

The Dispositional Antecedents of Affective Polarization in the United States

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Abstract

Scholars of mass political behavior in the United States have documented a rise in affective polarization, or a growing dislike of the opposing political party, in recent years. While affective polarization has been shown to be produced by an individual's ideological extremity or the alignment of partisan and sociodemographic identities, less attention has been paid to the ways in which dispositional forces shape affective polarization. In this study, I show that individuals who score higher on measures of authoritarianism and schadenfreude exhibit higher degrees of affective polarization. Subsequent analyses reveal that these trends are driven by self-identified Republicans, and that authoritarianism and schadenfreude exacerbate affective polarization by increasing the extent to which an individual likes her own political party.

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Recent years have seen an increasing scholarly focus on the nature of polarization within the American electorate. Moving beyond debates as to whether the mass public is ideologically polarized (Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008) or not (Fiorina, Abrams and Pope, 2005), a new consensus has emerged that Americans are polarized along an affective dimension. Thus, regardless of whether citizens are ideologically polarized or moderate in their views, political scientists largely agree that members of the Democratic and Republican parties increasingly dislike each other. Such dislike is important for mass behavior, as it has led Americans to view their counter-partisans as dangerous (Kalmoe, 2018) and a threat to the country's well-being (Webster, 2020). More troublesome, a growing body of work has shown that partisans tend to "de-humanize" supporters of the out-party (Cassese, 2019; Crawford, Modri and Motyl, 2013), which can – and often does – lead to behavioral biases outside of politics (Engelhardt and Utych, 2018).

Though plenty of work has documented this growth in affective polarization, much less attention has been paid to the sources of this partisan antipathy. Some posit that affective polarization has its origins in the alignment of individuals' partisan identities with their various sociodemographic identities (see, e.g., Mason, 2018; Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes, 2012), while others argue that affective polarization is driven by ideological conflict among elites (Banda and Cluverius, 2018) or growing ideological sophistication among the mass public (see, e.g., Webster and Abramowitz, 2017; Rogowski and Sutherland, 2015).

While both the alignment of partisanship with various sociodemographic identities and a growing ideological awareness among the mass public have certainly contributed to heightened levels of partisan animus in contemporary American politics, I argue in this article that affective polarization can be explained – at least in part – by dispositional characteristics unique to each individual. Specifically, I argue that both an individual's tendency to endorse authoritarian beliefs and to engage in *schadenfreude*, or take joy in the suffering of others, are associated with greater levels of affective polarization. Utilizing novel data on the dispositional characteristics of over

3,000 American citizens, I show that higher levels of authoritarianism and schadenfreude are both linked to greater amounts of affective polarization. However, unlike previous studies examining the relationship between authoritarianism and affective polarization (Luttig, 2017), I find that these relationships do *not* exist across party lines. On the contrary, I find that the relationships between authoritarianism, schadenfreude, and affective polarization are driven entirely by self-identifying Republicans. Moreover, I show that authoritarianism and schadenfreude are linked to higher levels of affective polarization by increasing the extent to which individuals feel favorably toward their own party.

In addition to furthering our understanding of affective polarization in the United States, the results I present in this article contribute to a nascent literature that focuses on the dispositional antecedents of affective polarization. While previous work has shown that individuals' personality traits and their propensity for feeling empathy are linked to affective polarization (Simas, Clifford and Kirkland, 2020; Webster, 2018), this study is among the first to show how multiple negatively-valenced dispositions shape partisan antipathy (Bower, 1991). In this sense, the results presented in this article both build upon and push forward a growing literature that focuses on the psychological underpinnings of the growing partisan negativity in contemporary American politics.

This remainder of this article proceeds as follows: first, I outline existing work on authoritarianism, schadenfreude, and affective polarization. Next, I develop a theory as to how these two dispositional forces should be expected to increase partisan animus in the United States. I then detail a new source of data and outline an empirical design to test the relationship between authoritarianism, schadenfreude, and affective polarization. I then present a series of results consistent with my theoretical expectations before concluding with some thoughts about the implication of these findings for American political behavior.

Authoritarianism, Schadenfreude, and Affective Polarization

Originating in psychological literatures, both authoritarianism and schadenfreude have been the recipients of increasing scholarly focus within political science. Drawing largely from Altemeyer's (1998) study of "right-wing authoritarianism," psychologists have demonstrated that those individuals who score high on measures of authoritarianism tend to be those who prioritize established hierarchies, are prone to following long-standing norms, and who obey authorities (see, e.g., Feldman, 2003). Individuals who score high on measures of authoritarianism also tend to exhibit greater amounts of intolerance (Corey, 2000). Phenotypically, authoritarianism is most common among those who score low on measures of openness to new experience and high on measures of conscientiousness (Sibley and Duckitt, 2008). Though authoritarianism can and does guide patterns of behavior, research has shown that the extent to which one acts on his or her authoritarian tendencies is largely a function of whether or not some societal threat is present. When a threat exists, "the manifestations of authoritarianism – intolerance, prejudice, punitiveness, and the like . . ." are magnified (Feldman and Stenner, 1997; Hetherington and Suhay, 2011).

Within political science, authoritarianism has been shown to produce polarization between Democrats and Republicans. Such a finding is attributable, in part, to the fact that self-identifying Republicans tend to score high on measures of authoritarianism; Democrats, on the other hand, score comparably lower on authoritarianism scales (Hetherington and Weiler, 2009). Yet, authoritarianism's ability to shape politics is not limited to interparty divides. On the contrary, recent work analyzing the 2016 Democratic presidential primary has shown that Democrats who scored high on authoritarianism were likely to vote for Hillary Clinton. By contrast, Democrats who scored lower on measures of authoritarianism were more likely to vote for Bernie Sanders (Wronski et al., 2018). Such a finding is due largely to the fact that authoritarianism has been linked to both conformity and establishmentarianism, and Clinton, as the candidate favored by

the Democratic establishment, was the beneficiary.

While authoritarianism largely pertains to one's relationship with existing hierarchies, authorities, and conventions, schadenfreude measures the extent to which an individual experiences "joy in the suffering of others." Schadenfreude is most typically expressed by those who are envious (van de Ven et al., 2015), vengeful (Sawada and Hayama, 2012), anti-social (Greitemeyer, Osswald and Brauer, 2010), low in self-esteem (van Dijk et al., 2011), and stand to gain from another's misfortune (Smith et al., 2009). Other work has shown that schadenfreude is not simply an individual-level dynamic. Instead, some argue that schadenfreude is most likely to be expressed when certain group dynamics are met. In particular, individuals are most likely to experience schadenfreude toward another group's suffering when they feel that their own group is inferior to the suffering group on some dimension or set of dimensions (Leach et al., 2003).

The Link to Affective Polarization

That authoritarianism can produce polarization has long been argued in the existing literature. Hetherington and Weiler (2009), for instance, argue that the differing amounts of authoritarianism exhibited by Democrats and Republicans in the mass public have led to an increasing divide on the two parties' stances on a myriad of issues, such as race relations, same-sex marriage, and immigration. This authoritarian divide in American politics also extends to views on foreign policy, with Hetherington and Weiler (2009) noting that preferences regarding military action in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks were bifurcated along high- and low-authoritarianism lines: the former preferred aggressive military reaction, while the latter group was more circumspect about the use of military force.

The differences in the parties' issue positions engendered by authoritarianism are likely to extend to affective ratings of the parties themselves. Indeed, a recent study by the Pew Research Center found that Americans tend to believe that a person's policy and political beliefs reflect their personal character. In fact, 70% of Democrats agreed that how someone thinks about

politics “says a lot” about the kind of person they are; a slightly smaller percentage, 63%, of Republicans said the same (Pew Research Center, 2016). With the distinction between “personal” and “political” disappearing, authoritarianism-fueled issue polarization should be expected to shape affective polarization as well.

Additionally, authoritarianism should be associated with greater amounts of affective polarization due to the psychological characteristics of the disposition. The extant literature indicates that individuals who score high on measures of authoritarianism tend to be highly committed to existing hierarchies, authorities, norms, and institutions. Thus, those who score high on measures of authoritarianism should have higher affective evaluations of their own party. Put another way, those individuals who are highly authoritarian should have higher affective ratings of the hierarchies, authorities, norms, and institutions unique to their own political lives – that is, their own political party. Conversely, there is no theoretical reason to assume that authoritarianism should be related to one’s views of the opposing party. Nevertheless, by increasing the extent to which one feels positively toward her own party, higher levels of authoritarianism will be associated with greater affective polarization among the mass public.

Schadenfreude, too, should be expected to have a link to higher levels of affective polarization. As discussed above, one of the key aspects determining whether an individual experiences schadenfreude pertains to group-level dynamics. Such an expectation comports with a large body of literature in social psychology that points to the importance of groups and group-level dynamics in shaping individual-level behavior. In particular, groups and group identities have been shown to affect the ways in which individuals think of themselves, others, and the groups to which people belong. Tajfel’s (1981) canonical work on groups, for instance, showed that individuals are prone to exhibiting in-group favoritism even when the groups to which individuals belong are entirely arbitrary (see also, Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Billig and Tajfel, 1973). Additionally, social psychologists have shown that individuals are prone to viewing members of out-groups negatively across multiple dimensions: they are more likely to believe that an

out-group member's failure is due to a lack of ability than bad luck, and they are more likely to perceive as important the characteristics and attributes that are typical of the in-group than those that are typical of the out-group (Hewstone, 1990). Collectively, these studies suggest that individuals exhibit in-group favoritism and out-group antipathy.

Importantly, these group-level dynamics have been observed across various settings. Because political parties and political beliefs increasingly function as social identities (Mason, 2018; Huddy, Mason and Aarøe, 2015), such patterns of behavior should also be observed within the political realm. The behavioral implication of the tendency for people to exhibit both in-group favoritism and out-group antipathy is that individuals should take some degree of satisfaction when misfortune befalls individuals outside of their own group. In fact, taking pleasure in the misfortune of one who belongs to the out-group is likely to further highlight the centrality, importance, and perceived righteousness of an individual's own group identity. Such an expectation has grounding in the extant literature, as scholars have shown that individuals are prone to engaging in group-level comparison (Buunk et al., 1990), that discriminating between in- and out-group members can lead to higher levels of self-esteem (Lemyre and Smith, 1985), and that people take pride in the high social standing of their own group (Smith and Tyler, 1997). By experiencing *schadenfreude*, or taking "joy in the suffering" of their political others, individuals will develop a greater affective distance between their own group (e.g. their own party) and the out-group (e.g. the opposing party). More specifically, experiencing *schadenfreude* should increase individuals' ratings of their own group by making their group look better, by comparison, to the group of an individual who is experiencing some misfortune.

Though I expect authoritarianism and *schadenfreude* to be linked to higher levels of affective polarization, these relationships should exist primarily – if not only – for self-identified Republicans. In terms of authoritarianism, the extant literature has argued that Republicans and those who are conservative in their world view tend to score higher on measures of authoritarianism than others (see, e.g., Hetherington and Weiler, 2009). Republicans also tend to score higher on

measures of conscientiousness, lower on measures of openness to new experiences, and are generally thought to be more deferential to existing hierarchies and authorities (Mondak et al., 2010; Gerber et al., 2010, 2012). Because authoritarianism and its associated characteristics are central to the Republican identity, authoritarianism should be a greater predictor of affective polarization for Republicans than for others.

Similarly, *schadenfreude* should be more important for Republicans than Democrats in terms of predicting levels of affective polarization. More than Democrats, those who self-identify as Republicans tend to be sensitive to threats (Huber et al., 2015). These threats, in particular, are concerned with maintaining the status and position of one's group (Mutz, 2018). Because Republicans are more sensitive to threats than Democrats, particularly in regards to threats to group status, they should be most likely to engage in behaviors and activities that seek to solidify their group's status. Emotions are one way in which intergroup relations and attitudes are formed and maintained. In fact, much of the psychological literature on emotions maintains that emotions "influence, when, and to what extent, people express positive or negative attitudes toward, and beliefs about, members of in- and outgroups" (DeSteno et al., 2004).

Schadenfreude is an emotion that is well suited toward the maintenance of one's group identity and the placement of that group vis-a-vis other social or political groups. *Schadenfreude* is most likely to be experienced when intergroup competition is high and when individuals strongly identify with their own group (Ouwwerkerk and van Dijk, 2014). Because American political competition in the current era is particularly fierce and acrimonious, and because partisanship can and does operate as an identity (Green, Palmquist and Schickler, 2002), opportunities for taking "joy in the suffering" of one's political others are readily available. That *schadenfreude* is likely to be experienced in contemporary American politics, combined with Republicans' overarching concern with group status, suggests that *schadenfreude* should be more likely among Republicans than Democrats.

Empirical Design

To test the relationship between authoritarianism, schadenfreude, and affective polarization, I draw on a unique dataset of over 3,000 Americans. Fielded in the Spring of 2019 via the Lucid academic platform, the survey asked respondents to answer a series of questions about dispositional traits, feelings towards the two major political parties, and a series of sociodemographic questions.¹ The data is 48% male, 56% Democratic, 44% Republican, and 38% of respondents have at least a Bachelors degree. Full summary statistics of the data can be found in Table 6 in the Appendix.

To measure how schadenfreude and authoritarianism are related to affective polarization, I run models with the following functional form:

$$Affective_i = \alpha + Disposition_i + \gamma X_i + \varepsilon_i,$$

where $Disposition_i$ measures individual i 's disposition toward authoritarianism or schadenfreude, depending on the model. To measure an individual's level of authoritarianism I asked survey respondents a series of questions pertaining to preferences regarding child rearing. Individuals were asked which trait from each of four different pairs they would prefer their child to have. Answers to these questions were then combined into an overall measure of authoritarianism, ranging from 0-4 (with higher values indicating a more authoritarian outlook). To measure an individual's dispositional level of schadenfreude, survey respondents were presented with a vignette about some misfortune befalling a new neighbor.² After reading these vignettes, individuals were asked to rate their level of agreement with three related statements derived from van de Ven et al. (2015). Agreement ranges from 0-6, where higher values indicate greater agreement.

¹For information on Lucid and its comparability to other survey platforms, as well as comparisons between Lucid and the American National Election Studies, see Coppock and McClellan (2018).

²Vignettes differed based off of an individual's stated partisan identification. The full text of the vignettes can be found in the Appendix.

Authoritarianism statements	Schadenfreude statements
(1) Which is a more important trait for a child to have: independence or respect for elders?	(1) I would be a little amused by what happened to [the individual].
(2) Which is a more important trait for a child to have: curiosity or good manners?	(2) I would be pleased by the little misfortune that happened to [the individual].
(3) Which is a more important trait for a child to have: obedience or self-reliance?	(3) I'd find it difficult to resist a smile.
(4) Which is a more important trait for a child to have: being considerate or well-behaved.	

Table 1: *Authoritarianism and Schadenfreude*. This table shows the statements used to create the scales measuring authoritarianism and schadenfreude. The most authoritarian individual would have answered "respect for elders," "good manners," "obedience," and "being considerate." The individual with the highest amount of schadenfreude would have answered "strongly agree" to each of the three statements.

Scores were then combined into an aggregate measure with possible values ranging from 0-18. The composite questions for each of these scales are shown in Table 1; the distributions of each of these measures are shown in Figure 1.

The dependent variable, *Affective_i*, captures the extent to which individual *i* is affectively polarized. It is measured by relying on individuals' responses to feeling thermometer ratings of the Democratic and Republican parties. These measures, which are widely used in studies of political behavior and public opinion, ask respondents to rate how they feel about a given person, group, or political party on a 0-100 scale. Higher values indicate more positive feelings. Affective polarization is captured by taking the absolute value of the difference between individuals' feeling thermometer ratings of their own and opposing parties. Higher values on this measure indicate a greater gap between the ratings individuals gave to their own and the opposing party and, thus, represent greater amounts of affective polarization. Because the dependent variable requires a partisan affiliation (e.g. the difference in affect between one's own party and the out-party), those respondents who identified as Independents were dropped from the analysis.³

³ Respondents who indicated that they are an Independent but lean toward one of the two parties were classified

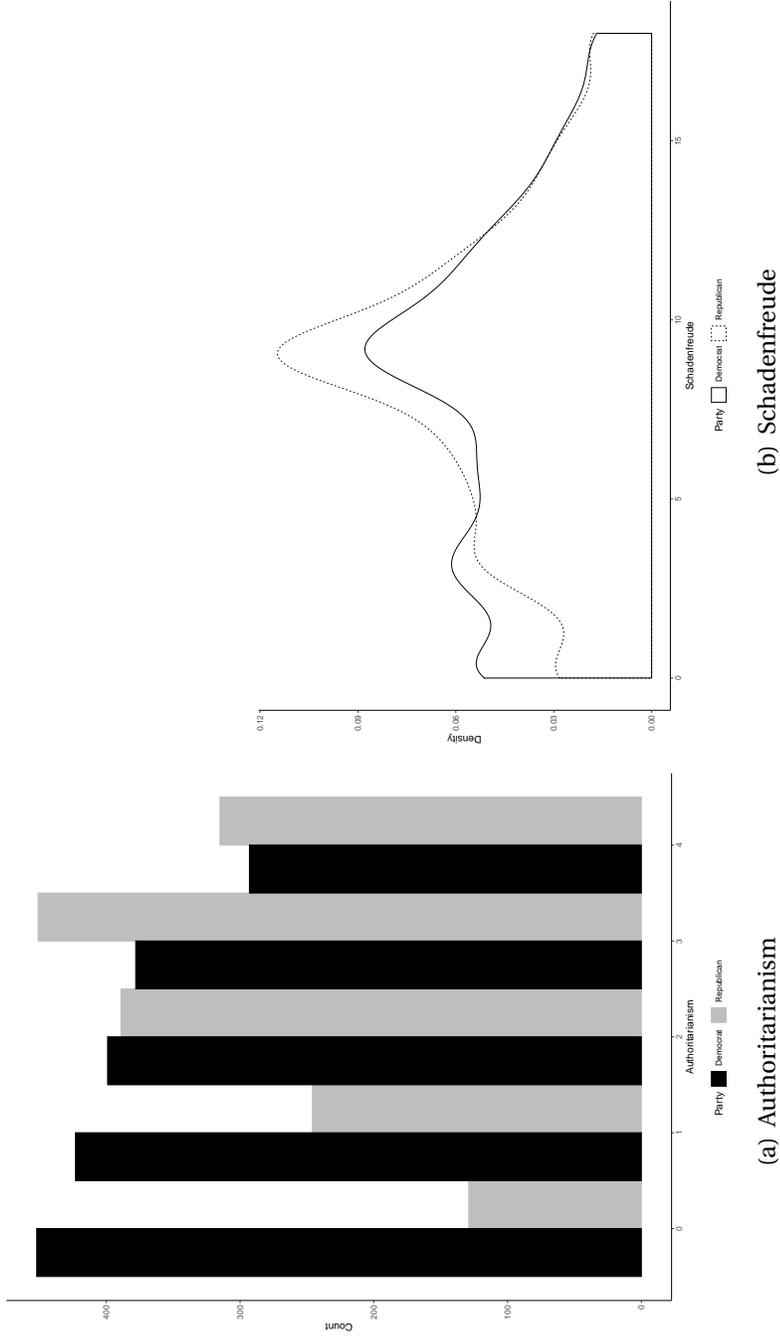


Figure 1: *Distribution of Authoritarianism & Schadenfreude*. These figures show the distribution of authoritarianism and schadenfreude by self-reported partisan identification.

To reduce bias in the estimates of the relationship between authoritarianism, schadenfreude, and affective polarization, I also include various controls captured by $\gamma\mathbf{X}_i$. Control variables include a dummy variable for non-White respondents, a dummy variable for male respondents, a discrete measure of each respondent's age in years, and a five-level measure of educational attainment ranging from no high school diploma to an advanced or professional degree. I also include an indicator variable for those who identify as "strong" Democrats or Republicans⁴, as well as a measure capturing each respondent's ideological extremity. This measure ranges from 1-7, where higher values indicate a more conservative (liberal) ideological orientation for Republicans (Democrats).

Results

The results of the regressions described above are shown in Tables 2 & 3. Table 2 shows the results of affective polarization regressed on authoritarianism; by contrast, Table 3 shows the results of affective polarization regressed on schadenfreude. For both the authoritarianism and schadenfreude regressions, I run three separate models: one on the pooled sample (both Democrats *and* Republicans), one on only Republican respondents, and one on only Democratic respondents.

The results shown in Table 2 suggest that an individual's disposition toward authoritarianism is not predictive of levels of affective polarization in the pooled sample. Similarly, authoritarianism is not predictive of affective polarization among Democratic respondents. However, among those individual who self-identify as Republicans, higher levels of authoritarianism predict greater amounts of affective polarization. Moving from the lowest to the highest amount of authoritarianism predicts a 5.84 point increase in affective polarization among Republicans.

as partisans.

⁴This measure takes on a value of one if an individual answers with either a one or a seven on the 7-point party identification scale and a zero otherwise.

This magnitude indicates that, among Republicans, the relationship between authoritarianism and affective polarization is stronger than that of race or gender.

Similar results emerge when examining the relationship between affective polarization and schadenfreude. With both the pooled sample and the Democratic models, schadenfreude is not related to affective polarization. However, as with the authoritarianism models, higher levels of schadenfreude are associated with a greater amount of affective polarization among self-identified Republicans. Among Republicans, moving from the lowest to the greatest amount of schadenfreude is associated with nearly an eight point increase in the amount of affective polarization exhibited. This increase in affective polarization associated with schadenfreude is greater in magnitude than changes in affective polarization associated with one's racial identity or gender.

The Nature of Affective Changes

The results shown above indicate that, among Republicans, higher levels of dispositional authoritarianism and schadenfreude are associated with increased affective polarization. In this sense, Tables 2 & 3 provide evidence in favor of my theoretical expectations. However, that authoritarianism and schadenfreude are associated with higher amounts of affective polarization for Republicans – that is, the “pulling apart” of affective evaluations of one's own party and the opposing party – does little to tell us about the precise nature of these affective shifts. Indeed, a growth in affective polarization could arise under three scenarios: an individual could grow to like their own party more, they could come to harbor greater dislike or resentment of the opposing party, or both of these scenarios could occur simultaneously.

While each of these scenarios seems plausible, the most likely scenario is that higher levels of authoritarianism and schadenfreude among Republicans are associated with greater affective polarization through increasing Republicans' affective evaluations of their own party. One reason for such an expectation centers on Republicans' ratings of the Democratic Party. In the data

	Affective Polarization		
	Full	GOP	Democrat
Authoritarianism	0.314 (0.364)	1.460** (0.581)	-0.526 (0.506)
Non-White	0.752 (1.109)	-2.329 (2.082)	2.057 (1.412)
Male	-2.985*** (0.942)	-1.977 (1.381)	-3.433*** (1.279)
Age	0.249*** (0.030)	0.160*** (0.045)	0.305*** (0.041)
Education	-0.938*** (0.353)	-2.145*** (0.515)	0.111 (0.481)
Ideological Extremity	4.227*** (0.366)	5.364*** (0.551)	3.211*** (0.505)
Strong Partisan	22.159*** (1.013)	23.860*** (1.513)	20.020*** (1.361)
Constant	7.693*** (2.569)	3.381 (3.626)	11.762*** (3.645)
N	3,095	1,366	1,729
R ²	0.251	0.322	0.212

* p < .1; ** p < .05; *** p < .01

Table 2: *Authoritarianism and Affective Polarization.* This table shows the relationship between individual-level authoritarianism and affective polarization. Among Republicans, higher levels of authoritarianism are associated with greater amounts of affective polarization.

	Affective Polarization		
	Full	GOP	Democrat
Schadenfreude	0.108 (0.104)	0.442*** (0.163)	-0.037 (0.135)
Non-White	0.711 (1.113)	-2.388 (2.094)	1.629 (1.395)
Male	-3.051*** (0.955)	-2.404* (1.400)	-3.323** (1.294)
Age	0.247*** (0.030)	0.166*** (0.045)	0.287*** (0.042)
Education	-1.000*** (0.347)	-2.373*** (0.511)	0.234 (0.472)
Ideological Extremity	4.136*** (0.366)	5.353*** (0.555)	3.320*** (0.494)
Strong Partisan	22.328*** (1.024)	23.808*** (1.537)	20.274*** (1.372)
Constant	8.186*** (2.514)	3.626 (3.622)	11.194*** (3.490)
N	3,063	1,353	1,710
R ²	0.253	0.323	0.213

* p < .1; ** p < .05; *** p < .01

Table 3: Schadenfreude and Affective Polarization. This table shows the relationship between individual-level schadenfreude and affective polarization. Among Republicans, higher levels of schadenfreude are associated with greater amounts of affective polarization.

used here, the median feeling thermometer ratings that Republicans gave the Democratic Party was 20.⁵ With ratings of the opposing party already so low, there is less room for dispositional forces to further shift Republicans' ratings of the Democratic Party downward. Conversely, the median affective rating that Republicans gave their own party is 75.⁶ Accordingly, there is more room for affective ratings of the in-party to increase than there is room for affective ratings of the out-party to decrease.

Most importantly, we should expect authoritarianism and *schadenfreude* to increase Republicans' views of their own party due to the nature of these dispositional forces. To begin, I examine the nature of the shifts in affective polarization as authoritarianism increases. As mentioned above, individuals who score high on measures of authoritarianism tend to prioritize the maintenance of traditional hierarchies and submission to established authorities. Thus, authoritarians should feel more positively toward their own party – that is, the established hierarchies and authorities that are germane to this context. To see whether this expectation receives empirical support, I regressed feeling thermometer scores of the in- and out-party on the same list of variables shown in Table 2. These results of these regressions are shown in Table 4. Because the relationship between authoritarianism and affective polarization appears to only hold for self-identified Republicans, I restrict my analyses in this section to only Republicans.

The results of the models displayed in Table 4 suggest that, among self-identified Republicans, higher levels of authoritarianism are associated with higher affective ratings of the Republican Party. Comparing the coefficients among the models in Table 4 that have been standardized to range from 0-1, the relationship between authoritarianism and feeling thermometer ratings of the in-party among Republicans is stronger than the relationship between the race and gender dummy variables, as well as the measure of age; the measure of authoritarianism is on par with the strength of the education measure.⁷ By contrast, authoritarianism has no connection

⁵The mean rating Republicans gave the Democratic Party was 25.92.

⁶The mean rating is 71.

⁷The table that replicates Table 4 but standardizes all variables to range from 0-1 can be found in the Appendix

	FT Own Party	FT Other Party
Authoritarianism	1.333*** (0.438)	-0.689 (0.481)
Non-White	-1.523 (1.581)	3.102* (1.724)
Male	-1.955* (1.036)	0.733 (1.143)
Age	-0.050 (0.033)	-0.177*** (0.037)
Education	-1.653*** (0.389)	0.763* (0.426)
Ideological Extremity	1.859*** (0.416)	-4.573*** (0.456)
Strong Partisan	19.699*** (1.130)	-6.000*** (1.254)
Constant	56.123*** (2.761)	60.083*** (3.002)
N	1,509	1,367
R ²	0.252	0.168

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

Table 4: *Republicans and Authoritarianism*. This table shows the relationship between authoritarianism and feeling thermometer ratings of the in- and out-party among Republicans.

to Republicans' views of the Democratic Party. These findings lend support to the theoretical expectation that authoritarianism should increase affective polarization mainly through its relationship to an individual's affective ratings of her own party.

	FT Own Party	FT Other Party
Schadenfreude	0.446*** (0.121)	-0.031 (0.134)
Non-White	-1.947 (1.587)	2.964* (1.728)
Male	-2.543** (1.049)	0.703 (1.155)
Age	-0.041 (0.033)	-0.168*** (0.037)
Education	-1.843*** (0.385)	0.911** (0.421)
Ideological Extremity	1.825*** (0.418)	-4.518*** (0.458)
Strong Partisan	19.445*** (1.145)	-6.537*** (1.268)
Constant	56.156*** (2.732)	57.899*** (2.986)
N	1,496	1,354
R ²	0.255	0.165

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

Table 5: *Republicans and Schadenfreude*. This table shows the relationship between schadenfreude and feeling thermometer ratings of the in- and out-party among Republicans.

To examine the precise ways in which schadenfreude is related to affective polarization among Republicans, I adopt the same approach as with authoritarianism and affective polarization. Thus, I separately regress feeling thermometer ratings of the in- and out-party and schadenfreude plus the series of control variables described above. The results of these regressions, shown in Table 5, are remarkably similar to those derived from the authoritarianism models. The results in column one indicate that Republicans with higher amounts of schadenfreude (Table 7).

express warmer feelings toward their own party. However, as with the relationship between authoritarianism and affective polarization, schadenfreude is not related to Republicans' views of the Democratic Party. This suggests that, like authoritarianism, schadenfreude is linked to higher levels of affective polarization primarily through its relationship with higher affective ratings of one's own political party. A standardized version of Table 5, available in the Appendix, indicates that the relationship between schadenfreude and affective polarization among Republicans is greater than the relationship between affective polarization and race, gender, age, and education.

Threats to Inference

Consistent with my theoretical arguments, the results I have presented show that authoritarianism and schadenfreude are associated with greater amounts of affective polarization among self-identified Republicans. However, the results presented above are observationally equivalent with a story in which higher amounts of affective polarization lead individuals to exhibit higher amounts of authoritarian beliefs and engage in schadenfreude when misfortune befalls supporters of the opposing political party. While the nature of these data do not allow for an adjudication as to which way the direction of causality runs, matters of theory suggest that any causal relationship is likely to run from authoritarianism and schadenfreude to affective polarization.

The earliest conceptions of authoritarianism believed it to be stable across an individual's lifetime (Altemeyer, 1981). More recent studies have corroborated this view of authoritarianism being a stable disposition. For instance, utilizing participants in the Minnesota Twin Registry database, Ludeke and Krueger (2013) found that the over time correlation – 15 years – in respondents' authoritarianism was a remarkably strong .74. Moreover, this correlation was obtained despite the fact that Ludeke and Krueger (2013) used different measures of authoritarianism between waves one and two in their survey. Though using different measures should “attenuate the correlation between them, [the authors] nevertheless observed a very high degree of rank-order

stability" (Ludeke and Krueger, 2013). The conclusion, then, is that authoritarianism is generally stable and is best conceived of as being akin to a personality trait.

Moreover, the nature of the questions used to measure authoritarianism make it unlikely that affective polarization exerts any sort of causal influence on individuals' dispositional levels of authoritarianism. The questions used to measure levels of authoritarianism in this study focused on individuals' preferences in regards to child rearing. Given the vastly different thematic foci of child rearing and attitudes toward the Democratic and Republican parties, it is unlikely that views on the latter subject cause changes in attitudes regarding the former.

Whether schadenfreude exhibits over-time stability is more of an open question. While it is the case that schadenfreude is experienced to varying degrees depending upon situational contexts and intergroup dynamics, there are both unique and stable individual-level factors that predict one's likelihood of engaging in schadenfreude when situations for doing so arise. In particular, research indicates that individuals who exhibit higher amounts of "negative" personality traits are more likely to experience schadenfreude (James et al., 2014; Porter et al., 2014). These "negative" traits include narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, which, collectively, are referred to as the "dark triad." Because personality traits, including those that comprise the "dark triad," are believed to develop early in the course of one's life and exhibit temporal stability once formed (Cobb-Clark and Schurer, 2012; McCrae and Costa, 1994), it is likely that at least some portion of an individual's tendency to experience schadenfreude is due to personal dispositions that are orthogonal to any political stimulus.

Despite evidence suggesting one's propensity to engage in schadenfreude is innate, it is almost certainly the case that schadenfreude and affective polarization are – to an extent – mutually reinforcing phenomena. The results presented above suggest that, among Republicans, higher levels of schadenfreude are associated with greater amounts of affective polarization and that this increase in affective polarization is attributable to Republicans who are experiencing schadenfreude displaying greater affective ratings of their own party. Yet, it is likely that higher

evaluations of one's own group (i.e. one's own political party) facilitates an environment in which experiencing schadenfreude at the out-group's misfortune is more likely. Indeed, as group identities harden and become more central to individuals, it is probably that experiencing "joy in the suffering" of others becomes easier. Whether this feedback loop between schadenfreude and affective polarization exists, and the precise extent to which one is more important than the other, is a promising area for future research.

Conclusion & Discussion

Contemporary American politics is characterized by high levels of partisan animosity. Compared to previous eras, Democrats and Republicans in the electorate increasingly dislike each other. This dislike, known as affective polarization, has been shown to have roots in both ideological-based disagreements and group-oriented conflict. In this paper, I have shown that the sources of affective polarization in the American electorate run deeper than policy disputes or group-based competition. Indeed, the results presented here suggest that affective polarization is perpetuated by dispositional forces that are unique to each individual. Specifically, I have shown how higher levels of authoritarianism and schadenfreude are both associated with higher levels of affective polarization. However, unlike prior work in this area (Luttig, 2017), my results indicate that these relationships are related to affective polarization only for those individuals who self-identify as a Republican.

Future work should continue to examine the dispositional sources of affective polarization among the American electorate. For example, are those whose disposition tends towards altruism more sympathetic in dealing with those who hold different political views? If so, then dispositional forces may not be associated only with higher levels of affective polarization; on the contrary, it is possible that some dispositional characteristics are associated with *lower* amounts of affective polarization. Relatedly, scholars should examine the ways in which dispositional

characteristics interact in order to shape levels of affective polarization. The preceding analysis has shown that, among Republicans, authoritarianism and schadenfreude are linked to higher levels of affective polarization. However, it might be the case that some other trait – for instance, empathy – attenuates the relationship between authoritarianism, schadenfreude, and affective polarization.

Though the results presented in this paper suggest myriad avenues for future research, they also yield normatively troubling implications for American politics. To the extent affective polarization harms democratic discourse and contributes to the paralysis of the legislative process within the federal government, seeking remedies to the growing amount of mass-level antipathy is desirable. If it was purely a function of societal influences, designing institutions and structures that mitigate the deleterious effects of affective polarization would be possible. If, however, affective polarization has roots in individual-level dispositional characteristics, as this and other studies have begun to demonstrate, then reducing mass-level animus may be extraordinarily difficult. The results of this study, then, suggest that – for at least one half of the American political divide – affective polarization may be an intractable feature of modern life.

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Schadenfreude Vignettes

For Democratic respondents: Suppose a new resident of your neighborhood had previously identified as a Democrat. However, during the most recent election, she voted straight-ticket for Republicans. She has subsequently lost her health insurance, which was provided to her through government subsidies. How would you feel about this?

For Republican respondents: Suppose a new resident of your neighborhood had previously identified as a Republican. However, during the most recent election, she voted straight-ticket for Democrats. She has subsequently seen her amount of take-home pay each month decrease due to tax increases. How would you feel about this?

Tables

Statistic	N	Proportion
Male	1671	.481
Democrat	1945	.560
Republican	1530	.440
Bachelors Degree	1321	.380
White	2472	.712
Black	412	.119
Hispanic	315	.091

Table 6: *Summary Statistics of Data.* This table shows summary statistics for the data used in this paper.

	FT Own Party	FT Other Party
Authoritarianism	5.334*** (1.751)	-2.757 (1.925)
Non-White	-1.523 (1.581)	3.102* (1.724)
Male	-1.955* (1.036)	0.733 (1.143)
Age	-3.578 (2.389)	-12.739*** (2.660)
Education	-6.612*** (1.557)	3.053* (1.706)
Ideological Extremity	11.155*** (2.497)	-27.435*** (2.738)
Strong Partisan	19.699*** (1.130)	-6.000*** (1.254)
Constant	57.088*** (2.271)	52.326*** (2.466)
N	1,509	1,367
R ²	0.252	0.168

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

Table 7: *Authoritarianism and Affective Polarization, among Republicans (standardized)*. This table replicates the models found in Table 4 but standardizes each variable to range from 0-1.

	FT Own Party	FT Other Party
Schadenfreude	8.025*** (2.179)	-0.556 (2.420)
Non-White	-1.947 (1.587)	2.964* (1.728)
Male	-2.543** (1.049)	0.703 (1.155)
Age	-2.981 (2.399)	-12.123*** (2.666)
Education	-7.371*** (1.540)	3.645** (1.685)
Ideological Extremity	10.951*** (2.508)	-27.109*** (2.746)
Strong Partisan	19.445*** (1.145)	-6.537*** (1.268)
Constant	57.236*** (2.214)	50.351*** (2.419)
N	1,496	1,354
R ²	0.255	0.165

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

Table 8: *Schadenfreude and Affective Polarization, among Republicans (standardized)*. This table replicates the models found in Table 5 but standardizes each variable to range from 0-1.