Revised version of the old Chapter 7 on the underpinnings of sorting and polarization among Whites. The old Chapter 7 is too long and its narrative is not cohesive. So, we are going to drastically shorten it to focus only on the following three sets of results

1. Changes over time in ideological distance from the parties by authoritarianism (Figures 11-12 in the original)
2. Asymmetric effects of ideological proximity to parties on voting as a function of authoritarianism (Figures 13 and 14 in the original)
3. Authoritarianism predicts presidential voting more among those who perceive greater partisan polarization (Figure 15 in the original).

These three portions of the chapter form a cohesive unit and they focus very precisely on questions of ideological proximity and perceived ideological polarization. **The only thing we might add (for context) to this reduced chapter is a simple chart and brief discussion showing that the \*perceived\* symbolic ideology gap between the parties increases over time for the full sample, for authoritarians, and for non-authoritarians. This would come before items 1-3 above.**

**Another question:** Following the other chapters, do we want to break the analyses in items 1-3 down by education? At the least, we should do this for item 1 (changes over time in ideological distance from the parties), but it might worth doing for all of them (items 1-3).

**A key point:** We effectively show that ideological proximity matters less among authoritarians. Authoritarians’ animosity toward the partisan outgroup cancels any effect of individual ideological proximity. This effect is pretty unique to authoritarians (vs. non-authoritarians).

**Chapter 7: Authoritarianism in an Ideologically-Divided Party System**

**Re-exploring the Culture-War Narrative: The Centrality of Social Ideology**

In previous chapters, we showed that White authoritarians are more inclined to align themselves with the GOP, whereas White non-authoritarians have gravitated towards the Democratic Party. This pattern of authoritarianism-based sortingwithin the White electorate presents numerous challenges for American democracy. The political parties are now both more homogeneous and ideologically divided, which has led pundits and scholars alike to bemoan how political compromise is simply infeasible in modern politics. The Democratic and Republican Parties increasingly advance drastically different visions for American society, both at the level of stated values and with respect to policy (Lakoff 2008).

For instance, many policy conflicts are rooted in the competing worldviews espoused by partisan authoritarians and non-authoritarians. Consider the contentious gay marriage debate in the United States, which reached a climax with the Supreme Court’s 2015 ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*. Prior to *Obergefell* and the Supreme Court’s legal recognition of same-sex marriage, the American states offered only a patchwork of legal protections for gay and lesbian couples as a result of the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). DOMA afforded states legal authority to refuse recognition of same-sex marriages. From DOMA to *Obergefell*, political liberals advanced a pro-marriage position couched in concerns over equity and freedom: gays and lesbians deserve the same legal protections as heterosexual couples. Conservatives advanced a qualitatively different narrative, that same-sex marriage challenged traditional social norms and even religious freedom itself. The conservative narrative emphasized the ways in which same-sex marriage would radically (and adversely) redefine the institution of marriage, thus posing a threat to traditional family arrangements.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Many contemporary debates reflect this underlying conflict between an emphasis on personal autonomy and freedom versus an interest in maintaining social cohesion and established, traditional practices (Tomkins 1967; Hetherington and Weiler 2018; Lakoff 2008). For example, debates about the extent to which the U.S. should welcome immigrants, allow transgender troops to serve in the military, endeavor to put men and women on a more equal footing, and regulate access to abortion all reflect this fundamental worldview divide, ultimately rooted in variation in authoritarianism.

**Ideological Alignment**

In this chapter, we extend our inquiry into authoritarianism-based sorting by considering how political polarization conditions White authoritarians’ and non-authoritarians political perceptions and decisions. The growing ideological division between the two political parties has contributed to a host of governing challenges. For instance, media coverage of governing bodies, such as the United States Congress, often feature stories of legislative gridlock, indecision, and during the 2018-2019 partial government shutdown, and presidential “temper-tantrums.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Much of the extant literature on polarization has focused on political elites, noting that Democratic leaders have grown more liberal and Republican leaders have become more conservative over time (e.g., McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2006).

However, evidence for similar polarization in the mass public is more equivocal. Some scholars have found little evidence substantiating the notion that the American public is more bimodal in the distribution of its opinions (Fiorina et al 2005; Bafumi et al. 2005; Bartels 2018), and others find that a large proportion of voters continue to identify as independent (suggesting dissatisfaction with both political parties; Klar and Krupnikov 2016). These findings present a challenge to the frequently-proffered “red-state/blue-state”narrative positing the existence of two Americas: one in the rural American heartland and South and a separate one in urban centers along the American coasts and other large metropolitan areas. Consistent with the caveats offered by these studies, media coverage also appears to overstate the prevalence of ideological divisions within the mass public (Levendusky 2013).

On the other hand, it is relatively well-established that the parties have become more ideologically *sorted* and cohesive. In this vein, Abramowitz and Saunders (2006), Hetherington and Weiler (2009), and Mason (2018) describe growing differences between the parties in terms of ideological consistency. Partisans are now more likely to adopt the ideological identity that matches their party’s and to hold *consistently* liberal or conservative preferences—especially if they are politically engaged (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008).[[3]](#footnote-3) Thus, liberals are less likely to identify as Republicans and conservatives are less likely to identify as Democrats, implying very little ideological common ground and little room for partisan compromise.

Rather than wading too far into debates about whether the American electorate is best described as polarized versus sorted, we adopt a conceptual middle ground by examining the extent by which the parties are ideologically divided and consistent. We thus conceive of ideological division between the partiesin several ways. Following the lead of Fiorina and colleagues and Dimaggio et al. (1996), we examine the ideological differences between Republicans and Democrats. However, in contrast to these scholars, we also disaggregate ideology into its social and fiscal dimensions. This broadly comports with the common finding that ideology is at least bi-dimensional, with one dimension reflecting support for cultural traditionalism versus openness to change and the other dimension reflecting support for equality versus hierarchy (Duckitt and Sibley 2010; Feldman and Johnston 2014; Malka, Lelkes, and Soto 2019; Jost et al 2003).

Following the work of Abramowitz, Hetherington, and others (Abramowitz and Saunders 2006; Hetherington and Weiler 2009; 2018), we also focus on heightened ideological consistency. Partisans are now more likely to hold consistently liberal or conservative preferences. To avoid confusion over terminology*,* we examine what we call *ideological alignment*:the extent to which policy views are “bundled.” Alignment consists of two characteristics: *extremism* and *consistency*. On one hand, extremism implies that partisans have become more ideologically extreme on average over time. For instance, is the 2016 GOP significantly more conservative than the 2000 GOP? Is the 2016 Democratic Party more liberal than the Democratic Party in 2000? On the other hand, consistency implies that individuals hold ideologically-congruent views on both the social and fiscal dimensions and that they hold an ideological identity that comports with their social and fiscal preferences.

In this chapter, we extend the analysis begun in Chapters 5 and 6 by considering the intersection of authoritarianism, ideological alignment, and political behavior within the White electorate. In line with previous work, we argue that Democrats and Republicans should not be equally divided on all issues. In response to many of the policy debates that galvanized authoritarian voters the early-to-mid 2000s – such as gay marriage, school prayer and abortion – we anticipate that social and cultural issues should be particularly divisive. We expect to observe a widening gulf between White Democrats and Republicans on this dimension in particular.

**Theoretical Expectations**

We organize this chapter around several theoretical expectations. We start by considering the growing ideological divide between the parties. We anticipate that self-identified White Democrats and Republicans should now be more ideologically divided than was the case during the early 1990s. Moreover, the divide should be especially pronounced with respect to the social dimension of ideology. We call this expectation the *ideological extremism hypothesis.* It is rooted in two observations: first, that party identification is now intertwined with authoritarian predispositions (as we have demonstrated in previous chapters); and second, that many of most salient policy debates in recent history have divided authoritarian and non-authoritarian citizens over concerns dealing with the tradeoff between personal autonomy and social cohesion. The other side of coin is consistency. The rise of elite polarization and partisan “echo chambers” in the media should produce “consistent ideologues,” i.e., Republicans who hold fiscally *and* socially conservative policy beliefs and who identify as conservatives and Democrats who hold social *and* fiscally liberal preferences and who identify as liberals. We refer to this as the *ideological consistency hypothesis.*

Next, we consider how authoritarianism itself intersects with ideological alignment to inform partisan identification among White voters. In particular, we examine the relative weight attached to the fiscal-ideology and social-ideology dimensions among both authoritarians and non-authoritarians. Because authoritarians are hyper-sensitive to threats to group cohesion, this should alter the relative weight attached to social and cultural ideology in partisan affiliation (Adorno et al 1950; Feldman and Stenner 1997; Feldman 2003; Duckitt 2001; Hetherington and Weiler 2007), particularly in time periods during which moral issues are salient. We argue that the early 2000s provide an excellent test case for this expectation. The existential threat posed by 9/11, coupled with media attention to divisive moral issues during the first half of George W. Bush’s presidency (e.g., gay marriage) should have enhanced the weight White authoritarian voters attached to social and cultural policy preferences in their political behavior. Thus, beginning with the early 2000s, social ideology should be increasingly foundational to party identification among authoritarian Whites. We call this the *culture-war hypothesis.*

Finally, negativity toward the party least ideologically congruent with one’s underlying worldview may play an especially large role in how authoritarian and non-authoritarian Whites situate themselves with respect to the parties (Abramowitz and Webster 2018). Given the divergence between the parties on the social issues that most markedly divide authoritarians and non-authoritarians from one another, we expect that White voters will see increased ideological distance between themselves and the party that least matches their views, i.e., the Democratic Party for authoritarians and the Republican Party for non-authoritarians. Indeed, we believe that the increase in polarization over the last few decades should manifest itself primarily in increased distance from the incongruent party. We refer to this as the *ideological-threat hypothesis.*

The ideological orientation of the parties should have downstream consequences, particularly with respect to voting among Whites. At the end of this chapter, we revisit standard proximity-based models of voting. We anticipate that ideological proximity with the political candidates should resonate differently with authoritarians and non-authoritarians. Chapters 5 and 6 emphasized a greater “stickiness” to Republican Party than Democratic Party identification. While authoritarians have defected to the Republican Party, we do not observe the same movement among non-authoritarians. The GOP instead has maintained a coalition of White conservative authoritarians and non-authoritarians. Thus, what we should generally observe is that authoritarianism will be particularly divisive on the left. We should observe a more substantial difference among liberals with respect to voting when comparing authoritarians to non-authoritarians. We refer to this as the *ideological proximity hypothesis.*

Lastly, we look at how authoritarianism and the pattern of growing ideological alignment that we document interact to shape the voting behavior of White Americans. Following other scholars that have argued that perceived ideological division “activates” individual differences in authoritarianism, we predict that authoritarianism should more strongly predict presidential voting among White Americans who perceived a larger ideological divide between the two parties. We refer to this as the *polarization hypothesis*.

Taken as a whole, the analyses in this chapter will show the ways in which authoritarianism and political polarization interact in the US. Authoritarianism has contributed to the increasing divergence between the two parties, resulting in more partisan extremity, ideological consistency, and out-party hostility. In turn, the polarization of the parties has magnified the effects of authoritarianism by increasing the extent to which Democrats and Republicans see the other party as a threat to their values.

**Measuring Ideology**

Ideology is a complex and contested concept in the study of mass political behavior. On one hand, ideology can be conceptualized and measured in terms of one’s ideological self-placement —what political scientists refer to as *symbolic ideology* (Ellis and Stimson 2009, 2012). This is what the standard measure of liberal-conservative ideology included in the American National Election Studies gets at. It asks respondents to place themselves on a seven-point scale, ranging from *extremely liberal* (1) on one end and *extremely conservative* (7) on the other. However, self-placement is a relatively blunt measure of ideological leanings, as it conflates ideology as a symbolic group label with a broader abstract worldview used to structure public policy attitudes (Feldman 1988; Duckitt 2001).

On the other hand, political scientists also conceptualize ideology as an overarching *belief system*. In Phillip Converse’s foundational work,a “belief system” is a “configuration of ideas and attitudes in which the elements are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence” (Converse 1964, 207; Tomkins 1964). Other research suggests that parts of these belief systems are strongly intertwined with worldviews, which provide a functional lens though which a part of the social world is perceived. For instance, a preference for economically conservative, market-oriented policies is strongly rooted in a “competitive jungle” worldview: human societies are naturally competitive and unequal, and it is up to oneself to get ahead. Likewise, a preference for socially conservative policies is often informed by the tendency to view the world as a dangerous and threatening place that needs to be brought to order by clear norms and restraints (Duckitt 2001; Sibley and Duckitt 2018).

In other words, “ideology” means several things to social scientists. How one defines the term is deeply connected with the normative question of how “ideological” the mass public is (Federico and Malka 2018). Converse (1964) and, more recently, Kinder and Kalmoe (2017) suggest a large number of Americans fail to structure their political beliefs along a liberal to conservative continuum. Instead, they argue, policy preferences are structured by one’s partisan affiliation. Ellis and Stimson (2009,2012) distinguish between “operational” (i.e., a policy belief structure) and “symbolic” (i.e., self-placement) ideologies. S*ymbolic ideology —* often measured as ideological self-placement, as noted above — approximates a social identity (Malka and Lelkes, 2010; Devine, 2015). *Operational ideology*, on the other hand, constitutes a summary composite of one’s policy preferences. They go on to highlight the need for semantic precision, by showing that a large share of the United States population identifies as “conservative” while holding liberal policy preferences (Ellis and Stimson 2012; Free and Cantril 1967).

We adopt an inclusive approach by examining both symbolic and operational ideology. We recognize that ideology — at least for many citizens — is a multifaceted construct. Thus, we differentiate between the social and fiscal dimensions of ideology*. Fiscal ideology* is one’s orientation regarding government spending, taxation, wealth redistribution, fiscal policy, the size and scope of the federal government, and inequality in a general sense. *Social ideology* is one’s orientation towards traditionalism, social change, conventional values, and social order.

In several parts of this chapter we will rely on separate social and fiscal ideology scores, which we generate for each respondent in our ANES data. Scores were constructed using a two-dimensional confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model. The *fiscal dimension* was defined by preferences for domestic spending, whether the federal government should guarantee a satisfactory job and standard of living, and preferences for public versus private health insurance. The *social dimension* was defined using abortion preferences, adoption by gays and lesbians, and feeling-thermometer evaluations of gays, fundamentalists, and feminists. We allowed these two latent dimensions to correlate with one another. The results from this analysis are displayed in Figure 1. The model provided a reasonably good fit to the data.[[4]](#footnote-4) The social items load on a latent social-ideology factor; the fiscal and economic items load on a latent fiscal-ideology factor, and the two factors are moderately related, *r=*0.44. Over this time period, those who endorse fiscally conservative preferences are likely to endorse socially conservative preferences. Despite the estimated correlation, this model shows that fiscal and social ideology are distinct dimensions and we will demonstrate that differentiating them is important for understanding the dynamics of authoritarianism in American politics.

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**Figure 1: Two-factor model of social and fiscal ideology. Estimates are unstandardized. Standard errors have been excluded. All parameter estimates are statistically significant. Ideology is estimated from a two-dimensional confirmatory factor model, with *domestic spending, jobs, and insurance* loading on the fiscal dimension and *abortion, gay adoption, feelings towards gays, fundamentalists, and feminists* loading on the social dimension. The correlation between these factors is 0.48. The model fit is adequate (RMSEA=0.073, CFI=0.95, TLI=0.91). After estimating this model, factor scores for each dimension were retained and used in subsequent analysis. Data are derived from cumulative ANES file and only include Whites observed in 1992, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016, in accordance with the data analyzed in previous chapters.**

**Ideological Alignment**

Let us begin with our expectations regarding ideological alignment. The parties should have grown more ideologically divided, and because issue considerations are effectively bundled by elites along a single left-right dimension, symbolic and operational forms of conservatism (both social and fiscal) should be increasingly interrelated. In other words, in the White electorate, *the parties should become more ideologically extreme and cohesive over time.* Figure 2 displays the social and fiscal ideology scores from our factor model across time, averaged within each party. Because the measures are scored such that higher scores denote conservatism, we refer to the scales as social and fiscal conservatism.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The *ideological extremism* hypothesis maintains that White partisans have become more ideologically divided over time. For fiscal conservatism, Republicans have grown significantly more conservative over time. In 1992 the mean fiscal conservatism score for Republicans was 0.25; in 2016, it was 0.45. This is an 80% increase over the 24-year period. Democrats have grown liberal, yet less so. Their predicted conservatism score was -0.25 in 1992. Compared to Republicans, their score changed by 48 percent (to -0.37 in 2016).[[6]](#footnote-6) Though the fiscal divide is noteworthy, it is important to note the social-ideology divide is much more pronounced. Though both White Republicans and Democrats have grown more socially liberal over time, the shift to the left has been much larger among Democrats. Indeed, it is the movement of Democratic Party on social issues that accounts for all of the growing partisan divide on this dimension. The predicted social conservatism level among Democrats in 1992 was -0.02. It decreases to -0.62 by 2016. This substantial asymmetry illustrates an important dynamic: The GOP has *not* grown more socially conservative over the last 25 years. In fact, Republicans are, on average, somewhat more liberal on social issues in 2016 than they were in 1992. The partisan divide on the social dimension has widened due to a sharp increase in social liberalism among self-identified White Democrats.[[7]](#footnote-7)

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**Figure 2: Sorting has produced a more ideologically polarized public. Ideology is estimated from a two-dimensional confirmatory factor model, with *domestic spending, jobs, and insurance* loading on the fiscal dimension and *abortion, gay adoption, feelings towards gays, fundamentalists, and feminists* loading on the social dimension. Since 2008, the parties have polarized on both fiscal and social policy, with Democrats heavily contributing to the partisan divide on social issues. We take this to suggest that the Democratic Party should now pose a more substantial ideological threat to authoritarian values. Data are from the cumulative ANES.**

Figure 2 provides evidence supporting our ideological-extremism hypothesis. It also speaks to one reason why we increasingly witness intractable political conflict in contemporary politics. The parties are more divided than in the past, particularly with respect to social ideology. Considering these divisions, partisans may now view the competing party as not only unpalatable, but altogether ideologically alien and increasingly difficult to see eye-to-eye with on public policy.

The model we present in this book suggests that these growing divides ultimately stem from the fact that White authoritarians and non-authoritarians are increasingly sorted into different parties. To verify that authoritarians and non-authoritarians also diverge on the two ideological dimensions, we re-estimated the trends for fiscal and social conservatism at the maximum and minimum levels of authoritarianism. We uncover a similar dynamic, which we summarize in Figure 3.[[8]](#footnote-8) The divide between White authoritarians and non-authoritarians widens for fiscal policy, but it widens much more with respect to social policy. Moreover, non-authoritarians become substantially more extreme in their social liberalism as time goes by. Indeed, non-authoritarians have moved so sharply to the left on social issues that the gap on this dimension has grown over time even though authoritarians have moved to the left on the same issues[[9]](#footnote-9) As Figure 3 shows, leftward movement on social issues among authoritarians appears to have largely stopped by 2008 while non-authoritarians have moved sharply left over most of this time period.

A close up of a map

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**Figure 3: Non-authoritarians have grown more liberal and authoritarians have become conservative. Ideology is estimated from a two-dimensional confirmatory factor model, with *domestic spending, jobs, and insurance* loading on the fiscal dimension and *abortion, gay adoption, feelings towards gays, fundamentalists, and feminists* loading on the social dimension. The correlation between these factors is 0.42. Model fit is adequate (RMSEA=0.08, CFI=0.92, TLI=0.88). Data are from the cumulative ANES.**

**Ideological Consistency: Policy Bundling and Media Sorting**

The trend toward ideological alignment documented in the previous section also implies that the social dimension of ideology — which activates differences between authoritarians and non-authoritarians more than other aspects of political belief — has become more strongly linked to the rest of many citizens’ belief systems. Coupled with changes to information technology (e.g., the rise of cable news) that facilitate exposure to politically-congenial messaging, the growing alignment of partisanship and ideology has contributed to what we refer to as *policy bundling*. Voters are now more likely to be exposed to ideologically consistent cues, with the likely consequence that different facets of ideology — symbolic, fiscal, and social — should be increasingly intertwined. This expectation is consistent with work suggesting that while media echo chambers do not necessarily lead to polarization, the new media landscape offers ideologically homogenous programs that provide voters with consistent ideological cues (Levendusky and Malhotra 2016; Levendusky 2013). Democrats and liberals who consume information from left-leaning sources are more likely to encounter political elites who “bundle” economic and social policy under an overarching liberal or progressive label. Likewise, Republican and conservative voters may be inclined to rely on conservative outlets, and they may be more likely to encounter elites who advance fiscally and socially conservative policy goals.

This implies that the different facets of ideology may be tightly bound together in contemporary politics, such that attitudes toward the social issues that most divide authoritarians and non-authoritarians are increasingly linked to both fiscal preferences and symbolic ideological identifications among White voters. This is the *ideological consistency hypothesis* we described earlier in this chapter. To explore this possibility, we again turn to the data from the ANES. Figure 4 tracks changes in the pairwise correlation between fiscal and social ideology, along with the correlations between ideological self-placement and the fiscal and social dimensions. Though there is some fluctuation over time, the figure makes clear these facets of ideology are strongly correlated in the White electorate, with the correlations reaching a maximum in the 2016 election. The correlations between social and fiscal ideology and between social ideology and symbolic ideology both increase over the years between 1992 and 2016, reaching a maximum in the latter year. Moreover, the association between fiscal ideology and ideological self-placement increases even more over the same time period, though it began at a lower level in 1992 (*r=*0.45) than the equivalent correlations between social and fiscal ideology and between social ideology and symbolic ideology. While ideology is certainly more nuanced than being simply “liberal” or “conservative,” we do find that symbolic and operational manifestations of ideology are more intertwined in 2016 than at any other time in this series. Thus, symbolic ideology, fiscal ideology, and social ideology have become more linked to one another in the minds of our White American respondents. In particular, the facet of ideology that is most linked to individual differences in authoritarianism — i.e., social ideology — is increasingly tethered to other facets of ideology among Whites.

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**Figure 4: Increased sorting has had the consequence of a greater alignment between symbolic and operational ideologies. Symbolic ideology is the 7-point self-placement item. Operational ideology – fiscal and social – is generated from the two-factor CFA described above. Data are from the cumulative ANES.**

The growing alignment between the various facets of ideology among White voters has the potential to further exacerbate political divisions. Iyengar and colleagues, for instance, document an increase in hostile attitudes towards those who belong to a different political party (Iyengar et al. 2012, Iyengar and Westwood 2015; Weber and Klar 2019). In addition, partisans tend to maintain social distance from those who endorse competing political views (Lelkes and Westwood 2016). The analyses we present here suggest that members of both parties have grown more ideologically extreme and cohesive. This suggests an important dynamic: the leftward shift of the Democratic Party — especially on social issues — may be increasingly threatening to authoritarians and to authoritarian Republicans in particular. Moreover, the stronger links between social ideology and other aspects of political belief among many Democrats may mean that authoritarians might have trouble disentangling other aspects of the Democrats’ ideological agenda from the social liberalism that they find particularly threatening.

Patterns of media consumption should be central to these processes. Authoritarians and non-authoritarians should prefer qualitatively different media environments that exacerbate partisan divisions. The growth of cable television news networks (e.g., Fox, CNN, MSNBC) over the past 25 years has made it increasingly possible for voters to tune into a news source that is consistent with their political orientations. Prior to this, someone who wanted to watch national political news on TV would likely have to choose between one of the three major networks: ABC, CBS, and NBC. Now a conservative can easily turn on Fox News anytime they want to while a liberal can view CNN or MSNBC just as easily.

To explore the relationship between authoritarianism and media consumption, we rely on recent data from the 2012-2016 Democracy Fund Voter Study Group (hereafter, VSG) survey to explore whether authoritarianism relates to media choice.[[10]](#footnote-10) Respondents were asked whether they watched 37 news programs and stations, ranging from *The PBS News Hour (PBS),* to *Fox and Friends (Fox), State of the Union (CNN),* and *48 Hours (CBS).* The analysis here relies on 30 questions about media viewing choices. Since we are interested in news and opinion reporting, we rely on a smaller subset of these items, discarding items asking about late-night comedy programs. However, the sheer number of news programs makes an analysis of each individual item intractable. We thus rely on a data reduction technique – multidimensional scaling – to examine how these items scale together. This allows us to ascertain whether certain media choices co-vary with one another in a meaningful way.

Figure 5 displays the multidimensional scaling solution.[[11]](#footnote-11) What is noteworthy is how the media items cluster together. In this figure, the distances signify how likely it is that an individual will watch both of two programs. The closer the items, the more likely it is that if a person watches one, he or she will watch the other. More distant items mean the news programs are less likely to be co-selected. For example, respondents who watch *Fox and Friends* are substantially more likely to watch programs like *Fox News Sunday*, *Hannity*, and The *O’Reilly Factor* than *Anderson Cooper 360* or *60 Minutes*. It is relatively easy to identify three meaningful clusters in this figure. One cluster is defined by Fox News programs (e.g., *Greta Van Susteren*, *O’Reilly, Hannity*, and *Fox and Friends*). This cluster is located in the lower left of the figure. A second cluster is defined by network news programs (e.g., *NBC News*, *Early Today*, *Good Morning America*, and *Meet the Press*). This cluster is located in the lower right. Finally, in the upper right, there is a third cluster defined by non-Fox cable news programs found on CNN and MSNBC.

A close up of a map

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**Figure 5: Media choice configuration from non-metric multidimensional scaling. The predictions are for non-Hispanic Whites only.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5+ |
| Network | 0.47 | 0.18 | 0.14 | 0.09 | 0.06 | 0.07 |
| Cable | 0.71 | 0.11 | 0.06 | 0.06 | 0.03 | 0.03 |
| Fox | 0.65 | 0.08 | 0.06 | 0.05 | 0.06 | 0.11 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Table 1: Proportion of counts across each type of media consumption pattern.**

Based on these results, we constructed three additive scales. One scale was constructed by summing the number of Fox News programs watched; another scale was created by combining the number of CNN and MSNBC news programs watched; a third scale was constructed by adding the number of network television news programs watched. Each scale thus represents a count of the number of reported news programs consumed. Table 1 displays the distribution of responses for each variable. The table indicates there are a non-trivial number of zeros for each scale; many of the survey respondents reported consuming no information from one or more of the listed new sources. For this reason, we estimated three zero-inflated negative binomial regression models predicting the counts of Fox, non-Fox cable, and network news programs watching using authoritarianism and the aforementioned controls as the right-hand side variables. A zero-inflated negative binomial model simultaneously estimates two regression equations: a *count model* predicting the actual number of observed outcomes of interest (i.e., number of programs of a particular type that we were watched) and a *zero model* (or *inflation model*) predicting the probability of a respondent being a “certain zero” (i.e., an individual who did not view any program in a given cluster).

The left panel in Figure 6 presents the marginal effect of authoritarianism on the expected number of each type of news program consumed in the count model, while the right panel contains the marginal effects of authoritarianism in the zero model. Looking first at the count model, authoritarians are *more likely* to watch Fox programs and *less likely* to watch other cable news programs relative to non-authoritarians. We find virtually no effect of authoritarianism on the expected number of network programs consumed, however. The estimates from the zero model are also telling, as they suggest that authoritarians and non-authoritarians engage in wholesale avoidance of certain media environments. As opposed to the results from the count model in which a positive marginal effect indicates a greater likelihood of watching programs in one of the clusters, a positive marginal effect in the zero model indicates that authoritarians are less likely to completely ignore programs in that cluster, while a negative marginal effect indicates that authoritarians are more likely to totally avoid programs in the cluster. Looking at the estimates with this in mind, non-authoritarians are more likely to report watching *no* Fox News programs, whereas authoritarians are more likely to report watching *no* CNN or MSNBC programs or network news programs. These estimates show that both authoritarians and non-authoritarians tend to avoid any exposure to cable news programs that conflict with their beliefs.

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**Figure 6: Marginal effects for authoritarianism in the count and zero models for media consumption for each media type. The predictions are for non-Hispanic Whites.**

Authoritarianism has a particularly strong effect in the count model. Indeed, Figure 7 shows that authoritarians clearly consume more Fox News than their non-authoritarian counterparts. Non-authoritarians are more likely to prefer MSNBC (relative to authoritarians), but even non-authoritarian Whites watch more Fox than MSNBC. This is clear by contrasting the left and middle plots in Figure 7.

This evidence of media sorting raises some interesting questions about the joint roles of authoritarianism, ideology, and media exposure in contemporary American politics. Are the different media preferences we see here simply reinforcing the effects of authoritarianism and partisanship? Or does exposure to partisan media *independently* lead to greater polarization? In addition, since people high in authoritarianism should be especially sensitive to normative threats, does the content of conservative media outlets – Fox News – heighten threat and exacerbate the effects of authoritarianism? Unfortunately, the increasingly strong interrelationships among authoritarianism, partisanship, and media exposure make it extremely difficult to distinguish these alternative mechanisms with these sorts of survey data.

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**Figure 7: Predictive effects for authoritarianism on the number of news programs watched per week. The predictions are for non-Hispanic Whites.**

**The Emerging Cultural Divide Among Whites: The Early 2000s as a Test Case**

Our argument also suggests that the social dimension of ideology has become increasingly central to the partisan identifications of White authoritarians. George W. Bush’s first presidential term provides an excellent setting for the examination of this unfolding dynamic. Bush’s first term was marked by two developments which should have been especially alarming to those sensitive to threats to social cohesion. Perhaps most obviously, the events of 9/11 and the subsequent global war on terror made concerns about national defense, international conflict, terrorist threats associated with religious outgroups, and debates about the balance between security and individual rights more salient than they had been in some time. At the same time, debates over social issues like gay marriage made cultural change and challenges to traditional social and religious values more highly salient (Hillygus 2004). For example, between 2000 and 2004, 15 states allowed voters to decide whether same-sex marriage should be banned in statewide referenda. Majorities supported those statewide bans in every case.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In Chapter 2, we argued that when faced with threat, authoritarians are more likely to advance policy goals that focus on the preservation of group cohesion over personal autonomy (Feldman 2003; Feldman and Stenner 1997; Federico and Malka 2018; Lavine, Lodge, Polichak and Taber 2000; Lavine Lodge and Freitas 2001; Velez and Lavine 2018). Under these conditions, the preservation of personal freedoms and liberties becomes secondary to policies that protect the normative order. It stands to reason that among authoritarian voters, the centrality of moral issues during the Bush presidency, coupled with the existential threats posed directly after 9/11, should have magnified the salience of the social dimension of ideology. Again, we refer to this as the *culture-war hypothesis*. We rely on the 2000-2004 ANES panel to explore this hypothesis. As we noted in the previous chapter, a panel design is particularly useful tool for several reasons. Most importantly, it allows us to examine how individuals change over time. We can explore, for instance, the relative weight attached to social ideology in political judgments among the same group of respondents over time.

As in the previous analyses, we start by using a two-factor confirmatory factor model to operationalize latent measures of social and fiscal ideology. The items we use are identical to the ones used in the factor model presented in Figure 1; however, they were only measured in the 2000 wave. Fiscal ideology was defined by domestic spending, jobs, and insurance*;* social ideology was defined by abortion, gay marriage, feelings towards gays, fundamentalists, and feminists*.* The overall model (Figure 7) provided a good fit to the data (RMSEA=0.048, CFI=0.96, TLI=0.93). Once again, the correlation between the factors was substantial, *r=* 0.52, implying a strong relationship between the fiscal and social dimensions of ideology once measurement error is accounted for.[[13]](#footnote-13)

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**Figure 8: Two factor confirmatory factor model for the fiscal and social dimensions of ideology, 2000-2004 ANES. Estimates are unstandardized. Standard errors have been excluded. All estimates are statistically significant. Ideology is estimated from a two-dimension confirmatory factor model, with *domestic spending, jobs, and insurance* loading on the fiscal dimension and *abortion, gay marriage, feelings towards gays, fundamentalists, and feminists* loading on the social dimension. After estimating these factors, factor scores were retained and used in subsequent analysis. Additional models are presented in the supplementary appendix.**

We leverage the panel structure of the data to determine whether social and fiscal ideology scores measured in the first wave (2000) vary in their predictive power among Whites across the three waves of the survey. We predict the party identification of White ANES panel respondents in 2000, 2002, and 2004 using the fiscal and social ideology scores derived in the 2000 wave.[[14]](#footnote-14) Since we expect that the ideology dimensions should vary in their impact across levels of authoritarianism, we also specify an interaction between ideology and authoritarianism. This effectively allows a test of whether the relationship between various dimensions of ideology and partisanship vary across this time period within the same set of White survey respondents.

Figures 9 and 10 display the estimated effects for White authoritarians and non-authoritarians, respectively. Among authoritarian respondents, conservatism on each dimension is positively associated with Republican identification and negatively associated with Democratic identification. However, as Figure 9 shows, the relative effects of fiscal and social conservatism change substantially over this four-year period. While the strength of the relationship between the fiscal dimension and party identification is relatively stable in magnitude over the three survey waves, social conservatism only becomes a pronounced predictor of partisanship among authoritarians beginning in 2002. By 2004, the effect of social conservatism on Republican identification exceeds that of fiscal conservatism, a dramatic change from four years earlier.

Contrasting Figure 9 with Figure 10, we also observe the predicted asymmetry in the relative effects of the two ideological dimensions on partisanship: the predictive power of the social-ideology dimension increases in 2002 and thereafter *only* among authoritarians. Indeed, the relationship between social ideology and partisanship among non-authoritarian Whites becomes weaker rather than stronger in the 2004 election. Thus, consistent with the idea that threats to social cohesion became more salient in the early 2000s, the relationship between social ideology and partisanship became substantially stronger among authoritarian Whites starting in 2002. This is consistent with our argument that authoritarians are particularly attuned to normative threats to group order. The contrast between the responses of authoritarians and non-authoritarians is striking. Despite the increased threat of terrorism and heightened conflict over gay rights, the effects of social ideology actually *decreased* somewhat among non-authoritarians from 2000 to 2004.

In Chapter 5 we demonstrated that there was a significant increase in the probability that someone high in authoritarianism voted for George W. Bush between 2000 and 2004 while there was no increase in Republican presidential voting for non-authoritarians. This is exactly what we would expect if authoritarians were responding to the normative threats that become more salient in these years. Here, we can see that this increase in Republican voting was accompanied by a strengthening of the relationship between social conservatism and partisanship among authoritarians. Non-authoritarians, living through these same events, exhibited no greater affinity for the Republican presidential candidate, nor any significant change in the effects of fiscal and social conservatism on their partisan inclinations.

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**Figure 9: Social ideology becomes more aligned with party identification among authoritarian voters. Data is from the 2000-2004 ANES Panel Study. Fiscal and social ideology are derived from a two-factor model, with items comparable to those used in the previous cross-sectional analysis. The factor model only uses wave 1 ideology items, as many of the fiscal ideology items were not asked in waves 2 and 3. Ideology is estimated from a two-dimension confirmatory factor model, with *domestic spending, jobs, and insurance* loading on the fiscal dimension and *abortion, gay adoption, feelings towards gays, fundamentalists, and feminists* loading on the social dimension. Our ideology estimate only uses data from the first wave, the 2000 ANES. Three models were then estimated for each year: The first predicts PID using a multinomial logit in 2000, the second is a multinomial logit for PID in 2002, and the third predicts PID in 2004. Data are from the 2000-2004 ANES Panel.**

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**Figure 10: Social ideology becomes less aligned with party identification among non-authoritarian voters. Data is from the 2000-2004 ANES Panel Study. Fiscal and social ideology are derived from a two-factor model, with items comparable to those used in the previous cross-sectional analysis. The factor model only uses wave 1 ideology items, as many of the fiscal ideology items were not asked in waves 2 and 3. Our ideology estimate only uses data from the first wave, the 2000 ANES. Three models were then estimated for each year: The first predicts PID using a multinomial logit in 2000, the second is a multinomial logit for PID in 2002, and the third predicts PID in 2004. Data are from the 2000-2004 ANES Panel.**

**Ideological Threat**

In *Suicide of the West,* longtime *National Review* contributor and conservative commentator Jonah Goldberg argues that contemporary political conflict is driven by two countervailing forces (Goldberg 2018). On one hand, successful democracies advance individualism and personal freedom. These freedoms, preserved by limited government and free-market economies, have unleashed social and technological advancements in the past several centuries. On the other hand, Goldberg suggests that such social arrangements are inherently unnatural and are occasionally supplanted by the natural tendency to fall back on parochial, group-oriented motives. While these tendencies act to preserve group cohesion, they also elicit out-group resentment, dehumanization of the other, and a tendency to vilify those who hold different political priorities. As we have noted elsewhere, primordial group-centrism of this sort increasingly overlaps with and manifests itself as intense partisanship (Mason 2018). In turn, partisan group-centrism has the potential to conflict with, even undermine, democratic stability, as partisans become animated by resentment towards the out-party.

Scholarship suggests that this phenomenon – generally known as *negative partisanship* – is both widespread and particularly deleterious to democratic governance. Partisans are more likely to view the world through the lens of partisan identity, relying on prior predispositions when making sense of new political information (Kunda 1990; Lodge and Taber 2006; Johnston, Lavine and Federico 2017). Negative partisanship similarly implies voters will fail to fairly and objectively evaluate political leaders if they hail from the out-party (Abramowitz and Webster 2018). Consider presidential approval, an outcome that has been shown to be generally responsive to exogenous factors such as the state of the economy, war, and scandal. Abramowitz and Webster (2019) note that Donald Trump’s approval in his first two years in office has been unique for two reasons. Upon assuming the presidency, Trump’s approval was historically low, lower than for any president since the dawn of scientific polling. Yet, at the same time, Trump’s approval unique in is its stability. His approval has hovered around 40%, irrespective of myriad scandals, unpopular policy proposals, and negative press coverage. Republicans have remained with the president (with approval numbers exceeding 80%), whereas Democrats have been relatively united in their opposition to the president (with approval ratings typically lower than 10%; Abramowitz and Webster 2018). Democrats despise Trump; Republicans love him. What is particularly noteworthy is that partisans of both stripes have *not* substantially updated their preferences.

Negative partisanship helps us also understand why so many citizens vote *against* the out-party’s candidate, rather than enthusiastically casting a ballot for their own party’s nominee. Shanto Iyengar and his colleagues, for instance, show that partisans have become *affectively polarized* over the past several decades. Partisans (unsurprisingly) harbor positive emotions towards their own party and negative emotions towards the competing party (Iyengar and Westwood 2015; Lelkes and Westwood 2016; Cassese 2019). Moreover, this affective divide has substantially increased in recent years. This growing divide, however, has not been driven by increased positivity towards one’s own part; instead, it results from the fact that partisans the out-party in an increasingly hostile light (Iyengar and Westwood 2015; Lelkes and Westwood 2016; Cassese 2019). While over two-thirds of Americans continue to identify with a political party, partisans have *not* expressed a growing satisfaction or enthusiasm with their own party. Instead, what has occurred is an explosion of resentment toward the competing party.

We believe that perceptions of threat from the disfavored party are at the heart of this divide. The trends described in this chapter, along with the evidence presented in previous chapters that authoritarians and non-authoritarians have increasingly sorted into different parties, suggest that White authoritarians and non-authoritarians should view the Democratic and Republican parties, respectively, as threatening. This should lead White authoritarians and non-authoritarians to increasingly diverge in their perceived similarity to each of the parties. However, we think this divergence should be driven primarily by changes in perceived proximity to the party that is most incongruent with one’s level of authoritarianism. White authoritarians should view the liberalism of the Democratic Party as inimical to a worldview defined by traditionalism and interests in group cohesion and social stability and should view themselves as more and more distant from the Democrats. Likewise, White non-authoritarians should view the conservatism of the Republican Party as ideologically threatening and should see themselves as increasingly distant from the GOP. As noted previously, we refer to this prediction as the *ideological threat hypothesis*.

To explore this hypothesis, we first create a respondent conservatism score with ideological self-placement. We rescaled the score to vary from 0 to 1, with high scores denoting conservatism. In the ANES, respondents are also asked to locate the political parties and candidates on these same dimensions. From these responses, we created ideological-placement scores for the Democratic and Republican parties by rescaling the scales from 0 (liberal) to 1 (conservative).[[15]](#footnote-15) Finally, we calculated the difference between the respondent’s placement of the parties and their own ideological preferences. A score between 0 and 1 means the party is comparatively more conservative than the respondent; a score between -1 and 0 indicates the party is comparatively more liberal than the respondent; a score of 0 indicates perfect alignment between the party and the respondent.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Figure 11 displays changes in perceived distance from the Republican Party among Whites. The dashed estimate represents authoritarians (i.e., those who score at the maximum value of our authoritarianism scale) and the solid estimates represent non-authoritarians (i.e., those who score at the minimum value of our authoritarianism scale). One conclusion from these estimates is that, over this time period, authoritarians have seen virtually no ideological distance between themselves and the Republican Party. Across election years, we observe an estimate that significantly overlaps with zero, which indicates that authoritarians view the Republican Party as ideologically close to them. On the other hand, the estimates clearly show that non-authoritarians have come to view the GOP as increasingly distant from them ideologically. Figure 12 displays changes in White respondents’ perceived distance from the Democratic Party. In this case, the perceived distance between non-authoritarians and the Democratic Party has changed little over time. Authoritarians, on the other hand, have come to see themselves as increasingly distant from the Democratic Party in ideological terms.

In sum, these results imply that White authoritarians have gravitated to the GOP because of the perceived liberalism of the Democratic Party. Conversely, our results suggest that White non-authoritarians have been attracted to the Democratic Party because of the perceived conservatism of the GOP. Since 2000, those high and low in authoritarianism have increasingly seen one of the parties – the Democratic Party for authoritarians and the Republican Party for low authoritarians – as increasingly distant from them ideologically and thus more of a threat to their values. These findings speak to the divisive nature of contemporary politics by showing how ideological perceptions of the Democratic and Republican parties have shifted relative to the self for White authoritarians and non-authoritarians. In the next section, we explore whether these shifts in ideological distance have downstream consequences for political behavior.

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**Figure 11: Ideological distance from the Republican Party as a function of authoritarianism. Entries represent estimated ideological distance of oneself relative to the Republican Party among low and high authoritarians. Estimates are from a linear regression in which the dependent variable is ideological self-placement minus ideological placement of the Republican Party*. Positive scores indicate the respondent is more conservative than the Party; negative scores thus indicate the inverse: the Republican Party is perceived as more conservative than oneself.***

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**Figure 12: Ideological distance from the Democratic Party. Estimates are from a linear regression in which the dependent variable is ideological self-placement minus ideological placement of the Democratic Party*. Positive scores indicate the respondent is more conservative than the Party; negative scores indicate the inverse: The Democratic Party is perceived as more liberal than oneself.* The ideological divide widens over time, as non-authoritarians increasingly view themselves as ideologically proximal to the party and non-authoritarians view themselves as far more conservative than the Democratic Party.**

**Ideological Proximity and Voting**

Authoritarians and non-authoritarians thus differ in their perceived ideological proximity to the two parties. By extension, we might observe that *ideological proximity* has a different effect on voting for authoritarians. A foundational argument in the study of mass political behavior is that rational voters participating in a two-party election should select the candidate or party that is ideologically most similar to them (Campbell et al 1960; Downs 1957; Stokes 1963; Singh 2014). The thrust of this argument is that if a particular candidate or party advances policy that maximizes a voter’s *utility* through policy, the voter should prefer and subsequently vote for that candidate or party (relative to the alternative; Jessee 2012). This is “voting correctly” in the ideological sense: It follows that one should prefer the option that holds the most ideologically similar views.

Though ideological proximity can be defined in different ways, we conceptualize and measure it simply as a respondent’s self-placement on an ideological dimension minus the respondent’s placement of a candidate or party on the same dimension. Thus, a proximity score of zero would indicate that the respondent’s ideology coincides perfectly with a candidate’s or party’s perceived ideology. If we were to plot the probability of voting for a candidate or party as a function of proximity scores, we should observe a symmetric, bell-shaped curve centered at zero that reflects the probability of voting for a candidate or party as the proximity score varies across its range.

Moreover, we should expect that a score of zero will generate a greater than 0.5 probability of voting for that party’s nominee. The peak of the bell curve should be greater than 0.5. If one believes a party perfectly represents one’s interests, that individual should be more likely to vote for a candidate of that party. On the other hand, as a voter comes to perceives the candidate or party as too conservative or liberal relative to the self, the probability of voting for it should decrease.

However, we suspect that relative ideological distances to candidates and parties will resonate differently depending on one’s level of authoritarianism and on whether one is considering Democratic or Republican targets. Our results above indicate that White voters increasingly see themselves as distant from the party that is most incongruent with their level of authoritarianism—i.e., the Democratic Party for authoritarians and the Republican Party for non-authoritarians. All other things being equal, this suggests that both White authoritarians and non-authoritarians should be relatively insensitive to perceived variation in ideological proximity to the out-party or its candidates when making vote decisions.

However, the results of Chapter 5 and 6 imply that not all things are equal with respect to authoritarian sorting among Whites. In those chapters, we demonstrated that White authoritarians have drifted away from the Democratic Party to a greater extent than White non-authoritarians have left the GOP. Put another way, the Democratic Party appears to repel White authoritarians to a greater degree than the Republican Party repels White non-authoritarians. In the present context, this suggests that we will find an asymmetry in out-party insensitivity. On one hand, if the Republican affinity is “sticky,” the ideological distance from the Republican Party should relate to voting the same way for White authoritarians and non-authoritarians: those who see themselves as closer to the GOP should be more likely to vote Republican and less likely to vote Democratic, regardless of authoritarianism. On the other hand, ideological distance from the Democratic Party should matter less for White authoritarians than White non-authoritarians: both White authoritarians and non-authoritarians who see themselves as closer to the Democratic Party should be more likely to vote Democratic and less likely to vote Republican, but this tendency should be *weaker* among White authoritarians. As noted above, we refer to this prediction as the *ideological-proximity hypothesis*.

To examine this prediction, we once again rely on the cumulative ANES data for the 1992-2016 period, though with a slightly different statistical model than we have used in previous analyses. Specifically, we predict the probability of voting for the Republican or Democratic presidential candidate using the ideological difference-score measure described above. The respondent’s ideological ratings of the self and the target are scaled to range from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating the most liberal position and 1 indicating the most conservative position; thus, proximity scores can range from -1 to 1. Since proximity is equal to self-rating minus rating, a positive score indicates the respondent reports the target is less conservative than themselves; a negative score indicates the party is more conservative than the respondent. We then interact proximity scores with authoritarianism. This allows us to examine whether White authoritarians and non-authoritarians rely differently on their ideological proximity with each party.[[17]](#footnote-17) All else equal, we should observe that the closer one is to a party, the more likely they are to vote for that party’s candidate. In Figure 13 we display the probabilities that authoritarians and non-authoritarians vote for the Republican presidential candidate, conditional on their reported ideological proximity to both parties.

Our estimates of White authoritarians’ and non-authoritarians’ voting behavior as a function of proximity to the GOP (represented by the gray lines in Figure 13) are close to what a standard proximity model would predict. Both authoritarians and non-authoritarians who rate the Republican Party as perfectly aligned with their own ideology are *most* likely to vote Republican; the probabilities at this point exceed 0.5 in each case. White non-authoritarians’ voting behavior as a function of proximity to the Democratic Party (represented by the black lines) is also broadly consistent with the proximity model. Non-authoritarians who perfectly align with the Democratic Party are *most likely* to vote Democrat and least likely to vote Republican.

In contrast, White authoritarians are relatively insensitive to proximity to the Democratic Party, as indicated by the relatively low curvature of the black line compared to the gray one in the left-hand panel of Figure 13. Though authoritarians whose Democratic proximity scores approach zero (indicating a perfect fit with the Democrats) become less likely to vote Republican, the probability of voting Republican change far less for them as a function of proximity to the incongruent Democratic Party compared to proximity to the Republican Party. There is some asymmetry in non-authoritarians’ vote choices in response to their proximity to each party but their response to ideological differences from the Republican Party are only a little smaller than distance to the Democratic Party.

When voting in presidential elections, authoritarians thus appear relatively indifferent to the ideological orientation of the Democratic Party. This suggests that the drift of White authoritarians from the Democratic Party toward the GOP is characterized by an especially strong element of negative partisanship. Given their heightened sensitivity to threat from out-groups, White authoritarians seem especially likely to simply disregard ideological proximity to the Democratic Party, even when their ideological self-identification is close to their perceived placement of the Democratic Party.

The estimates in Figure 13 rely on proximity measures derived from general ideological self-placement. However, as we have shown, the divergence between the parties on social issues is a core reason why authoritarians and non-authoritarians have diverged in their partisanship and voting. Moreover, both our own analyses and those of others reveal that general ideological self-placement is itself strongly linked to social-issue preferences (e.g., Ellis and Stimson 2012). Nevertheless, economic matters still divide the two parties, and voters continue to list economic concerns as being among the most important issues facing the country (Johnston et al. 2017; Lee 2009; Smith 2007). The fiscal platforms of the parties may serve as an alternate basis for party affinity, over and above social issue preferences. Thus, it is worth asking whether variation in proximity to the parties *specifically* on the “competing” fiscal dimension might be weighted differently in vote choice among authoritarians and non-authoritarians. Fortunately, the ANES surveys include a battery of items asking respondents to place candidates and parties on seven-point scales with respect to domestic government spending and government-guaranteed employment. If the pattern we uncovered with respect to proximity on general ideology is a robust one, then authoritarians should also be relatively impervious to the fiscal ideology of the Democratic Party. That is, authoritarians who view themselves as perfectly aligned with the Democratic Party on economic issues should still vote for the GOP.

Figure 14 examines this by replacing the ideological self-placement measure from the previous set of analyses with the fiscal-ideology measure used in other sections of this chapter. We find a pattern quite similar to that in Figure 13, with an even stronger asymmetry for White authoritarians. Again, the key finding is that White authoritarians’ vote choices in presidential elections do not vary that much as a function of how close they see themselves being to the Democratic Party on fiscal matters. Indeed, among those who see themselves as perfectly aligned with the Democrats on fiscal issues, we still observe a 0.75 probability of voting Republican. These analyses of proximity voting illustrate the power of authoritarianism to influence the decision rules that people use to arrive at vote decisions. While the two parties are clearly distinguishable on fiscal policies, authoritarians largely disregard their proximity to the Democratic Party on these issues and vote Republican even when their economic issue preferences are closely aligned with the Democrats.

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**Figure 13. Probability of voting Republican by ideological proximity (Respondent Conservatism – Party Conservatism) and authoritarianism. Ideological proximity is left-right self-placement. Positive proximity scores indicate the respondent feels he/she is more conservative than the Republican Party; negative scores indicate the respondent feels he/she is more liberal than the Republican Party. A score of zero indicates perfect ideological alignment. Probabilities are estimated from a probit regression with cubic splines specified for the alignment items. All remaining variables are held at their respective means and modes. The splines accounts for non-monotonicity in the relationship between the proximity measure and voting. Authoritarians who are ideologically aligned with the Republican Party are far more likely to vote Republican. Non-authoritarians defect.**

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**Figure 14: Probability of voting Republican by fiscal ideological proximity (Respondent Conservatism – Party Conservatism) and authoritarianism. Ideological proximity is left-right placement of oneself, candidate, and parties with respect to government guaranteed jobs and domestic spending. Positive proximity scores indicate the respondent feels he/she is more conservative than the Republican Party; negative scores indicate the respondent feels he/she is more liberal than the Republican Party. A score of zero indicates perfect ideological alignment. Probabilities are estimated from a probit regression with cubic splines specified for the alignment items. All remaining variables are held at their respective means and modes. The splines accounts for non-monotonicity in the relationship between the proximity measure and voting. Authoritarians who are ideologically aligned with the Republican Party are far more likely to vote Republican. Non-authoritarians defect.**

**Ideological Polarization and the Electoral Activation of Authoritarianism**

Lastly, we argue that the increasing ideological polarization of the American political parties has strengthened the relationship between authoritarianism and voting among White Americans. In the previous chapters and in the results we have presented in this chapter, we have shown that White Americans are both more definitively “sorted” into different parties as a function of authoritarianism and more likely to see a clear ideological gap between the parties. Thus, voters are increasingly presented with a clear contrast of visions when they enter the voting booth—a contrast which now includes a sharp divide between the parties on the social issues that most clearly separate authoritarians and non-authoritarians from one another (Hetherington and Weiler 2009, 2018; Johnston et al. 2017; Levendusky 2009; Mason 2018).

Importantly, research on authoritarianism suggests that the political behavior of authoritarians and non-authoritarianism is especially likely to polarize in the presence of perceived social disagreement about core group values (Feldman 2003; Feldman and Stenner 1997; Stenner 2005). We believe that the pattern of growing ideological alignment that we have documented in this chapter—which has widened the gulf between the parties—provides citizens with a clear polarizing stimulus of this sort. If this is the case, then we should expect to find a stronger relationship between authoritarianism and presidential voting among White Americans when they also perceive a larger ideological gap between the two major political parties. As noted at the outset of this chapter, we refer to this prediction as the *polarization hypothesis*.

To examine this prediction, we again rely on the cumulative ANES data and estimate the probability of voting Republican in presidential elections as a function of authoritarianism and its interaction with the perceived ideological difference between the two parties.[[18]](#footnote-18) We coded the ideological difference variable on a 0 to 1 metric – with 1 corresponding to the belief that the Republican Party is substantially more conservative than the Democratic Party. Thus, high scores denote maximum perceived ideological polarization. In figure 17, we plot the marginal effect of authoritarianism across levels of perceived ideological polarization. We do not plot the marginal effect among respondents who believe the Democratic Party is more conservative than the Republican Party, as this indicates potential confusion with the survey questions. [[19]](#footnote-19)

The figure indicates that the voting behavior of authoritarians is a function of their perceptions of political polarization. Authoritarians who perceive no polarization – i.e., the parties are rated as equally conservative—are less likely to cast a Republican vote, relative to those who perceive a Republican Party that is diametrically opposed to the ideology of the Democratic Party. On the other hand, non-authoritarians are less responsive to the ideological orientation of the two parties. They cast a vote for a candidate irrespective of the partisan ideological divide. Perceived polarization therefore increases the marginal effect of authoritarianism on presidential voting. The difference between high and low authoritarian voters in the probability of voting Republican increases substantially as perceptions of ideological polarization increase. On the whole, we find a substantially stronger relationship between polarization and voting among authoritarian respondents, which we believe is generally supportive of the polarization hypothesis.

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**Figure 15. Marginal effect of authoritarianism on voting, across levels of perceived ideological polarization. Authoritarian predispositions are less aligned with voting when voters perceive a greater ideological polarization between the parties. The measure of polarization is (Ideology of Republican Party – Ideology of Democratic Party). We excluded respondents who viewed the Democratic Party as more conservative than the Republican Party (11% of cases). The results are substantively the same if we include these cases or censor these cases by scoring them zero. All models also control for an interaction between political engagement (i.e., assessment of the respondent’s knowledge) and authoritarianism.**

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have explored the ways in which two core trends in American politics – the sorting of White Americans into different parties on the basis of authoritarianism and the growing ideological divergence between the parties – have intersected with one another over the last few decades. Across a series of analyses, we have demonstrated that the partisan divide is increasingly intertwined with disputes about matters that sharply separate authoritarian Whites from non-authoritarians. We began by providing evidence for an increase in ideological alignment over recent decades—specifically, an increase in the extent to which Democrats and Republicans are ideologically different from one another (*ideological extremism*) and the extent to which members of each party hold ideologically constrained orientations across the symbolic, social, and fiscal facets of ideology (*ideological consistency*). Importantly, our data suggest that divisions related to the social dimension of ideology have emerged as a more important aspect of the divide between the parties and that differences along this social dimension are more tightly linked to other aspects of ideology than in the past. Using panel data, we also provided evidence that the social dimension of ideology—in addition to being more tightly linked to other facets of ideology—became a stronger determinant of partisan affiliation among authoritarian Whites during a period of time in which normative threats were highly salient, i.e., the immediate post-9/11 period in the early 2000s. This provides support for what we referred to earlier as the *culture-war* hypothesis.

Moreover, we demonstrated that White Americans’ sense of closeness to the two parties has evolved in concert with their levels of authoritarianism. Consistent with our *ideological threat* hypothesis, we found that White authoritarians and non-authoritarians have come to see larger and larger ideological gaps between themselves and the parties most “incongruent” with how they see the social world, i.e., the Democratic Party in the case of authoritarians and the Republican Party in the case of non-authoritarians. In contrast, authoritarians’ and non-authoritarians’ perceived proximity to the parties most “congruent” with their worldviews—the GOP among authoritarians and the Democratic Party among non-authoritarians—has changed very little. Thus, White Americans with different levels of authoritarians have shifted their views of the partisan landscape in ways that primarily suggest a greater sense of distance from a disfavored party rather than increased closeness to a favored party.

Finally, we provide evidence that perceptions of where the parties stand relative to one another conditions the voting behavior of authoritarians and non-authoritarians. First, in a test of our *ideological proximity* hypothesis, we show that White authoritarians are relatively insensitive to how ideologically close they believe themselves to be to the Democratic Party—an insensitivity to perceptions of the Democratic Party that does not appear among non-authoritarian Whites or for perceptions of the Republican Party among either White authoritarians or non-authoritarians. Even when their ideological inclinations align closely with the ideological inclinations they assume the Democratic Party to have, Whites high in authoritarianism tend to vote Republican. In other words, White authoritarian Americans appear to have developed such an animus toward the Democratic Party that considerations of ideological proximity to the party do not register much for them. Second, in an examination of what we refer to as the *polarization hypothesis*, we provide evidence that authoritarianism is “activated” by stronger perceptions of ideological divergence between the parties. Consistent with the idea that perceived social discord—especially insofar as it touches on differences in fundamental values—widens the political gulf between authoritarians and non-authoritarians, we find that authoritarianism is more strongly associated with Republican presidential voting among White Americans who see a larger ideological gap between the two parties.

Thus, the evidence we present in this chapter suggests that the evolution of the White electorate along worldview lines involves more than a simple process of authoritarians and non-authoritarians sorting into different parties (as shown in Chapters 5 and 6). Rather, it also entails broader shifts toward greater ideological alignment within each party coalition and changes in the ideological basis of partisanship among White Americans at different points on the authoritarianism spectrum. It has also brought about a state of affairs in which White Americans increasingly feel a sense of distance from the party that is least congruent with their worldview and care little about how much their own preferences might overlap with it. Polarization, in the end, has amplified the relationship between authoritarianism and political behavior in the White electorate.

In the next chapter, we shift gears and examine the attitudes and behavior of those citizens who have not been caught up in the process of sorting discussed in the previous three chapters. Though Americans—and White Americans in particular—have increasingly sorted themselves into different parties on the basis of authoritarianism, party identification is notably “sticky” and resistant to change. In Chapter 8, we show that these “unsorted” citizens show distinct inclinations relative to their sorted compatriots, albeit in an asymmetric way. Though non-authoritarian Republicans have remained largely similar to authoritarian Republicans in their attitudes and behavior, authoritarian Democrats show a notable pattern of demobilization (i.e., low levels of interest and participation) and defection toward conservative issue positions and votes.

**Appendix**

**Robustness Checks**

*2004 Panel.* Due to the non-trivial correlation between the fiscal and social dimensions in the 2000-2004 panel, we estimated separate models for each ideology type. While these models do not suffer from collinearity, we are unable to definitively state that the models are representative of the effects of direct fiscal or social conservativism – i.e., the effects in Figures A1-A2 represent the unique and shared effect of each ideology type.

**ch7_aa1.pdf**

**Figure A1: Replication of panel analysis with separate regression models for authoritarians.**

**ch7_aa2.pdf**

**Figure A2: Replication of panel analysis with separate regression models for non-authoritarians.**

Because the 2000-2004 panel also includes a more extensive list of policy items, we re-estimated our measurement models with more items. Next, we predicted the probability of identifying as Democrat, Independent, or Republican using the factor scores from this model.

**ch7_m2.pdf**

**Figure A3: Alternate model specification for fiscal and social ideology, using the cumulative ANES. The model fit was good (RMSE=0.048, CFI=0.92. TLI=0.91).**

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**Figure A4: Replication of panel analysis with different ideology scores for authoritarians.**

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**Figure A5: Replication of panel analysis with different ideology scores for authoritarians.**

1. <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/07/overview-of-same-sex-marriage-in-the-united-states/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/meet-the-press/schumer-trump-s-temper-tantrum-over-wall-funding-leading-shutdown-n948521)>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This is generally defined as *ideological-partisan* sorting in contemporary work. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. RMSEA=0.071, CFI=0.94, TLI=0.89. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. After retaining factor scores, we regress fiscal and social ideology on party identification, along with gender, age, education, income, and religious affiliation. These models were estimated for 1992, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016. We then simulate sample average predictions for each partisan category. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The social and fiscal ideology scores do not have a natural scale. Zero, for instance, does not imply that one is a moderate. The scores should be interpreted in a relative sense – a score of zero, relative to a score of -1 or +1 represents a more moderate ideological position. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Although it might seem odd that Republicans have grown more socially liberal over the last 25 years, virtually all of this leftward movement is a function of views on gay rights and gay marriage. As much survey data has shown, the public as a whole has become increasingly supportive of gay rights, though the degree of change in those views does vary across demographic and political groups (cite). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Again, these are estimates from a regression model, here at minimum and maximum authoritarianism. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. As we noted above, most of the leftward movement on social issues among authoritarians is limited to policies related to gay rights. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The Democracy Fund Voter Study Group survey is an online study based on the YouGov panel. It began with a large sample of respondents who were interviewed in 2011/2012. 8000 of those respondents were then re-interviewed after the 2016 election. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. We present the data in a two-dimensional space, for clarity. The solution is from non-metric multidimensional, in which we minimize the distances between items by relying on a “distance” matrix. We constructed the distance matrix by first calculating the co-occurrence of each selection, then standardizing this measure by dividing by the total number of media selections in the sample, and subtracting this number from 1, which now represents the “distance” between selections. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S.\_state\_constitutional\_amendments\_banning\_same-sex\_unions [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. We present supplementary model specifications in the appendix. The estimates in the figure are unstandardized. The correlation we present is the standardized covariance between the factors. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. We also use year 2000 ideology scores for practical reasons. Many of the items are not measured in all three time points. Due to listwise deletion, 2002 and 2004 respondents were analyzed if they also participated in the 2000 panel. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Unfortunately, the ANES does not consistently offer a battery of *social* and *fiscal* items for the parties and candidates. Thus, we are not able to disaggregate the various types of ideological evaluation. However, considering our evidence of ideological alignment, particularly in recent elections, we do not view this as problematic. Likewise, the items scale together reasonably well (Respondent Ideology, alpha=0.69; Republican Party Ideology, alpha=0.76; Democratic Party Ideology, alpha=0.78). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The estimates in the figure are based on predictions from a linear regression model, in which the respondent’s ideology minus the Republican or Democratic party’s ideology was regressed on authoritarianism, along with the control variables used in previous chapters. We then estimated the average predictive effects for both authoritarians and non-authoritarians. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The model we estimate is a probit regression with a cubic spline. We simulate the standard errors through 500 bootstrap replications. This accounts for the likely non-linear and non-monotonic impact of ideological distance on voting. First, the relationship should be non-monotonic, as those as the midpoint are theoretically most likely to vote for a particular party. Second, we anticipate a non-linear relationship. We do not expect the slope for those who believe the Republican Party is too conservative to be the same as the slope among those who believe it is too liberal. Because only two parties are viable contenders in U.S. elections, an individual who believes the Republican Party is too liberal should be far more likely to vote Republican than an individual who feels the party is too conservative. For instance, a score of -0.5 should yield a greater probability of voting Republican than a score of 0.5. Finally, since our estimates are pooled across election years, we also include fixed effects for survey years. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The model is specified with the same covariates used in previous analyses (gender, age, education, income, and religious identity). We also control for the respondent’s level of political knowledge and the interaction between the ideological difference variable and knowledge. It includes year-level fixed effects, since the estimates are pooled across election years. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. A negative score indicates confusion, as it denotes the perception that the Democratic Party is more conservative than the Republican Party. Approximately 73% of the ANES sample places the Republican Party to the right of the Democratic Party, and 7% rate the parties as ideologically equal. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)