and present, such as Saddam Hussein, Kim Jong-Il, and Fidel Castro. One even identified Darth Vader. The scholarly literature tends to focus on followers rather than leaders, mostly painting an unflattering picture of authoritarians as angry people suffering from some cognitive defect, which causes them to blindly follow a Hussein, a Castro, or a Vader.

The term has, at times, been co-opted for political purposes. To cite one particularly high-profile recent example, John Dean (2006), former White House counsel under Richard Nixon and now a vocal critic of the Bush administration, penned a *New York Times* bestselling polemic, provocatively titled "Conservatives Without Conscience." It characterized George W. Bush as an authoritarian leader of weak-minded lemmings, a view that we do not share.[7] Indeed, it is not possible for scholars to know with any certainty how

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[7] Although some of Bush's decisions are consistent with an authoritarian disposition, they have, by and large, centered in the foreign policy realm. This focus obscures areas where Bush's worldview seems nonauthoritarian. His position on immigration and affect toward Latinos departs from accepted understandings of authoritarianism. The same is true of his calls for tolerance toward Muslims in the United States in the aftermath of 9/11.

authoritarian political elites are because no data have been collected to measure it. In any event, it is likely that these dark, normative undertones have undermined authoritarianism's scholarly impact and have made it nearly impossible to discuss it in nonscholarly circles.

Given our concerns about the term, some may question why we continue to use it. First, it is not as though *all* the scholarly literature on the topic is problematic; much is carefully done and conceptually and methodologically rigorous. Indeed, many of the giants among professional political scientists and political historians, including Robert Lane, Seymour Martin Lipset, Herbert McClosky, and Richard Hoffstadter, employed this term at one time or another in their research. Second, our work makes use of and builds upon existing research that specifically uses the term *authoritarianism*. We found our efforts to substitute a less polarizing term, while retaining much of the conceptual framework, disorienting.[8] Had we found a suitable alternative, we would have gladly used it. Unfortunately, we did not.

Since the term authoritarianism carries unwanted baggage, we want to make clear from the outset that we are not arguing that all Republicans are authoritarians and all Democrats are not. That is far from true. Authoritarianism runs deep among some racial minorities, not to mention lower education and lower income whites – all traditional Democratic constituencies, though, importantly, decreasingly so, for lower education whites. In fact, we provide evidence in Chapter 9 that, among non-African Americans, a preference for Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama in the 2008 Democratic nomination struggle was in large part a function of authoritarianism. At first blush, this result might seem inconsistent with our argument that authoritarianism now structures interparty conflict, with Democrats now the nonauthoritarian party. On closer inspection, however, the importance of authoritarianism should come as no great shock, given the presence of a black candidate and the fact that the white working class, a disproportionately authoritarian group (see, e.g., Lipset 1959), figured prominently in the Clinton coalition. It should also remind us that party sorting on any issue or attitude is never likely to be complete.

As for differences in authoritarianism between Republicans and Democrats, the average distance is significant and increasing to be sure, but it is important not to exaggerate the magnitude of such attitudinal differences between mass partisans (Fiorina et al. 2004). Moreover, we show that the authoritarian divide we identify as having crystallized soon after the turn of the twenty-first century results from a sorting process in which both the average Democratic identifier is

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[8] It is also worth noting that we explored the possibility of using negatively valenced terms to describe those scoring low in authoritarianism to balance the negative valence of the term *authoritarian*. One term we considered was *relativist*. Ultimately we decided that relativism might be a "characteristic" of someone scoring low in authoritarianism, but it was conceptually distinct from it. Conceptually, anarchist fits the bill better than relativist but the opposite end of our measure of authoritarianism, which we discuss in Chapter 3, does not tap anarchism.

becoming significantly less authoritarian and the average Republican identifier is becoming somewhat more so.

In that sense, our treatment of authoritarianism departs fundamentally from most others. Unlike most scholars, we do not focus on the supposed pathologies of "the authoritarian personality" or, to use a more up-to-date term, *authoritarian disposition*. Oftentimes, the real stars of our show are the less authoritarian (those scoring in the middle of the distribution) and the nonauthoritarian (those scoring toward the bottom of the distribution), whose preferences, we demonstrate, change under identifiable conditions such that they actually mirror those of authoritarians. Perceived threat, which supplies these identifiable conditions, plays a critical supporting role, but in a way that challenges the scholarly conventional wisdom. Using mostly experimental methods, scholars have often demonstrated that threat "activates" authoritarianism, causing those scoring high in authoritarianism to become less tolerant and more aggressive than usual. Conversely, threat supposedly causes nonauthoritarians to become more tolerant and principled. We challenge this reasoning. Such findings likely result from the fact that scholars have generally provided experimental subjects stimuli that are more threatening to those scoring high than low in authoritarianism (see Oxley et al. 2008). While these studies tell us a lot about who is more sensitive to threat, they tell us less about what happens when threat is perceived by people who score in different parts of the authoritarianism distribution.

When those scoring lower in authoritarianism do perceive significant threat, we find that they are not heroic, small "d," democrats. In fact, under such conditions, their preferences on issues become indistinguishable from those who score high in authoritarianism. Hence, when threat is perceived symmetrically across the distribution of authoritarianism, as seems to have occurred after the September 11 terrorist attacks, opinions converge on issues in which preferences are structured by authoritarianism. Real world manifestations of such convergences include the relatively high percentage of Americans willing to trade off civil liberties for security in late 2001 and 2002 and George W. Bush's stratospheric approval ratings during the same period.

Those scoring low in authoritarianism do not perceive much threat from groups such as gays and lesbians, blacks, or immigrants. When threat is perceived asymmetrically across the distribution of authoritarianism, as is the case with matters involving these relatively unpopular political minorities, a polarization of opinion results.[9] Our results in Chapter 7 reveal that as authoritarianism has become an important determinant of party identification in the early twenty-first century, it has produced a *partisan* polarization or sorting of preferences on a range of issues for which preferences are structured by authoritarianism. Provided threat continues to be perceived more by those scoring high in authoritarianism than those scoring low, this sorting process ought to deepen in the future. Although partisans were more divided on traditional

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[9] As a matter of frequency, this ought to be the case much of the time because those scoring high in authoritarianism tend to feel threatened constantly (Altemeyer 1996).

New Deal issues than cultural issues in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Layman and Carsey 2002; Bartels 2006), it might not be the case forever. As sorting progresses along these lines, we expect that divisions on preferences structured by authoritarianism ought to continue to gain on those along the traditional New Deal cleavage.[10]

This interaction between perceived threat and authoritarianism also helps us understand recent dynamics in party competition. Our results suggest that those who score in the middle of the authoritarianism distribution (the less authoritarian) are particularly politically relevant in election campaigns. If they come to perceive significant threat from things like changing societal norms or the specter of world terrorism, their preferences on related issues move to the right, which ought to make them more sympathetic to Republican candidates. When they perceive less threat, their preferences swing toward the left, which ought to make them more sympathetic to Democratic candidates. In that sense, Barack Obama was probably correct in his assessment that the 2008 presidential election was a competition between hope and fear.

Importantly, our theory and results square with recent party fortunes. Since feelings of threat from terrorism were basically symmetric right after 9/11 (personal communication with Stanley Feldman), our theory would predict a convergence of preference on national security matters that would benefit Republicans. Of course, Republicans dominated the 2002 elections and fared quite well in 2004. As September 11 has become a more distant memory, however, those who score lower in authoritarianism have come to feel less threat from terrorism faster than those who score high. As a result, we have seen a surge in the Democrats' fortunes, not to mention at least a gradual increase in partisan polarization (Fiorina and Levundusky 2006; Abramowitz and Saunders 2008).

So, while some might hope to caricature our effort as an exercise in name-calling, such an attack would be unjustified. Our goal is not to deride one side of the political divide and, as a consequence, elevate the other. Rather, our goal is to demonstrate that many political choices are now, in part, structured by a potentially polarizing worldview, while they were not before. It is not authoritarians, per se, who are interesting, but rather it is the *concept* of authoritarianism that most merits close scrutiny.

AUTHORITARIANISM AND WORLDVIEW EVOLUTION

In situating authoritarianism near the center of the contemporary partisan divide, we borrow heavily from Carmines and Stimson's (1989) theory of issue evolution. An issue evolution occurs when a new issue potent enough to stir

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[10] The financial crisis during the 2008 general election campaign surely had some impact on voting behavior and, as we note in Chapter 10, it is possible that a major financial upheaval could set in motion a newly evolved set of cleavages. We take up these issues in greater depth in the Epilogue.

passions cuts across the existing line of cleavage. The parties take distinct and opposing views on such issues, prompting ordinary Americans to follow suit. For example, race in the 1960s was the catalyst to an issue evolution which split the Democratic Party of the time into roughly northern and southern factions and prompted a reconfiguration of partisan battle lines – to the benefit of the Republican Party (GOP).

In this book, we document the rise of a number of sometimes diverse issues which, taken together, form a tapestry of reinforcing themes. Each issue, in its own way, threatens to unsettle the established way of life in America. As such, each issue threatens to upset how Americans view their country and themselves – in short, their *worldview*. This worldview taps into Americans' tolerance for difference, ambiguity, and order and is thus animated by authoritarianism. We therefore characterize American politics as undergoing a *worldview evolution* in which politics is increasingly contested over issues for which preferences are structured by authoritarianism. Rather than one dominant, critical issue dividing Republicans and Democrats as has traditionally been the case throughout American history (Sundquist 1983; Burnham 1970), we have a cluster of related issues for which authoritarianism provides the connective tissue.

The issues we have in mind start with race and the civil rights movement in the 1960s. As previously discussed, the issue of race proved sufficiently powerful that it evolved a new party system (Carmines and Stimson 1989). Although race initially worked to the Democrats' advantage in 1964, it became a Republican advantage in subsequent elections, with the GOP dominating the White House and later Congress in the decades that followed. Some scholars have charitably suggested that the white backlash against African Americans resulted from the belief that blacks violate time-honored norms of hard work and individual achievement (Kinder and Sears 1981; Huckfeldt and Kohfeld 1989; Kinder and Sanders 1996). Other scholars have more bluntly asserted a direct link between racial policy preferences and authoritarianism (Sniderman and Piazza 1993). Based on our understanding of authoritarianism, racial resentment justified in terms of norm violation is authoritarian in nature (see also Kinder and Sanders 1996, Chapter 9).

Similar to race, the battle over women's rights evokes notions of the proper societal order and threats to it. Increasingly women moved from their roles as housewives and protectors of the home fires into the workplace, causing a sea change in American life that directly affected a broad swath of Americans. More recently, gay rights have become centrally important in the 2000s. Again, whether or not people endorse gay marriage has much to do with their notions of time-honored traditions and norms in American life.

Race, women's issues, and gay issues are similar in nature, so it may seem logical that they cluster together on an authoritarian dimension. But there are other issues, which subsequently rose to national prominence, that may seem unrelated to these social issues but which are likely structured by authoritarianism as well. For example, the string of liberal decisions handed down by the

Warren Court in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly those involving criminal rights, have aroused great passions since Richard Nixon's presidency. Whether it is more important to protect the safety of citizens or the rights of the accused has divided Americans ever since. Patriotism and its symbols became central concerns in the 1984 presidential election campaign after Timothy Johnson burned an American flag outside the Republican National Convention. And, in 1988, whether or not school children should be required to say the Pledge of Allegiance played an important role. More recently, the war on terrorism has become an increasingly important part of the political landscape. Importantly, preferences for how best to deal with terrorist threats, whether forcefully or diplomatically, and what kinds of civil liberties citizens are willing to forgo to protect their safety are powerfully a function of authoritarianism, too.

To precipitate a worldview evolution, the major parties had to, over time, take distinct and opposing positions on these issues. Indeed, they have. The Democratic Party, formerly the main vehicle for segregation, is now the party of inclusion, both in terms of race (Carmines and Stimson 1989) and, more reluctantly, sexual orientation (Lindaman and Haider-Markel 2002). Republicans, over the last several decades, have evolved from the "party of Lincoln" on racial matters to the "states' rights" party. Most Republicans supported President Bush's endorsement of a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage as well. On feminism, Republicans, starting in the 1980s, articulated a preference for more traditional norms, starting with their opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment in 1980 (Wolbrecht 2000). Democrats, in contrast, have championed a less traditional role for women. Despite the Democrats' best efforts, they have been tagged as the party that protects civil liberties while the Republicans are seen as the party that protects Americans' physical safety.

Although both parties adopted a tough, multilateral stance to confront the Soviet Union during the Cold War, the parties have more recently adopted different philosophies on foreign policy. Nowhere is this clearer than in their divergent approaches to a post-September 11 world. Republicans have shown a preference for the concreteness of armed conflict over the subtleties of diplomacy. Especially as the situation in Iraq began to deteriorate in mid to late 2004, Democrats articulated a more multilateral, diplomacy-heavy position with a firm emphasis on ending the U.S. commitment as soon as possible. It is telling that there were no doves among the leading Republicans, and there were no hawks among the leading Democrats in the quest for the 2008 presidential nomination.[11]

This authoritarianism-based worldview evolution apparently results more from campaign strategies adopted by conservative elites than liberal ones, a process we elaborate in Chapter 4. Although liberals complain bitterly about

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[11] It is also noteworthy that Hillary Clinton was criticized in Democratic circles for her unwillingness to admit her vote to authorize war in Iraq was a mistake while the major Republican hopefuls calculated that admitting mistakes in this realm would be viewed by their constituency as damaging.