

Personality, Polarization and the 2012 Election

Marc J. Hetherington

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Marc Hetherington is Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University

Thank you all for coming out today, and thanks to Dennis Plane for the overly generous introduction. I am sure you all know how lucky you are to have Dennis in your midst. He is one of the most generous, kind-hearted people I have met and a terrific scholar.

Let me start with a story. There is a debate in political science—talk about small potatoes, a political science debate—about whether our country is really polarized. We know our officeholders are polarized; all you have to do is turn on a TV and notice that members of Congress from the Republican and Democratic Parties have nothing in common these days. But there is a question of whether the electorate is polarized.

One of the works I am going to talk about is by Morris (Mo) Fiorina, who suggests that polarization is a myth as it relates to the politics of ordinary people. In some ways I think Mo is right. But the data that I am going to marshal show that politics has changed. One way I will illustrate that is by talking about my family. I grew up in politics. One of the reasons I could work with Pennsylvania State Senator Robert Jubelirer is because my dad was a political operative in Republican Party politics all the way back to the 1960s. I have an odd family—I grew up talking about politics at the dinner table even when I was eight years old. The other odd thing is my brother is eighteen years older than me. Same parents, but eighteen years different. My dad is a conservative Republican and my brother is this wide-eyed liberal. He has been a legal services lawyer in New York for the last thirty-plus years. You can imagine that they did not agree about anything during Vietnam, Watergate, and the Jimmy Carter years. They always argued.

The other thing about our house, especially when my brother Bryan would visit, was that it was always full of screaming between Dad and Bryan. But it was not really screaming; it was always good-natured. At the end of the day we would put our arms around each other and say, “We will just move along from here. We still love each other.” It was a really close family, too.

In 2004, all of my brothers and sisters ended up in Chicago at the same time, and my parents were there, too. Some were there for a wedding; I was there for a conference; my brother was there for another reason. So we all met at a French restaurant and sat around the table. What do we remember about 2004? It was a contentious election. Kerry ran against the weak economy and the war, and Bush ran a patriotic campaign and talked about an amendment to ban gay marriage. You can imagine who around the table

got into an argument—my dad and Bryan. But there was a difference. I looked to my left, and maybe it was too much wine, but my mom started crying. She had never done that before, even though she never liked the fact that my dad and Bryan argued. What that told me in 2004 was that politics had changed in some fundamental way. It was hotter and more visceral, something more emotional. Maybe it did not show up in the distance between those Democrats and Republicans who were apart on the issues, but there was something deep down inside of us that had changed.

We have this conventional wisdom that there is intense polarization in the electorate; it is deeply polarized. They vote differently, and they think differently. And not only that, the trend is getting worse. We hated each other in 2004, but we hate each other more in 2012. We see all this weird evidence that suggests maybe we really are different. According to the consumer research firm Experian Simmons, Republicans and Democrats watch different TV shows. When you take a look at some of the Republican TV shows, you see a pattern: a lot of reality shows. Things like *The Amazing Race*, *Survivor*, *Dancing with the Stars*, *The Bachelor*—things along those lines. When you check out the Democratic shows, you also see uniting themes. One thing is that not very many of them are popular, because Republicans do not watch them: *Dexter*, *Kourtney & Khloe Take Miami*, *Brothers and Sisters*, *The Good Wife*, *Parks and Recreation*, *Breaking Bad*. There are a lot of quirky, weird characters. People like Dexter—*Dexter* is about a serial killer. Democrats like that. Does anyone watch *Mad Men*? It is a period piece and it is my favorite show. But jeez, there is no one to root for, and all the characters are sort of weird. In *30 Rock*, you have the very neurotic Tina Fey, who plays an outwardly neurotic character.

We also watch different sports, which I think is kind of interesting. According to the market research firm NMRPP [National Media, Research, Planning & Placement], there is a Republican skew to sports watching—college football and the PGA tour in particular. The niche sports—women’s sports (the WNBA, women’s tennis) and Major League Soccer—are for Democrats. WWE [World Wrestling Entertainment] ends up on the Democratic side of the spectrum. You think you know the Democrats, but I guess they are furtively at home watching The Rock.

These differences seem to be getting more intense. One way to look at it is inter-marriage—not marriage between the races, which traditionally is how inter-marriage is talked about, but rather between the parties. Back in 1960, a couple of scholars came up with a survey that asked: “Suppose a son or daughter of yours was getting married. How would you feel if he or she married a supporter of the other party?” And it is very interesting. Not very many people worried about it: 5% of Republicans and 4% of Democrats felt “displeased.” That was the word on the survey question for if their son or daughter married outside of their political party. What do you think it would be now? Jon Krosnick and his colleagues put some surveys out in the field. I am going to tell you about one of them—rather than “displeased” or “not displeased,” they asked people to place themselves on a four-point scale that said

“very upset,” “somewhat upset,” and a couple of things on the other side of the midpoint. What percentage of Americans do you think would be “somewhat upset” or “very upset” if their children married a member of the opposite party? Twenty percent of Republicans would be upset, as would 20% of Democrats.

When people talk about polarization, another thing that they often talk about is that the electoral map is pretty distinctive. In 2000, it looked this way.

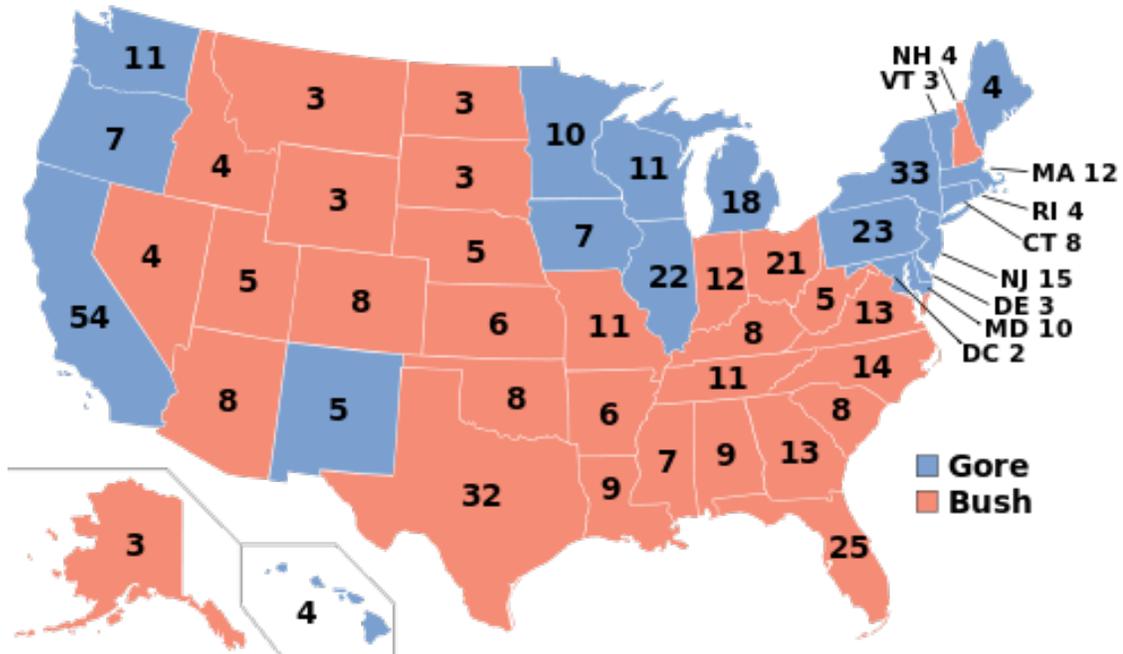


Figure 1. Map of the 2000 Electoral College Results. Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:ElectoralCollege2000.svg>.

And there is one thing that I think is kind of interesting—in every presidential election dating back to 1992, fully thirty-two states voted for the same party’s presidential candidate in every one of those elections. So there is very little movement; more than 60% of states vote exactly the same way no matter if Bob Dole, John McCain, or George Bush is running—or if John Kerry or one of the other Democratic candidates that we have seen is running. And not only that, the map looks this distinctive.

It gets even more distinctive in 2004. Talk about uninterrupted dominance—blue appears only on the coasts and the Upper Midwest. It is interesting that all of these states add up to a near tie as far as electoral votes are concerned. The 2000 and 2004 elections were the two closest Electoral College elections since 1916 when Woodrow Wilson won his second term. These are historically close elections. But the divide seems pretty remarkable.

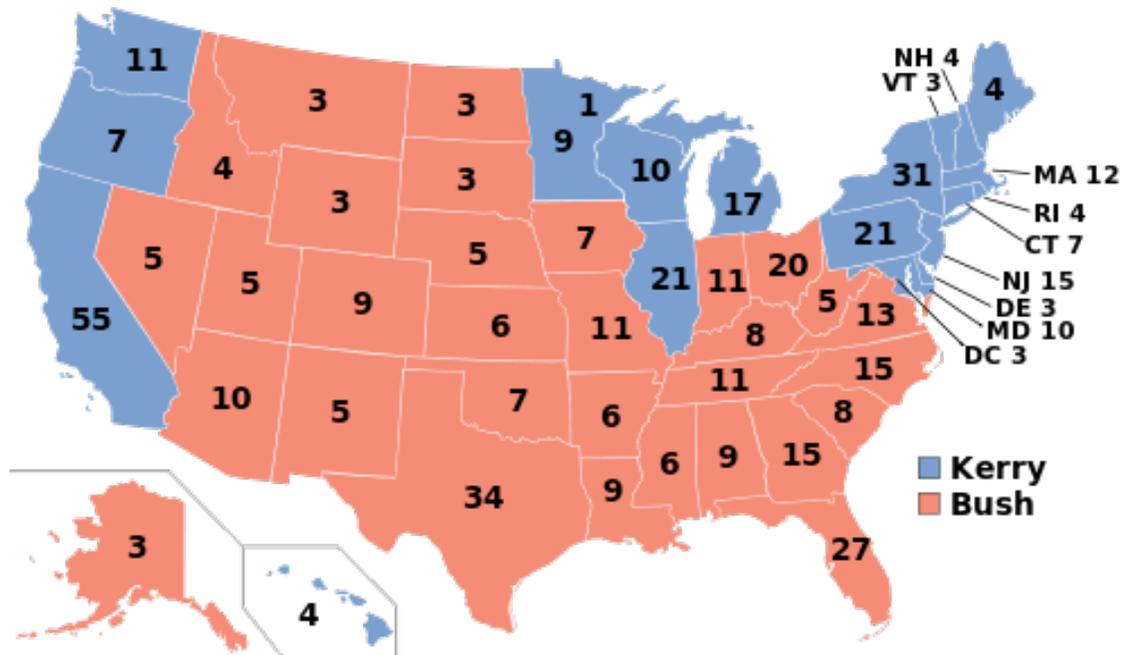


Figure 2. Map of the 2004 Electoral College Results. Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:ElectoralCollege2004.svg>.

If you break this down by county, what do these red states have in common? They are rural. And what do these blue states have in common, except for when you get up to Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire? They are urban. Places with urban centers tend to be more liberal and places that are out in the country tend to be more conservative. And it matches up with voting behavior.

This is what 2008 looked like. Think about where the economy was in 2008. McCain probably was not the best candidate that the Republicans could have chosen, although I do not know who would have been better. He was not the strongest candidate that the Republicans have run over the years. This is probably the best-case-scenario map for the Democrats in a lot of ways. Maybe you could have added Arizona to the mix; McCain is from Arizona so perhaps that is why he held on there. We will come back to Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado in a little bit. And Florida will be an interesting part of the story in a little bit, too.

All of this has been used to suggest that we are stuck in a rut. Politics is always going to be like this because Republicans and Democrats do not have anything in common. They see the world in completely different ways. All the blue states are liberal and all the red states are conservative. So it creates this situation where compromises do not take place. Now I will say, at the elite level—that is, among people who hold office—that is actually relatively true. Look at ideology scores that political scientists come up with to measure the ideology of the members of the House. If you looked at the people in the 1970s, there were about eighty Republicans and Democrats who were in the wrong party

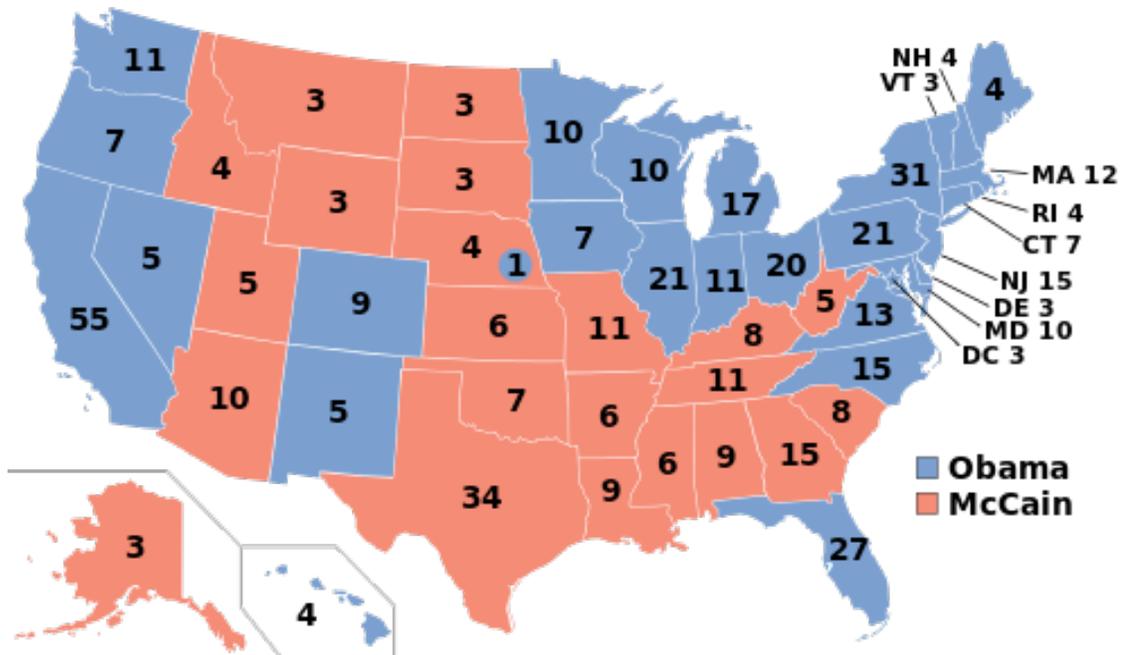


Figure 3. Map of the 2008 Electoral College Results. Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:ElectoralCollege2008.svg>.

based on their ideology. You would have to move about eighty or so Republicans who were too liberal for the Republican Party into the Democratic Party, and a bunch of old, conservative Southern Democrats from the Democratic Party into the Republican Party. If you did that same analysis now, do you know how many Democrats and Republicans you would need to move to get complete ideological separation between the parties? None. Every Democrat is more liberal than every Republican. And every Republican is more conservative than every Democrat. So that is true in Washington, but is it really true in the electorate?

This is what Morris Fiorina looks at in *Cultural War? The Myth of a Polarized America*.¹ I would absolutely recommend you guys read it—it is a terrific book. Congress is polarized, delegates to party conventions are polarized, and the presidential candidates (because they have to run in primaries) are moving as far to the right or left as they possibly can. And that is one of the things that cause us to think that the public is polarized. But, according to Fiorina, ordinary citizens are not polarized. He makes a really good point: what does being polarized about politics suggest about your relationship with politics? For you to be a liberal or a conservative, what does that suggest to you about politics? You care, right? You know what it means to be a conservative, you know what it means to be a liberal, and you strongly feel that way. Let me ask you, how many of your friends care about politics? Probably almost none of them. Some of them do and that is great. I hope that more of them do than used to. But the sad fact is that forty to fifty percent of Americans do not care about politics. They care about their jobs, they care about

their kids, they care about their dog. But they do not care about politics. If that is the case, then a heck of a lot of people are not polarized, because they do not care. So they are moderate. They do not even know what they are, and that is Fiorina's argument. Their choices are polarized and that makes them look polarized. A Republican might not hate John Kerry and might not love George Bush. That same voter might not be a super-conservative or hate liberals. It might just be that those polarized choices are the only ones available in an election.

Fiorina has this great illustration of the people who are closely and deeply divided. When the population is closely and deeply divided, conservatives are on one end and liberals are on the other. Most of the people are out on the tails. They are really strong in their partisanship and their ideology. In a closely and deeply divided America, there are few moderates. Some claim that we are closely divided—and our elections are about 50/50—and that we are deeply divided. However, Fiorina suggests that we are not like that. While we might be closely divided, we are not deeply divided. We are closely divided because about fifty percent of the electorate is on the left half of the distribution and fifty percent of the electorate is on the right half of the distribution. But most Americans are nonetheless moderates in the middle of the distribution. Most Americans do not have strong partisan feelings. So we only look like we are deeply divided because the elections come out really close. It comes down to 537 votes in Florida in 2000 or to about 10,000 or 12,000 votes in Ohio in 2008.

Fiorina also looks at the percentages of people in red and blue states who have favorable evaluations of various groups, including the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, evangelical Christians, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, and atheists. His data are taken from 2000, when the red state/blue state political divide is seen as being a big thing. These are group evaluations, and he looks at people who are from red states and people from blue states. And the red state people like the Republican Party a little bit more: 58% of red staters have a favorable opinion of Republicans, compared to 50% of the blue staters who have a favorable opinion of the Republicans. These are not huge differences between how they feel about groups. The only one that really pops here is atheists. There is a ten percentage point difference. The blue staters like atheists ten percentage points more than do the red staters. Still, only 37% of blue staters like atheists. Everyone is on the same side of the midpoint here. For Muslims you also see a nine point difference.

How about issues? How do red staters and blue staters differ on issues? It is kind of funny to remember—you were in fifth grade so you probably do not remember—there was a debate on how to use our budget surplus. Roughly the same percentage of red staters and blue staters want to cut taxes (14% each), pay off the debt (23% and 21%), and boost domestic spending (24% and 28%). How many want to abolish the inheritance tax? Blue states and red states feel the same way about it—about 70% want to abolish it. School vouchers, privatization of Social Security, Medicare coverage of prescription drugs,

increasing defense spending . . . again, red states and blue states are on the same side of the midpoint—on the same side of fifty percent. We are not looking at big differences here.

What about red staters' and blue staters' moral views? Maybe it is about culture? In 2000, red staters were more likely to say, "Religion is a very important part of my life." But blue staters are not exactly secular; 62% of blue staters say that religion is an important part of their lives, while 74% of red staters make the same claim. Red staters and blue staters both think that churches should stay out of politics: 43% and 46%, respectively. They do not think clergy should discuss issues or candidates from the pulpit. Both sides think that is a bad idea; only 33% of red staters and 35% of blue staters think it is OK for the clergy to do so. Should we ban dangerous books? Red staters are a little more likely to say that, but barely more (42% versus 37%). The only place we see a big difference is in the attitudes toward homosexuality: 31% of red staters strongly believe that homosexuality should be accepted by society, while 41% of blue staters strongly believe that it should. But again, there is not a real outpouring of difference here.

I read Fiorina's book and I thought he must be right because that is what the numbers say. Then I started to think about it a little more and about ideology. The 2004 National Election Study asked people to place themselves on seven-point issue scales that range from "extremely liberal" on one end to "extremely conservative" on the other end. And you see, not even Democrats like the word *liberal*. They do not call themselves that: 0% say they are extremely liberal and something like 2% say they are simply liberal. However, just over 50% call themselves moderate or say that they have not thought that much about it. Only 28% or 29% of Republicans call themselves moderate, while nearly 40% claim they are conservative.

So in other words, there is complete separation between the elites, but a lot of overlap between the masses on ideology. People frankly have no idea what ideology means. If you ask my dad, who is very conservative, he says he is moderate. Why do you think he says that? It sounds good. "Moderate" sounds good. "Ideological"—that sounds bad. So that is one of the reasons why we should think about Fiorina's argument a little bit. The other reason is that they did not find polarization in the survey data. There are a lot of reasons to think that might happen. There are a lot people who do not really have an opinion. What they tend to do is choose the middle response to these types of things. And that is particularly likely to take place with people who do not follow politics closely. So they do not care; they are interested in their job or their life and things like that. The middle response is safe—it sounds good to be moderate and it sounds bad to be an extremist. How many people would like to call themselves an ideologue? Saying "I am a moderate," seems good. And in that sense there are lots of reasons for this.

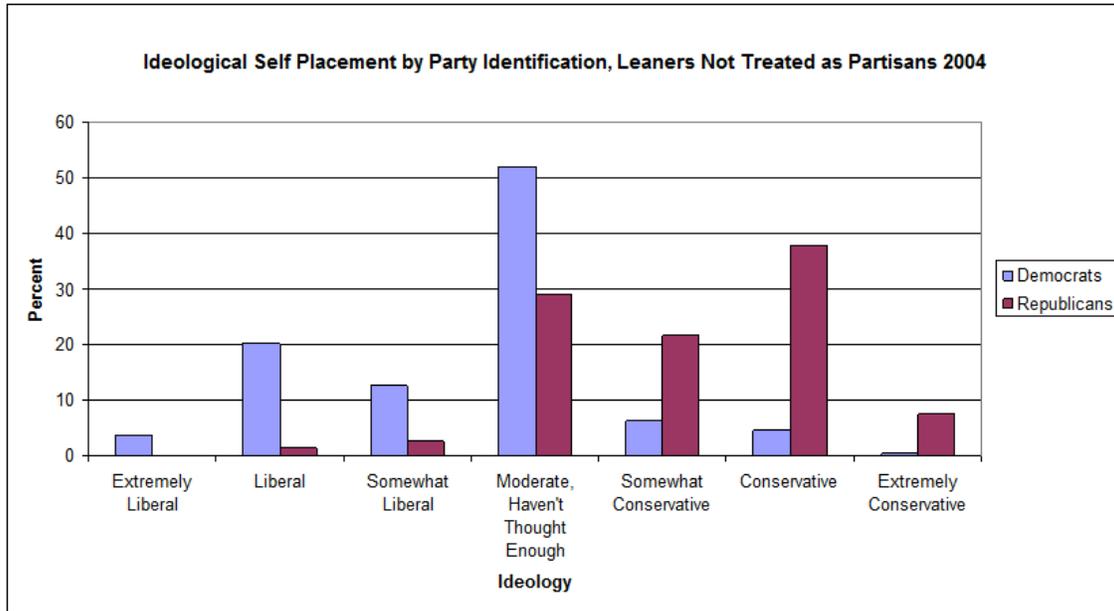


Figure 4. Ideological self-placement data from the 2004 National Election Study.

It is unclear how far apart people have to be to be polarized. This got me to thinking a little bit. What would Fiorina accept as evidence of polarization? Sometimes he does not see fifteen to twenty-five percentage point differences as polarization. Or if both sides are on the same side of the midpoint—even if they differ to the degree that they are either pro- or anti-something—he sometimes does not see polarization. So I was thinking, what was the most polarizing time in modern history?

I went back to the 1964 National Election Study. They asked a set of questions on school integration and the degree of separation that ought to take place in society and on how housing should be integrated. I took a look at whether non-Southerners and Southerners differed by a lot. And they do differ by a good bit, but usually only on the order of twenty or twenty-five percentage points. Furthermore, usually Southerners and non-Southerners were on the same side of things. Only 31.5% of non-Southerners thought we should desegregate American institutions. If polarization did not show up in survey data from the Civil Rights Era, when could it possibly show up? But that leaves me still wondering: Why was my mom crying at dinner when Bryan and Dad got in their usual argument about politics?

Well, I started to think about polarization in terms of something other than how far apart people are. I identified a number of different characteristics. First, issues that divide groups have to be deeply felt. There is an article by Ted Carmine and Jim Stimson on issue types. They delineate between hard issues and easy issues. Hard issues are those you have to think about; easy issues are those you feel in your gut. Race is an easy issue because people have gut feelings about that. Health care reform? That is a

	Non South	South	Difference
School Integration			
Federal Government Should See To It	41.9	19.2	22.7
Depends	8.2	5.3	
Federal Government Should Stay Out	36.4	64.3	27.9
Failed to Answer	13.5	11.3	
Degree of Segregation			
Desegregation	31.5	9.5	22.0
In Between	49.0	42.2	
Segregation	19.5	48.3	28.8
Housing Integration			
Whites Have Right to Keep Blacks Out	23.7	51.5	27.8
Blacks Have Right to Live Where They Can Afford	54.8	29.3	25.5
Failed to Answer	17.9	19.2	

Table 1. Data from the 1964 National Election Study.

hard issue—I challenge this later on—because you have to think about it. It is not as clear as all that, which I will also get into later.

Second, significant differences have to exist between the groups on issues. Republicans and Democrats have to be far apart on these things. They cannot be the same; they cannot agree on things. Why were gay rights a divisive issue in 2004? Because no one had brought it up before. Elites have to make these issues salient. How militaristic or how hawkish ought we to be on military policy? You know it just was not an issue during the 1990s—it was not salient—but after 9/11 it became super-salient. This is the mushy part that I do not know exactly how to describe, other than to say that the differences between the sides have to feel irreconcilable. The sides struggle to understand each other. This is hard to measure, but it is how I feel we must conceptualize this difference.

The explanation that I came up with for what is different now compared with before centers on what we are divided about. And there is this old literature that goes back to the 1940s and 1950s that is organized around the extraordinarily polarizing term *authoritarianism*. If you call someone an authoritarian, how do you think they feel about that? But unfortunately, that is the term that Theodor Adorno and his coauthors used in the book called *The Authoritarian Personality*, and it was used for decades after that, so I am sort of stuck with it.²

Some people think authoritarianism is a personality characteristic. Some think it is a world view, some think it might be genetically arrived at, and some do not think it is any of those things. But to the extent that it exists, it is a need for order. It is thinking that certain proper authorities can provide that order. It has several characteristics: submission to authorities, conventional thinking, and aggression to people who are members of out-groups. The thing that is unique about authoritarianism is that it organizes political conflict on a lot of different issues that do not seem to fit together. But if you believe in this sort of personality, or world view, or genetic construct—it could be physiological, it could be a lot of things—then issues like limiting civil liberties or how you feel about African Americans all of a sudden start to seem somewhat more similar than you would guess.

In the past, personalities had nothing to do with how Republicans and Democrats were divided from each other. Our argument is that the changes in the content of the issues over the course of the last forty years put something that is deep down in our guts at the center of political conflict. And that is why we feel that our differences are irreconcilable, while we are not, as Fiorina shows, a mile apart on the issues.

So how should this manifest? People who score high on authoritarianism tend to like black-and-white understandings of things; ambiguity is not seen as a particularly good thing. And there are a lot of people in the United States and elsewhere who think about the world as a battle of good versus evil, right versus wrong, values versus a lack of values. One of the things that we saw a lot of in the post-9/11 world in particular was a lot of us-versus-them rhetoric. There are certain dominant groups that perhaps you are a member of, and there are groups that are not dominant groups, or groups that you don't really like very much. Often times you see the denigration of out-groups. There is a tendency to have forceful solutions to problems because there is no ambiguity to force. You punch someone in the face—Boom!—you know what is going to happen. You engage in diplomacy with somebody, and anything can happen. So that lack of ambiguity is something that people who score high on authoritarianism find attractive.

Now I should tell you that you can think about this sort of concept of authoritarianism in a lot of ways. Rather than use the word *authoritarianism*, use the words *authority-minded* and *authority-questioning* if that makes you feel any better. But the book *The Authoritarian Personality* was derided for all sorts of reasons—some methodological, some otherwise. Alan Wolfe, a terrific sociologist and political scientist, said it was the social science case study on how to do everything wrong. The funny thing is that people pointed out the methodological flaws with this book, but they did not show that authoritarianism did not matter. Again, it is the term. Jonathan Weiler, who wrote *Authoritarianism and Polarization in American Politics* with me, and I asked our students, “Who comes to mind when you hear the word *authoritarian*?”³ We got answers like Kim Jong Il and Saddam Hussein (when he was still alive). And one of my students said Darth Vader—that was great. When I was thinking about

authoritarianism, the person who scored high in my mind was my dad. And I do not mean that as a disservice to my dad.

For the record, I am not saying that only authoritarians are intolerant. In fact, some people who score low on authoritarianism are intolerant of people who are different from them, too. I think it comes from a different place. We have a measure called feeling thermometers—can you imagine what this is? Someone comes into your home as part of this big survey and all of the sudden they whip out this thermometer that has zero to one hundred, with fifty at the midpoint. They ask, “How do you feel about this group?” Zero means you really hate it, one hundred means you love it, and fifty means you do not really think a lot about it and are sort of neutral. Non-authoritarians gave an average feeling thermometer score of forty degrees to Christian fundamentalists in 1992. In 2004, all of the sudden they hated Christian fundamentalists, giving a score of thirty-one. People who scored high on authoritarianism have not really changed at all in their assessments of Christian fundamentalists. Just to put that thirty degrees in some perspective, that is a lower score than people give illegal aliens. That is an extraordinarily low score, a lower score than high-scoring authoritarians give a group they do not like: gays and lesbians. You would guess that would be a problem for people who score high on authoritarianism. It turns out that those who actually score high on authoritarianism don’t hate gays and lesbians as much as people scoring low on authoritarianism don’t like Christian fundamentalists.

One of the things I do not want you to leave here thinking is that all Hetherington was doing was talking smack on Republicans. That is not what I am saying at all. This is how we measure authoritarianism. Even if you don’t buy this measure, I think it is wild that the answers to these questions predict a tremendous amount of American politics. I will show you some examples.

They ask about desirable characteristics of kids. Of course, everyone wants their kids to have all of these characteristics. But if you had to choose, which ones would you pick? I am going to give you pairs from the survey, and you tell me which ones are more important for your child to have. Independence or respect for elders? Authoritarians value respect for elders over independence. While I score relatively low on the authoritarianism scale, as a parent I now appreciate respect for elders—though I don’t get a lot of it. If you choose respect for elders over independence, obedience over self-reliance, good manners over curiosity, and being well-behaved over being considerate, you have scored at the maximum on the authoritarian scale.

Again, if you are a high-scoring authoritarian, it is not like you are a bad guy—it is just that you like well-behaved kids over considerate ones. Similarly, you score at the bottom of the scale if you choose independence, self-reliance, curiosity, and being considerate. That is our measure, which is flawed in certain ways, but here is what is weird about it: it works. So you put these together and the minimum authoritarian is a person who got zero authoritarian responses and the maximum authoritarian got all four.

We should see if authoritarians are concerned about difference, out-groups, gays and lesbians, changes involving gays adopting, gay marriage, and gays in the military. We should see big differences from the most to the least authoritarian. We should see a difference—and in fact, we do. We can see sixty percentage point gaps in some of these cases listed in the table below. For survey data it is out of control.

Item	Support
Gay Adoption	
Minimum Authoritarian	89
Midpoint Authoritarian	51
Maximum Authoritarian	28
All	50
Gay Marriage	
Minimum Authoritarian	71
Midpoint Authoritarian	36
Maximum Authoritarian	19
All	35
Protect Gays from Job Discrimination	
Minimum Authoritarian	94
Midpoint Authoritarian	77
Maximum Authoritarian	67
All	75
Allow Gays in the Military	
Minimum Authoritarian	95
Midpoint Authoritarian	79
Maximum Authoritarian	67
All	81

Table 2. Survey data about gay rights categorized by the authoritarian scores of the participants.

Civil liberties—we would think that civil liberties are things that non-authoritarians are interested in, while authoritarians would not care as much about abstractions like that. And that is exactly what we find: twenty to thirty percentage point differences. What about the use of force? Maximum authoritarians favor strength over diplomacy. Minimum authoritarians think that diplomacy is a better idea than strength. Maximum authoritarians think that the war in Iraq was right. Minimum authoritarians think the

war in Iraq was a mistake. And I can tell you it divides people who are racial liberals and racial conservatives—another sort of out-group. It also has a big effect on how pro-immigration people are. People who score high on authoritarianism overwhelmingly want to build a 700-mile fence between Texas and Mexico. People who score low do not want to do that. The bottom line is that this measure works in the places that it is supposed to work. Since it is all tied together by this construct, this personality, maybe politics is not so much about individual issues but rather about bigger things. And maybe that is why we disagree so vehemently and that is why my mom is crying at dinner.

So how did we get here? Jonathan Weiler and I argue that it is a process that develops over time. There is a theory that Edward Carmines and James Stimson call “issue evolution,” in which a new issue comes up and displaces an old issue. Race did this in the 1960s. Our political divide used to be about how big the government was going to be in order to intervene in the economic market place. But starting in the 1960s it became about race. Race did not use to have anything to do with it. Does anyone know what the pro-civil-rights party was back in the 1950s? The Republicans. The Democrats had the South and the South was an officially segregated place. And so obviously, the parties have sort of switched on this. And now people are starting to think about politics in terms of race.

Crime comes up as an issue in presidential politics, especially in the 1960s. The Republicans took a more conservative stand on this. It was a smart political move for Republicans to take—our cities were on fire and the 1968 election year was out of control. There were urban race riots. The interesting thing is that order is something that appeals to the more authoritarian, and protecting criminal rights is important to the non-authoritarian. We get feminism in the 1970s and 80s, which is a real challenge to the existing order. If you are a conventional person, the idea of women in the work place does not seem like a big deal now, but it was a huge deal then. And the Republicans took clear and distinctive positions on that issue. The Republicans opposed the Equal Rights Amendment and the Democrats embraced it. It ended up not being ratified, but it was clear where the parties were on that issue.

After that, we get gay rights and then the war on terrorism. The thing that knits all these things together is authoritarianism. It unifies all these issues over time. After all the issues come to the fore, our politics are divided increasingly by authoritarianism. All this shows that people who score low on authoritarianism in the early 2000s are moving in a Democratic direction, and people who score high are moving in a Republican direction.

Has the authoritarian divide gotten deeper in recent years? In 2010 we had a survey in the field and were interested in some of the manifestations of this in Tea Party support. If you want to know why people say they support the Tea Party, it is based on how authoritarian they are—how many parenting questions they answer in an authority-minded way.

And what all this points up is that this is now part of our political DNA; it did not used to be, but now politics is about these things. Now, one of the more embarrassing things that I bring up in the book—and I brought this up in Professor Dunwoody’s class—is what if politics were not so much about gay rights, civil liberties, war, and life-and-death things? What if politics were about health care? Would we be as deeply divided?

Of those who scored low on authority-mindedness (or high on authority-questioning), 77% thought that the Obama health care reform was a good idea. Of those who scored at the maximum on authority-mindedness, 15% liked health care reform. This is an enormous difference. Support for cap-and-trade for reducing carbon emissions has similarly big differences. What this points out is that authoritarianism is structuring opinions about things now that are far beyond what we would have predicted before. In fact, it now goes as far as to help us to predict what makes us Republicans and what makes us Democrats.

Let me ask you guys, which of the Republican candidates for president do you think the authority-questioning people would have a problem with—if you had to pick one or two? You got it: Rick Santorum. Maybe Santorum wants us to go back to a different time. As far as some of these issues are concerned, interest in tradition would make him very popular among people who score higher. And Romney of course is a Mormon, and it might be that people who score high on authoritarianism would see that as something of a threat or a problem and might not like him very much. It sort of works.

One of the most important developments as it relates to this divide is that these types of appeals—race, law and order—are all designed to win over the formerly solid Democratic South by the Republicans. The Republicans are now stuck in a position that is really difficult. What is the fastest growing minority group in the United States? Latinos. The Republican stance on immigration is a real problem as it relates to attracting Latino supporters. And I think it is really interesting that as you take a look at some of the most successful Republican candidates and governors over the course of the last ten years, they are the ones who realized this problem. Why did George Bush do so well in Texas and also win the presidency? He was a pro-immigration candidate. He got 40% of the Latino vote. His brother, Jeb Bush in Florida, was very reluctant to endorse Mitt Romney because Romney has this very conservative view on immigration. That is something that will hurt them in the general election.

If Republicans do not win the votes of what is now 26% of the electorate—that is the combination of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and other minority groups—they will have to win such an overwhelming percentage of the white vote in order to win that it is going to be nearly impossible. The Republicans have this authoritarian base that is not in favor of immigration, and it is going to hurt them in the general election when there is a large number of Latinos and South Asians and other immigrants in the electorate. If you think about the one swing area in the country that really exists,

it is the desert Southwest: New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Nevada. These are states that have shifted over time, even in the last few elections. You have high percentages of Latino voters in all of those states. They are not big states, but all together they are bigger than Virginia, bigger than North Carolina. If Republicans cannot win those states, they will have a really hard time winning an election.

So how do we overcome this polarization? I actually think polarization stinks because it gets in the way of people making compromises. It prevents people from viewing issues a certain way. I think there is a really serious mistrust between Republicans and Democrats these days because of what has developed in American public life. How are we going to overcome that? How is your generation going to solve the problem that our generation has played a central role in creating? It is really my brother's generation that is the problem—I just wanted to point that out—but our generation has not made it any better. We are the most apathetic generation of all. You guys put us to shame for your willingness to join other people to bridge divides and differences.

So I am hopeful, and this hopeful point is where I want to end this talk. There is a book written by a guy named Robert Putnam called *Bowling Alone*.⁴ It is not about bowling, but about something called social capital. Bowling in leagues is something that builds social capital or social trust between people. And that is one of the things that has broken down. We are so sorted out geographically; Republicans and Democrats don't live next to each other. If you are a Democrat and move from the North to the South, you move to the city. If you are a Republican and move from the South to the North, you move to the country or the suburbs. We are in a sense segregating ourselves by ideology. We don't know what people who are not like us think. They start to become like aliens to us. Just to give you one example, we moved from the North to the South, from Maine to Tennessee. We moved to this area in the suburbs that is a pretty conservative place. The first thing my wife, who is a vocal Democrat, did was go to the Kerry/Edwards headquarters, get a sign, and put it in our front lawn. I was like, "We are ruined in the neighborhood! No one is ever going to talk to us." It turned out we found a note in our mailbox. It was an anonymous note and the person said, "You are not the only Democrats on this street. We are Democrats too." They would not come tell us or anything like that. It took us a couple of weeks to find out who those people were. We need to get over that stuff. There is a generation before us that bowled together in leagues—they joined things, bridged gaps between social and economic status, and built social capital. Maybe they were not as good on race, but we have learned from those types of experiences.

That is one of the things I want you to think about as you move on in life. This brings me back to a story from a guy named Ron Suskind, who has written critical books about the Bush White House and, more recently, about the Obama White House. He came to talk at Vanderbilt soon after I arrived there. And you know, it was one of those times—we had just moved and I had two little kids and was not

getting any sleep at all. And we were going through all sorts of problems with our older one. This story just moved me and hopefully it will give you some inspiration.

He told this story about the moon landing in 1969. You know, “One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” He was living with his brother and his parents in a split-level house in Delaware. If you have ever been in a split-level house, the basement is the bottom floor and there is no natural light that comes in. The moon landing was about to take place, the kids were in their jammies, and the parents wanted to get them to bed. They were all watching this historic event and all of the sudden, the lights went out. A power outage. Everybody was asking, “What are we going to do?” Apparently, he had a World War II dad who had a very commanding presence. He said, “Come to me, come to me,” and everybody reached over and they walked up the steps in the dark and went outside. It was a blackout for the whole street. So they stood in the car port and they looked around: “What are we going to do?” The dad, with a commanding presence, said, “We are going to get in the car and we are going to drive to the lights. And we are going to drive until we see light.” It was the 1960s and everyone had a giant car. Everybody dove into it and of course the seats were vinyl. He put it in reverse, pulled out of the driveway, and was driving like a mad man. The kids were in their pajamas—probably flammable—and they were sliding back and forth in the car as he went around turns as fast as he could. And his wife was going, “Christ, you have to slow down or you are going to kill the kids and kill us!” He said, “We have to drive to the light.” He drove over a hill and the kids were getting airborne. And they were saying, “Please slow down!” His response: “We have to drive to the light and see the moon landing.”

When they got to a place where they could see lights in the distance, he floored it. They got to the first house—and I think this harkens to a different time—what did they do? They went up to a perfect stranger’s front door and said, “Hey, our power is off. Can we come in and join you?” They went in to exactly the same house, a split-level with a basement. And there were a bunch of people down there who had the same problem. The family had invited a bunch of people into their home to watch this historic event. Everybody was probably from very different walks of life and many different backgrounds. They were perfect strangers but with the moon landing they embraced a moment of national unity. And the world just did not seem so polarized. So my admonition to you about how we are divided by this personality structure is to find ways past it. What I tell my students at Vanderbilt is to “drive to the light.” I want you guys to take our generation there, because we are so jaundiced and awful about the other side that we cannot seem to find any way to get over that. And I really think that it is your generation that will lead to that change.

NOTES

1. Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2006).
2. T. W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950).
3. Marc J. Hetherington and Jonathan D. Weiler, *Authoritarianism and Polarization in American Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
4. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).



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