

POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR SEMINAR

« The Dynamics of Authoritarianism in American National Elections »

Session XI

The construct of authoritarianism has a long history in psychology research but, until recently, has been largely ignored in political science studies of political behavior and voting. Evidence of increasing opposition to social change, ethnocentrism, and intolerance in the U.S. and other Western democracies suggests that it is important to explore factors that may exacerbate these tendencies. I argue that authoritarianism is an important predisposition that varies across people in all populations that has important implications for political behavior in democratic societies. Using data from recent American elections, I show how authoritarianism has become increasingly related to partisan identification, ideology, and vote choice over the last 25 years. By the beginning of the 2016 election campaign a substantial proportion of Republican primary voters had high levels of authoritarianism. I then examine how contextual factors moderated the effects of authoritarianism in the 2016 election. These empirical findings suggest ways in which authoritarianism can help deepen our understanding of the growth of right-wing populism.



Stanley Feldman is a Professor in the Department of Political Science at Stony Brook University and Associate Director of the Center for Survey Research there. He has been at the forefront of the study of authoritarianism in politics. His research focuses on the origins of political preferences. He is particularly interested in the structure of political ideology and values, and the psychological bases of attitudes and opinions. He is currently working on projects to better understand the nature and complexity of ideology and the implications of this complexity for explanations of core political attitudes and beliefs. His work has examined the impact of personality characteristics on political attitudes, particularly authoritarianism.

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