

important story, Rego makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of constitutional transformation, democratization, and backsliding in this crucial period of American political development.

**Gun Country: Gun Capitalism, Culture and Control in Cold War America.** By Andrew C. McKeivitt. Chapel Hill, NC:

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In many respects, historian Andrew C. McKeivitt's new book covers familiar ground. A growing number of studies have plumbed the intersection of gun rights activism, gun culture, and its swirling political and policy environs, including Mark R. Joslyn's *The Gun Gap: The Influence of Gun Ownership on Political Behavior and Attitudes* (2020), Matthew LaCombe's *Firepower: How the NRA Turned Gun Owners into a Political Force* (2021) Scott Melzer's *Gun Crusaders* (2009), Melissa K. Merry's *Warped Narratives: Distortion in the Framing of Gun Policy* (2020), Noah Schwartz's *On Target: Gun Culture, Storytelling, and the NRA* (2022), and my own book, *The Politics of Gun Control* (9th ed. 2024). McKeivitt, however, provides a fresh perspective and a persuasive argument on this otherwise well-examined subject.

McKeivitt states his thesis succinctly: "The Cold War and consumer capitalism were the structures that made the gun country what it was by the 1990s" (10). Post-World War II entrepreneurs like Samuel Cummings made a fortune by purchasing massive quantities of war surplus weapons from war-weary European nations at bargain basement prices and then stoking U.S. market demand for the guns "with new styles of advertising that pitched dirt-cheap rifles as throw-away toys for the weekend warrior" (11). Even in the 1950s, the Eisenhower administration weighed whether to intervene, but ultimately decided that it was better to direct the flow of guns to the U.S. domestic market instead of to international communism. That decision kept the arms spigot open and delayed governmental action until assassinations and spiraling crime in the 1960s spurred congressional action that, in turn, activated the first coordinated gun-control movement and correspondingly radicalized the gun rights community.

The book's ten chapters break down into three sections: an exploration of the roots of post-World War II gun entrepreneurial capitalism, culminating in the passage of the 1968 Gun Control Act (Chs. 1–4); an analysis of the limitations of that law and how they were exploited by gun capitalism (Chs. 5–8); and a discussion of how these forces yielded America's modern gun predicament (Chs. 9–10).

Most importantly, McKeivitt debunks the naïve myth that the American gun culture is mostly a bunch of fun, gun-loving hobbyists besieged by gun-control zealots. There is of course a multifarious gun culture, and other books—Pamela Haag's *The Gunning of America* (2016) and Cameron McWhirter and Zusha Elinson's *American Gun: The True Story of the AR-15* (2023)—explore the role of the gun industry and gun organizations in shaping and promoting that culture in the nineteenth century and for the modern AR-15 assault rifle, respectively. McKeivitt's book centers on the Cold War era to map how gun manufacturers and entrepreneurs built and stoked that culture. For example, out of the debate over the GCA came the paradigm of the "virtuous gun buyer and owner, the 'law-abiding citizen,' and counterposed his rights against the unvirtuous criminal and radical, all the while accommodating... the virtually unchecked expansion of gun capitalism" (109).

He also debunks other gun tropes, like the assumption that California's 1967 Mulford bill—which criminalized the public carrying of loaded firearms—was enacted as a hysterical racist reaction to disarm African Americans after some armed Black Panthers entered the State Capitol (the Mulford bill passed thereafter). Race-based fear certainly served as a catalyst, but Mulford's bill and many others then before the legislature predated that demonstration. As McKeivitt points out, "Mulford's bill was just one of a range of gun control bills the California State Assembly took up in May 1967" as "legislators feared a range of extremists across the spectrum having access to the leftover weapons of war that continued to flow into the United States" (78–79). In addition to rising fears of extremist armed groups like the Minutemen, the biggest news headline from a few weeks earlier had covered a police raid on the Pacific Heights, San Francisco mansion of a wealthy eccentric and his wife who had quietly amassed a "fantastic cache of war weapons" (80) in their home, amounting to 30 tons of armaments. Further investigation uncovered another 77 tons of weapons they had stored nearby, "an arsenal fit to topple a small country" (80–81).

In Chapter 8, McKeivitt sidesteps the NRA-centered gun-rights leadership narrative to concentrate on the lesser-known (though also less consequential) component of that movement—what the author calls "an un-NRA history of the early postwar gun rights movement" (180). This non-NRA gun rights movement, spanning grassroots groups and organizations formed in the 1970s including the Gun Owners of America and the Second Amendment Foundation, deserves the treatment he gives it. But McKeivitt's own examination makes clear that these individuals and groups revolved around the NRA sun. When grassroots gun activists "located freedom not in the will of a democratic populace but in the vigilance of an armed citizenry" (189), the NRA co-opted this rhetoric and embraced the view that an armed population was the very definition of a free nation. The springboard for that was

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 *civil 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