

# Rejecting Authoritarianism: When Values are Endogenous to Politics <sup>1</sup>

By Amy Erica Smith, Mollie Cohen, Mason Moseley, and Matthew Layton

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## Abstract:

As politicians with authoritarian tendencies win elections globally, it becomes urgent to understand the social psychological etiology of support for such candidates. Prior research identifies authoritarian parenting values as a likely predictor of vote choice. We argue that elections featuring authoritarian candidates might also *impact* such attitudes, as voters take cues from elites. This paper assesses evolution in authoritarian parenting values over Brazil's 2018 presidential campaign. Analyzing AmericasBarometer data and a five-wave panel study, we find, consistent with prior literature, that authoritarian parenting attitudes early in the campaign predict eventual vote for authoritarian candidate Bolsonaro. However, contrary to views of authoritarian parenting as a stable, exogenous disposition, these attitudes polarize over the campaign. Furthermore, this evolution is not consistent with prior scholarship on how authoritarian values respond to threat: evolution is limited to Bolsonaro's opponents, who become increasingly anti-authoritarian. The results call for a reconsideration of authoritarianism in the public.

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“The mother cell of society is the family. As such, what is the purpose of a family in which there doesn’t exist the principle of conscious and natural hierarchy between parents and children, in which there is not mutual respect, almost always provoked by the irresponsibility of the parents in not bringing to the children the basic principles of religion, morals, and honesty? Such a family will be fatally driven down the road to its disintegration, and to its weakening. Just as families, so are countries; and just like parents, so are governments.”

*-From a textbook for security personnel combatting internal “subversives” during Brazil’s military dictatorship, quoted in Samways (2013)*

In the wake of the Allies’ victory over Axis powers in World War II, Theodor Adorno and his coauthors wrote that “fascism, in order to be successful as a political movement, must have a mass basis...[T]he Nazi leaders...acted as if it were necessary at every moment to take into account the psychology of the people—to activate every ounce of their antidemocratic potential...” (1950, 10). Seven decades later, the world again finds itself in a wave of autocratization, albeit one of a softer variety. Once again, mass support for authoritarian leaders has been critical, this time typically via elections. In the third wave of authoritarianism, democratic backsliding has most often taken place at the ballot box, as citizens have elected authoritarian candidates who overtly expressed their disdain or ambivalence toward democratic institutions and norms during their campaigns.

What role does psychology play? Is there such a thing as an “authoritarian personality” that predicts support for the new generation of authoritarian leaders, as Adorno and coauthors posited? And if so, how does the political environment *shape* that personality? While Adorno et al. conceptualized authoritarianism as a “more or less enduring organization of forces within the individual,” they also recognized that it “evolves under the impact of the social environment” (1950, 5). Subsequent research, however, has largely conceptualized authoritarianism as a long-

standing disposition that affects but is not affected by political outcomes. We argue that authoritarian values simultaneously shape and are slowly shaped by politics, with important consequences for political systems. As authoritarian leaders shift the dispositions of their supporters and opponents, political regimes themselves could hang in the balance.

In this paper, we analyze AmericasBarometer data as well as a five-wave online panel study conducted during and after Brazil's 2018 presidential campaign that resulted in the election of the far-rightist Jair Bolsonaro. We examine both the effect of authoritarian values on support for Bolsonaro, and the reverse effect of support for Bolsonaro on changes in those values over the course of the campaign. Moreover, drawing on conflicting prior research on the relationship between authoritarian values and threat, we examine whose views change: whether supporters or opponents of the authoritarian candidate.

We find that authoritarian values early in the campaign strongly shaped eventual vote for Bolsonaro, at the same time that early support for Bolsonaro also had downstream consequences for those values. In other words, authoritarianism and support for authoritarian candidates were mutually endogenous, contradicting conceptualizations of authoritarianism as a stable disposition largely external to politics. At the same time—and contrary to existing research on the relationship between threat and authoritarianism—we find that the campaign led to polarization in authoritarian values. This polarization happened because Bolsonaro's opponents became increasingly anti-authoritarian over the course of the campaign; however, the campaign did not change authoritarian predispositions among Bolsonaro's supporters. As a result, Bolsonaro's campaign and victory had the paradoxical effect of leading levels of authoritarianism to decline slightly in the population as a whole. These results suggest the need for a reconsideration of the nature, determinants, and consequences of authoritarianism in the electorate.

## **Authoritarian Parenting Values and Election Campaigns**

While the term “authoritarianism” has various meanings in scholarship on comparative politics, in political psychology it refers to an orientation toward the world that emphasizes submission to authority figures, a preference for convention, and aggression toward outsiders (Altemeyer 1996; Feldman 2003; Stenner 2005). Individuals high in authoritarianism view respect and obedience to authority figures as foundational to maintaining social order. Conventionalism refers to a preference for maintaining the dominant culture, which leads to intolerance of individuals who flout those conventions. Aggression targets individuals who are perceived to threaten the social order (e.g., immigrants or racial or sexual minorities). This psychological predisposition has been linked to a range of political attitudes and behaviors.

Authoritarianism is associated with conservatism (e.g., Duriez, Van Hiel, and Kossowska 2005; Johnston and Wronski 2015), although this orientation does appear across the political spectrum (Luttig 2017; Wronski et al. 2018). It also predicts opposition to civil rights and support for human rights abuses (Azpuru and Malone 2019; Larsson, Björklund, and Bäckström 2012), intolerance toward minority groups and immigrants (Golec de Zavala, Guerra, and Simão 2017; Roccato, Vieno, and Russo 2014), and even support for anti-democratic activities (e.g., presidents limiting political opposition, hypothetical coups d’etat; Azpuru and Malone 2019).

A debate that is both conceptual and methodological has emerged over whether authoritarianism is a *political* orientation or a less domain-specific worldview, personality trait, or value. Both initial scholarship relying on the F-scale (or “fascism” scale; Adorno et al. 1950)<sup>2</sup> and subsequent work utilizing an “RWA” or “right-wing authoritarianism” battery were

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<sup>2</sup> The F-scale fell out of favor because it suffered from low validity and concerns about acquiescence bias (e.g., Altemeyer 1981).

criticized for measuring authoritarian predispositions using questions highly related to the political dependent variables they aimed to predict. In response, scholars increasingly conceptualize and measure orientations toward authority as basic dispositions that are outside politics and that influence multiple domains. One such approach focuses on parenting attitudes, based on the insight that family relations serve as a model or heuristic that citizens apply to other spheres (e.g., Azpuru and Malone 2019; Barker and Tinnick 2006; Lakoff 2010). “Authoritarian parenting values” describe individuals’ preferences for behaviors in children, which are assumed to reflect basic predispositions to order and hierarchy, and to be theoretically distinct from *outcomes* of an authoritarian disposition (e.g., intolerance).<sup>3</sup> This conceptualization has been widely employed in studies of authoritarianism in politics (e.g. Feldman and Stenner 1997; Feldman 2003; Stenner 2005; Wronski et al. 2018), including in Latin America (Azpuru and Malone 2019; Cohen and Smith 2016; Maldonado 2020; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009).<sup>4</sup> In the present paper, we use the parenting-based conceptualization.

Authoritarian parenting values should predict support for authoritarian candidates, although evidence supporting this contention is somewhat sparse. Authoritarian candidates are those who demonstrate indifference or opposition to liberal democracy’s core norms and rules (e.g., Dahl 1971). Such leaders show weak commitment to the rules of the democratic game, deny the legitimacy of their political opponents, tolerate (or even encourage) violence against their political opponents, and show a willingness to violate their opponents’ civil liberties (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018 pp. 23-24). In short, authoritarian politicians’ speech and actions

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<sup>3</sup> “Values” are beliefs about desirable end-states or goals, which can be ranked and which motivate action in various domains (e.g., Schwartz 2012). In that sense, authoritarian parenting attitudes count as values (see also Goren 2020).

<sup>4</sup> The authoritarian parenting battery is not without its critics. One concern is that the measure does not predict outcomes well among African Americans, who tend to score high on authoritarian parenting values but also vote for candidates on the political left; see Pérez and Hetherington 2014.

mirror impulses that past scholarship has linked to authoritarian predispositions in the mass public.

However, studies linking individual authoritarianism to voting for candidates that are explicitly authoritarian are rare. Most research on this trait has been conducted in Western Europe and the United States, which have had limited experience with such candidates in the post-war period. Even so, scholars have linked RWA to electoral support for far right and populist candidates in Europe (Mayer and Perrineau 1992) as well as the “leave” campaign during the 2016 Brexit referendum (Golec de Zavala, Guerra, and Simão 2017). More directly related to support for explicitly authoritarian candidates, authoritarian parenting values predicted support for Donald Trump in the 2016 U.S. election (Chattopadhyay 2018; Federico et al. 2016; MacWilliams 2016). And Cohen and Smith (2016) show that authoritarian parenting values predict pre-election support for overtly authoritarian candidates in 14 elections in 9 Latin American countries. In brief, there is good reason to expect that:

H1. Authoritarian parenting values will predict vote choice for authoritarian presidential candidates.

### *Reversing the Causal Arrow*

But what if the causal arrow goes both directions—if support for authoritarian candidates also *shapes* authoritarian parenting values? A burgeoning literature suggests that a wide range of attitudes and dispositions are endogenous to partisanship and candidate support. Most obviously, affective orientations toward parties and individual political leaders shape evaluations of political outcomes, from sociotropic economic evaluations to presidential approval to attitudes toward specific policy issues (Bartels 2002; Bisgaard 2015; Bullock et al. 2015; Donovan et al. 2020;

Evans and Pickup 2010; Jerit and Barabas 2012; Jones 2020). The logic is simple. First, views of politicians and parties serve as heuristics, facilitating summary judgments on issues that require background knowledge or sophisticated policy reasoning (e.g., Campbell et al. 1964). Second, even when simple policy or performance evaluations require no more cognitive effort than partisan judgments, affective ties to elites may trigger partisan biased reasoning processes. Such partisan bias might result from selective exposure to information (deliberate or through individuals' social environments), from affectively driven "hot cognition," or from motivated use of available information (e.g., Lodge and Taber 2005; Taber and Lodge 2006). Regardless of the mechanism, in all these circumstances citizens base their evaluations of elites' outputs on their feelings about elites themselves.

A more recent body of evidence, however, has shown that attitudes toward political elites can influence even more distal psychological dispositions. Over several decades, political psychologists have hunted for underlying, core psychological traits that might be causally prior to politics and powerfully explain citizens' political positions—traits such as values, personality, moral foundations, or other moral intuitions (Barker and Tinnick 2006; Federico et al 2013; Goren 2020; Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2009; Lakoff 2010; Miles and Vaisey 2015; Mondak 2010; Schwartz, Caprara, and Vecchione 2010). However, a series of studies demonstrates that many of these supposedly exogenous dimensions are, at least sometimes, *influenced by* political views themselves. For instance, Goren (2005) determined that between 1992 and 1996 in the United States, shifts in partisanship constrained, but were not strongly constrained by, political values—an effect that Connors (2020) demonstrates likely stems from the social influence of partisan networks. Similarly, scholars have in recent years shown that Americans' party identification influences such supposedly exogenous dispositions as moral foundations (Ciuk

2018; Hatemi, Crabtree, and Smith 2019; Smith et al. 2017) and personality (Boston et al 2018). Even more strikingly, recent work suggests that Americans' partisanship can influence such long-standing social identities as religious affiliation (Campbell et al 2018; Djupe, Neiheisel, and Conger 2018; Goren and Chapp 2017; Hout and Fischer 2002; Margolis 2018). In short, while Campbell et al. (1964) viewed partisanship as a core political identity that was shaped by demographic identities and values in the "funnel of causality" of voting behavior, recent work suggests that this "unmoved mover" might belong further back in that funnel.

Core attitudes toward childrearing and the family would seem longer-lasting and more fundamental than the vicissitudes of electoral preferences and attachments to political elites. Nonetheless, following from this literature, we argue that political loyalties may not only respond to, but also drive, authoritarianism, particularly in the context of sustained exposure to relevant elite cues. Two mechanisms could underlie such effects. First, political loyalties—including both partisanship and candidate support—can become social identities that trigger attitudinal change through elite persuasion. Just as in-group elites help voters learn "what goes with what" in their *political* attitudes (Converse 1964), consistent exposure to elite messages that bear on essential issues such as order and hierarchy may trigger a process in which voters realign those views. Second, alignment could be rhetorical, driven by social desirability as citizens increasingly recognize which responses match their in-group loyalties (Achen and Bartels 2017). Indeed, two new studies in the United States suggest that authoritarian parenting values are endogenous to other political attitudes. In a working paper analyzing a series of panel studies since 2000, Goren and Chapp (2020) show that views on same-sex marriage and abortion shape authoritarian parenting values, but are not in turn shaped by such values. And analyzing a panel study of the 2016 US presidential election, Luttig (2020) finds that attitudes toward the candidate



Donald Trump influenced self-reported authoritarian parenting values, but that such values did not trigger changes in attitudes toward the candidate.

Questions remain, however. First, evidence varies on the degree of mutual impact between elite attachments and fundamental dispositions. On the one hand, the two existing studies in the United States suggest that the causal arrow runs almost entirely from political attitudes to authoritarianism, rather than the reverse. On the other hand, studies of political values and moral foundations generally find that those dispositions are fairly stable and do shape partisan attachments, even though they are not entirely exogenous to politics. Given the limited research on this matter to date, more evidence is needed to determine how stable, influential, and endogenous authoritarian parenting values might be. In sum, we expect that:

H2. Authoritarian attitudes are endogenous to candidate support over the course of an election with an authoritarian candidate.

### *Whose Views Change?*

Beyond endogeneity, we tackle a second set of unresolved issues. Existing studies have not considered who adjusts their views. Do supporters of authoritarian candidates become more authoritarian, or do their opponents become less so, or both? The answer to this question has tremendous import for how we understand the democratic impact of elections with authoritarians on the ballot. If authoritarian candidates trigger rising authoritarianism among their supporters, we might see a spiral in which certain voters became ever more disposed to accept authoritarian candidates. If, however, authoritarian opponents moved *away* from authoritarianism, this might indicate that the democratic body politic had built some antibodies against aggressors.

Prior work on authoritarianism offers some insights. Substantial debate exists about whether threat intensifies authoritarian policy views among latent authoritarians (e.g., Feldman 2003; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009; Stenner 2005) or instead increases downstream authoritarian preferences among non-authoritarians (e.g., Altemeyer 1996; Hetherington and Suhay 2011; Hetherington and Weiler 2009). According to the first perspective, cross-national research suggests that threat tightens the correlation between latent authoritarianism and subsequent attitudes and behavior (Maldonado 2020; Roccato, Vieno, and Russo 2014). For instance, Merolla and Zechmeister (2009) show that experimental exposure to terrorist and economic threats increases Americans' and Mexicans' preferences for punitive policies, particularly among those who hold authoritarian parenting values.<sup>5</sup> The second perspective, by contrast, argues that authoritarianism is a persistently salient personality trait, activated by the triggers of daily life—perhaps in part because authoritarians experience heightened fear (e.g., Dallago and Roccato 2010). As a result, some individuals *always* prefer policies and candidates that protect the status quo through aggression toward minorities. In this view, threat impacts the attitudes of *non*-authoritarians, triggering formerly tolerant individuals to increasingly prefer aggressive and restrictive policies. As threat boosts authoritarian policy preferences among non-authoritarians, intolerance will increase in the population (e.g., Hetherington and Suhay 2011).

Democratic campaigns present various threats to the electorate. First, campaigns inherently constitute out-group challenges to in-group partisan identities, threatening all voters with affective ties to candidates who could potentially lose. Second, different candidates make a variety of specific threats salient. Right-wing authoritarian candidates often highlight threats from crime or racial or sexual minorities. By contrast, their opponents may portray authoritarian

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<sup>5</sup> The study also employs an adapted battery, to make scale items more relevant to student samples.

candidates as threats to the democratic system. In all cases, electoral campaigns featuring authoritarian candidates are likely to be contexts of high threat.

Under such circumstances, predictions drawing on the two competing perspectives diverge. Most obviously, both suggest support for authoritarian candidates should increase during threatening campaigns: either among those with authoritarian parenting values (per the first perspective) or among citizens who were less authoritarian at the outset of the campaign (per the second). We, however, are primarily concerned with the reverse causal arrow. To what extent do supporters or opponents of an authoritarian candidates adjust their parenting values when an election raises levels of threat? Neither side of the debate we reviewed directly considers how threat influences authoritarian parenting values *themselves*. Instead, both perspectives address other dependent variables, such as intolerance of racial minorities or support for authoritarian politicians. Indeed, they assume that authoritarian parenting values are exogenous and stable under conditions of threat. Nonetheless, if we relax that assumption, both sides provide hints regarding how threat might influence such values. The “activation” perspective suggests that threatening campaigns could trigger rising authoritarian parenting values among the supporters of the authoritarian candidates, analogously to the impact of experimental threats on other attitudes. By contrast, the “non-authoritarian increase” perspective would predict stable (and high) authoritarianism among supporters of the authoritarian candidate, with an increase in such parenting values among *opponents* of the authoritarian candidate, who began the campaign with less authoritarian views. Existing literature, however, provides little evidence adjudicating between these predictions, and the one existing study of endogenous authoritarianism (Luttig 2020) provides few clues regarding whose attitudes change over time.

Beyond those competing predictions, scholarship on social identity and endogenous attitudes suggests a third perspective: some threats might *decrease* authoritarianism within certain groups. While the activation-versus-non-authoritarian-increase debate has largely contemplated external, security-related threats, democratic electoral contexts often present a threat to in-group identity, instead. Prior evidence suggests that out-group partisan cues may be more effective in triggering value change than in-group cues (Goren et al 2009); we suspect that similar processes may play out for authoritarianism. If so, consistent exposure to partisan out-group elites high in authoritarianism could trigger their less-authoritarian opponents increasingly to reject authoritarian values. Following from this discussion, we ask the following:

RQ1. In elections featuring authoritarian candidates, do levels of authoritarian parenting values (a) increase among authoritarian candidates' supporters, (b) increase among such candidates' opponents, or (c) decline among such candidates' opponents?

*Moving Beyond the "Narrow Database" of the United States: The Brazilian Case*

A final unresolved question relates to the role of context. In a famous article, Sears (1986) decried social psychology's reliance on the "narrow data base" of "college sophomores in the laboratory" to develop supposedly universal generalizations about psychological processes. Sears' and others' critiques stimulated decades of academic work to diversify samples. Nonetheless, even today political psychology continues to be limited by its reliance on samples from the United States to understand issues such as polarization and support for authoritarianism. The vast majority of research into authoritarianism and endogenous attitudes has been based in the United States; the nearly exclusive focus on that single country case study raises questions about how broadly effects extend to other contexts. Prior research shows that levels of authoritarian parenting values in the United States are the lowest in the Western Hemisphere

(Cohen and Smith 2016); this may make such values more malleable in the United States under contexts of threat, as they are less likely to have hit ceiling effects. In addition, certain features of the American political system may make partisanship a particularly powerful driver of Americans' core psychological dispositions. The rise of culture war politics, combined with sorting and polarization at the elite level, may help citizens identify different parties with different fundamental outlooks such as moral foundations, political values, or authoritarian parenting values. Moreover, the two-party system creates a bipolar space in which voters can more easily identify parties' moral attributes. Finally, the winner-take-all electoral system as well as high levels of affective polarization and social sorting at the mass level in the United States may increase the psychic and social benefits of aligning oneself with the fundamental views of one's party, as well as the costs of deviation. For all these reasons, then, we should be skeptical about whether effects identified within the United States extend to other contexts. Tests outside the United States are necessary to understand how far these results travel.

Nonetheless, we might logically expect similar processes to occur in at least some other contexts. The most important preconditions are that citizens must have relatively stable, deeply rooted, and affective ties to parties or politicians who are associated with distinctive positions on the dispositions in question (Dancey and Goren 2010; Goren, Federico, and Kittilson 2009). Political polarization should further heighten citizens' tendency to link their partisan ties to their other views (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2015, Layman and Carsey 2002). In the Brazilian case that we consider here, Samuels and Zucco have shown that attitudes toward the Workers' Party (PT) and Party of Brazilian Social Democracy (PSDB) can serve as heuristics driving policy evaluations (2014, 2018). However, we are unaware of evidence to date regarding

the impact of partisanship on more fundamental dispositions such as values, personality, or authoritarianism outside the United States.

A number of features of the contemporary Brazilian political context make this country a site in which ties to elites might orient fundamental psychological dispositions or values. Over the past two decades, increasingly polarized, religiously based culture war politics has come to orient political divisions between a left wing led by the PT and a right wing led by a large number of highly fragmented parties (Smith 2019). In this context, a growing bloc of evangelical legislators has become associated with conservative stances on sexuality politics issues such as LGBT rights and abortion, improving representation of the policy views of conservative citizens whose policy views were poorly represented by other politicians (Boas and Smith 2019). Prior work in the US shows that such issues have been particularly important in shaping citizens' authoritarian parenting values (Goren and Chapp 2020). While Brazil's extreme multipartisanship might ordinarily complicate citizens' ability to identify parties and politicians with different stances on fundamental values and morals, the past two decades have seen elites and voters become increasingly polarized by their stances on the PT. That is, "petismo" (PT support) versus antipetismo has become the central partisan divide in Brazilian politics, simplifying the partisan ideological space (Samuels and Zucco 2019). Moreover, while early work suggested that petismo was driven by ephemeral election- and candidate-related factors, recent work shows that this attitude has become a meaningful social identification that is relatively stable but that has changed over time with the party's brand (Baker et al. 2016).

We expect that authoritarian parenting values played an important role in Brazil's 2018 election. On the left, the PT candidate Fernando Haddad became strongly associated with sexuality politics issues. Haddad's opponents successfully ran a fake news campaign on social

media that characterized Haddad's platform as planning to enlist the state to forcibly recruit young children into homosexuality and transgender identities (Smith 2019). On the right, the eventual election winner Jair Bolsonaro was associated with conservative stances on sexuality politics issues, and with opposition to policies that would reduce traditional race and gender hierarchies (Layton et al. 2020). Moreover, the election reactivated an older cleavage between advocates of democracy versus defenders of the 1964-1985 military regime, as Bolsonaro, an army officer during the regime, was vocal and persistent in his defense of the regime. Indeed, recent work shows that the election campaign sorted and polarized the electorate by attitudes toward democracy and authoritarianism (Cohen et al 2020). These two issue cleavages (sexuality politics and democracy) were correlated, as the 2018 election may have reactivated a historical link between the military regime and conservative, authoritarian stances on sexuality politics and the family (Cowan 2016; Samways 2013).

## **Data**

We examine the relationship between authoritarianism and candidate support using two datasets. The first is the Brazilian wave of the AmericasBarometer, conducted between January and March 2019; the second is an original five-wave online panel study we gathered from July 2018 to January 2019 using the Qualtrics survey platform. We contracted NetQuest, an international survey provider, to recruit participants to achieve a diverse national sample that is representative of the population with respect to gender and region, and meets a targeted income distribution.<sup>6</sup> Our panel study intentionally replicated numerous questions from the AmericasBarometer time series to facilitate direct comparison of the results (all variables are described in the SI). Such a

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<sup>6</sup> In a middle-income country like Brazil, individuals in the lowest income brackets are difficult to recruit for online studies such as this one.

comparison is further facilitated by the fact that the AmericasBarometer went into the field just two weeks after the final wave of our study. The two datasets offer distinct advantages: while the AmericasBarometer is based on a high-quality, nationally representative, face-to-face survey sample, our panel study enables us to examine change within individuals and questions of mutual influence.

The beginning of our panel coincides with the official start of the presidential campaign, and the final wave was fielded shortly following Bolsonaro's inauguration. Over the five study waves, we received 6,045 total responses. Here, we examine results from the first (N=2,018, collected July 6-21, 2018), second (N=1,009, September 10-19), fourth (N=957, October 29-November 8), and fifth (N=817, January 9-25) waves (see the SI for a discussion of attrition).<sup>7</sup> By measuring authoritarian parenting values in July, prior to the campaign, we are able to estimate the effect of these predispositions on votes for Bolsonaro, measured using a retrospective question asked in the fourth wave, independent of any shifts in authoritarian parenting values attributable to the campaign. These data also allow us to measure whether and to what extent authoritarian parenting values are endogenous to support for, or opposition to, Bolsonaro. To do so, we take advantage of first-wave measures of authoritarianism, as well as a feeling thermometer assessing respondents' approval of Bolsonaro.

The two surveys use an identical measure of authoritarian parenting values, which asks respondents about their preferences over three paired traits that children can have. Respondents were asked: "Talking about the qualities that children ought to have, here are various characteristics. In your opinion, which one is the most important for a child?" The paired traits are "independence" or "respect for elders"; "obedience" or "autonomy"; and "creativity" or

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<sup>7</sup> The third study wave was conducted on a half-sample and did not include the authoritarian parenting battery.



“discipline.” Variables are recoded so that “1” indicates the authoritarian option and “0” the non-authoritarian. We then take the mean of these three responses; final values range from 0 (no authoritarian responses) to 1 (exclusively authoritarian responses).<sup>8</sup> This variable is available in all but the third wave of the panel study; it was asked of only a half-sample of respondents in the AmericasBarometer.

We examine H1 using both datasets. In the AmericasBarometer, we assess the relationship between vote choice and authoritarian parenting values, both measured early in 2019 (see the SI for wording of the vote choice variable). In our panel survey, we predict vote choice in late October using a retrospective vote choice measure asked in early November (Wave 4). The question reads: “To begin, here is a list of candidates from the first-round presidential election in 2018. For which candidate did you vote in the first round?” Individuals who reported voting for Bolsonaro are coded as “1,” those who reported a vote for another candidate are coded as “0,” and those who reported abstaining or casting a blank or spoiled vote are coded as “2.”

For the endogeneity analyses testing H2 and the Research Question, we relied exclusively on the panel study, and our endogenous variable is a measure of approval of Bolsonaro asked in the first and fourth waves. The question reads: “Here is a list of [pre-]candidates in the 2018 presidential election.<sup>9</sup> To what extent do you approve or disapprove of these candidates?” Responses ranged from 1 (strong disapproval) to 7 (strong approval); we recode responses to range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating higher approval of Bolsonaro.

Because Bolsonaro made anti-democracy appeals, in both datasets we control for three pre-election measures of democratic orientations. Doing so allows us to be confident that the

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<sup>8</sup> Cronbach’s alpha is 0.68 for the recoded items, suggesting a strong scale.

<sup>9</sup> Because the first study wave was fielded before official candidate selection, candidates were listed as “pre-candidates” in that survey. For later waves, the item referred to “candidates.”

estimated association between authoritarian parenting values and support for Bolsonaro does not merely reflect the link between authoritarian parenting values and either broader anti-democratic orientations. First, we control for abstract support for democracy, measured in both studies using a Churchillian measure of democratic support (asked in all waves of the panel). Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: “Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government.” Responses ranged from 1 (strong disagreement) to 7 (strong agreement). Second, drawing on Booth and Seligson (2009) among others, we create a measure of “system support,” again using an identical battery in both studies (included in the first, fourth, and fifth waves of the panel). Our index averages beliefs that the courts guarantee a fair trial, respect for the country’s political institutions, beliefs that citizens’ rights are well-protected under the political system, pride to live under the political system, and beliefs that one should support the political system. All variables were measured on a seven-point scale, with higher values indicating more support. We rescaled both the measure of abstract support and the measure of system support to range from 0 (low support) to 1 (high support). Third, we measured support for hypothetical coups d’etat. In the AmericasBarometer analysis, this is based on a single dichotomous variable, as described in the SI. In our own panel, we assessed support for coups in three scenarios in all but the fourth wave: when there is a lot of crime, when there is a lot of corruption, and under current circumstances. Our resulting variable takes the average of support for coups across each of these three scenarios and ranges from 0 (no support for coups) to 1 (support for coups in all three scenarios).

It is also important to account for ideology, as citizens on the right are known to have higher levels of authoritarianism, and Bolsonaro almost certainly attracted rightists. In both studies, we controlled for self-reported ideology, measured using a question that asked

respondents to situate themselves on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 indicates “left,” and 10 indicates “right.” Given evidence that non-response to this question is high and correlated with measures of class and political sophistication in Brazil and across Latin America (Ames and Smith 2010; Batista Pereira 2020; Zechmeister and Corral 2010), we convert this variable into a series of categorical variables for left (position 1–4), center (5–6), right (7–10), and non-responder. This variable is only available for the fifth wave in the panel study.

We also include demographic control variables, including self-reported gender, age, ethnicity, education, religious identification, and household wealth (in the AmericasBarometer) or a measure of socio-economic status (in the panel). All variables are described in further detail in the SI.

## **Results and Discussion**

Before turning to our main analyses, we briefly consider where Brazil stood in early 2019 on authoritarian parenting. In the nationally representative AmericasBarometer survey, the level of these values was exceptionally high, at 0.88 on the 0 to 1 scale.<sup>10</sup> The question was not asked in other countries in 2019, and so those results cannot be put in comparative context. Contrasting Brazil’s 2019 figure with regionwide results from 2012 reported in Cohen and Smith (2016), however, we see that authoritarian parenting had jumped up substantially in Brazil, from .78 in 2012. Analyzing nineteen countries, Cohen and Smith (2016) show a strong inverse relationship between human development and authoritarianism in 2012; the US had lowest authoritarian parenting at .53, and the Dominican Republic had highest, at .91. Thus, the 2019 result of .88 in

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<sup>10</sup> Cohen and Smith (2016) actually reported mean levels on a 0 to 100 scale, which we convert to 0 to 1 for ease of comparison here.

Brazil is very high indeed. This provides some initial indication that authoritarianism may evolve over the long-term, either responding to or shaping political developments.

Our main analysis begins by assessing the relationship between authoritarian parenting values and support for Bolsonaro in the AmericasBarometer in early 2019, as we show in Table 1 (see SI for full results). After accounting for ideology as well as several democratic attitudes, authoritarian parenting values strongly correlate with reporting a first-round vote choice for Bolsonaro. Holding other variables at their observed values, moving from the minimum to maximum levels of authoritarian parenting is associated with a rise in the predicted probability of reporting a first-round vote choice for Bolsonaro from .29 to .43—an effect similar in magnitude to that of moving from minimum to maximum values of support for democracy. Authoritarian parenting values are among the strongest correlates of a first-round vote choice for Bolsonaro.

Table 1. Multinomial logistic regression model of reporting a vote for Bolsonaro, AmericasBarometer 2019

	Other Candidate (v. Bolsonaro)	Abstain/Null/Blank (v. Bolsonaro)
Authoritarian Parenting Values	-1.541* (0.752)	-1.579* (0.696)
Support for Democracy	1.370** (0.477)	0.487 (0.479)
System Support	-1.158** (0.339)	-0.827** (0.260)
Support for Coups	-1.323* (0.585)	-0.716 (0.581)
Leftist	1.128 (0.764)	-0.298 (0.564)
Centrist	0.950 (0.727)	0.250 (0.543)
Rightist	-0.381 (0.708)	-0.757 (0.515)
Demographic Controls	YES	YES
<i>Observations</i>	489	

	Other Candidate (v. Bolsonaro)	Abstain/Null/Blank (v. Bolsonaro)
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Notes: The multinomial logistic regression models control for gender, household wealth, ethnicity, education, religion, religious attendance, age, size of place of residence, and region. Standard errors are in parentheses. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

While these results are superficially consistent with H1, the cross-sectional nature of the AmericasBarometer data poses major challenges to any assessment of direction of influence. Not only is vote choice measured three months after the election, but, more importantly, authoritarian parenting values are measured contemporaneously with vote choice. Under these circumstances, it is entirely possible that support for Bolsonaro, or his victory and inauguration, influenced these values, rather than the reverse. To examine mutual influence more closely, then, we turn to our panel study.

Figure 1 shows the results of a multinomial logistic regression model predicting the relationship between authoritarian parenting values measured in the first wave and first round vote choice for Bolsonaro reported in the fourth study wave (see full results in the SI).<sup>11</sup> Consistent with H1, and with prior work from Latin America (e.g., Cohen and Smith 2016, Maldonado 2020), we observe an association between authoritarian parenting values and later vote choice, even after accounting for a range of democratic attitudes, ideology, and demographics. Those with the lowest authoritarian parenting values in July have a 32.9% predicted likelihood of reporting a first-round vote for Bolsonaro in November, and a 47.7% likelihood of reporting a vote for a candidate other than Bolsonaro (values not shown).<sup>12</sup> As authoritarian parenting values increase, the distribution of first-round vote choices shift. Those

<sup>11</sup> Because authoritarianism should impact citizens' sincere candidate preferences, we run all our analysis in the main body of the paper using vote choice in the first-round election; Bolsonaro is predicted to have received about 44% of the first-round vote in our data, within the margin of error of his recorded 46% of the vote in that round. In the SI we also present equivalent analysis using second round vote choice for Bolsonaro versus Haddad.

<sup>12</sup> We observe no association between authoritarian parenting values and abstention or invalidating the ballot.

with the highest authoritarian parenting values in July have a 46.3% likelihood of voting for Bolsonaro, and only a 39.5% likelihood of voting for a different candidate. Across the range of the independent variable, the size of the effect of authoritarian parenting values in July on voting for Bolsonaro in October is 13.4 percentage points. Strikingly, this is effectively identical to the magnitude of the association between authoritarianism and vote choice observed above in analysis of the cross-sectional AmericasBarometer.

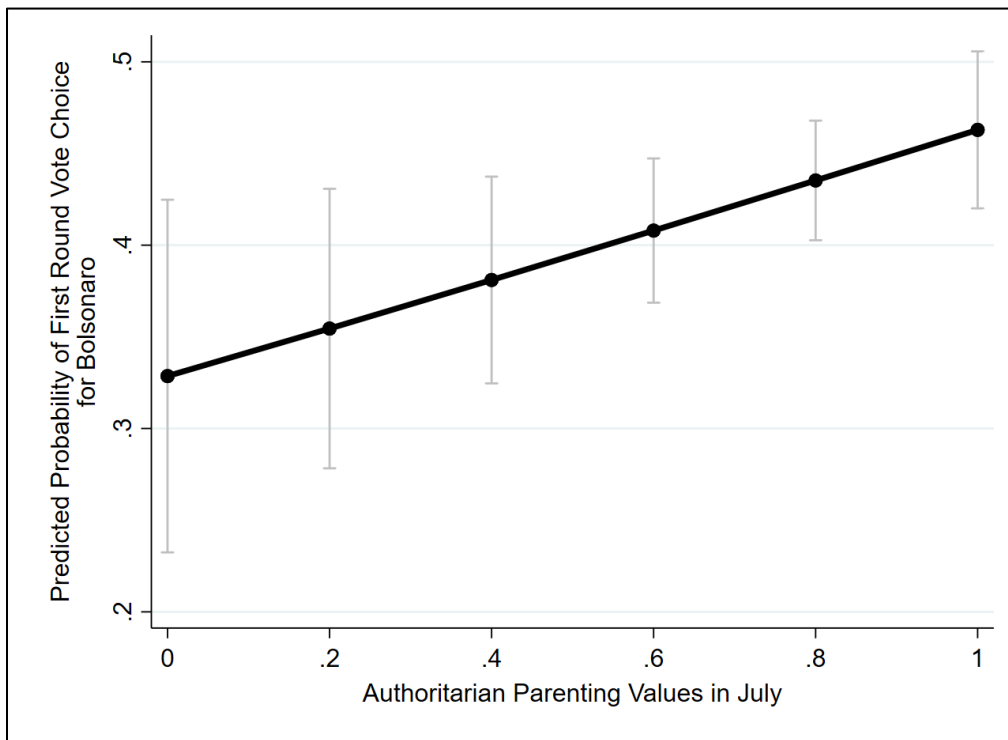


Figure 1. The Association between Authoritarian Parenting Values in the First Wave and Subsequent Candidate Support in the First Round Election

Note: Predicted probabilities are calculated based on second model from SI Table A5.

Are authoritarian parenting values endogenous to vote choice over the course of the campaign? Table 2 replicates Luttig’s 2020 analysis of the mutual endogeneity between support for the authoritarian candidate Trump and authoritarian parenting values in the 2016 US

presidential election—the only study to date to consider the mutual impact of these variables.<sup>13</sup> As noted above, all variables run from 0 to 1, facilitating interpretation of the coefficients for cross-lagged variables and lagged dependent variables. Because we measured the Bolsonaro feeling thermometer in just two waves (Waves 1 and 4), we can only run one test of the cross-lagged impact of authoritarianism on that measure of Bolsonaro support. However, we do run a second test of that cross-lagged impact using self-reported vote choice for Bolsonaro in the second wave (Column 2), although the use of a binary dependent variable is not standard in such analysis. Because we measured authoritarian parenting values in four of the five waves, we are able to run two tests of the cross-lagged impact of the Bolsonaro feeling thermometer on these values (Columns 3 and 4).

Table 2. Mutual Relationship Between Bolsonaro Support and Authoritarian Parenting Values

	Bolsonaro Feeling Thermometer (Wave 4) (OLS)	Bolsonaro v. Haddad Vote (Wave 4) (Logit)	Authoritarian Parenting (Wave 4)	Authoritarian Parenting (Wave 5)
Authoritarianism (Wave 1)	0.185** (0.035)	1.030* (0.430)	0.638** (0.028)	
Authoritarianism (Wave 4)				0.660** (0.029)
Bolsonaro Feeling Thermometer (Wave 1)	0.577** (0.026)		0.104** (0.021)	
Bolsonaro Feeling Thermometer (Wave 4)				0.131** (0.024)
Vote Intention for Bolsonaro (Wave 3)		5.025** (0.382)		
Vote Intention Undecided (Wave 3)		1.393** (0.299)		
Demographic Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES
Number of Observations	822	714	848	721

<sup>13</sup> Luttig uses support for the Republican party as a second dependent variable. We do not have a feeling thermometer of support for Bolsonaro's then-party, the Social Liberal Party, in the data, nor would such responses be meaningful in the Brazilian context.

Notes: All variables are coded to run 0 to 1. Models control for gender, ethnicity, education, socioeconomic status, religion, and age. Standard errors are in parentheses. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Contrary to Luttig's finding that support for Trump impacts but is not impacted by authoritarian parenting values, our analysis in the case of Brazil 2018 presents evidence consistent with a mutually endogenous relationship. Columns 1 and 2 of the table show the relationship between early authoritarian parenting values and later support for Bolsonaro. Column 1 shows the relationship between first-wave authoritarian parenting values and fourth wave feelings toward Bolsonaro. Consistent with Figure 1 above, the relationship is positive and significant, suggesting that authoritarian values increase support for Bolsonaro. Column 2 of the table shows the association between first-wave authoritarianism and vote choice for Bolsonaro (versus Haddad) as reported in the post-election fourth wave. Even controlling for vote intention as reported in the third study wave, there is a positive, significant association between authoritarian parenting values and vote choice.

Columns 3 and 4 test the endogenous relationship between support for Bolsonaro and later authoritarian parenting values. Column 3 examines the effect of the first wave feeling thermometer on authoritarian parenting values, as reported in the fourth study wave, controlling for initial authoritarian parenting values. We find a positive, significant effect of early Bolsonaro approval on authoritarian parenting attitudes in the post-election wave. Column 4 replicates this analysis, examining the endogenous relationship between approval of Bolsonaro reported in the fourth wave and authoritarian parenting values reported in the fifth study wave in January 2019. In short, while there is a strong association between earlier authoritarianism and later vote choice, we also find a strong association between candidate support and later levels of authoritarianism, consistent with H2.



The Research Question asks whether the relationship between earlier candidate preferences and later reported authoritarian parenting values is driven by shifts among Bolsonaro's opponents or his supporters. Figure 2 presents results consistent with the former. The Figure presents reported levels of authoritarian parenting attitudes among Bolsonaro's first-round supporters (measured retrospectively in the fourth survey wave; denoted with a gray dashed line) and opponents (denoted with a solid black line) by survey wave. Bolsonaro's eventual supporters began the campaign with significantly higher levels of authoritarian parenting attitudes than his opponents. On the 0 to 1 scale, authoritarian parenting values among Bolsonaro's supporters were just over 0.8 units in July, compared to 0.7 units among eventual Bolsonaro opponents. Average levels of authoritarian parenting values hold steady at slightly above 0.8 units among Bolsonaro's supporters over the course of the campaign and through his January inauguration. Among those who ultimately voted against Bolsonaro in the first round, however, authoritarian parenting values decline significantly over the course of the election, from 0.7 units in July, 2018 to 0.6 units after the inauguration in January, 2019.

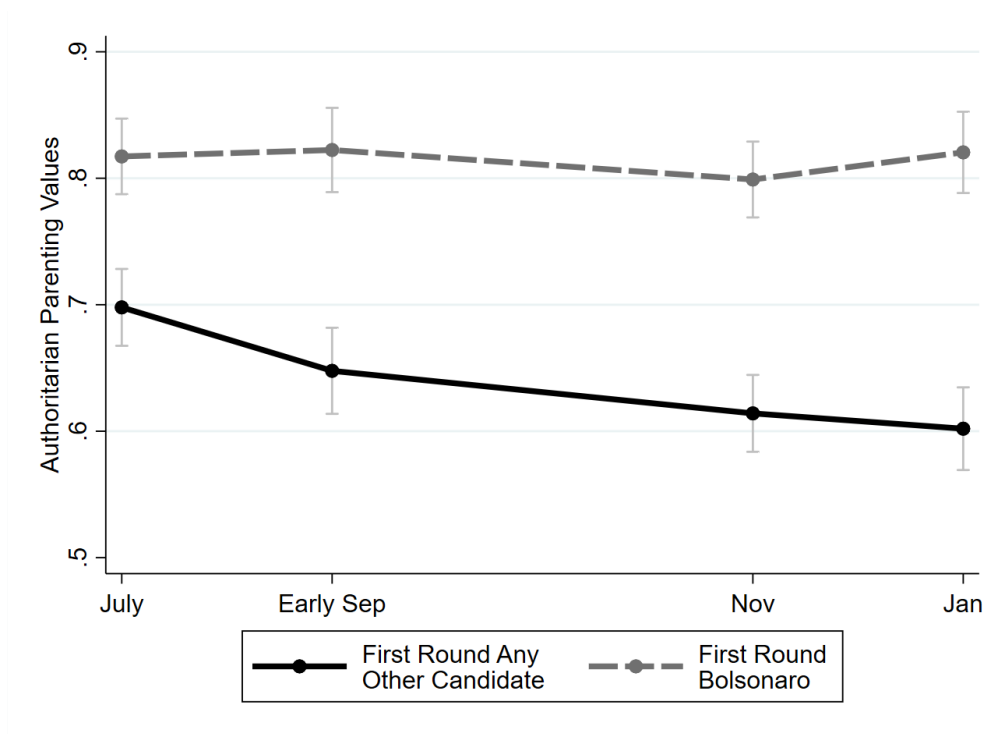


Figure 2. Trends in Authoritarian Parenting Values among First-Round Bolsonaro Supporters and Opponents

Note: Predicted probabilities are calculated based on second model from SI Table A3.

These results are inconsistent with both the “activation” and “non-authoritarian increase” perspectives that we reviewed earlier in this paper. The predictions we derived from the “activation” approach suggested that the threatening context of the campaign would lead to a rise in authoritarian parenting values among initial supporters of Bolsonaro. By contrast, those we derived from the “non-authoritarian increase” approach suggested that the political context would lead to a rise in those values among initial opponents of Bolsonaro. Finally, we suggested a third approach focusing on social identity, in which citizens adjust their attitudes in line with in-group and out-group opinion leaders. These results would appear to be consistent with that third perspective: it seems that some of Bolsonaro’s opponents may have learned to reject authoritarianism by observing and rejecting the behavior of the candidate they opposed.

## Conclusion

As authoritarian candidates compete and win elections around the world with increasing frequency, it is important to understand the origins of their mass support and the effects of their campaigns on the public. While authoritarian candidates may excite and mobilize new political coalitions, campaigns featuring authoritarian candidates may also affect electorates, potentially desensitizing the public to anti-democracy rhetoric and laying the groundwork for future electoral victories.

We use a novel panel dataset collected during Brazil's 2018 presidential election, which authoritarian candidate Jair Bolsonaro won. The results from our analyses are clear: voters who hold strong authoritarian parenting values were significantly more likely to vote for a candidate who ran on an explicitly anti-democracy platform. However, contrary to much existing scholarly literature on authoritarian parenting values, but consistent with work on the endogeneity of moral foundations, we find that attitudes toward Bolsonaro simultaneously shaped Brazilians' views about social hierarchies.

These results have implications for scholarly understanding of the core dispositions driving political behavior. While much scholarly literature has conceptualized views such as authoritarian parenting values or moral foundations as stable predispositions or traits, this study adds to other recent work suggesting that, even over the course of a single election campaign, apparently deeply rooted values can be endogenous to candidate preferences. Yet, importantly, that endogeneity has limits. Contrary to prior evidence from Luttig (2020), but consistent with work from other scholars (Chattopadhyay 2018; Cohen and Smith 2016; Federico et al. 2016; MacWilliams 2016), our analysis shows that authoritarian parenting values *were* an important, if not entirely exogenous, driver of vote choice.

Finally, our results shed light on whose attitudes changed. We do not find evidence that the campaign activated latent authoritarianism, as hypothesized by Feldman and Stenner (1997) and others. And while authoritarian parenting values appear to be persistently salient among Bolsonaro supporters, we also do not find evidence that threats to democracy typified by the campaign resulted in population-wide increases in authoritarianism, either (e.g., Altemeyer 1996). Rather, we find that exposure to this political campaign featuring an authoritarian candidate led to polarization in authoritarian parenting values, with those values *declining* among Bolsonaro’s opponents.

Our findings have important implications for how we understand the current wave of autocratization. On the one hand, they suggest that cross-national variation in authoritarian parenting values can have critical real-world implications for how voters respond to authoritarian candidates when they arise—authoritarian parents may make authoritarian voters. On the other hand, our results also suggest that such candidates also shape the demand-side, in somewhat counterintuitive ways. Authoritarian candidates can potentially have a long-term liberalizing effect on politics by making certain citizens *less* supportive of traditional social hierarchies, overall. This finding echoes recent work on “thermostatic” support for democracy, which has documented that many individuals double down on their commitments to democracy when they perceive it is under attack (Claassen 2020; Cohen et al. 2020).

Our results further demonstrate the importance of studying the psychological correlates of support for authoritarian candidates outside the “narrow data base” of the United States. Using panel data, our findings strongly suggest that authoritarian parenting dispositions *do* predict downstream support for an authoritarian candidate, despite one study finding contrary evidence in the United States (Luttig 2020). Similar work is needed in other cases and contexts to

understand these contradictory results. At the same time, the limitations of our work also constitute a call for a more sophisticated comparative political psychology of authoritarian support. While Brazil is a likely case in which we would find a mutual relationship between authoritarian parenting values and candidate support, we cannot empirically test the scope conditions of our findings. Would they hold for left-wing authoritarian candidates as well as right-wing ones, or in conditions of lower partisan polarization? As the third-wave of autocratization persists, the increasing prevalence of authoritarian candidates will demand careful empirical and theoretical work.

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