

Authoritarianism, Social Dominance, and Generalized Prejudice

A proposal to continue studying Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Social Dominance Orientation in the 2016 ANES Times Series Study

Abstract

In July 2013, scales measuring Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Social Dominance Orientation were included in an ANES study for the first time when a subsample of panelists who had been randomly selected from the 2012 Time Series Study internet sample were re-interviewed. We had initially proposed these ‘short, reliable scales’ (Smith, Hanley & McWilliams, 2011) on the basis of pilot national data indicating that these measures powerfully predict a wide range of attitudes and prejudices. This finding, in turn, amplified and extended findings long reported in many less comprehensive studies.

Our original hypothesis was that including Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) scales would enhance the capacity of the Times Series Study to predict prejudice. That hypothesis is now strongly supported by the evidence from the 2013 study, both for anti-Black prejudices (Smith, Hanley, McWilliams, 2014) and for homophobia (Smith, Hanley, Willson, Alvord, 2015).

On this ground, we hope to see the RWA_5 and SDO_4 scales included in future Times Series Studies including the 2016 study.

Until 2013, the American National Election Studies (ANES) measured authoritarianism with a single 4-part item, which asked respondents to rate the desirability of contrasting traits in children. In 2011, two of us (Smith & Hanley, with McWilliams) proposed the inclusion of two major further scales to measure authoritarianism more completely: a 5-item Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale (RWA_5) and a 4-item Social Dominance Orientation scale (SDO_4).

The point of origin for this proposal was the discovery by McFarland & Adelson (1996), amplified by Altemeyer (1998) that RWA and SDO are unusually strongly predictive of ethnocentrism – significantly more than other attitude scales

– while they co-vary only modestly. Both appear to be forms of authoritarianism and both have strong, and strikingly independent, associations with prejudice.

Since 1998, this discovery has inspired an expanding field of “dual process” studies that treat RWA and SDO as “dual paths to generalized prejudice” (Levin *et al.*, 2012; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). But until the 2013 ANES internet study, empirical research into authoritarianism was balkanized. The word “authoritarianism” itself was applied to results derived from two quite different scales – the child-trait item, which was productively used by many scholars (Kinder & Dale-Riddle, 2012, Tesler & Sears, 2010, Merolla & Zechmeister, 2009, Kinder & Sanders, 1996) and RWA and SDO items, which were discussed in a separate literature. But we felt that the two approaches would be most productive when conjoined – and that the inclusion of RWA and SDO alongside the child-trait items would qualitatively enhance their combined predictive power, not least with respect to prejudice.

This hypothesis is strongly supported by the evidence from the July 2013 reinterview study concerning anti-Black prejudice and homophobia.

Sample

The 2012 study obtained a representative national sample by multistage area-probability sampling with face-to-face interviewing; of that sample, a subset was recontacted in 2013. Since our focus is bias, we restricted our analysis of anti-Black bias to white respondents for whom we had non-missing values for the key variables (N=1023); for homophobia we analyzed those respondents who identified as heterosexual for whom we had non-missing values for core variables (N=1378).

Variables

Dependent variables. Homophobia. (1) support for adoptions by gay and lesbian couples; (2) agreeing that ‘coming out’ is good for society or does no harm; (3) agreeing that public kissing by gay and lesbian couples is no worse than public kissing by heterosexual couples; (4) support, respectively, for gay and lesbian civil unions and marriages; (5) beliefs about the extent of homophobic discrimination; and (6) feelings toward gays and lesbians.¹ *Anti-Black prejudice.* We treated three different attitudes as dependent variables: symbolic racism, negative Black affect and negative stereotypy. Symbolic racism is assessed via four 5-point Likert-scale items: (1) “Irish, Italian, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors”; (2) “Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Blacks to work their way out of the lower class”; (3) “Over the past few years, Blacks have gotten less than they deserve”; and (4) “It’s really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if Blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as Whites.” The stereotypy scale consists of two 5-point Likert-scale items tapping white respondents’ ratings of Blacks on intelligence and diligence. Finally, the negative affect scale reports respondents’ impressions of Blacks on a 100-point feeling thermometer plus two 5-point Likert items: (1) how often have you felt sympathy toward Blacks and (2) how often have you felt admiration.²

Independent variables. RWA. We derived our 5-item RWA_5 scale from Altemeyer’s 20-item RWA scale by multinomial logit analysis of a pilot national

survey. *RWA_5* ($\alpha=.73$) consists of Likert-scaled items, the first two of which are contrait: (1) “There is no ‘one right way’ to live life; everybody has to create their own way”; (2) “Our country needs free thinkers who will have the courage to defy traditional ways, even if this upsets many people”; (3) “Our country will be great if we honor the ways of our forefathers, do what the authorities tell us to do, and get rid of the ‘rotten apples’ who are ruining everything”; (4) “What our country really needs is a strong, determined leader who will crush evil and take us back to our true path”; and (5) “The ‘old-fashioned ways’ and ‘old-fashioned values’ still show the best way to live.” Factorially, items 1, 2, and 5 load strongly on Conventionalism; items 2, 3, and 4 load strongly on Aggressiveness; and the famous “triple-barreled” item 2 loads strongly on the factor of Submissiveness as well.

SDO: We derived our 4-item *SDO_4* scale from the original *SDO* scale (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). This scale ($\alpha=.62$) consists of Likert-scaled items, the first two of which are protrait: (1) “If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems”; (2) “It’s probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom”; (3) “Group equality should be our ideal”; and (4) “We should do what we can to equalize conditions for everyone.” These items were not piloted nationally before 2013 but they are often included in short *SDO* scales and they tap the major factors associated with *SDO*: Group-based dominance (items 1 and 2) and Opposition to equality (items 3 and 4).

CT: The child trait or “CT” scale ($\alpha=.66$), asks for choices between sets of traits: (1) independence or respect for elders, (2) curiosity or good manners, (3) obedience or self-reliance, and (4) being considerate or well-behaved.³

Control variables. We examined variables that are often associated with bias, including, *for both prejudices*, liberal/conservative self-identification and, to control for the possibility that SDO_4 taps anti-egalitarianism rather than SDO, the standard ANES Egalitarianism scale ($\alpha=.83$); *for anti-Black bias*, a scale of perceptions of economic threat ($\alpha=.81$), and a 2-item fundamentalism scale; *for homophobia*, a 4-item moral traditionalism scale ($\alpha=.77$), a continuous variable for attendance at religious services, and dummy variables for fundamentalist self-identification and having a gay or lesbian friend or family member.

Respondent attributes were also analyzed; they appear in the tables below.

Findings

Authoritarianism matters. This is true both for anti-Black and homophobic prejudice, as we see in Tables 1 and 2, below. Table 1 shows that, after we control for the variables cited above, RWA, SDO, and CT all have large robust effects on anti-Black prejudices – especially RWA and SDO. Table 2 shows that, similarly, after we control for the other variables cited above, RWA, SDO, and CT all have large and robust effects on anti-homosexual biases – especially RWA.

Racism results. Table 1, Col. 1, presents parameter estimates from an OLS regression model predicting symbolic racism. This shows that, net of the effect of demographics, fundamentalism, conservatism, and economic threat perceptions,

both RWA and SDO have large and statistically significant effects on prejudice.⁴ Thirty-point increases in RWA or SDO predict increases in SR of 7.98 (30*.266) and 6.81 (30*.227) points. CT increases have significant but much smaller effects; a 30-point CT increase corresponds to an increase in SR of just 2.37 (30*.079) points.

This finding is particularly important because symbolic racism looms larger than other forms of anti-Black prejudice in this subject pool (a finding that is often reported in other studies). The mean value of the SR scale is well above (66.50) the mean values of the anti-Black affect (58.37) and stereotypy (47.41) scales.

Meanwhile, in Table 1, Col. 2, we see parameter estimates from an OLS regression model predicting anti-Black affect. Here too the effects of RWA and SDO are positive and statistically significant, and the effect of SDO, in particular, is greater than child-trait effects by a statistically significant margin.⁵

Table 1, Col. 3, presents parameter estimates from an OLS regression model predicting anti-Black stereotypy. Of the authoritarianism measures, only the SDO and CT effects are significant. And the fact that estimates of SDO effects on both affect and stereotypy suggests that high SDO scorers are less reluctant to express overt forms of prejudice than high RWA and CT scorers. Further, SDO is a more consistent predictor of old-fashioned, overt racism than either fundamentalism, conservatism, or economic threat perceptions.⁶ It is also worth noting that, in general, demographics are relatively meager predictors once authoritarianism, conservatism, fundamentalism, and threat have been taken into consideration.⁷

Homophobia. In Table 2, parameter estimates from logistic regression models predict approval of same-sex adoptions, coming out, and kisses in public. Net of the effects of other variables, a 1-point RWA increase raises the chance of a biased response by nearly 25% for all items.⁸ SDO's effects are less dramatic, but also sizeable: a 1-point increase is associated with a decrease of 22.8% ($e^{-.259}=.772$) in approval for same-sex adoptions; 17.3% ($e^{-.189}=.827$) for coming out; and 12.8% ($e^{-.137}=.872$) for same-sex kisses.⁹ We obtain similar results for RWA, but not for SDO, with respect to marriages and civil unions (as indicated by our multinomial logit analysis). A 1-point RWA increase lowers support 20.0% ($e^{-.223}=.800$) for civil unions and 27.1% ($e^{-.316}=.729$) for same-sex marriages. High RWA scores, in short, are closely associated with homophobia by every ANES measure. SDO's negative effects are also real, but only with respect to same-sex marriages.¹⁰

Authoritarianism, in other words, weighs heavily on prejudice in all its forms.
In different but equally pertinent ways RWA, SDO and CT are all powerful predictive.

A few other findings are also notable, outside the realm of bias. Since RWA and SDO have not previously been studied by means of studies of this caliber, the 2012-13 studies shine new light on old issues. Several new results emerge, not least, and most positively, the fact that the mean RWA score (44.25) is surprisingly low. Less positive is the finding that the mean SDO score (41.47) is unexpectedly high.

Meanwhile, in other areas: Gender. As usual RWA scores are relatively balanced, while men exceed women on SDO (as usual) – but the gender disparity in SDO scores is less than usual. Age: Respondents 66+ scored higher on RWA

and lower on SDO than 18-to-35 year-olds, but only modestly. Education: RWA scores fall sharply while SDO scores fall modestly as education rises; SDO exceeds RWA for those with college degrees. Income: As income rises, RWA falls sharply while SDO rises nearly as steeply. Respondents with more than \$85K have mean SDO scores above their mean RWA scores. Urban-Rural: RWA is much higher in rural counties than in urban counties; SDO is also somewhat higher in rural areas. All these results strengthen our conviction that the 2016 ANES Time Series Study would benefit significantly from the renewed use of the RWA_5 and SDO_4 scales.

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Table 1. OLS REGRESSION COEFFICIENT FROM MODEL PREDICTING SCORES ON ANTI-BLACK PREJUDICE SCALES (STANDARD ERRORS IN PARENTHESES)

	SYMBOLIC RACISM	ANTI-BLACK AFFECT	ANTI-BLACK STEREOTYPY
RWA_5	.266*** (.061)	.110* (.046)	.047 (.059)
SDO_4	.227*** (.051)	.220*** (.044)	.209*** (.050)
CT	.079** (.026)	.026 (.022)	.063* (.029)
Cconservatism	.242*** (.042)	.037 (.046)	.095* (.047)
Economic threat	.320*** (.064)	.033 (.058)	.107 (.076)
Fundamentalism	-.019 (.041)	-.003 (.045)	-.155** (.046)
Gender (male=1)	.029 (1.668)	1.504 (1.368)	1.988 (1.652)
Age (years)	.032 (.046)	-.097* (.038)	-.027 (.046)
Education (BA+=1)	-3.526* (1.706)	-.955 (1.423)	-.184 (1.588)
Income (1000s USD)	.493** (.180)	.025 (.157)	.284 (.184)
Metro county (=1)	-2.055 (2.061)	-2.995 (1.715)	.422 (2.348)
Constant	13.138* (5.132)	52.061*** (4.127)	27.446*** (6.586)
R-squared	.430	.179	.115
Number of cases	1013	1013	1013

* p > .05 ** p > .01 *** p > .001

Table 2. LOGISTIC REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FROM MODEL PREDICTING SCORES ON HOMOPHOBIA SCALES, HETEROSEXUALS ONLY (STANDARD ERRORS IN PARENTHESES)

SCALES	APPROVE SAME-SEX ADOPTION	APPROVE COMING OUT	APPROVE PUBLIC KISSING
RWA_5	-.264* (.065)	-.272** (.069)	-.262** (.064)
SDO_4	-.259** (.065)	-.189** (.072)	-.137* (.061)
CT	-.021 (.039)	-.006 (.043)	-.050 (.041)
Moral traditionalism	-.400** (.062)	-.362** (.063)	-.457** (.059)
Egalitarianism	.008 (.067)	-.018 (.059)	-.014 (.057)
Liberalism/conservatism	-.118* (.052)	-.064 (.054)	.006 (.059)
Fundamentalism	-.431 (.241)	-.438 (.233)	-.664** (.221)
Religious attendance	-.074** (.025)	-.065* (.026)	-.013 (.023)
Gender (male=1)	-.667** (.193)	-.324 (.207)	-.221 (.182)
Age (in years)	.008 (.006)	.007 (.006)	-.003 (.006)
Some college	.079 (.200)	-.663* (.273)	.091 (.220)
BA or higher	-.135 (.184)	-.556* (.274)	-.170 (.223)
Black	-.403 (.313)	-.320 (.405)	-.280 (.296)
Hispanic	-.301 (.368)	-.107 (.336)	.510* (.307)
Other racial-ethnic group	-1.111 (.760)	.094 (.571)	.481 (.369)
Knows gay/s or lesbian/s	.538** (.195)	.964** (.201)	.680** (.176)
Constant	6.568** (.674)	6.503** (.677)	5.278** (.533)
Number of cases	1378	1378	1378

* p > .05 ** p > .01

¹ The first three dependent variables (*against adoption, coming out is good, kissing in public is no worse*) are binary-response variables which are coded 1 if respondents express unbiased attitudes and 0 otherwise. We analyze these variables via logistic regression. The variable measuring attitudes towards civil unions and marriages is a categorical variable with three responses – coded 0 if respondents disapprove of both civil unions and marriages, 1 if they approve of civil unions only, and 2 if they approve of gay and lesbian marriages. We analyze this variable using a multinomial logit model. Since the last two variables (*extent of discrimination and feelings toward gays and lesbians*) are continuous, we analyze them with standard OLS regression models. A feeling score of 100 is “very warm” and 0 is ultra-cold, while 50 is neutral. With respect to the extent of discrimination 100 affirms a great deal of discrimination, 50 indicates “a moderate amount” of discrimination, and 0 indicates “none at all.”

² Each item was reverse coded (as needed), standardized, and averaged to produce the respective measures. The scales were later recoded to range from 0 to 100 to permit comparison of parameter estimates. Each scale also exhibits a high degree of reliability, with Cronbach’s alphas equaling .86 for the symbolic racism scale, .79 for the negative Black stereotype scale, and .63 for the negative Black affect scale.

³ Respondents scored 5 if they chose the presumably authoritarian options (respect, good manners, obedience, well-behaved) and 1 if they chose the opposites. The items from all three of these more-or-less authoritarianism scales (RWA, SDO, CT) were reverse coded as appropriate, and standardized to range from 0 to 100, with higher values indicating a higher degree of right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, and what, for the CT scale, *à la* Barker and Tinnick (2006), we call “disciplinarianism” respectively.

⁴ Only economic threat perceptions proved more powerful for this particular form of prejudice.

⁵ While the magnitude of the SDO coefficient is larger than that of RWA, the difference is not statistically significant and we cannot reject the null hypothesis that the two effects are equal.

⁶ With respect to the control variables, while the effects of conservatism and economic threat perceptions on scores on the SR scale are large and positive, their effects on both anti-Black affect and stereotypy are not equally great, so that we cannot rule out the null hypotheses that they are equal. Fundamentalism has a statistically significant effect only on stereotypy – and this effect is negative, as per findings reported in the literature.

⁷ Education and income are statistically significant only *vis-à-vis* symbolic racism (negatively and positively respectively), and the age effect is statistically significant only *vis-à-vis* affect, with older respondents expressing more positive feelings than younger respondents net of the effect of the other variables included in the analysis.

⁸ Specifically, a 1% RWA increase reduces support for all three: for same-sex adoptions by 23.3% ($e^{-.264}=.767$); for the view that coming out is good or does no harm by 23.9% ($e^{-.272}=.761$), and for public same-sex kisses by 23.1% ($e^{-.262}=.769$).

⁹ And it is important to note that the differences in the size of the coefficients corresponding to RWA and SDO, respectively, are not statistically significant in any of these three models.

¹⁰ While a 1-point increase in SDO lowers support for same-sex marriages by 23.1% ($e^{-.263}=.769$), support for civil unions is nearly unaffected; in this instance, the coefficient associated with SDO is negative but not statistically significant at the .05 level. Overall, of the control variables, only one is powerfully predictive: Moral Traditionalism (MT). That may in part reflect the presence of an MT item that calls for judgment about “traditional family ties” – and the differences between the coefficients for MT, RWA, and SDO are statistically significant at the .05 level; in the remainder of cases, we cannot rule out the null hypothesis that the differences in question are zero. But notwithstanding that overlap, moral traditionalism is clearly a well-established scale with independent, negative, and sizeable effects on anti-homosexual bias.