

Authoritarianism and Social Identity: Explorations into Partisan Polarization

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Abstract

Recent research has suggested that current polarization in American politics represents a “worldview evolution” of ideas that has split the public along the autonomy—conformity dimension of authoritarianism. Building upon this argument, I offer an alternative mechanism through which authoritarian dispositions may shape the nature of partisan conflict, by incorporating social identity theory into a “group-based” model of authoritarianism. As the two parties provide clear stereotypes of their leaders and members to the mass public, I hypothesize that authoritarian dispositions lead citizens to view their partisan in-group as a “*convergent*” partisan identity which assimilates their other social identities, and this more psychologically durable identity, in turn, leads to greater affective partisan attachments. With a nationally representative sample, I explore how authoritarian dispositions differentially impact citizens’ perceptions that 1) their social groups possess more overlapping members; 2) their party identity reflects a “convergent” partisan identity that encompasses the members of their other social in-groups; and 3) their in-party is best characterized by strong, cohesive leadership, and members who all share the same belief systems. I also test how authoritarianism, mediated through perceptions of a “convergent” partisan identity, intensifies party affiliations. Overall, I demonstrate that authoritarianism significantly shapes citizens’ views of their social in-groups and their partisan identity, such that high authoritarians cognitively perceive their in-party as a cohesive, singular identity to which they are much more strongly, and affectively, attached.

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Recent theoretical and empirical work suggests that political attitudes and identities in the mass public are meaningfully associated with personality dispositions (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, and Sulloway 2003; Jost, Federico & Napier, 2009; Gerber et al 2010; Mondak 2010). Of these myriad traits, *authoritarianism* – a personal disposition pitting preferences for individual autonomy against group-level conformity (Altemeyer 1988; Feldman 2003; Stenner 2005) – has received particular attention for its critical role in shaping ideological positions and partisan polarization in current American politics (Barker & Tinnick 2006; Hetherington & Weiler 2009; Hetherington & Suhay 2011). Conceptualized as needs for order, security, and certainty, Hetherington & Weiler (2009) argue that authoritarianism has structured a “worldview evolution” of ideas that has split the public along the autonomy—conformity dimension of authoritarianism. Put simply, citizens possessing stronger authoritarian dispositions gravitate towards the Republican Party on the basis of their conservative ideological positions on social issues made salient during the “culture war” debate.

But this general approach to authoritarianism-driven partisanship possesses some fundamental flaws. First, it is a-theoretical in the sense that it treats authoritarianism as a stable trait that universally produces support for conservative elites and their right-wing policies, without providing a contextual mechanism beyond sorting that explains *why* authoritarianism characterizes these ideological shifts. This line of work also ignores the role of partisan identity in the polarization process, instead simply treating identity as an outcome of ideological constraint and realignment towards an increasingly conservative Republican Party. Indeed, Hetherington & Weiler (2009) admit the fact that few Americans are ideological (see also Converse 1964; Zaller 1992), and suggest that “ideology and issues are not really the main places to look for evidence of polarization in ordinary Americans.” (pg. 195) Party demographics (e.g. ethnic, religious, and regional compositions) have also shifted since the “issue evolution” of the social domain, such that today’s parties provide clear stereotypes that represent their leadership structures and membership to the mass public (see Fiorina, Abrams & Pope 2011). These stereotypes, in turn, affect citizens’ social identities (Tajfel & Turner 1979) as partisans (Campbell, Converse, Miller & Stokes 1960; Green, Palmquist & Schickler 2002). With such clear membership stereotypes permeating the political discourse,

citizens can more readily feel the “oneness” and “sameness” consistent with authoritarianism among their fellow partisans (Stenner 2005), particularly when their party’s membership actually reflects demographic homogeneity. Indeed, authoritarianism, and its correlated needs for order, certainty, and security, is primarily concerned with maintaining stable patterns of interactions in society and reducing the fear of social disorder from unconventional “outsiders” (Feldman 2003; Stenner 2005). If authoritarianism is driving the current partisan conflict, this process should be predominantly propelled by how the parties’ leaders and members provide uniformity or autonomy; and not necessarily by their ideological stances on salient issues.

Thus, the current paper proposes and empirically tests an alternate mechanism by which authoritarianism influences citizens’ partisan identities. Building upon social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner 1979) and social identity complexity theory (Roccas & Brewer 2002), I argue that individuals high in authoritarianism attach themselves to political parties on the basis of two core group structures – *tight cohesion* embodied by its leadership, and *overlapping social identities* of its members. As such, citizens perceive their in-party as possessing these traits differentially across the authoritarian dimension, *independent* of existing ideological inclinations. Additionally, I suggest that authoritarianism is associated with citizens’ perceptions of their party identification as a “*convergent*” *partisan identity* – a superordinate social identity that encompasses all members of an individual’s salient social groups into a singular in-group entity.

When citizens view their partisan identities as a “convergent” partisan identity that amalgamates their other salient social identities, they create stronger psychological bonds with their party as it becomes their ultimate source positive social esteem (via Social Identity Theory, Tajfel & Turner 1979). When authoritarianism drives the convergent partisan identity, it should also form a qualitatively different type of partisan attachment for these individuals – one in which citizens’ partisanship resembles sports fanships – that taps into the party identity’s importance, appropriateness, and inclusiveness (Huddy, Mason & Aaroe, 2010; Huddy & Khatib 2007). This kind of partisan identity as a social identity has revealed the emotional intensification by which identity can drive long-standing attachments

(Campbell et al 1960; Green, Palmquist & Schickler 2002), political behavior (Huddy et al 2010), and even partisan polarization (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). As such, this paper proposes an alternate mechanism by which authoritarianism has structured partisanship in recent American politics; a mechanism that is ideologically content-free because it relies upon more ultimate cognitive, motivational, and emotional perceptions and attachments to one's partisan identity.

The goals of the current paper are as follows: First, I re-conceptualize authoritarianism as a group-based construct (Duckitt 1989), wherein individuals seek to establish social order through overlapping group identities. Second, utilizing a nationally representative survey of adults, I empirically test the core assumptions that group-based authoritarianism differentially predicts citizens' perceptions that 1) their social groups possess more overlapping members; 2) their party identity reflects a "convergent" partisan identity that encompasses the members of their other social in-groups; and 3) their in-party is best characterized by strong, internally cohesive leadership, and members who all share the same belief systems. Finally, with the same data, I extend the theoretical model of group-based authoritarianism to partisan attachment. Overall, I demonstrate that authoritarianism significantly shapes citizens' views of their social in-groups and their partisan identity, such that high authoritarians cognitively perceive their in-party as a cohesive, singular identity to which they are much more strongly, and affectively, attached.

Authoritarianism & Social Identity Theory: A Group-based Framework

While authoritarianism has been conceptualized as a set of personality-driven social values (Duckitt & Fisher, 2003; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008) and measured as an innate predisposition for submission to a legitimate authoritative entity that upholds the current social order (see Altemeyer, 1988; Feldman, 2003; Stenner, 2005), extant literature on the topic has failed to explain *how* authoritarians determine which authorities they submit to, and which social orders they strive to defend. Further, authoritarian submission is, in practice, a measurement construct – any variance in authoritarian submission reflects an individual's position on the autonomy-conformity dimension (Feldman 2003). This

measurement limitation ignores the structural aspects of one's group-based identities and how they influence the quality of authoritarian submission.

Building on earlier work that describes group-based authoritarianism (Duckitt, 1989; Duckitt & Fisher, 2003), I too take the position that social group attachments are integral to the manifestation of authoritarian belief systems, attitudes, and behavioral tendencies. However, I also suggest that certain attributes of social groups (e.g. cohesiveness, overlapping memberships) make them differentially appealing to authoritarians. As such, high authoritarians affiliate with political groups not on the basis of the group's ideology or issue positions, but on the type of social order and structure the group identity provides.

The Authoritarian Disposition

In the sixty years since the concept of authoritarianism was introduced by Adorno, et al. (1950), political psychologists have empirically tested and refined the dimensions of this personality trait. Latent dispositions typically correlated with the authoritarianism construct consist of greater needs for order, structure, and closure; intolerance for confusion, ambiguity, and uncertainty; and increased reliance on established authorities to provide order (Jost et al., 2003; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Hetherington & Weiler, 2009). Further, Duckitt subcategorizes authoritarianism based upon individuals' beliefs that the world is dangerous (Duckitt, 2001) into the following dimensions: authoritarianism (desire to maintain coercive social control), conservatism (drive to maintain existing status quo), and traditionalism (expression of morality values). These dimensions are similar to Altemeyer's (1988) three clusters of attitudes – authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conformity, which have been since reconstructed as a continuum between individual autonomy and group conformity (Feldman 2003).

This conceptualization along the autonomy—conformity continuum considers people's orientations towards society as interactions between latent dispositions and perceived social threat (Feldman & Stenner 1997; Feldman 2003; Stenner 2005). This view encompasses Altemeyer's aggression, conventionalism and submission clusters (Altemeyer 1988) concurrently with environmental factors. Such factors entail authoritarians' fears that stable patterns of interactions among members in a

society will break down resulting in large-scale social disorder (Feldman 2003; Wrong 1994). With these components, Stenner (2005) thus defines the authoritarian dimension as “an individual predisposition concerned with the appropriate balance between group authority and uniformity, on the one hand, and individual autonomy and diversity, on the other,” where the characteristic attitudes of authoritarianism emerge in the presence of normative threats. Given the interaction between personality traits and environmental threats, Sibley & Duckitt (2008, see also Duckitt, 2001) treat authoritarianism as a social attitude that emerges out of this dynamic. Overall, these conceptualizations of authoritarianism place the unit of analysis at the individual, rather than the group level.

Believing that the individual-level approach to authoritarianism was reductionist and failed to address key group phenomenon, such as prejudice and ethnocentrism, Duckitt (1989) provided an alternate framework in which the three authoritarian clusters (see Altemeyer 1988, Feldman 2003) directly stem from group processes. As such, he defined authoritarianism as “simply the individual or group’s conception of the relationship which should exist . . . between the group and its individual members.” (Duckitt, 1989, pg. 71) From his perspective, authoritarian dispositions reflect the intensity with which individuals emotionally identify with a given social group. Relating this definition to the autonomy—conformity construct, as an individual becomes more committed to the group (e.g. the Democratic or Republican Party), she will subvert all individual-level needs and values as completely as possible to the cohesion of the group and its requirements. Authoritarian submission, aggression, and conformity are thus consequences of strong in-group attachments.

While Duckitt’s (1989) theory enhances the autonomy—conformity interpretation of authoritarianism with the linkage to group identities; it possesses an inherent flaw. Primarily, he ignores the fact that strong social identities are not exclusively held by high authoritarians; such that individual-level autonomy and group attachment are not mutually exclusive constructs. Thus, Duckitt’s explanation fails to account for people who possess strong in-group affiliations to groups which are characterized by tolerance of ambiguity and openness to new experiences. Other *structural features* of social groups must, therefore, predict authoritarians’ strong attachments. By utilizing Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner,

1979), and Social Identity Complexity Theory (Roccas & Brewer 2002), I identify the structural group features most appealing to authoritarians. Exploration of these group features should reveal the underlying nature of authoritarians' social identities, as well as the group-level processes by which they manifest authoritarian submission and conformity.

How Authoritarianism Informs Social Identities

As individuals interact with one another through social groups, they form a social identity or “that part of an individuals' self-concept derived from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to this membership.” (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255) In their seminal work on Social Identity Theory, Tajfel & Turner (1979) present two big ideas regarding individuals' social preferences. The first, cognitively-based aspect, known as self-categorization theory (see Turner et al., 1987), posits that people routinely categorize themselves as members of myriad social groups; and can be made aware of these memberships. The second, motivational aspect postulates that individuals strive for a positive self-concept and in the process utilize favorable connotations of their social in-groups, as compared to other out-groups, in order to bolster their self-esteem. This motivational process further contains an emotional component in which people feel a sense of closeness to their in-groups (see Huddy, et al., 2010 for an example).

When applying authoritarianism to social identities, social identity serves two functions for authoritarians by providing security in the face of social threats (see Optimal Distinctiveness Theory, Brewer & Caporael 2006; Brewer 2007), and positive self-esteem through denigration of non-conformist out-groups (Brown 2000). Furthermore, each of the three aspects of social identity (cognitive, motivational, and emotional) relates to specific facets of the authoritarian disposition. For instance, cognitive categorization in a group should minimize ambiguity, whereas the motivational and emotional attachment to a group should promulgate authoritarian submission. In order for political groups (i.e. the Democratic or Republican Party) to provide these functions of social identity, individuals must *subjectively* perceive (Huddy 2001) them as possessing the structures necessary to address their predispositions on the autonomy—conformity dimension.

To identify these key group structures, I draw upon social identity complexity theory (Roccas & Brewer 2002). An individual's social identity complexity refers to the subjective representation of multiple self-selected in-group identities (e.g. church membership, ethnicity) as having varying degrees of overlapping group prototypes and membership (e.g. all Christians are White; and all Whites are Christian). Those who perceive a high overlap possess a social identity in which "different in-groups are actually conceived as a single *convergent* social identity." (Roccas & Brewer, 2002, pg. 95) Contrastingly, those whose group memberships represent myriad prototypes that share little in common will be said to possess a *complex* social identity (see Figure 1, Panel 1 for examples of convergent and complex social identity representations).

Importantly, this subjective concept of overlapping group membership is a function of an individual's motivational needs for certainty and their cognitive complexity to mentally integrate various group representations (see Tetlock 1983). The antecedents of social identity complexity – operationalized by need for closure and uncertainty orientation (Roccas & Brewer, 2002) and need for cognition (Miller, et al., 2009) – encompass an individual's predilection to form a clear-cut representation of his social world. When individuals are epistemically uncomfortable with ambiguity and confusion, they will compartmentalize their social identity into a *convergent singular* identity that represents the intersection of their multiple group memberships. Given their needs for certainty, cognitive closure, and intolerance of ambiguity, authoritarians should therefore view their social identity as more convergent than low authoritarians.

Additionally, Roccas & Brewer (2002) discovered that induced threat led to increased perceptions of in-groups being more similar to each other. Their results indicated that certain types of negative affect, like stressful mood or anxiety, depleted the cognitive resources necessary to process and integrate more complex and inclusive group memberships. Such findings reflect similar work done on induced threat, information processing, and need for cognitive closure in authoritarians (see Lavine, Lodge, Polichak & Taber 2002; Lavine, et al., 2005; Thorisdottir & Jost, 2011). In a synergistic fashion, as authoritarians perceive greater social threat, their multiple group identities should converge upon a social identity with

intense group cohesion and conformity. Because so much of one's projected self-concept and sense of security is embedded within this converged identity; these group attachments are, by necessity, strong and unwavering. Relating back to Duckitt's (1989) model of group-based authoritarianism, the intense group affiliations that drive authoritarian submission and conformity are in fact by-products of the cohesiveness and convergence of the authoritarian's singular identity.

In addition to this more concrete cognitive concept, authoritarians' subjective perceptions of their social identities should be motivated by their strong need for security. Threats to an authoritarian's social order are, in actuality, threats to her positive self-concept and safety in such a distinctive identity categorization (i.e., the two functions of social identity see also Tajfel & Turner 1979). Thus, authoritarians are attracted to political groups that require strong conformity from its members in order to induce a sense of collective security, and those which strive to secure their place in the hierarchal status of society (Duckitt & Fisher 2003). Cohesive political groups with strong internal leadership allow for individual-level assimilation while simultaneously providing distinct group-level self-conceptualizations. For authoritarians, highly cohesive political groups whose members all share the same beliefs and values (regardless of what those values entail) serve as a source of social meaning and stability, and provide a collective coping response to external threats (Ellemers, Spears & Doosje 2002).

The "Convergent" Partisan Identity and Party Attachment

On the basis of the literature reviewed above, I propose that the functional "match" between political groups and authoritarian dispositions is constituted on *cohesive, overlapping group identities*. These two group traits should appeal to authoritarians independent of any ideological content regarding the values or belief systems of society (e.g., the salient "culture war" issues that Hetherington & Weiler (2009) argue structure authoritarian-based polarization). Further, the partisan identity subsequently formed on these traits, I from here on out refer to as the *"convergent" partisan identity*.

The "convergent" partisan identity explains why citizens possess such strong party attachments (Campbell, et al. 1960; Green, Palmquist & Schickler 2002; Iyengar, Sood & Lelkes 2012). Take, for example, a stereotypical Democrat, portrayed in the media as an "agnostic, professional, urban northern

female.” (Fiorina, Abrams & Pope, 2011, pg. 4) Her Democratic “convergent” partisan identity would entail a perception that the Democratic Party included all of these different social groups, and that *all* females, agnostics, urban professionals, and northerners were also Democrats. In this case, she would be strongly attached to the Democratic Party, because her sense of positive self-identity (Tajfel & Turner 1979) and security in a stable social order (Brewer 2007; Feldman 2003), is entirely tied into her identity as a Democrat (see Figure 1, Panel 2 right side). On the other hand, if this same Democrat possessed a more *complex* partisan identity (see Figure 1, Panel 2 left side), she would recognize that the Democratic Party also includes men, non-professionals, and southerners; and that some women, professionals, northerners, and even agnostics are Republican. Knowing that not all aspects of her social identity are indelibly linked to the Democratic Party, her identity as a Democrat would be weaker. As authoritarian dispositions lead to a more “convergent” partisan identity, this identity, in turn, intensifies group affiliations (Duckitt 1989) that embody the “fundamental and overwhelming desire to establish and defend *some* collective order of oneness and sameness.” (Stenner 2005)

Current Study and Hypotheses

The current paper empirically tests the core assumptions of the group-based authoritarianism theoretical framework posited above. In particular, using a nationally representative survey of adults, I plan to show that authoritarianism differentially predicts how individuals *perceive* their partisan identity as encompassing their other social identities, and possessing cohesive leadership structures. This first step in this process is to demonstrate that authoritarianism influences perceptions of overlapping member similarity across multiple in-groups such that:

H1: Individuals higher in authoritarianism will perceive increased overlapping social identities among their salient in-groups.

In similar fashion, authoritarianism is expected to affect individuals’ perceptions of their political party’s members as encompassing citizens who all share their same social identities. Yet, while authoritarians, regardless of their party affiliation, *should* perceive the membership composition of their in-party in a cognitively concrete fashion; the contextual realities of party membership stereotypes may condition this

subjective process. In current American politics, the Democratic Party has become known as a party which encompasses racial diversity and inclusion (Edsall & Edsall 1991; Black 2004), while the Republican Party has increasingly been viewed as representing a small core constituency, described most recently by focus groups in a RNC report as “narrow minded,” “stuffy old men,” who are “the party of the rich.”¹ With these contrasting stereotypes of party member demographics, it is possible that the effects of authoritarianism on “convergent” partisan identity perceptions may reflect heterogeneity in that:

H2: Individuals higher in authoritarianism will be more likely to perceive a “convergent” partisan identity.

H2a: This effect will be conditional upon which party individuals affiliate with, such that Republicans will exhibit a greater “convergent” partisan identity.

Additionally, authoritarianism should influence citizens’ perceptions of their in-party as being a cohesive political organization with tight leadership control, namely:

H3: Individuals higher in authoritarianism will be more likely to characterize their in-party as having members who all share similar beliefs, and possesses a strong internal leadership structure.

Finally, I examine the broader impact of my group-based authoritarianism model on partisan affiliations such that:

H4: Individuals higher in authoritarianism will exhibit stronger social identity attachments to their in-party, as mediated through their “convergent” partisan identity.

Methods

Nationally Representative Survey

To test my hypothesized effects of authoritarianism, I conducted a nation-wide random digit dial (RDD) phone survey. Households were contacted from September 4 - October 10, 2012, with a total of 232 adults participating in the survey. Respondents were asked to list the various social groups they belonged to, make comparisons between the members of these groups, characterize members of the

¹ The “Growth and Opportunity Project” report (<http://growthopp.gop.com/default.aspx>), and New York Times article: “Blunt Report Says G.O.P. Needs to Regroup for ‘16” published 3/18/13 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/19/us/politics/republicans-plan-overhaul-for-2016-primary-season.html>)

Republican and Democratic Party in terms of their social groups, rate each political party on various organizational traits, and provide personal values and demographics. The majority of respondents were female (60%), White (81%), and, on average, older than the general population (mean = 58.5 years old, sd = 16 years). Most respondents identified with one of the two major parties, and were evenly split between Democratic and Republican parties (Rep = 44%, Dem=44%, Independents = 12.5%).

Measuring Authoritarianism

As the main independent variable, four items operationalized the construct of authoritarianism. Much research on authoritarianism suggests that this personal disposition is strongly related to aversion to ambiguity and sensitivity towards threats to the social order (e.g., Lavine, et al. 2002; Feldman, 2003; see Jost et al. 2003 for a meta-analysis). Consistent with recent work (Feldman and Stenner 1997; Hetherington and Suhay 2011; Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Stenner 2005), authoritarianism was measured by asking respondents to make four pairwise comparisons of values, and to indicate which value in each pair they consider more important for a child to possess. The comparisons included, “Independent or Respect for Elders,” “Curiosity or Good Manners,” “Obedience or Self-Reliance,” and “Considerate or Well-Behaved.” These items were scaled together ($\alpha = .59$) and recoded from 0 to 1 such that higher values indicate more authoritarian dispositions.

Overall, authoritarianism is well distributed across the full range of the scale (mean = .54, sd = .33). There exists, however, heterogeneity in the distribution of authoritarian dispositions across Republicans and Democrats that reflects current perspectives (see Hetherington & Weiler 2009), with the level of authoritarianism significantly greater among Republicans (mean = .58, sd = .31) than it is among Democrats (mean = .47, sd = .35).

Measuring Overlapping Identities and the “Convergent” Partisan Identity

To capture the amount of perceived overlap across salient social identities, I utilized a 6-item battery developed from social identity complexity theory (see Roccas & Brewer 2002; Miller et al 2009) that assessed respondents’ subjective impressions of the extent of overlap in membership between each of their five self-reported social in-groups. The salient social groups in this measure included: neighborhood

type (e.g. large city, suburban, etc.), social class (e.g. working class, middle class, etc.), religious affiliation (e.g. Christian, Jewish, etc.), race (e.g. White, Black, etc.), and gender. For each item, respondents were asked to estimate how many people who belonged to one social group (e.g. neighborhood type) also belonged to another (e.g. social class), on a 5-point scale from “none” to “almost all.” For instance, a self-reported White, Christian respondent would be asked: “Of people who are *Christian*, how many of them would you say are also *White*?” In this manner, the six items compared memberships between: 1) neighborhood type and religious affiliation; 2) neighborhood type and race; 3) social class and religious affiliation; 4) social class and race; 5) religious affiliation and gender; and 6) religious affiliation and race (see Appendix for the text of all items). All six items were scaled together to form the *Overlapping Identities* dependent variable for hypothesis 1 ($\alpha = .73$), and was coded 0 to 1 where higher values represent greater perceived membership overlap across the five salient social groups (mean = .597, sd = .147).

The “convergent” partisan identity, defined earlier as the extent to which individuals perceive that members of their in-party overlap with members of their other salient social groups, was measured through two separate 5-point items that gauged the level of membership overlap between the Democratic and Republican parties and the other five salient social groups included in the *Overlapping Identities* variable. Each item, based again on Roccas & Brewer (2002), asked respondents to rate “how many people who are members of the Democratic/Republican Party are also <placed in respondent’s social class, neighborhood type, religious affiliation, race, and gender.>” from “none” to “almost all.” Since the convergent partisan identity variable concerns only the respondents’ perceptions of their own *in-party*, responses from these two separate items are combined into the *Convergent Partisan Identity* variable such that Democratic Party perceptions were included for Democrats identifiers and Republican Party perceptions were included for Republican identifiers. Due to the nature of this coding, the *Convergent Partisan Identity* variable excludes respondents who identified themselves as pure independents (N=28), as perceived membership overlap with one’s in-party would be theoretically meaningless for an individual who does not identify any party. This merged variable was then rescaled from 0 to 1 (where 0

represents absolutely no overlap between members of the respondent's in-party and her other social groups, and 1 represents almost complete overlap between members of the respondent's in-party and her other social groups; mean = 0.54, sd =0.22); and serves as the main dependent variable for hypotheses 2 and 2a.

Measuring Party Organizational Characteristics

In addition to the overlapping social and partisan identity items, respondents were also asked to rate the Republican and Democratic parties on two traits that should be differentially appealing to authoritarians – similar beliefs and tight, cohesive leadership. The first of these dichotomous items asked: “Of the Democratic and Republican parties, which one do you feel has more members who all share the *same views and beliefs*,” while the second asked “which [party] do you feel is better characterized by *tight formal control* of its members, and a *strong internal leadership structure*” (see Appendix for full text). For each item, respondents had to decide whether the Republican Party or the Democratic Party best exemplified the particular organizational characteristic.

To create the two dependent variables that represented perceived *in-party* shared beliefs and tight, cohesive leadership, I transformed these variables in a similar fashion as the convergent partisan identity variable, such that the dichotomous response was between in-party versus out-party, rather than Democratic versus Republican Party. For instance, if a Democrat selected the Democratic Party as containing members who all share the same beliefs, the *Same Beliefs* variable would be coded 1. In this way, the *Same Beliefs* and *Cohesive Leadership* variables were coded 1 if a respondent chose her in-party, and 0 if she chose her out-party. Due to the nature of this coding, respondents who identified as pure independents were excluded. In general, most respondents (79%) felt that their in-party members all shared the same beliefs; though this perception was more common (at $p < .1$) among Republicans (83%) than among Democrats (74%). There was less of a ceiling effect for the *Cohesive Leadership* variable, where only 61% of respondents viewed their in-party's leadership as holding tight formal control. Again,

a significantly greater (at $p < .01$) proportion of Republicans (72%) held these perceptions about their in-party's leadership than Democrats (51%).

Partisan Identity

Two different measures were used to capture partisan affiliations among respondents. The first, *Party ID* was assessed with the standard question: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what," and the follow-up item "Would you call yourself a strong or not so strong Democrat/Republican" for partisans, and "Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party," for self-identified Independents. These items combined formed a 7-point scale, coded 0 to 1 such that 0 represents Strong Democrats and 1 represents Strong Republicans. As mentioned earlier, there were an equal amount of Republicans and Democrats in this sample. *Partisan Strength* was also calculated through these measures by folding the 7-point *Party ID* variable, and coding it such that 0 represents Pure Independents and 1 represents Strong Partisans (mean = .62, sd = .36).

The second measure of partisan identity, *Partisan Attachment*, was based upon four items developed by Huddy & Khatib (2007) that were intended to assess "the degree to which the respondent finds an identity important, appropriate, and inclusive." (Huddy et al 2010, pg. 9) Respondents received these questions on the basis of their answers to the *Party ID* and *Partisan Strength* measures above, where, for example, Republicans were asked about their Republican identity, and pure Independents were not given the scale. These items specifically asked: 1) the importance of being a Democrat/Republican; 2) how well the term Democrat/Republican described them; 3) how often they used "we" instead of "they" to describe Democrats/Republicans; and 4) the extent to which they thought of themselves as being a Democrat/Republican (see Appendix for full text). These items were combined and rescaled 0 to 1, from the least to the greatest partisan attachment (mean = .55, sd = .23).

Control Variables

Finally, I collected a series of demographic control variables from respondents including: *Ideology* (measured by a 5-point item asking for respondents' general self-placement on social issues, scaled 0=very liberal to 1=very conservative), *College Degree* (a dummy variable for education where 1=obtained at least a college degree, and 0 otherwise), *Age* (a continuous variable of respondents' self-reported age), *White* (dummy variable for race where 1=White and 0=Non-White), and *Gender* (male=1).

Results

Authoritarianism and Overlapping Social Identities

I begin by examining authoritarianism's effect on increased perceptions of overlapping membership among respondents' five salient social groups – social class, neighborhood type, religious affiliation, race, and gender – thus providing support for the first hypothesis. I estimated an ordinary least squares model with robust standard errors that regresses perceived overlapping social identities on authoritarianism and the controls described above.

[Insert Table 1 here]

The estimates, shown in Table 1, support the hypothesized relationship between authoritarianism and overlapping social identities. Authoritarianism has a significant, positive effect ($B = 0.068$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that respondents who are higher in authoritarianism perceive increased membership overlap between people who share their neighborhood type, social class, religious affiliation, race, and gender. Put another way, individuals with greater authoritarian dispositions – be they Republicans, Democrats, or Independents – view their myriad social identities as more subjectively embedded in a singular in-group representation, creating a *convergent* social identity for them (the right venn diagram in Figure 1, Panel 1). While the present effects of authoritarianism are modest, these results nonetheless demonstrate that, as predicted, authoritarians possess proclivities towards viewing their social world in more concrete terms, in a way that is consistent with earlier work on social identity complexity theory that links cognitive complexity and intolerance of ambiguity with views that one's social groups are similar and share the same members (see Roccas & Brewer 2002).

Examining the “Convergent” Partisan Identity

The relationship between authoritarianism and perceived similarity among social in-group members demonstrated above may not necessarily translate to individuals’ views of their partisan identity, where salient stereotypes of in-party member demographics may color citizens’ perceptions. I thus examine the direct and interactive effects of authoritarianism on respondents’ views that their partisan identity is a “*convergent*” identity that inclusively incorporates the members of their other five social groups into its fold. In accordance with hypotheses 2 and 2a, I expect authoritarianism will have both a positive direct and interactive effect with party ID on perceiving a “convergent” partisan identity, such that respondents with greater authoritarian dispositions will view their party as more encompassing of citizens who belong their other social in-groups, and this effect will be enhanced among Republican identifiers (see Figure 1 Panel 2 for example). To test these hypotheses, I specified two ordered probit models with robust standard errors using Clarify software (Tomz, Wittenberg & King 2003) that estimate the effects of authoritarianism (the first directly, and the second as a moderation with *Party ID*), the overlapping social identities variable, and the specified controls, on the 5-point *Convergent Partisan Identity* variable.

[Insert Table 2 here]

Ordered probit estimates (see Table 2) provide mixed support for hypotheses 2 and 2a. On one hand, the coefficient for authoritarianism in Model 1 has absolutely no effect on respondents’ perceptions of a “convergent” partisan identity ($B = -0.097$, n.s), suggesting that authoritarian dispositions do not influence respondents’ perceptions of their partisan identity (like they did on more general social identities), and thus failing to support hypothesis 2. However, by examining the pattern of coefficients in Model 2, it is evident that the null findings in Model 1 were due to the effect of authoritarianism on the “convergent” partisan identity being *conditioned* by the respondents’ party identity. Thus, in the second, interactive model, the constituent term for authoritarianism represents the effect of this variable among those identified as “strong democrats”, and is negative and statistically significant ($B=-1.152$, $p<.05$). The interaction term, in contrast, is positive and highly significant ($B=2.162$, $p<.01$), indicating that as

respondents identified less with the Democratic Party and more with the Republican Party, authoritarian dispositions increasingly lead to greater perceptions of a “convergent” partisan identity. Further, in both models, *Overlapping Identities* (the dependent variable in hypothesis 1) has a positive and highly significant effect, such that respondents who viewed their social identities in a singular fashion with overlapping members, were more inclined to view their in-party in those same concrete terms.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

To better interpret this pattern of results, I have depicted the predicted probability that a respondent thought “almost all” of the members of their in-party were also members of their social class, neighborhood type, religious affiliation, race, and gender (see Figure 2). While, in general, respondents’ propensities towards viewing their in-party in such concrete, singular terms are low, the heterogeneity of authoritarianism’s impact across the two parties on these perceptions is evident. For those who self-identified as strong Democrats (the blue bars), low authoritarians had a 11% chance of holding a “convergent” partisan identity while high authoritarians had a 1.5% likelihood of thinking about the Democratic Party in this way. Alternatively, strong Republican identifiers (the red bars) had approximately a 2% likelihood of holding a “convergent” partisan identity at the low end of authoritarianism, and a 15% probability among the most authoritarian. Importantly, high authoritarian Republicans were about 10 times more likely (at $p < .05$) to possess a “convergent” partisan identity than were Democrat authoritarians, while low authoritarian Democrats were about 4 times more likely (at $p < .05$) to perceive their in-party membership in this overlapping manner than low authoritarian Republicans. Overall these findings reveal that, for Republican identifiers, authoritarianism predicts increased “convergent” partisan identities, as hypothesized; whereas among Democrats it those with the least authoritarian dispositions, contrary to initial expectations, who perceive the Democratic Party as encompassing members from all their other social in-groups.

Authoritarians, for a variety of cognitive and motivational reasons (see Jost et al 2003), seem predisposed towards conceptualizing their social identities in relatively simple terms. However, when a party’s members represent diverse social and demographic backgrounds, it may be difficult for citizens to

ignore that reality, thus deterring them from perceiving their partisan identity in such concrete, convergent terms. This may be the case among Democrats, who might acknowledge that the Democratic Party's members represent a wider range of ethnic, educational, and religious backgrounds, regardless of how they scored on the authoritarianism scale. It would therefore be those individuals who scored low in authoritarianism, through their increased cognitive complexity and tolerance of ambiguity, who could still feel that members of the Democratic Party also shared their other social identities all the while being depicted as a party of "diversity" (Edsall & Edsall 1991; Black 2004). This possibility is considered in greater detail in the discussion section.

Authoritarianism and Party Characteristics

I also anticipate that authoritarians will characterize their in-party as possessing certain types of organizational traits, in particular, cohesive leadership traits that allow the party to promote authoritarian submission (see Altemeyer 1988; Feldman 2003) and to fulfill needs for certainty and security (Jost et al 2003) through a group-based social order that represents "oneness" and "sameness" of its members (see Duckitt 1989; Stenner 2005). More bluntly, I predict in hypothesis 3 that those who score higher in authoritarianism are more likely to think that their in-party "has more members who all share the same views and beliefs" and "is better characterized by tight formal control... and a strong internal leadership structure." As described earlier, these characteristics are operationalized as dichotomous variables, where respondents choose between their in-party or the out-party as best representing the specified trait. Given the dichotomous nature of these two dependent variables, I estimated two probit models with robust standard errors using Clarify (Tomz, Wittenberg & King 2003) that regress the in-party perceptions of same beliefs and cohesive leadership, respectively, on authoritarianism and controls.

[Insert Table 3 & Figure 3 here]

Consistent support for hypothesis 3 is demonstrated in Table 3. In the *Same Beliefs* model (first set of columns) authoritarianism has a marginally significant, positive effect on thinking the in-party, rather than the out-party, contains more members who share similar values and beliefs ($B = 0.661, p < .1$). Similarly, in the *Cohesive Leadership* model (second set of columns), authoritarianism has a significant

positive effect on thinking that the in-party is better characterized by tight, controlling internal leadership ($B = 0.668, p < .05$). More intuitively, when moving from the lowest to highest levels of authoritarianism, a respondent's predicted probability of characterizing their in-party members as all sharing the same beliefs increases from 68% to 86%, holding all other variables at their central tendencies (see Figure 3, left panel). While most respondents seem predisposed towards considering their fellow Democrats or Republicans as sharing the same beliefs and values, this increase across the full range of authoritarianism is statistically significant at the $p < 0.1$ level. Further, respondents' propensities to choose their in-party as the party best characterized by strong, cohesive internal leadership significantly increases (at the $p < .05$ level) from 49% to 74% across the authoritarian dimension (see Figure 3, right panel). These findings confirm expectations that, indeed, citizens with greater authoritarian dispositions are more inclined towards characterizing their party's leadership as possessing organizational traits that provide a functional "match" with their latent needs for certainty, order, and security.

Implications for Partisan Attachment

Finally, I explore the broader implications of my group-based authoritarianism model on partisan attachment. As discussed earlier, authoritarianism may structure the current nature of partisan conflict in the U.S. by working through partisan identity rather than through salient issues. As authoritarianism differentially affects how citizens perceive their in-party as a conglomerate representation of their other social identities (demonstrated above), this "convergent" partisan attachment should consequently create a stronger, more durable identity through which citizens obtain their positive self-concept (see Tajfel & Turner 1979). Recent empirical work suggests that social identity theory lies at the heart of mass polarization such that "to the extent that party identification represents a meaningful group affiliation, the more appropriate test of polarization is affective, not ideological, identity." (Iyengar et al 2012, pg. 406)

I test this broader impact more specifically through hypothesis 4, wherein authoritarianism, as mediated through perceptions of a "convergent" partisan identity, leads to increased *Partisan Attachment* (the 4-item scale adapted from Huddy & Khatib (2007) that treats partisanship in social identity terms). Given the heterogeneous effects of authoritarianism on the "convergent" partisan identity demonstrated in

hypothesis 2a above, I specified two separate mediational models – one that only includes Democrats and another that only includes Republicans, and estimated each using structural equation modeling (SEM package) in Stata 12. Each of these models simultaneously regressed partisan attachment on the “convergent” partisan identity (with authoritarianism and all controls included), and the “convergent” partisan identity on authoritarianism and all controls.

Preliminary results from these models somewhat support the mediational effects of authoritarianism as predicted by hypothesis 4. As seen in Figures 4A and 4B, holding a “convergent” partisan identity has a large, significant effect on increased partisan attachments for both Democrats ($B=.25, p<.05$) and Republicans ($B = .24, p< .05$). However, authoritarianism only seems to have an effect on such strong partisan attachments among Republicans. For those respondents self-identifying as Republicans, authoritarian dispositions have marginally significant direct ($B=.12, p<.1$) and indirect effects ($B=.04, p<.1$) on increased attachment to one’s party identity. Among Democrats, this is simply not the case, as authoritarianism has no significant direct or indirect effects on *Partisan Attachment*; though the indirect of authoritarianism reflects a washing out of the negative effect of those dispositions on holding a “convergent” partisan identity, and a positive effect of that singular identity on party attachments.

Overall, these results present an interesting dichotomy between Democrats’ and Republicans’ partisan identities, and their antecedents. On one side, the path from authoritarianism to more affectively intense partisan attachments, in line with the group-based authoritarianism model predicted in hypothesis 4, is strongly supported among Republicans. On the other, authoritarianism has either no effect or a counter-intuitive effect on partisan attachment, in opposition to hypothesis 4, among Democrats, despite the strong connection present between Democrats’ sense of a “convergent” partisan identity and their partisan attachments. Regardless, these findings highlight an interesting and substantively meaningful link between citizens’ *cognitive* perceptions of their partisan identities (via the “convergent” partisan identity’s amalgamation of other social in-group members) and their *affective* attachments to in-party.

Discussion

Overall, the present findings demonstrate that authoritarianism plays a key role in shaping individuals' perceptions of their social and political identities. Consistent with the proposed theoretical model of group-based authoritarianism, those scoring higher in authoritarianism are more likely to view their social, and sometimes political, identities as a singular entity of overlapping group memberships. Further, the organizational traits of political parties that allow authoritarians to use their social identity as a mechanism for maintaining security in their social order (see Feldman 2003), shared beliefs and values among all members and tight cohesive leadership, were perceived by high authoritarians of their in-party. And, ultimately, I show that authoritarianism may lay the groundwork for mass political polarization by creating strong party attachments that are formed independent of ideological, or issue-based, considerations.

Yet, I do not find universal support for my hypotheses. Most interestingly, were the heterogeneous effects of authoritarianism on perceptions of the “convergent” partisan identity, conditioned by individuals' self-reported party identity. This somewhat counter-intuitive finding could be explained through a variety of reasons. First, it may be the case that Democrats higher in authoritarianism simply do not view a party publicly stereotyped for its diversity as a singular entity that encompasses members of their other social in-groups; and conversely, Democrats lower in authoritarianism (through greater cognitive complexity) may think that the Democratic Party represents all of their in-groups (and more) *because* they are the party of diversity. With only a single item measuring the “convergent” partisan identity, either option could be plausible. Alternatively, and in support of Hetherington & Weiler's (2009) argument, authoritarianism in this context may be acting as a proxy for ideology, such that those who are more liberal feel the Democratic Party is a convergent identity for them, and those who are more conservative believe the Republican Party to be a convergent identity. Ideology, in this study, is measured as a self-reported placement (i.e. as more of an identity), rather than through a battery of salient social and economic issue position items, making it impossible to tease apart whether authoritarianism operates

heterogeneously on the “convergent” partisan identity because of individuals’ ideological policy preferences.

These possible explanations for the heterogeneous effects of authoritarianism on the “convergent” partisan identity, however, cannot be effectively tested or eliminated with the extant data. Therefore, more data must be collected that explicitly taps into Democrats’ perceptions of their party’s membership and ideological stances. I am presently developing a survey instrument that will better measure the “convergent” partisan identity through multiple items that compares various social in-groups. This instrument will also include “liberal” and “conservative” as identities can be included in the overlapping social identities and “convergent” partisan identity measures; as well as a battery of social and economic issues. Such refined survey instruments, along with a larger sample size, should be sufficient to test the robustness of the current findings, and delve further into the heterogeneous nature of authoritarianism’s effect on partisan identity perceptions and attachments. With this additional data, I can demonstrate that my group-based approach to authoritarianism provides a more parsimonious, and ultimate, mechanism by which authoritarian dispositions have shaped recent political conflict in America.

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Table 1. The Effect of Authoritarianism on Overlapping Social Identity

	β	SE
Constant	0.321	0.048
Authoritarianism	0.068**	0.033
Party ID	-0.071*	0.039
Ideology (Social Issues)	0.118**	0.052
College Degree	-0.007	0.019
Age	0.002***	0.001
White	0.120***	0.032
Gender	-0.027	0.018
R ²	0.2278	
N	211	

where *** is $p < 0.01$, ** is $p < 0.05$, and * is $p < 0.1$ on a two-tailed test

Table 2. Ordered Probit Effects of Authoritarianism on the “Convergent” Partisan Identity

	Model 1		Model 2	
	β	SE	β	SE
Authoritarianism	-0.097	0.299	-1.152**	0.509
Party ID	0.342	0.328	-0.818*	0.492
Authoritarianism*Party ID			2.162***	0.775
Overlapping Social Identities	2.258***	0.730	2.548***	0.756
Ideology (Social Issues)	-0.302	0.442	-0.266	0.444
College Degree	-0.048	0.165	-0.021	0.167
Age	0.015**	0.006	0.015**	0.006
White	-0.099	0.266	-0.254	0.284
Gender	0.203	0.164	0.275	0.168
Cut 1	0.281	0.533	-0.190	0.537
Cut 2	1.200	0.512	0.775	0.515
Cut 3	2.645	0.529	2.265	0.528
Cut 4	3.903	0.540	3.539	0.534
Pseudo R2	0.0668		0.0864	
N	175		175	

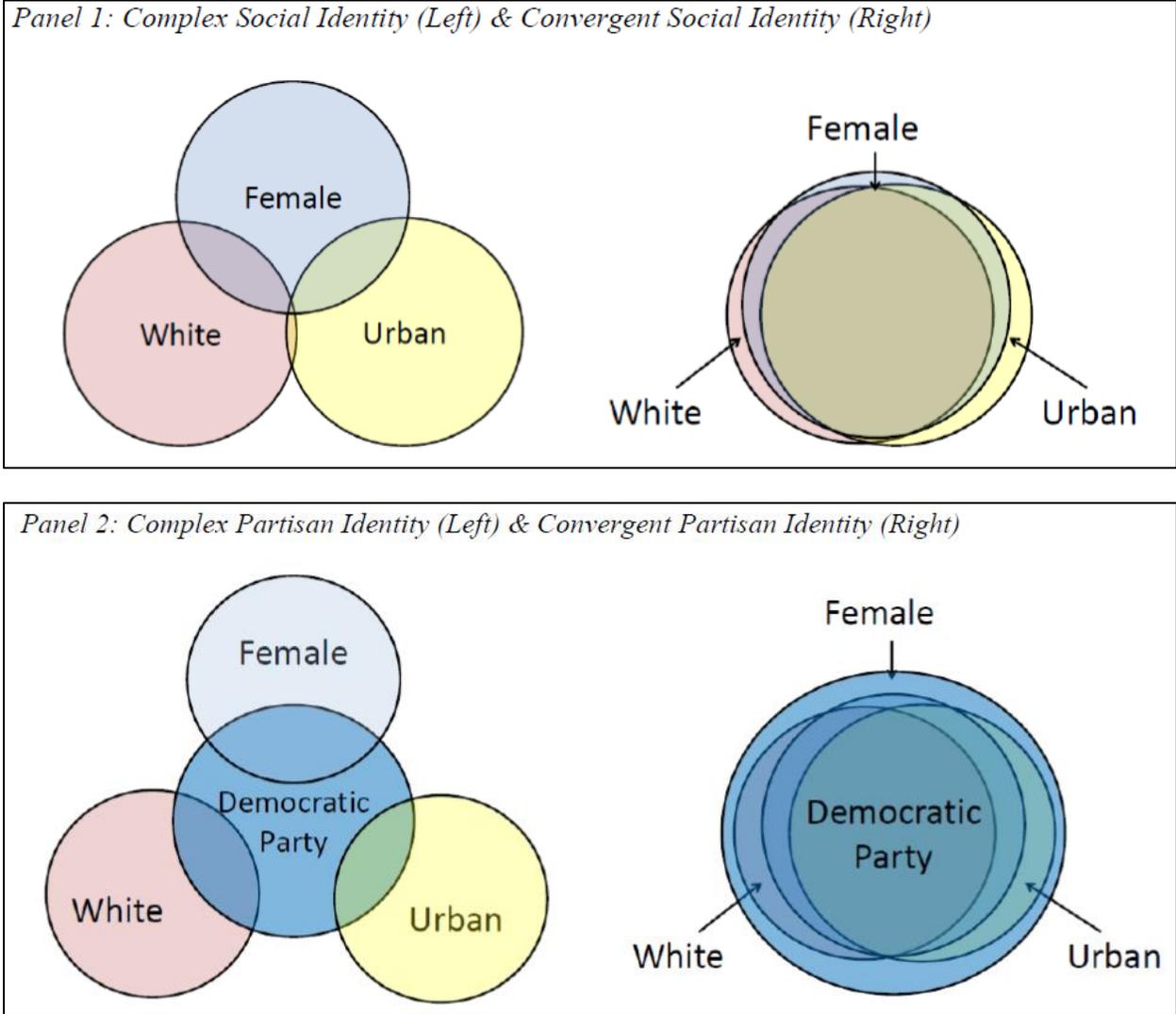
where *** is $p < 0.01$, ** is $p < 0.05$, and * is $p < 0.1$ on a two-tailed test; excludes pure independents

Table 3. Probit Effects of Authoritarianism on Perceptions of In-Party Characteristics

	<i>Same Beliefs</i>		<i>Cohesive Leadership</i>	
	β	SE	β	SE
Constant	-0.279	0.565	-0.816	0.551
Authoritarianism	0.661*	0.370	0.668**	0.328
Partisan Strength	0.451	0.407	0.348	0.383
Ideology (Social Issues)	0.771*	0.428	1.082**	0.422
College Degree	0.050	0.234	0.137	0.215
Age	0.002	0.006	0.001	0.006
White	-0.104	0.315	-0.244	0.277
Gender	0.013	0.236	0.134	0.213
Pseudo R2	0.0653		0.0853	
N	169		170	

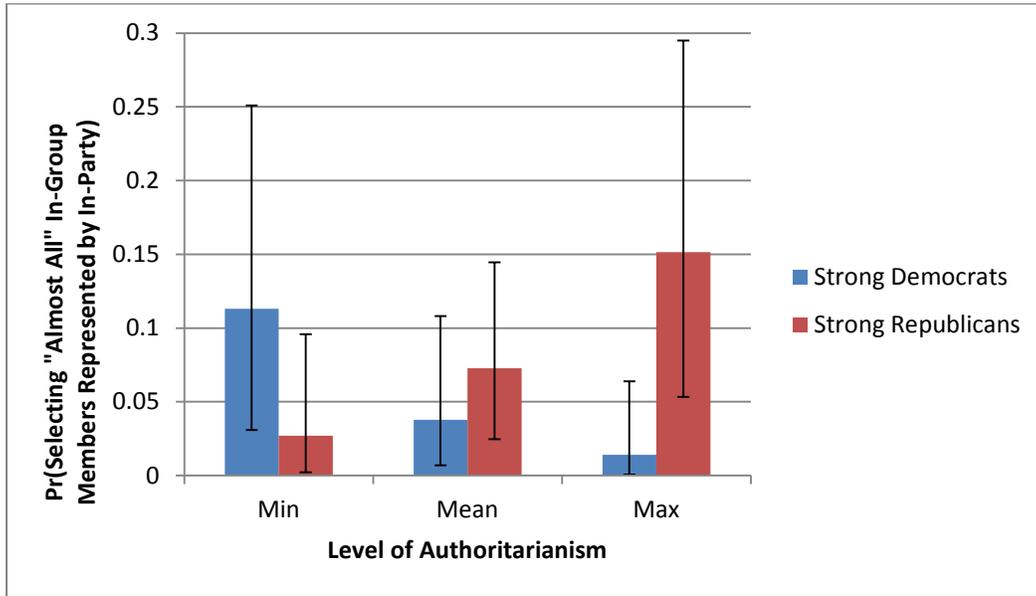
where ** is $p < 0.05$, and * is $p < 0.1$ on a two-tailed test; excludes pure independents

Figure 1: Examples of Overlapping Social Identities, and Convergent Partisan Identities



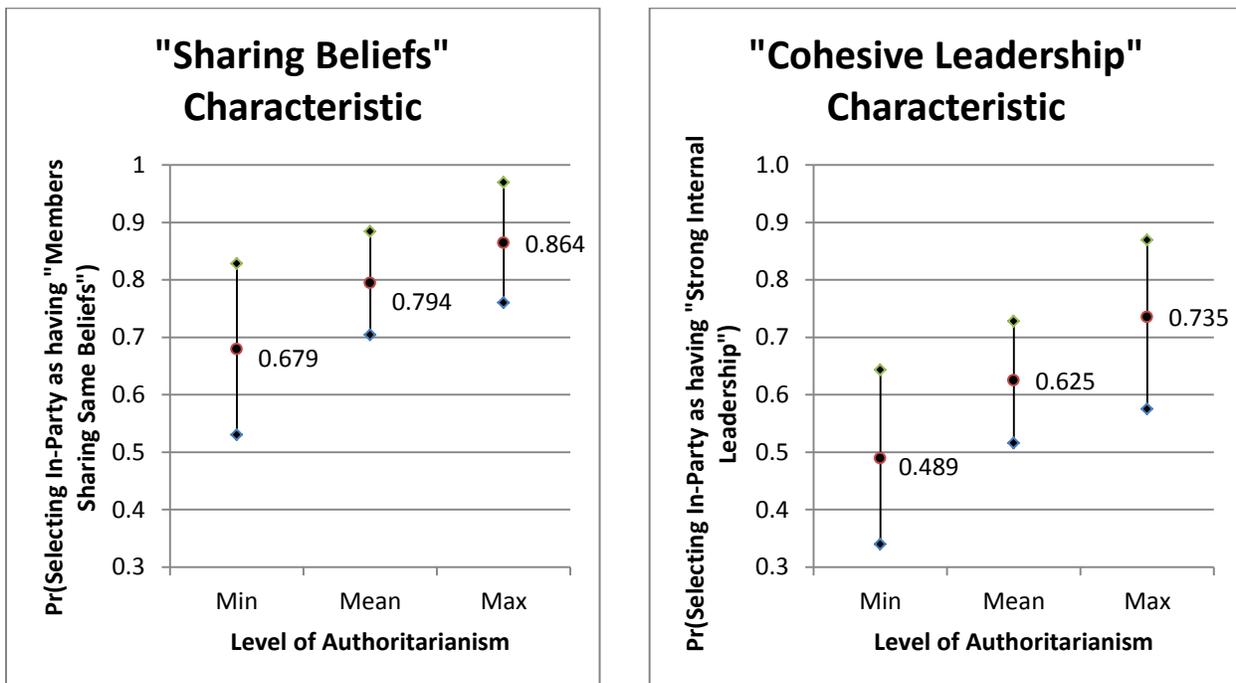
In complex social/partisan identities, individuals acknowledge differences between in-group categories such that Democrats can be White, Female and Urban; but also that Democrats are non-White, Male, and non-Urban, etc. In convergent social/partisan identities, multiple identities of White, Female, and Urban are subjectively embodied in a single representation of Democrats.

Figure 2: Predicted Probability of Perceiving a “Convergent” Partisan Identity Across Levels of Authoritarianism, by Party



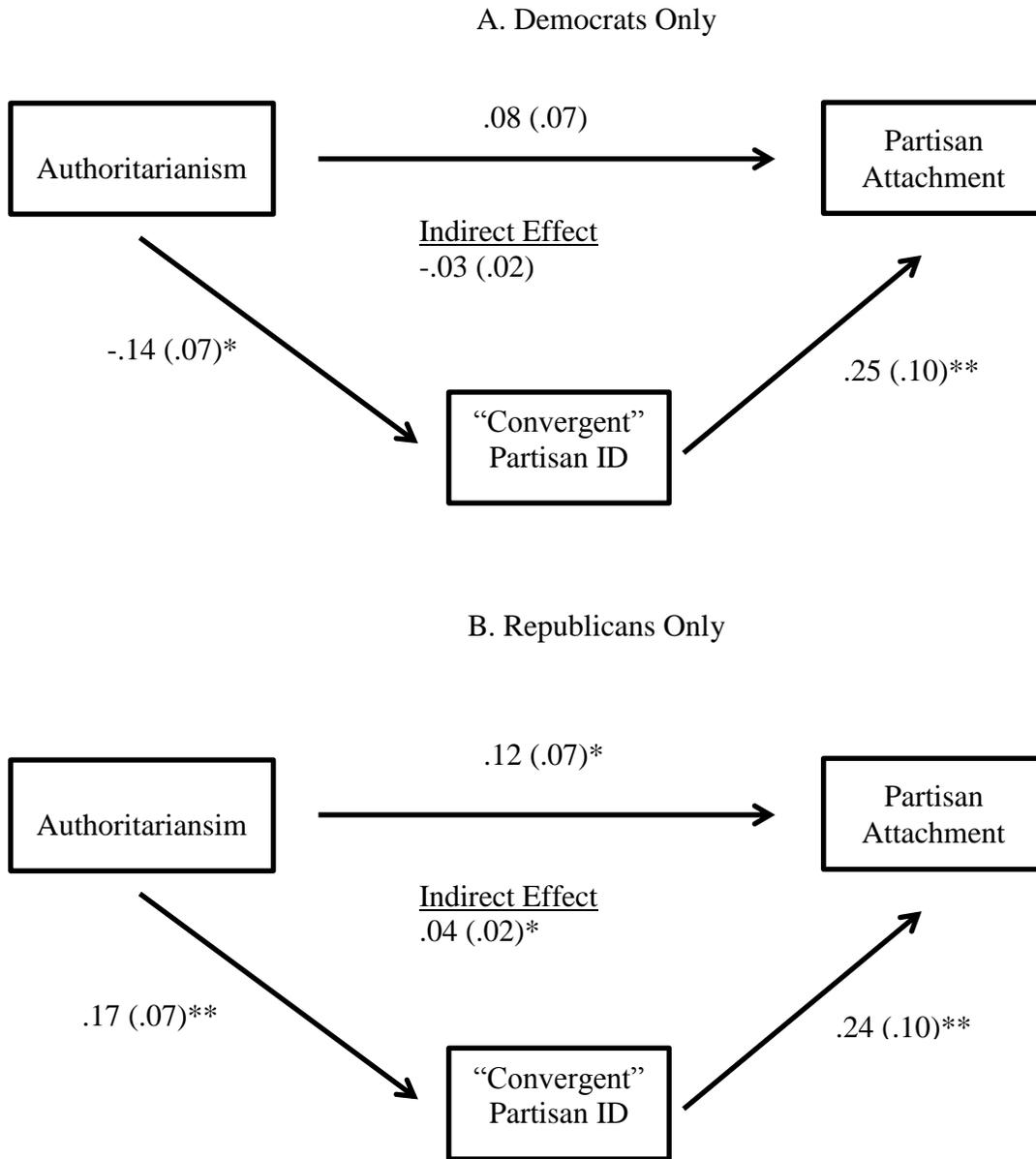
Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the mean predicted probabilities.

Figure 3: The Effects of Authoritarianism on In-Party Characteristics



Lines represent 90% and 95% confidence intervals around the mean predicted probabilities in each panel, respectively.

Figure 4. Structural Equation Models Linking Authoritarianism to Partisan Attachment



Notes: Entries are maximum likelihood coefficients and standard errors. All variables are coded from zero to one. * $p < .1$ and ** $p < .05$

Appendix: Survey Items

Authoritarianism

Although there are a number of qualities that people feel that children should have, every person thinks that some are more important than others. I am going to read you pairs of desirable qualities.

Please tell me which one you think is more important for a child to have:

1. INDEPENDENCE or RESPECT FOR ELDERS
2. CURIOSITY or GOOD MANNERS
3. OBEDIENCE or SELF-RELIANCE
4. BEING CONSIDERATE or WELL BEHAVED

Social Identity Overlap:

1. Think about people who live in <large cities/small cities or towns/suburbs/rural areas>. Of people who live in <large cities/small cities or towns/suburbs/rural areas>, how many would you say are also <pipe in religious affiliation response from item above>, almost all, most, some, a few, or none?

- 1 Almost All
- 2 Most
- 3 Some
- 4 A Few
- 5 None

2. Again think about people who live in <large cities/small cities or towns/suburbs/rural areas>. How many of them would you say are also <pipe in race from item above>, almost all, most, some, a few, or none?

- 1 Almost All
- 2 Most
- 3 Some
- 4 A Few
- 5 None

3. Now, think about **all** people who belong to the <pipe in lower/working/middle/upper class from item above>. Of people who are <pipe in social class>, how many of them would you say are also <pipe in religious affiliation>, [almost all, most, some, a few, or none]?

- 1 Almost All
- 2 Most
- 3 Some
- 4 A Few
- 5 None

4. Again think about people who belong to the <pipe in lower/working/middle/upper class from item above>. How many of them would you say are also <pipe in race from item above>, [almost all, most, some, a few, or none]?

- 1 Almost All
- 2 Most
- 3 Some
- 4 A Few
- 5 None

5. Next, think about **all** people who are <pipe in religious affiliation>. How many of them would you say are also <pipe in male/female from sample info>, [almost all, most, some, a few, or none]?

- 1 Almost All
- 2 Most
- 3 Some
- 4 A Few
- 5 None

6. Again think about people who are <pipe in religious affiliation>. How many of them would you say are also <pipe in race from earlier item>, [almost all, most, some, a few, or none]?

- 1 Almost All
- 2 Most
- 3 Some
- 4 A Few
- 5 None

Convergent Partisan Identity

1. How many people who are members of the **Democratic** Party are also <pipe in social class, city type, religious affiliation, race, and gender from previous items>; almost all, most, some, a few, or none?

- 1 Almost All
- 2 Most
- 3 Some
- 4 A Few
- 5 None

2. How many people who are members of the **Republican** Party are also <pipe in social class, city type, religious affiliation, race, and gender from previous items>?

- 1 Almost All
- 2 Most
- 3 Some
- 4 A Few
- 5 None

Political Party Characteristics

1. Of the Democratic and Republican parties, which one do you feel has more members who all share the **same views and beliefs**? The Democratic Party or the Republican Party?
 - 1 Democratic Party
 - 2 Republican Party

2. When thinking about the Democratic and Republican parties as **political organizations**, which one do you feel is better characterized by **tight formal control** of its members, and a **strong internal leadership structure**? The Democratic Party or the Republican Party?
 - 1 Democratic Party
 - 2 Republican Party

Partisan Attachment

1. How important is being a [Democrat/ Republican] to you?
 - 1 Extremely important
 - 2 Very important
 - 3 Not very important
 - 4 Not important at all

2. How well does the term [Democrat/ Republican] describe you?
 - 1 Extremely well
 - 2 Very well
 - 3 Not very well
 - 4 Not at all

3. When talking about [Democrats/ Republicans], how often do you use “we instead of “they”?
 - 1 All of the time
 - 2 Most of the time
 - 3 Some of the time
 - 4 Rarely
 - 5 Never

4. To what extent do you think of yourself as being a [Democrat/ Republican]?
 - 1 A great deal
 - 2 Somewhat
 - 3 Very little
 - 4 Not at all