

the takeover of the NRA at its 1977 annual convention by a more radical, absolutist, and politicized faction led by the movement's chief ideologue, Harlon Carter. By wrapping the gun rights cause in the rhetoric of freedom and adopting an absolutist, no-compromise position, the NRA remade the national gun debate by divorcing it from the realities of escalating domestic gun trafficking and the resulting mayhem. Lying just beneath the surface of this rhetoric was "[c]oded language about race, gender, and class" that "pervaded the increasingly panicked discourse of gun rights groups" (191).

The apotheosis of these developments emerged in the 1990s when the United Nations took steps to address international gun violence and illegal gun trafficking. The NRA responded by obtaining advocacy (akin to lobbyist) status at the UN in 1997 and making the preposterous two-part claim that the UN was trying to infringe on America's domestic gun rights by enacting a "virtual worldwide ban on firearms ownership" (238). Thanks in large part to the gun-friendly administration of George W. Bush and his appointee to the UN, John Bolton, whose ill-concealed contempt for the UN was well known, the organization's small arms conference came to naught.

McKevitt's argument reaches further than his evidence at times, and his scant one-paragraph treatment of how the conservative legal community transformed the law of the Second Amendment by introducing a fictional individualist reading of the Second Amendment's "right to bear arms" misses a vital part of this narrative. Still, McKevitt's book is persuasive, and he offers an important addition to our understanding of the country's gun policy environment. As he details, gun manufacturers, dealers, and importers have long sought to avoid the spotlight, gladly yielding the public face of gun rights to the NRA. With the NRA's recent implosion, that calculus has started to change.

### **Respect and Loathing in American Democracy: Polarization Moralization, and the Undermining of Equality.**

By Jeff Spinner-Halev and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2024. 280p. \$99.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.

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The extensive recent literature on polarization has focused on affective polarization: polarization in partisans' feelings toward political parties. In the United States, it is abundantly clear that partisans on both sides have come to increasingly dislike the opposition party over the last several decades. In *Respect and Loathing in American Democracy*, Jeff Spinner-Halev and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse study a distinct but closely related topic—disrespect. While liking out-partisans might be too much to ask for, respecting them perhaps is not, or perhaps at least should not be.

*Respect* starts by noting it was motivated by a friend of one of the authors saying after the 2016 election: "I believe in equality and the importance of respecting my fellow citizens, but I cannot respect anyone who voted for Donald Trump" (p. x). *Respect's* authors, a political theorist and a political psychologist, note that "From that line, the liberal respect paradox that we study here was born." This paradox, a term proposed in this book, is summed up in the next line: "To believe in equality yet insist that 45 percent of fellow Americans cannot be respected is a remarkable statement" (p. x).

A book about respect requires a careful definition of the term, and Spinner-Halev and Theiss-Morse in fact propose definitions for two variants, which they call *recognition respect* and *civic respect*. Recognition respect is a new term for what psychologists call *unconditional respect*. It entails "acceptance of the idea that all human beings have intrinsic worth as moral agents" (p. 25). The authors report survey data showing Democrats were more likely to say they hold this value than Republicans, though the magnitudes of these differences were not large. However, Democrats were not more likely than Republicans to say that out-partisans "should be given respect simply because they are fellow human beings" (p. 34). (In addition to the multiple surveys that the book draws upon, the authors conducted several focus groups and sprinkled in quotes from participants throughout the book, providing useful illustrations of some of the reasoning underlying the opinion data.)

The second type of respect, civic respect, "means listening to and taking seriously the ideas of one's fellow citizens" (p. 51), building upon the existing concept of *mutual respect* in political theory. The full definition of civic respect is laid out over multiple pages and comprises three parts: 1) listening to those with different views; 2) avoiding political stereotyping; and 3) not assuming those who hold different views are uninformed or misinformed. The authors present data indicating that partisans are equally highly likely to agree with the definition of civic respect but considerably less likely to give out-partisans this type of respect, again to about an equal degree.

*Respect* next analyzes causes of disrespect. The authors propose that Democrats and Republicans tend to hold different worldviews, with Democrats focused on social justice and Republicans emphasizing national solidarity. Partisans on both sides moralize their worldview, meaning they see it as a moral conviction and not simply an opinion. The authors then present additional empirical results showing that for both sides, stronger belief in their side's worldview is associated with a lack of both types of respect for out-partisans. Moreover, on both sides, partisans who more strongly believe that citizens have a responsibility to contribute to the goals implied by their worldview have less recognition respect for out-partisans and are more judgmental. (Judgmentalism is also associated with less recognition respect.) In the final chapters, the authors more

explicitly argue in favor of both types of respect (noting limits to when civic respect should be granted) and specifically make the case for *egalitarian pluralism*: “to privilege egalitarianism but to recognize that there may be times when equality should defer to other values” (p. 158).

I both like, and respect, *Respect*. My summary does not do justice to the richness of empirical results the book reports, and the interdisciplinary collaboration allows the book to make a unique contribution to the literature on undue polarization. The text is filled with empathy and wisdom, and I think it accomplishes the Herculean task of being written in a way that both liberals and conservatives will consider largely fair and reasonable, despite *not* dodging discussion of specific substantive issues. The distinction between recognition and civic respect is certainly useful, though I found these particular terms opaque—perhaps “humanity respect” and “opinion respect” would be clearer. I am always glad to see more talk of the vices of judgmentalism and virtues of pluralism.

The liberal respect paradox is a compelling hypothesis, but the evidence presented that liberals value respect more than conservatives is not obviously convincing. For instance, when asked about agreement with the statement, “All people should be given respect because they are fellow human beings,” the mean responses on a 0–1 scale were 0.74 for Democrats and 0.68 for Republicans (32). The survey question on civic respect as an ideal, in turn, asks about agreement with a definition of civic respect, and not whether respondents personally hold this as a value. *Respect* even includes evidence (not emphasized by the authors) that Democrats do give Republicans more civic respect than Republicans give to Democrats—for instance, 54% of Republicans agreed with the statement, “There is no good reason to vote for the opposing party,” while only 46% of Democrats agreed with this. References to the large literature on selective exposure and partisan differences, or lack thereof, in willingness to listen to opposing viewpoints, would be very useful for gaining a more general understanding of partisan differences in civic respect.

On the other hand, results from the Bob experiment (in which participants were asked how much they respect a citizen named Bob with either prototypically liberal or conservative views) imply that Democrats do offer considerably less respect to Republicans than vice versa. Moreover, when Trump voters were asked if they agree that Clinton voters are “condescending,” “immoral,” “intolerant,” or “dishonest,” the option closest to disrespectful—condescending—was most popular. Ultimately, I think it is very plausible that Democrats are relatively far from their civic ideals and falter when it comes to giving both types of respect to out-partisans, but also that both Democrats and Republicans hold both types of respect as an ideal and struggle to behave accordingly.

The book’s biggest shortcoming, to my mind, is a lack of careful discussion of the differences between disrespect

and dislike, and relatedly, a lack of discussion of alternative explanations for disrespect. Given the literature’s focus on affective polarization noted above, I would like more clarity on exactly what is added by studying respect. Dislike is driven by identity-based rivalries and beliefs about poor character traits: we are more likely to dislike someone when we think they are, for example, foolish, closed-minded, or self-serving. Are there any such traits that lead to dislike and not (civic) disrespect, or vice versa? How prevalent, if at all, are partisans who dislike the out-party but respect them? The authors note early on that respect is “both a belief and a practice” (TK) but perhaps as a belief, it is quite similar to the beliefs that drive dislike. If that is the case, the book’s contribution would be more clear with greater emphasis on respect as a practice.

The explanation for disrespect offered by the authors based on differences in worldviews is well said and offers a useful contribution unto itself. One strand of research not present here that I suggest the authors and readers check out is behavioral economist Ben Enke’s recent excellent research on universalism versus communitarianism as a driver of left versus right political views. But the authors’ theory—that partisans see the out-party’s worldview as morally wrong—does not explain disrespect as a separate phenomenon from dislike, and the authors also do not discuss why their explanation outperforms competing theories (for disrespect alone or for dislike-driven disrespect). One alternative that jumps to mind is partisan identity. Strengthened partisan identity has been emphasized in the literature as the key cause of growth in affective polarization; it is possible that Democrats with stronger social justice views have stronger partisan identities, and this is what also causes a lack of recognition respect for Republicans. Moreover, the connection between the authors’ explanation for disrespect, focusing on moralization, and the definitions of recognition and civic respect, which fail to mention morality, is unclear.

Finally, I can’t help but view the book through the lens that I have used in my work on this topic—on how affective polarization is often exacerbated by misperceptions resulting from cognitive biases—and I think applying these ideas would help clarify the book’s claims that we are too judgmental and do not provide as much civic respect to out-partisans as we should. *Respect* reports very neat new data showing Democrats and Republicans mostly support the other side’s worldview—and that both sides vastly underestimate the other side’s support for their own side’s worldview, implying that there is indeed undue civil disrespect.

The authors’ tone in the end is mixed: somewhat hopeful about but also weary of the widespread deep antipathy across the political divide. Reading *Respect*, I couldn’t help but think of an assertive individual commanding, “YOU GIVE [X] RESPECT!”—and having this command actually be followed. Changes in beliefs are difficult; perhaps

making changes in the practice of respect is a more feasible path forward for progress in American politics.

**State of the Parties 2022: The Changing Role of**

**American Political Parties.** Edited by John C. Green, David B. Cohen, and Kenneth M. Miller. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022. 328p. \$110.00 cloth, \$42.00 paper. doi:10.1017/S1537592724000318

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In September 1993, the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron hosted a conference on the “State of the Parties.” That gathering produced a book with 23 chapters from a mix of prominent and emerging scholars. The essays were designed to offer punchy and student-friendly evaluations of political parties and their role in the American political system. A few synthetic chapters at the beginning and end framed larger issues. The authors expressed skepticism that Bill Clinton’s election augured a durable change in the Democrats’ fortune and looked ambivalently at larger themes. The laments of party decline that had dominated scholarly discourse in prior decades had gone into abeyance, but the master theme of polarization that would loom ever larger in coming years had not yet congealed. The guts of that 1993 volume, 10 of its 23 chapters, dug deep into the activities of the political parties themselves. In keeping with scholarship on the rise of the “service party,” they documented just how parties worked to provide campaign resources to the candidate operations that dominated electoral politics.

The epochal shock of the 1994 midterm elections occasioned another conference in Akron two years later and another edited volume. Publication ever since then has followed a regular schedule, with a new edition of *State of the Parties* following each presidential election. Each volume has followed the same pattern: many short chapters, with some attention to the shape of the party system and a more intense focus on what parties actually do, especially on where and how they spend money. John C. Green has edited each one, along with a changing retinue of coeditors; some contributors have been regulars, and many scholars on parties have made an appearance along the way. (I coauthored a chapter for the eighth edition.)

The ninth volume in the series, *State of the Parties 2022: The Changing Role of American Political Parties*, offers a good occasion for stocktaking in this long-standing project. The Bliss Institute has generously posted the previous eight volumes of *State of the Parties* on its website. A graduate student looking to understand the field as it has responded to changing developments in American politics—the first volume was closer in time to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 than it is to the present—would

do well to download everything and take a good look through to find patterns of continuity and change.

This institutional legacy frames the latest volume in both its considerable strengths and its telling omissions. The product of a virtual conference in November 2021, it covers a tumultuous period. The denouement of the 2020 election came not on Election Day but with the formal counting of electoral votes, delayed by insurrectionists storming the Capitol on January 6, 2021. Yet, understandably given its lineage, the volume largely takes up and extends long-standing themes treated in previous volumes, rather than striking out in new directions. In particular, the editors’ brief opening essay offers capsule summaries of the 2020 election and the coming chapters more than it provides a frame for larger issues. Above all, the question of how to understand the Republican Party in the Trump years, electorally viable but careening and, to many observers, dangerous, gets tackled in fits and starts more than as a motivating theme.

Polarization—and not questions of democratic performance or democratic decline that have been much in the air in recent discourse—dominates the discussion of the party system. Important essays from Alan Abramowitz and Morris Fiorina bring their diverging perspectives to offer something of a reprise of their debate that framed many a “Parties” course in the 2000s and early 2010s. Abramowitz emphasizes partisan-ideological consistency as the ongoing force behind polarization, motivating both the rise in affective partisanship and in straight-ticket voting. The correlation between liberal-conservative identification and relative-feeling thermometer evaluations of the two parties has risen from 0.33 in 1980 to 0.52 in 2004 to 0.67 in 2020. By contrast, Morris Fiorina, in a somewhat reframed idiom but still colored by his long-standing skepticism of party elites, casts a jaundiced eye from the top down. He expresses doubt that either an identitarian Democratic Party or a populist-nationalist Republican Party will be able to command sufficient support to break the long political deadlock. For their part, Byron Shafer and Regina Wagner frame the transformation of recent decades in terms of activists vanquishing party regulars in the wake of party reform after 1968. Yet they say less about how the “activists’ revenge” played out in the context of a divided system and a Trump-Biden election in which the protagonists were, in very different ways, hardly creatures of their parties’ hardcore activists.

It is worth calling attention to some standout essays, all of which hit the sweet spot of providing easily digestible new data on party activity within the context of longer-term trends. Robert Boatright tackles primary challenges to House incumbents, noting that the wave of ideologically motivated challenges to Republicans peaked in the 2014 cycle while the Democrats have seen a new burst of challengers. In turn, as incumbent Democrats largely bested leftist insurgents, he notes that “there is little evidence that the Republican Party