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Article in *Psychological Inquiry* · August 2009

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Three Kinds of “Conservatism”

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When people use the terms *conservative* or *right-wing* they typically mean one (or problematically, more) of the following: an enduring inclination to favor stability and preservation of the status quo over social change (what I call “status quo conservatism”); a persistent preference for a free market and limited government intervention in the economy (“laissez-faire conservatism”); or an enduring predisposition, in all matters political and social, to favor obedience and conformity (oneness and sameness) over freedom and difference.

The latter—which some have labeled “social conservatism” (Wilson, 1973; Wilson & Patterson, 1968) but which I call “authoritarianism”—has been my central research interest for more than a decade (see Feldman & Stenner, 1997; Stenner, 1997; especially Stenner, 2005). In that time, I have repeatedly tested two central hypotheses, as follows.

H1: Authoritarianism (and *not* conservatism, lack of education, or religion) is the principal determinant of intolerance of difference across time and space and domain, that is, across any stretch of history, all cultures and every aspect (including racial, political and moral intolerance).

Note that this proposition is not so bold as to claim that authoritarianism will always be the principal determinant of, say, *racial* intolerance in a *certain* region at a *particular* point in time, but only that authoritarianism explains the most variance in intolerant attitudes and behavior *across* domains, and cultures, and periods.

I have argued (see also Duckitt, 1989) that authoritarianism is an individual predisposition—a system of *functionally related* stances—addressing one of those “basic human dilemmas . . . common to all mankind” (Duckitt, 1989, p. 72): that of the appropriate balance between group authority and uniformity and individual autonomy and diversity.

Mostly we recognize a predisposition by observing individuals’ tendencies to respond in a like manner to seemingly distinct objects and events, whose common content then suggests the nature of the predisposition (Converse, 1964). Thus, it remains true that authoritarianism is one of the most misconceived, mismeasured, and misunderstood concepts in all of social science (these endless and murky debates have been examined

elsewhere, including Brown, 1965; Christie & Jahoda, 1954; Kirscht & Dillehay, 1967; Martin, 2001; M. B. Smith, 1997; Stenner, 2005). But the rather impressive coherence within individuals of attitudes and behaviors variously reflecting rejection of diversity and insistence upon sameness has always suggested the existence of *some* kind of predisposition to intolerance of difference, that *somehow* brings together certain traits: obedience to authority, moral absolutism, intolerance and punitiveness toward dissidents and deviants, racial and ethnic prejudice. Scholars with *widely* varying notions of what authoritarianism is and where it comes from have long agreed on the broad contours of what it looks like and what it does (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Nevitt Sanford, 1950; Altemeyer, 1981, 1988, 1996; Duckitt, 1989; Greenstein, 1987; Katz, 1960; Lipset & Raab, 1970; Rokeach, 1960; Stenner, 2005; Stouffer, 1955).

For my own part, I would be content to label this “thing” *difference-ism*, and certainly, there would be considerable advantages to sidestepping the historical critiques and ongoing skepticism associated with earlier work on the concept of authoritarianism. Still, the predisposition can appropriately be labeled “authoritarianism” for the simple reason that suppression of difference and achievement of uniformity necessitate autocratic social arrangements in which individual autonomy yields to group authority. Thus, individual desire for particular outcomes is associated with preference for certain social arrangements or processes. These relatively stable desires and preferences locate individuals at varying points along a dimension ranging from extreme authoritarianism to extreme “libertarianism,” marked at one end by preference for uniformity and insistence upon group authority and at the other end by preference for diversity and insistence upon individual autonomy.

Note that each end of this dimension incorporates both a preferred social process (obedience to group authority vs. individual autonomy) and a preferred end-state (uniformity vs. diversity), and I remain determinedly agnostic regarding the extent to which these preferences for particular social arrangements necessitate acceptance of certain outcomes, as opposed to desires for particular ends leading to insistence upon certain social processes. (The direction of causality between one’s preferences regarding social process and

end-state might even be different for the characters at each end, with libertarians, for example, perhaps motivated by a preference for individual freedom, whereas authoritarians tend to start with a fundamental desire for social uniformity).

Thus, for example, some authoritarians might insist upon autocratic social arrangements to assure themselves of living among kindred folk all sharing their beliefs and behaving in like manner. But others may deem submission to group authority a prudent organizing principle for society, and simply accept the social uniformity that tends to accompany it. Likewise, some libertarians might insist upon individual autonomy because they appreciate the diversity in beliefs, behaviors, and companions it tends to bring them. Or they may simply be accepting of difference because of the high value they place upon the freedom that inevitably produces it.

Regardless, what authoritarianism actually *does* is incline one toward attitudes and behaviors variously concerned with structuring society and social interactions in ways that enhance sameness and minimize diversity of people, beliefs, and behaviors. It tends to produce a characteristic array of stances all of which have the effect of glorifying, encouraging, and rewarding uniformity and disparaging, suppressing, and punishing difference. Because enhancing uniformity and minimizing diversity implicate others and require some control over their behavior, ultimately these stances involve actual coercion of others (as in driving a Black family from the neighborhood) and, more frequently, demands for the use of group authority (i.e., coercion by the state).

In the end, then, authoritarianism is far more than a personal distaste for difference (and libertarianism more than a mere preference for diversity). It becomes a normative “worldview” about the social value of obedience and conformity (or freedom and difference), the prudent and just balance between group authority and individual autonomy (Duckitt, 1989), and the appropriate uses of (or limits on) that authority. This worldview induces both personal coercion of and bias against different others (racial and ethnic outgroups, political dissidents, moral “deviants”) as well as political demands for authoritative constraints on their behavior. The latter will typically include legal discrimination against minorities and restrictions on immigration, limits on free speech and association, and the regulation of moral behavior, for example, via policies regarding school prayer, abortion, censorship, and homosexuality, and their punitive enforcement.

H2: The impact of authoritarianism on intolerance of difference is conditional upon levels of collective (particularly “normative”) threat, such that this relatively stable and enduring predisposition yields more or less intolerant attitudes and behavior

depending upon (the experience or perception of) threatening or reassuring conditions.

The idea that “normative threat” is the critical catalyst for the activation of latent authoritarian predispositions, and their manifest expression in intolerant attitudes and behaviors, is the central argument in my theory of the “authoritarian dynamic” (Stenner, 2005). Quite simply, if authoritarianism is a functional predisposition it should be “activated” as and when it needs to serve its function. A predisposition serving certain needs for the individual is called into service when needed. In diverse and complex modern societies, the things that make “us” an “us”—that make us *one and the same*—are common authority (oneness) and shared values (sameness). For authoritarians, then, the conditions most threatening to oneness and sameness are questioned or questionable authorities and values, for example, disrespect for leaders or leaders unworthy of respect, and lack of conformity with or consensus in group norms and beliefs.

To summarize briefly the findings from a wide array of studies (both experimental and “real world”; see especially Stenner, 2005), I have found that confidence in political leadership and (at least perceptions of) consensus in public opinion are critical reassurances for authoritarians, who are concerned above all else with maintaining (or more precisely, enforcing) oneness and sameness across the collective, however that group may be defined for them. Nothing aggravates authoritarians more than feeling that leaders are unworthy of trust and respect, and/or that beliefs are not shared across the community (“normative threat”). And nothing lets down their defenses more than confidence in political leaders and widespread public consensus (“normative reassurance”).

Authoritarians prove to be relentlessly “sociotropic” boundary-maintainers, norm-enforcers, and cheerleaders for authority, whose classic defensive stances are activated by the experience or perception of threat to those boundaries, norms, and authorities. Those are the critical conditions to which authoritarians are eternally attentive. The perceived loss of those conditions—via disaffection with leaders, or divided public opinion—is the catalyst that activates these latent predispositions and provokes their increased manifestation in racial, political, and moral intolerance (and its corollary: punitiveness). This is the authoritarian’s classic “defensive arsenal,” concerned with differentiating and defending “us”, in conditions that appear to threaten “us”, by excluding and discriminating against “them”: racial and ethnic minorities, political dissidents, and moral “deviants.” In conditions of normative threat, authoritarian fears are alleviated by defense of the collective “normative order”: positive differentiation of the ingroup, devaluation of and discrimination against outgroups, obedience to authorities, conformity with rules and

norms, and intolerance and punishment of those who fail to obey and conform.

Note that this simple two-variable interaction (intolerance = authoritarianism \times threat)—which I have labeled the “authoritarian dynamic” (Stenner, 2005)—can comfortably accommodate some long-standing empirical puzzles, including the surge and decline of intolerant behaviors in the aggregate over time, and the (parallel) mystery of a purportedly enduring individual predisposition that does not consistently produce intolerant behavior across different situations.

Authoritarianism, Status Quo Conservatism, and Laissez-Faire Conservatism

Although this article does not concern itself principally with these hypotheses, it was their exhaustive investigation elsewhere (see Stenner, 2005) that first prompted me to pay close attention to distinguishing authoritarianism from both status quo conservatism and laissez-faire conservatism. As noted, these are two distinct predispositions with which authoritarianism is regularly confused, all three of which are routinely lumped together under the unhelpful rubric of “conservatism.” It was in the course of distinguishing what authoritarianism *is not* that I also learned a great deal about what conservatism *is*, and these are the lessons I would like to bring together in this article.

What authoritarianism *is not* is a desire to preserve the status quo whatever that may be. It does *not* preclude support for social change, so long as we are changing together in pursuit of common goals. And it is *not* preference for laissez-faire economics. It does *not* necessitate opposition to government interventions that might serve to enhance oneness and sameness. Apart from confusing theory and confounding evidence for half a century or more, our failure to recognize the important distinctions between these predispositions creates needless skepticism among those (quite reasonably) reluctant to accept that distaste for change implies distaste for other races, or that commitment to economic freedom somehow suggests an interest in moral regulation and political repression. Likewise, it leads us to underestimate (and thus underemploy) the potential for those often-maligned status quo conservatives to serve as guardians of liberal democracy and bulwarks against fascist social movements (see also Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993). Most provocatively, it leads us to underestimate the potential for authoritarians, under the right conditions, to get behind programs like affirmative action for minorities, which hold out the prospect of minimizing some of the difference they so abhor.

By the close of this article I hope to have demonstrated the following:

- that authoritarianism, status quo, and laissez-faire conservatism are very different beasts
- that when people talk of the impact of “conservatism” on intolerance what they mostly have in mind is authoritarianism
- that neither aversion to social change nor rejection of market intervention implies, necessitates, or tends to produce generalized intolerance of different races, beliefs, and behaviors¹
- that authoritarianism is the primary determinant and conservatism a relatively minor determinant of general intolerance of difference
- that authoritarians’ concern for the collective—generally *harmful* to the collective—may (in certain blessed conditions) actually be helpful.

Political Psychology versus Political Ideology

First, I want to make clear that I am thinking and speaking of these different “conservatisms” as fundamental psychological predispositions something akin to universal personality dimensions, not as political philosophies, and certainly not as contemporary political ideologies. Political ideologies gain currency and electoral force by speaking to the fundamental values in a culture, and combining, prioritizing, trading off, and exploiting those values in one way or another. Any of these postures might be labeled “conservative” at one time or another, or in this place or that. But these alignments are not natural or necessary. Whether they are universal and enduring in individual psychology is an empirical question, and the only one of interest to us here.

In contemporary U.S. politics, for example, “conservative” has come to mean *all at once* intolerant of difference, averse to change, and opposed to market intervention. That does roughly approximate the way in which preferences on the three dimensions are currently “packaged” in the American party system, but this is a very different matter from the way in which those preferences are packaged *in Americans*, not to mention how they might be packaged by the system in the future.

Thus, for example, we know that “conservative” political actors in the contemporary United States have made effective electoral use of pervasive beliefs that racial minorities abuse social welfare and violate cherished norms of hard work and individual self-reliance (Bobo, Kluegel, & Smith, 1996; Gilens, 1999; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Peffley, Hurwitz, & Sniderman, 1997), that they are implicated in the “epidemic” of crime and drug abuse (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997; Mendelberg, 2001) that is supposedly destroying

¹See also Sniderman and Piazza (1993) for a discussion of the connection, or lack thereof, between conservatism and racial prejudice.

the fondly remembered America of everyone's youth, and that they are morally lax more generally (Sniderman & Piazza, 1993).

Yet all of this says more about the behavior of political elites than the attitudes of citizens. It is a serious mistake to assume that the "buttons" political actors will sometimes push, the symbols they might manipulate, the rhetoric they employ to mobilize (for example) intolerant sentiments in their favor, reflect that which *generates* those sentiments. None of this indicates that intolerance of difference, aversion to change, and preference for laissez-faire economics stand in general relationship as dimensions of human psychology. And of course, the way political elites might package and sell issues in the *current* political context, to maximize their electoral appeal to *multiple* constituencies, must not be confused with the manner in which different value commitments tend to go together *within* individuals, universally and perpetually. It must be clear that the latter—an empirical question, and a question of psychology—is our only concern in this article.

The Plan

To distinguish these three "conservatisms," I move systematically through a series of demonstrations of their widely differing origins, nature, and effects. Much of the argument and evidence I offer in this article is drawn from my prior extended investigation of these claims (Stenner, 2005). I restate those arguments as economically as possible—though some of the material is unavoidably dense—and summarize the central findings of the previous analyses, referring readers back to the original source for further details on theory, methods, and data.

Different Origins

Taking the simplest task first, let me briefly relate what we now know about the widely differing *origins* of these three predispositions. Among other things, this "sneak peek" at their developing characters is good preparation for the harder task of thinking about the fundamental differences in their *nature*. Happily, with measures that cleanly distinguish the three predispositions, and estimation methods allowing for reciprocal relationships between them, it quickly becomes evident that each has very different origins and that their unique determinants are consistent with our understanding of the fundamental distinctions between them.

First, authoritarianism turns out to be heavily determined by the kind of variations in personality and cognitive capacity that would naturally affect individuals' needs for oneness and sameness, and the ease, comfort, and pleasure with which they handle freedom, complexity, and difference.

Openness to Experience—one of the Big Five personality dimensions, and itself substantially heritable—clearly plays a powerful role in mitigating against authoritarian predisposition. Authoritarianism is very substantially reduced by openness to experience, which has long been associated with a preference for variety, complexity, novel experiences, and intellectual stimulation.

With regard to cognitive factors, variables (such as verbal ability) that reflect (at least in large part) the individual's innate cognitive capacity have a very substantial ameliorative effect in diminishing authoritarian tendencies. This holds true controlling for years of education and possession of a college degree (and presumably the exposure to libertarian norms thought to go along with that), although these latter factors—and, frankly, anything remotely tapping into intelligence or knowledge—also play a significant role.

As for status quo conservatism, it is apparently partly a function of "conscientiousness": another of the Big Five personality dimensions. There is evidence that conscientiousness—associated with rigidity, orderliness, and a compulsion about being in control of one's environment—promotes conservatism to a considerable degree. Although it is no stretch to imagine this personality type being implicated in rejection of change and uncertainty, still much of this aversion seems attributable simply to increasing age. The importance of age is consistent with the purported overriding concerns of this predisposition, given that aging is generally associated with increasing rigidity, intolerance of uncertainty, and discomfort with new experiences (Shock et al., 1984; Storandt, Siegler, & Elias, 1978). This stands in subtle but significant contrast to the primary dependence of authoritarianism on cognitive incapacity, which should indeed be more detrimental to one's ability to deal with *complexity* than with *uncertainty*.

Finally, consistent with our understanding of laissez-faire conservatism as primarily concerned with economic equality/inequality and the (re)distribution of wealth, by far the most important and consistent determinant of free market values is socioeconomic status (see also Evans & Heath, 1995, p. 199; Heath, Evans, & Martin, 1994, pp. 126–127). The more privileged one's socioeconomic position—that is, the more one is favored by market distribution of economic rewards—the greater the objection to government intervention in the economy. This applies to a number of variables variously reflecting aspects of socioeconomic status, such as subjective social class (especially important), occupational prestige, education, and of course family income. In short, attitudes toward government intervention in the economy are in the end largely a product of whether one would be more the beneficiary or benefactor of that intervention.

Authoritarianism versus Laissez-Faire Conservatism: The Independence of Freedom and Equality

What, then, are the critical differences in the fundamental nature of these three “conservatisms”? The easiest case can be dealt with first and disposed of rather swiftly: the virtual independence—even *inverse* relationship—of authoritarianism and laissez-faire conservatism. There is an odd but rather persistent notion that commitment to laissez-faire economics somehow also suggests an interest in moral regulation, political repression, and racial discrimination. Apart from simply being illogical on its face—that those who *demand* authoritative constraints on the individual in all matters moral, political, and racial would tend to *reject* government intervention in the economy—lumping authoritarianism and laissez-faire conservatism together as an inevitable “right-wing” duo (with libertarians and socialists automatically teamed on the “left”) contradicts some long-standing arguments and evidence regarding the independence of commitments to freedom and equality.

The idea that there are two distinct dimensions centered on the values attached to freedom, and equality (though variously labeled), which universally structure social and political attitudes is one of the more persistent notions in social science (see Braithwaite, 1982, 1994, 1998; Rokeach, 1973, 1979; see also Schwartz, 1992, 1994), not to mention political philosophy (see Bobbio, 1997; Hume, 1752/1998; Russell, 1936; see also Norman, 1987). The most well known authority and proponent is of course Rokeach (1973), who went so far as to conclude that all ideological differences are in the end “fundamentally reducible, when stripped to their barest essence, to opposing value orientations concerning the political desirability or undesirability of freedom and equality in all their ramifications” (p. 169).

The available empirical evidence points to the primacy of freedom and equality, and the relative independence of preferences regarding these two values. It is clear that the laissez-faire/socialism (inequality/equality) dimension, although representing the major ideological divide in party systems and support in modern liberal democracies (Bishop, Barclay, & Rokeach 1972; Cochrane, Billig, & Hogg, 1979; Thannhauser & Caird 1990), cannot alone account for the structure of political attitudes (Fleishman, 1988; Heath, 1986; Luttbeg & Gant, 1985;), and that attitudes toward freedom/difference versus obedience/conformity reflect an independent value dimension cutting across this so-called Left–Right divide.² Numerous studies reveal that these two distinct dimen-

sions (variously labeled) structure social and political thought for mass publics, between them accounting for most of the variance in those attitudes (see especially Evans & Heath, 1995; Evans, Heath, & Lalljee, 1996; Fleishman, 1988; Heath, 1986; Heath & Evans, 1988; Heath et al., 1994; Heath et al., 1991; Himmelweit, Humphreys, & Jaeger, 1985; Robertson, 1984).

The value attached to government intervention and economic equality, over limited government and market determination of rewards, should of course assume a central role in accounts of party support in modern liberal democracies and of attitudes toward redistribution and public ownership the world over. But there is truly scant evidence that, *across* time and space, authoritarians tend to favor free markets, let alone that free market values are somehow implicated in generating intolerance of difference. Indeed, the available evidence suggests quite the reverse (see Stenner, 2005, pp. 130–135, 188–198). I have found that across diverse cultures, laissez-faire conservatism is *negatively* (though trivially) correlated with both authoritarianism (–.07) and status quo conservatism (–.11), and is generally associated with *tolerance* of difference (although still contributing very little to its explanation). Interested readers may refer to the original source for greater detail on the data and methods, but I want to reiterate here a few important points that should bolster the reader’s confidence in these findings.

First, the cross-national and cross-temporal data I put together to test these claims—drawn from the *World Values Survey 1990–1995* (WVS; see Inglehart, Basañez, & Moreno, 1998)—arguably constitutes the most complete and representative data set assembled of the world population. It encompassed more than 110,000 respondents from 80 independent samples drawn of 59 different nations³ between 1990 and 1998. This covers most major regions of the world—developed and developing nations alike—and cultures varying widely along all the major dimensions of interest, from Switzerland to China to Nigeria to Azerbaijan. Particular national samples were retained as long as they measured all three predispositions and most of the intolerance items, (which is what necessitated confinement to this particular slice of time). Respondents were retained so long as they had scores for most of those items. Elaborate routines were employed to

³I excluded only pilot studies (Ghana 1995); subnational samples drawn of Northern Ireland, Puerto Rico, and different regions of Russia and Spain, and surveys that failed to measure (or failed to measure exactly as they had been measured by the others) any of the three key predispositions, being authoritarianism, status quo conservatism, and laissez-faire conservatism (Britain 1998, Colombia 1997, Poland 1990, Switzerland 1990), or else failed to measure many of the individual items constituting any of the different intolerance scales (Bangladesh 1996, Japan 1995, Pakistan 1996, South Africa 1990, South Korea 1996, Turkey 1996). Note that the first wave of the WVS, collected in 1981, had to be excluded entirely for failing to meet those last two criteria).

²Note that this bidimensionality likewise underwrites the organization of McClosky and Zaller’s (1984) well-known investigation of “capitalist” and “democratic” values in the United States.

impute missing values from exogenous variables, in order that all possible respondents could be retained. Thus, we can be confident that these findings reasonably reflect general regularities in the behavior of mass publics.

Second, I took great care to construct from these data "clean," unambiguous, and universally applicable measures of authoritarianism, laissez-faire, and status quo conservatism (the latter examined shortly). I held to a "bare bones" measurement strategy that (swimming against a very strong tide in social science) favors face validity over scale reliability and seeks to reflect fundamental orientations, simply and cleanly—the one thing, the whole thing, and nothing but the thing—without referencing actors or arrangements that may be time bound, culturally specific, or the actual subjects of our investigation. The widespread confusion of our three discrete predispositions has been aggravated by analysts' reliance on measures that confound these distinct inclinations with each other (not to mention with the dependent variables), such as the original F-scale (Adorno et al., 1950), Wilson's "social conservatism" (Wilson, 1973; Wilson & Patterson, 1968), Altemeyer's (1981, 1988, 1996, 2007) Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale, and the popular but distressingly content-free "self-placement" measures. The problem is, to determine whether these three inclinations go together in individuals we must at least be capable of discerning when they are *apart*. In the *WVS*, I was fortunate to have measures that cleanly distinguish the three predispositions and sufficient cross-national variation in the alignment and impact of those dimensions to separate them out.

As is my custom (see supporting arguments in Stenner, 2005), my measure of fundamental predisposition to authoritarianism was constructed simply from childrearing values, a strategy whose advantages over such as the Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale are palpable in any comparative investigation across nations widely varying in the gods the "godless" would be without and the norms the "deviants" would be deviating from, in how "the proper authorities" were installed and how they might be removed, in just what the "rebellious" would be rebelling against and proposing in its stead. Here, authoritarianism was simply indicated by respondents choosing (from a proffered list of 11) those "especially important" qualities "that children can be encouraged to learn at home"; counting "obedience" and "good manners" as reflecting authoritarian tendencies; and "tolerance and respect for other people," "independence," and "imagination" as indicative of libertarian inclinations (the second component reversed and equally weighted in the final measure). Note that I can rule out here any concern that such a measure might actually reflect childrearing *practices* (in one's own family, or the family of origin) more than childrearing (hence fundamental) *values*. For one, responses

to the childrearing values measures are not growing steadily more "permissive" over time, and they prove barely responsive to subcultural variations (e.g., ethnic origin, upbringing/residence in rural region/southern United States) and sociodemographic attributes (e.g., sex, social class) that would surely impact childrearing practices.

As for my measure of laissez-faire conservatism, it simply gauged respondents' positions on whether incomes should be made more equal (or allowed to vary as individual incentive), on private versus collective ownership and management of business and industry, and on whether government "should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for" (see Appendix E at <http://www.karenstenner.com> for more detail).

Because the simplest evidence is often the most compelling, I note that even crude categorical versions of these variables (whose ordinal scales correlate at just $-.07$) only reinforce the folly of confusing "right-wing" with authoritarian tendencies (see Appendix E, Table E.6, at <http://www.karenstenner.com>; also Appendix D, Table D.7, for relevant U.S. data). Worldwide, capitalists are twice as common as socialists (leaving both libertarians and authoritarians far more capitalist than socialist), nevertheless libertarians are more capitalist *than authoritarians*. Likewise, in line with that worldwide trend, authoritarians are not more socialist than capitalist, but they are more socialist *than libertarians*. All of this clearly contradicts the supposedly self-evident association between authoritarianism and laissez-faire conservatism.

One might reasonably think of freedom and equality as the core "terminal" values (Rokeach, 1973, 1979) universally structuring political ideology, with preferences regarding each attaining political expression in authoritarianism and laissez-faire conservatism, respectively. Those distinct inclinations should then regulate political and social attitudes in their different domains.

As for *status quo* conservatism, it is important to recognize that social change can leave us either closer to, or further from individual freedom, and likewise closer to, or further from economic equality. Thus, stability versus change is somewhat more an "instrumental" value bearing on the means by which we might attain or preserve those desired ends. Depending on the circumstances, it may align (although with differing probability) with *either* freedom or constraint, *either* equality or inequality. But this is not to say that status quo conservatism is entirely a process preference, devoid of substantive content, because generally the extent and rate of social change can be limited by constraints on individual freedom. So there is some common resonance to the concerns and objectives of authoritarians and status quo conservatives. The critical issue (certainly for liberal democracy) is to determine

if and *when*, despite this sympathetic vibration, they ever want to sing different tunes.

Authoritarianism versus Status Quo Conservatism: Difference Across Space versus Difference Over Time

So the fundamental distinction between authoritarianism and status quo conservatism—between aversion to difference, and aversion to change—is rather more difficult to discern than that between authoritarianism and laissez-faire conservatism. For my part, I have found it useful to think of authoritarianism as *primarily* an aversion to difference across space (i.e., diversity of people and beliefs) and status quo conservatism as *primarily* an aversion to difference over time (i.e., change). That is to say, the two characters diverge in whether they find difference across space or difference over time *more* objectionable. But they clearly share a general distaste for difference. Other things being equal, then, authoritarians should also prefer not to confront new experiences or face an uncertain future, and conservatives should also prefer not to share their environment with unfamiliar people, or to deal with different beliefs and behaviors. Social stability can generally be enhanced by the kinds of constraints on individual freedom so appealing to authoritarians for their tendency to minimize difference. Likewise, social diversity can often be constrained by limiting the pace of social change. Thus in many conditions, the concerns and interests of authoritarians and status quo conservatives may tend to converge, such that we often see a modest alignment of authoritarianism and status quo conservatism.

Nevertheless, the two characters still diverge in whether they find *more* objectionable difference across space, or difference over time, that is, variety or novelty, complexity or uncertainty. Although this may seem a subtle distinction to draw, it has important political consequences: some commonplace but by no means insignificant, others rare but absolutely vital to the maintenance of liberal democracy at critical historical junctures.

First, one of those commonplace consequences is that although authoritarianism should always provoke intolerance of difference across domains, cultures, and time, status quo conservatism will only produce intolerance if intolerance is the status quo. For status quo conservatives (but *not* authoritarians), social stability is more important than striving for oneness and sameness, and aversion to change trumps aversion to difference. So authoritarians can generally be relied on to clamor for racial segregation, *and* restrictions on free speech, *and* censorship of pornography. If it happens to represent the status quo they are compelled to preserve, status quo conservatives *may* demand one without the others. Given a cultural context of stable,

institutionalized and authoritatively supported respect for diversity, they may demand nothing at all. (At least in theory, one can even imagine regimes so persistently and pervasively tolerant that aversion to change among citizens socialized in said culture might actually *bolster* tolerance of difference). Thus status quo conservatism, in notable contrast to authoritarianism, should yield only modest and erratic returns of intolerance, with the intolerant “yield” varying in line with prevailing traditions, in *that* domain, within *that* culture, or at *that* historical juncture.

Table 1 presents evidence bearing on these claims, which has been extracted and compiled from an array of earlier analyses (Stenner, 2005, pp. 91–116, 188–192). The upper panel utilizes data drawn from a set of Western European and Eastern European countries sampled by the WVS around 1990. The Western European analyses include a set of countries that mostly represent the “cradle of liberal democracy”: Sweden, Denmark, West Germany, Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France, plus Spain, Portugal, and Italy. The Eastern European set mostly includes countries from behind the “Iron Curtain”: East Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Belarus, Russia, and Romania, plus Serbia and Croatia. They were all surveyed on the eve of German reunification, after 40 years of separate development and vastly different cultural socialization, which will certainly make the results difficult to reconcile with a “social learning” account of authoritarianism and intolerance.

The WVS constructs reflecting authoritarianism and laissez-faire conservatism have already been outlined. My measure of *status quo* conservatism—guided by the same measurement philosophy previously described—was formed simply from two items gauging (on 10-point scales, anchored each end) the extent to which respondents agreed that “one should be cautious about making major changes” (vs. “you will never achieve much in life unless you act boldly”), and that “ideas that have stood the test of time are generally best” (vs. “new ideas are generally better than old ones”). (As usual, the resulting scale was rescored to be of one unit range, and centered on a sample mean of 0).

Cleanly measured, status quo conservatism proves to be substantially independent of authoritarianism, correlating just .18 across the Western European nations, .16 across the Eastern European set, and a meager .09 across the entire pooled WVS1990–1995. Note again that the same story of relative independence is told if we cross-tabulate crude categorical variables formed from the two ordinal scales (see Appendix E, Table E.5, at <http://www.karenstenner.com>; also Appendix D, Table D.6, for relevant U.S. data). Thus, whereas 52% of authoritarians are conservative (meaning, averse to change), so too are 44% of libertarians (neither of which deviates far from the population proportion of 48%).

Table 1. Influence of Authoritarianism and Status Quo Conservatism on Intolerance of Difference Across Domains, Cultures, and Time

	General Intolerance of Difference	Racial Intolerance	Political Intolerance	Moral Intolerance	Punitiveness
W. Europe 1990 ^a					
au	.29 (.41)	.24 (.28)	.29 (.25)	.32 (.31)	.26 (.25)
sq	.15 (.18)	.11 (.11)	.15 (.11)	.24 (.20)	.03 (.03)
E. Europe 1990 ^b					
au	.20 (.30)	.20 (.21)	.22 (.19)	.17 (.16)	.21 (.22)
sq	.08 (.12)	.02 (.03)	.15 (.13)	.11 (.11)	.04 (.05)
USA 1972–1982 ^c					
au	.50 (.48)	.55 (.37)	.64 (.45)	.48 (.38)	.10 (.10)
pc	.21 (.24)	.18 (.14)	.18 (.15)	.25 (.24)	.14 (.15)
USA 1990–2000 ^d					
au	.72 (.65)	.77 (.59)	.84 (.53)	.75 (.48)	.21 (.17)
pc	.14 (.20)	.06 (.07)	.11 (.11)	.22 (.22)	.11 (.14)

Note. Cell entries are unstandardized ordinary least squares multiple regression coefficients (standardized coefficients in parentheses) indicating the independent influence of authoritarianism and status quo conservatism on intolerance of difference. All coefficients are significant at least at $p < .10$ (two-tailed tests applied throughout). Sources: For Western and Eastern Europe, *World Values Survey 1990*, except for Serbian and Croatian samples drawn from *World Values Survey 1995*; see Appendix E, Table E.1 at <http://www.karenstenner.com> for data description and univariate statistics. For U.S. samples, *General Social Survey 1972–2000* (non-Hispanic Whites only); see Appendix D, Table D.1 at <http://www.karenstenner.com> for data description and univariate statistics. au = authoritarianism; sq = status quo conservatism; pc = "political conservatism."

^a $N = 17,823$. ^b $N = 11,320$. ^c $N = 8,591$. ^d $N = 9,787$.

The lower panel of Table 1 reports analyses drawing on U.S. data from the *General Social Survey 1972–2000* (GSS). This data set was selected for its virtues of being collected regularly, in 23 independent cross-sections, spanning almost 30 years of U.S. history, and measuring the critical dependent and independent variables relatively consistently across this specific slice of time. Like the cross-national variation provided by the WVS, this temporal variation guards against the possibility of drawing invalid conclusions about relations between variables, that might be evidenced only on account of some peculiar cultural or historical conditions, or political maneuvering at a certain point in time.

This was particularly important in the U.S. analyses given the absence of specific measures of status quo and laissez-faire conservatism, and thus my necessary reliance on one of those ubiquitous, but highly imperfect "self-placement" measures of (what U.S. commentators unreflectively label) "political conservatism." Such self-placement measures require respondents to place either their "views" or themselves (what "you think of yourself as," or "consider yourself to be") on an ordinal scale ranging (usually with no further explanation) from "liberal" to "conservative," or from "Left" to "Right." Because the measure has no actual content or substance—we are not actually asking anyone what they think or feel or believe about anything—it ends up reflecting whatever it means to the respondent to claim one of those labels, which mostly echoes whatever current political elites are saying it means, in that particular culture, at that point in time. So absence of content makes for shifting content in response to current political packaging, "conservative" comes

to mean whatever political maneuvering says it means right now, and one labels oneself "conservative" (today) because one did or said or believed something that political elites are calling conservative. Unsurprisingly, that self-labeling then aligns with what one did or said or believes. But that certainly does not indicate that those outcomes were influenced by "conservatism," let alone by status quo, or free market values specifically. Nevertheless, this is the only "conservatism" measure routinely available in U.S. data. As best I can tell from earlier investigations, the measure (these days) mostly reflects a peculiar American amalgam of aversion to change and rejection of government intervention, perhaps reflecting somewhat more of the former than the latter.

As for authoritarianism, the GSS data allowed construction of a better-than-usual measure using respondents' partial rank ordering of 13 desirable qualities for children (6 of those relevant to authoritarianism), with respondents indicating the 3 "most desirable" qualities, the "most desirable of all," the 3 "least important," and the "least important of all." The values considered reflective of authoritarianism were obedience, neatness, and good manners, whereas the libertarian values alternately reflected a preference for children being curious, exercising their own judgment, and being responsible for themselves (see Appendix D at <http://www.karenstenner.com> for more detail). These choices were used to construct a highly discriminatory measure of authoritarianism that, again, shows no real trend over time and is relatively unmoved by demographic and environmental variables that surely influence actual childrearing practices.

Note that the U.S. analyses (in contrast to the cross-cultural analyses of the *WVS*) employ only non-Hispanic White respondents to the *GSS*. This is because the *GSS* naturally taps the peculiar ways racial intolerance is expressed in the U.S. by White Americans toward African Americans, as indicated here by whether “White people have a right to keep Blacks out of their neighborhoods if they want to” and whether interracial marriage should be banned, as well as willingness to vote for a well-qualified Black man nominated by their party for president.

In contrast, in the *WVS* cross-national surveys, I can resort to items purposely designed to reflect the same phenomena consistently across diverse cultures, without reference to nation-specific actors, objects, and arrangements. Thus, my *WVS* measure of racial intolerance included such items as respondents’ opinions on whether employers should give priority to [their nationality] over immigrants when jobs are scarce, and indications of whether they chose (from a list of 10 groups) “people of a different race” and “immigrants/foreign workers” as those they “would not like to have as neighbors.”

So although I have argued that authoritarianism is a universal phenomenon that always produces the same characteristic attitudes (which, of course, is the point of the analyses in Table 1), clearly in these U.S. data those same inclinations are bound to be *expressed* somewhat differently by majority and minority respondents. So as a practical matter, those predispositions cannot be investigated by observing identical expressions of intolerance (i.e., the same dependent variables) for Whites and non-Whites alike.⁴ After all, we would not expect non-White authoritarians to express their racial intolerance in affection for the KKK and derogatory stereotypes of Blacks (e.g., as opposed to affection for Louis Farrakhan and subscription to anti-Semitic stereotypes). Note that this caution applies likewise to including non-Whites alongside Whites in U.S. analyses involving that problematic self-placement measure of “political conservatism,” given the highly endogenous way in which the content of the measure (i.e., the meaning of the labels) gets filled in.

Yet even if this “political conservatism” measure reflects some muddled and shifting mix of aversion to change *and* big government, it is evidently only very modestly related to authoritarianism. Across the *GSS* the correlation between the two predispositions is just .09. A simple cross-tabulation of categorical variables again indicates only slight association, most of which is attributable to the fact that authoritarians in the contemporary United States are simply reluc-

tant to label themselves “liberal” (tending to grasp at the “moderate” label instead). But authoritarians are still no more willing than libertarians to call themselves “conservative” (see Appendix D, Table D.6, at <http://www.karenstenner.com>).

So all in all, it does seem evident that status quo conservatism and authoritarianism are rather different things. The question addressed in Table 1 is, exactly how and when and why do they differ? Recall I have argued the two characters share a common distaste for difference but diverge in whether they find difference across space (diversity), or difference over time (change) *more* objectionable. Authoritarians simply cannot abide freedom and diversity. But status quo conservatives, in certain times and places, will try to live with these things—racial diversity, civil liberties, moral freedom—if they are institutionalized, authoritatively supported, well-established traditions, or sources of social stability. This means that *across* domains, cultures, and time, authoritarians push relentlessly for restrictions on all manner of difference, even at the risk of tremendous social change and instability. But when meeting such demands would overturn well-established practices or violate widely shared norms or traditions, status quo conservatives will not be clamoring alongside them, or at least not so loudly. Thus, although authoritarianism feeds intolerance everywhere we look, the intolerance produced by status quo conservatism will fluctuate with variations in local traditions, with the intolerant “yield” particularly modest where the status quo lends little support to intolerant sentiments or practices.

And that is what we see in the evidence of Table 1, which reports unstandardized multiple regression coefficients (standardized betas in parentheses), indicating the independent influence of authoritarianism and status quo conservatism on intolerance of difference, across domains, cultures, and time. Note that these analyses also controlled for *laissez-faire* conservatism (in the *WVS*), or Republican versus Democratic party identification (the best *GSS* proxy for free market values), which was either trivially or negatively related to the dependent variables (and thus excluded from presentation). Although the exact content of the dependent variables naturally varies between the *GSS* and the *WVS* (see Stenner, 2005, pp. 92–94, 188–189, and Appendices D and E at <http://www.karenstenner.com> for details), the racial intolerance scales involve things such as anti-immigrant sentiment and demand for racial discrimination in housing, employment, and marriage; the political intolerance scales include attitudes toward free speech and free association, democracy, and civil liberties; moral intolerance covers the likes of homosexuality, pornography, abortion, divorce, and compulsory prayer; and punitiveness can include stances regarding imprisonment, capital punishment, harsher sentences, and being tough on crime. The overall

⁴Thus the effort invested (and costs incurred) to find dependent variables having universal applicability across cultures and subcultures, and with minimal reference to culture-specific targets of intolerance.

measures of general intolerance of difference were formed by summing these four equally weighted components. (Note that all these scales, like the explanatory variables, were ultimately rescored to be of one-unit range).

When the WVS was collecting these European data in 1990, Eastern Europe was just emerging from decades of communist control and isolation from the liberal democratic traditions of Western Europe. Thus at this critical historical juncture, the Western and Eastern European sets varied widely in cultural traditions, in ways that nicely illuminate the differences between authoritarianism and status quo conservatism. It is evident (see Table 1) that the intolerant returns to status quo conservatism are far less dependable than those generated by authoritarianism and vary in ways consistent with variations in cultural traditions.

We find that conservatives in these Eastern European countries were not so inclined as their Western European peers to favor attempts to regulate sexual behavior, restrict reproductive choice, or privilege domestic arrangements such as marriage, with high religiosity and state incursions into the realm of private morality having been less common in the Eastern European tradition (compare the coefficients for status quo conservatism in the moral intolerance column of Table 1). Mostly socialized under monolithic regimes determined to suppress ethnic conflict and discourage any kind of particularistic identity, neither did aversion to change so incline Eastern European conservatives to expressions of racial animosity. Note that this is not to say the Eastern Europeans were less disposed than their Western counterparts to racial and moral intolerance, only that they were less disposed *by their conservatism* to such intolerance,⁵ as the traditions to which their aversion to change attached them less often included the unconstrained expression of ethnic identity, pride and animosity, and public regulation of private moral choices.

Thus an overriding aversion to change heavily constrains the extent to which status quo conservatism will yield intolerance of difference *across* cultures and domains (racial, political, and moral). For status quo conservatives, a stable, institutionalized, and authoritatively supported respect for diversity should generally be preferable to dismantling those well-established protections, and moving toward an uncertain future holding out the prospect of greater uniformity of people and beliefs, yet at the cost of intolerable social change and uncertainty. In sharp contrast, we find that authoritarians relentlessly push for severe restrictions on all manner of difference, even in pervasively tolerant cultures, in fact *especially* in pervasively tolerant cultures, where the institution of such restrictions would

constitute vast social change amounting to a reversal of generations of political struggle that made democracies from monarchies and citizens of subjects.

Turning now to the U.S. analyses, the collection of the *GSS1972–2000* data across time (vs. cultures) allows for a different but equally compelling test of our claims. Collected over nearly 3 tumultuous decades of U.S. political history, these data enable a further demonstration of the extent to which the intolerant "yield" of conservatism shifts with changing cultural norms, with analyses run separately on data drawn across (roughly) the first and last decades of this period. This division of time is historically rather arbitrary but has the virtue of leaving us with approximately the same number of years, surveys, and respondents in each of the two subsets. (Note that the *GSS* has continued regular surveys to the present day but in 2000 ceased measuring some of the critical variables in my analysis).

Overall, it is again evident that authoritarianism has by far the greater impact on intolerance of difference, and its dominance as an explanatory factor has only increased over time (see lower panel of Table 1). The impetus to intolerance generated by *conservative* predispositions is again modest and varies across domains in line with peculiar local traditions. Most important, it has dissipated over time in the wake of major cultural change.

Consistent with our expectations, the influence of conservatism has dissipated *least* in that domain in which American culture has always shown an interest unusual among developed nations: that of moral regulation. Yet still, the intolerant returns to conservatism remain comparatively slight, even in the earlier period. In an unusually religious culture with strong Puritan roots (Ammerman, 1987; Hunter, 1983; Liebman & Wuthnow, 1983; Wald, 1987), conservatives are predictably inclined to object to the growth of "gay rights" and supposed proliferation of pornography. But even here, moving across the full range of the conservatism scale from "extremely liberal" to "extremely conservative" increases moral intolerance by just 25 and 22 percentage points in the earlier and later periods, respectively, compared with a 48- and 75-point boost from authoritarianism in those periods.

Likewise consistent with our expectations, the influence of conservatism has dissipated *most* precipitously in the domain that has experienced what can only be described as a seismic shift in norms: the realm of racial intolerance, where these days conservatism plays a trivial role, providing little fuel for the fire. It seems clear that the intolerant "returns" to conservatism have altered in line with a fundamental and apparently now lasting shift in racial norms. Equal treatment under the law is a durable canon of American culture in general. It is these deeply resonant cultural values (Myrdal, 1944) that were "accessed" and employed in the civil

⁵These kinds of claims pertain to the determinants, not the levels, of intolerance.

Table 2. *A Parsimonious Account of General Intolerance of Difference*

Explaining General Intolerance with One Explanatory Variable:	Variance Explained	Adding a Second Explanatory Variable:	Variance Explained
Authoritarianism	.12	authoritarianism + age (z score within nation)	.16
Years of education	.06	authoritarianism + years of education	.15
Age (z score within nation)	.05	authoritarianism + no. of children	.15
No. of children	.04	authoritarianism + status quo conservatism	.14
Status quo conservatism	.03	authoritarianism + subjective social class	.13
Subjective social class	.03	authoritarianism + family income (decile)	.13
Raised religious	.03	authoritarianism + raised religious	.13
Family income (decile within nation)	.02	authoritarianism + laissez-faire conservatism	.13
Laissez-faire conservatism	.02	authoritarianism + currently in the workforce	.12

Note. Cell entries are R^2 values from ordinary least squares regression models of general intolerance of difference consisting of either one (left panel) or two (right panel) explanatory variables. Source: *World Values Survey 1990–1995*, all national samples, $N = 110,298$ throughout; see Appendix E, Table E.1 at <http://www.karenstenner.com> for data description and univariate statistics.

rights revolution of the 1960s (Kinder & Sanders, 1996; McClosky & Zaller, 1984; Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo, 1985), which formally secured equal status under the law for Americans of all races. The doctrine of equal treatment truly has claim to the status of cultural orthodoxy (Myrdal, 1944). Its firm entrenchment now in the sphere of race appears to have fundamentally altered the “yield” of racial intolerance we can expect from conservatism⁶ (see also Sniderman, Tetlock, Glaser, Green, & Hout, 1989).

All in all then, it should be evident that the extent to which status quo conservatism yields intolerance of difference depends on the established institutional and cultural context, on the peculiar conjunction of local traditions, on precisely what one would be changing away from and toward, in that domain, in that culture, at that time. But as the broad survey of Table 1 makes apparent, authoritarianism rather consistently produces a predictable cluster of sociopolitical stances varying in target and form but never in function. The animating spirit throughout is to limit difference in people, beliefs, and behaviors. Across space and time, authoritarianism persists in packaging together the taste for racial discrimination, moral regulation, and all-out political repression.

A Parsimonious Account of General Intolerance of Difference

One must not imagine that this simple variable that outperforms any “conservatism” in accounting for intolerance is itself merely reflecting the “real” explanatory factor, say, lack of education, or lower socioeconomic status, or religiosity, or an insular upbringing of one kind or another. As is clear from the analysis

⁶Among other things, this highlights the danger of inferring the unsuitability of certain dependent variables for reflecting racial intolerance from the inability of some independent variable to explain them, the plausible (and theoretically important) alternative being that one’s explanatory variable has simply lost its explanatory power.

of our *entire* “world data set” (110,000+ respondents from 59 nations) in Table 2, there is no variable capable of explaining more of the variance in intolerance of difference than this one fundamental orientation, measured by nothing more elaborate than childrearing values.

The numbers reported in column 2 of Table 2 are the R^2 values obtained regressing our measure of general intolerance of difference against each of the explanatory variables arrayed in column 1, in turn. These figures thus represent how much of the variance in general intolerance of difference is explained by each of those factors alone, arranged in order of their evident explanatory power. Now, the *WVS* measures a comprehensive array of sociodemographic variables.⁷ The reader can assume that all of the “usual suspects” were tested and that any (e.g., gender, or college education) that do not appear in this table explained no more of the variance in intolerance than those listed here.

No other variable (certainly not status quo or laissez-faire conservatism) comes close to matching the explanatory power of authoritarianism, which remains impressive (particularly given the obstacles stacked against its revelation in a collated data set such as this). Only a handful of other variables can explain, on their own, more than 3% of the variance in intolerance. Years of education, and age, alone, explain only 5 or 6% of the variance, and they add just 3 or 4% to the account provided by authoritarianism (see

⁷Although the variations across these samples in administration and coding (and incomplete documentation of those variations), as well as the extent of missing data, are truly daunting (and, of course, inevitably the source of much random error). Discovering and taking account of all these variations as I constructed the many variables included in the analyses, and devising and implementing elaborate routines for imputing the missing values so that as many samples and respondents as possible could be retained, easily amounted to 2 months of work, and readers wishing to replicate these analyses are strongly advised to contact the author to obtain the relevant command files.

final column). Authoritarianism on its own explains a hefty 12% of the variance in intolerance of all manner of difference worldwide. Remember, this is everyone “in the mix” together, responding to the same general queries: the Yoruba in Nigeria picturing Hausa, Fulani, or Christians; the British imagining their South Asian minorities; Australians the “yellow peril” descending from East Asia; Russians the people of the Caucasus; and *vice versa*, and all of them thinking about their own country’s peculiar array of dissidents, deviants, and criminals.

Authoritarianism versus Status Quo Conservatism: Conservatives as Defenders of Freedom

We began with a seemingly simple distinction between authoritarians and status quo conservatives in the priority each assigned to avoiding difference across space (diversity) versus difference over time (change). We saw that two characters with common resonance who sometimes “sing the same tune” can diverge markedly in the paths they choose, as when status quo conservatives stop fueling racial intolerance and start defending (or at least not undermining) a new order now entrenched whether they like it or not.

It is a natural progression to wonder what actually happens to the relationship *between* these predispositions when their priorities come into conflict and their interests de-align in this manner. I contend that societal conditions that set at odds their primary concerns (limiting difference vs. limiting change) should “unhinge” the modest alignment of the two dimensions. I have in mind some kind of unified collective action to effect major social change in pursuit of greater oneness and sameness, which could range from ambitious and widely supported government programs of social engineering to “authoritarian revolution” at the extreme. Although clearly there is much in here to excite and attract authoritarians, to status quo conservatives it should conjure only fearful images of rapid change, uncertainty, and instability. Conditions such as these can be expected to de-align authoritarians and status quo conservatives, rendering the two dimensions—authoritarianism and conservatism—either wholly independent or even negatively related.

Thus, historical moments in which these kinds of choices present as stark alternatives should be particularly critical for unmasking the two characters: revealing that which is ultimately at stake for each, how their primary concerns diverge, and *why that matters* for the rest of us. Although data are rarely collected in the midst of the infrequent “authoritarian revolution,” we should certainly observe the same “de-coupling” of authoritarians and status quo conservatives in more mundane versions of those critical historical moments.

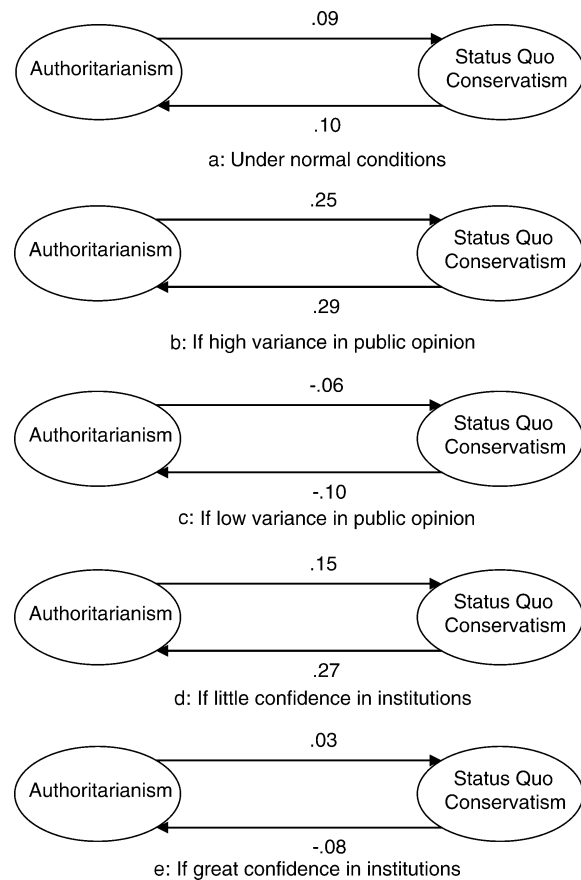


Figure 1. Relationship between authoritarianism and status quo conservatism under varying conditions. *Note.* Path entries are conditional coefficients calculated from unstandardized two-stage least squares regression coefficients in Appendix E, Tables E.2 and E.3 (column 4) at <http://www.karenstenner.com>. All paths significant at $p < .10$ (one-tailed tests applied as appropriate). Source: *World Values Survey 1990–1995*, all national samples; $N = 108,813$ (authoritarianism), $N = 103,684$ (status quo conservatism).

Figures 1 and 2, drawing on evidence from the *WVS* and *GSS*, respectively, depict some “everyday” political contexts that may divorce authoritarians from status quo conservatives, even line them up with different partners, and the antithetical conditions that bring them only to a closer union. Overall, it is evident that the highly contingent relationship between authoritarianism and status quo conservatism depends critically on confidence in the authorities who would be governing and intervening and the extent of public consensus on the goals of their interventions.

This level of public consensus (actually, dissensus) was indexed in the cross-national *WVS* by a measure of the within-nation variance in survey responses, specifically: the actual variance across the respondent’s national sample in responses to those items reflecting intolerance of difference and aversion to change. Because the *GSS* is instead a survey of one nation over time, my measure there alternately gauged the variance in the opinions being expressed among all those

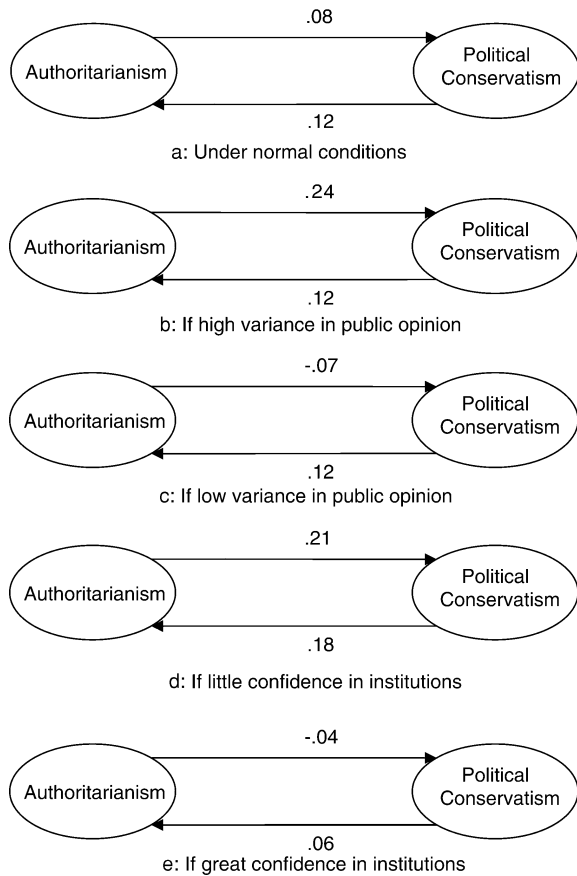


Figure 2. Relationship between authoritarianism and “political conservatism” under varying conditions. *Note.* Path entries are conditional coefficients calculated from unstandardized two-stage least squares regression coefficients in Appendix D, Tables D.2 and D.3 (column 4), at <http://www.karenstenner.com>. All paths significant at $p < .10$ (one-tailed tests applied as appropriate). Source: *General Social Survey 1972–2000* (non-Hispanic Whites only); $N = 6,930$ (authoritarianism), $N = 22,974$ (political conservatism).

interviewed within a few days of the respondent (calculated for each little half-a-week slice of time across 3 decades of the *GSS*). These measures of variance in the opinions expressed by fellow survey respondents served to reflect the diversity of beliefs a citizen (of that nation, or at that time) must have confronted in the course of their daily interactions and consumption of popular media. They serve as critical interaction variables in the analyses depicted here. (See Appendices D and E for full details of variable construction, and Tables D.2, D.3, E.2 and E.3 therein for the two-stage least squares analyses that generated these results).

Whereas the measures just discussed reflected the external opinion climate being experienced by the respondent, the other main interaction variable simply summed the degree of confidence the respondents themselves had in “the people running” certain institutions, which included in the *GSS*, for example, the likes of Congress, the U.S. Supreme Court, and the executive branch of the federal government.

What we find is that the modest relationship between authoritarianism and conservatism grows stronger when there is low confidence in institutions and much disagreement among citizens (see Figures 1b and 1d for the *WVS*, and Figures 2b and 2d for the *GSS*). Essentially, when there is little consensus on the ends to pursue, and little confidence in the authorities that would pursue them, authoritarians cling tighter to conservatism, and clearly have no interest in engineering social change under these conditions, indeed no interest in government doing anything at all.

For their part, this specter of social instability edges conservatives closer to authoritarianism, with conservatives perhaps finding the coercive bent of authoritarianism attractive as the cacophony of dissent grows and they lose confidence in the ability of “the authorities” to manage it. In sharp contrast, when consensus is high (limiting conflict and unpredictable public moods), and they are confident in the institutions underwriting social stability, conservatives tend to *reject* authoritarianism and trust the individual to their own devices (see the negative influence of conservatism on authoritarianism in Figures 1c and 1e). In those same conditions, authoritarians too are seeking release from the old partnership, suddenly keen to disavow the “stay put, do nothing” conservative stance, and deploy all that useful institutional authority in pursuit of the common goals that seem, or promise, to unite us (see the negative influence of authoritarianism on conservatism in Figures 1c, 2c, and 2e).

These striking and politically consequential contingencies in the relationship between authoritarianism and conservatism can be sensible only if we recognize the important distinctions between their primary concerns. Authoritarians almost by definition favor the subordination of the individual to the demands of the collective. It is clear they can be comfortable with an activist government when confident in the ends to be pursued and the leaders who will pursue them, but otherwise shift sharply to a limited government conservative stance. For their part, conservatives grow more attracted to authoritarianism when public opinion is fragmented and fractious, and major institutions fail to inspire confidence. But they are notably disinclined to adopt authoritarian stances when conflict seems to be at manageable levels, and they remain confident in the institutions that would manage it. And they most definitely will not be “on board” for the authoritarian revolution unless the uncertainty and instability that that promises seem no worse than that which they currently confront.

Among other things, failure to recognize these important distinctions leads us to underestimate (and thus under employ) the potential for conservatives to serve as guardians of liberal democracy, and bulwarks against fascist social movements (see also Sniderman et al., 1991; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993). It is no secret

that liberal democracy is most secure when individual freedom and diversity are pursued in a relatively orderly fashion, in a well-established institutional framework, under responsible leadership, within the bounds set by entrenched and consensually accepted “rules of the game.” This should be perfectly acceptable to status quo conservatives but distasteful to authoritarians (perhaps a modern liberal democracy that is entrenched and unchallenged is actually the worst kind of all). On the other hand, the prospect of some wholesale overthrow of the system in pursuit of greater unity should be appealing to authoritarians but appalling to conservatives. Liberal democracy would seem least secure when conservatives cannot be persuaded that freedom and diversity are authoritatively supported and institutionally constrained, and authoritarians can be persuaded that greater sameness and oneness—the “one right way” for the “one true people”—lie just the other end of the “shining path.”

Authoritarianism versus Laissez-Faire Conservatism: Authoritarians as Social Engineers

More controversially, failure to recognize these distinctions leads us to under-estimate authoritarians, as much as we underestimate conservatives. For example, it leads us to neglect the potential for authoritarians, under the right conditions, to get behind programs like affirmative action for minorities, which hold out the prospect of minimizing some of the difference they so abhor. Now, keep in mind our dawning recognition that laissez-faire conservatism actually has no natural appeal for authoritarians, despite the regularity with which the two are carelessly lumped together. We have already seen reliable evidence that authoritarianism and laissez-faire conservatism are either trivially or negatively associated. We *should* expect a modest inverse relationship between the two, given the pressing interest of authoritarians in the exercise of collec-

tive authority over the individual, and inversely, the aversion of libertarians to any constraints on individual freedom, extending right across the social, political and economic spheres. Authoritarians ought to be attracted to the idea of big government and collective control of social and economic outcomes, just as libertarians ought to prefer limited government and free markets, favoring minimal interference in all affairs of the individual, economic and otherwise.

Now put these pieces together with the realization that authoritarians are perfectly willing to embrace massive social change in pursuit of greater oneness and sameness. Should we really be surprised to discover that authoritarians (who unquestionably are generally driven to denigrate those of different race) can actually be attracted to affirmative action schemes promoting greater social equity (a.k.a. uniformity)? Although it surely seems counterintuitive at first, there is some evidence to suggest that those least tolerant of racial diversity *might* actually be brought around to supporting programs redressing racial inequality when the proposed policies (e.g., quotas in university admissions) seem likely to reduce some of the (real or imagined) differences they so abhor (see Table 3, column 3 and Figure 3; see also Appendix A1, Table A1.4 and Figure A1.4 at <http://www.karenstenner.com>). This not-obvious insight itself depends upon recognizing that much of what we tend to call racism is more appropriately understood as difference-ism.

Granted, by no means is it obvious from Figure 3 that anyone other than the “very liberal” will even become more likely than not to support quotas in admissions any time soon. My point is only that others *could* be persuaded to join with ardent liberals on the issue, and the most likely candidates at every point along the “liberal-conservative” ideological spectrum are those of an authoritarian bent. Authoritarianism clearly plays a particularly important role in pulling conservatives back from vehement opposition into a realm of possibility where they are at least potentially

Table 3. *The Interaction of Authoritarianism and “Political Conservatism” on “Right-Wing” Party Identification and Opposition to Affirmative Action*

Explanatory Variables	Right-Wing Party Identification	Opposes Racial Quotas in University Admissions ^a
Authoritarianism (instrument)	-.60 (.14)**	-1.85 (.96)**
Political conservatism (instrument)	.52 (.13)**	2.50 (1.17)**
Authoritarianism × Political Conservatism	-.82 (.30)**	-4.20 (2.28)*
Constant	.53 (.01)**	.94 (.17)**

Note. Cell entries are (column 2) unstandardized regression coefficients, and (column 3) logit coefficients, from multivariate analyses (standard errors in parentheses). See Appendix B, Table B.1, at <http://www.karenstenner.com> for data description and univariate statistics; Table B.2 (“1st stage estimates”) for the variables and estimates used to construct the instrument for authoritarianism; and Table B.3 for the political conservatism instrument. Source: *Multi-Investigator Study 1999* (non-Hispanic Whites only). $N = 844$.

^aThis analysis also tested and, where necessary, controlled for any effects upon the dependent variable of experimental manipulations within this section of the survey and those that preceded it. Full details available from author upon request.

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$ (one-tailed tests applied as appropriate).

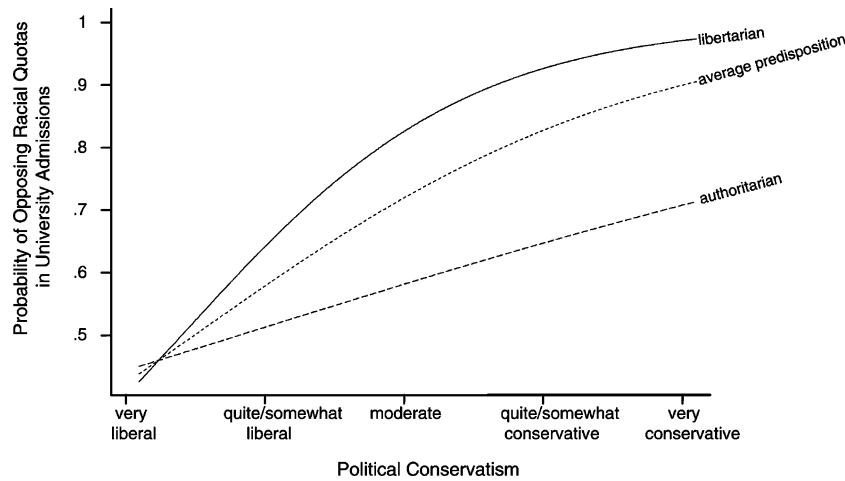


Figure 3. Effects of “political conservatism” on opposition to racial quotas in university admissions given varying authoritarianism. Source: *Multi-Investigator Study 1999* (non-Hispanic Whites only), $N = 844$; see Table 3 in text and Appendix B at <http://www.karenstenner.com> for further details.

persuadable. Judging from all the evidence we have considered here, what it would take to “seal the deal” are greater consensus on the issue, leaders capable of inspiring confidence that equitable *outcomes* (not just equitable opportunities) could actually be achieved, and an accompanying rhetoric far more focused on the power of unity than the joys of diversity. Again I am not pretending that any of this would be simple or swift, only that it provides some potentially critical leverage on a significant social issue, from a most unexpected source, where the current bases of support are exhausted and proponents have little left to work with.

More generally, apart from softening opposition to specific interventions such as affirmative action schemes, authoritarianism seems to pull everyone (and again, especially conservatives) away from identification with political parties espousing laissez-

faire principles, which in the United States is the Republican Party (see Table 3, column 2 and Figure 4). In spectacular style, authoritarianism tends to transform conservative U.S. electors—who otherwise cleave consistently to the Republican Party—into Independents or leaning Democrats (see also Appendix A1, Table A1.4 and Figure A1.3, and Appendix D, Tables D.4 and D.7, and Figure D.3 at <http://www.karenstenner.com>). But authoritarians are generally more Democrat than libertarians irrespective of “liberal–conservative” ideology.

Independent Characters and Shifting Partnerships

Authoritarians have long been accused of “closed-mindedness” (a claim I take issue with shortly).

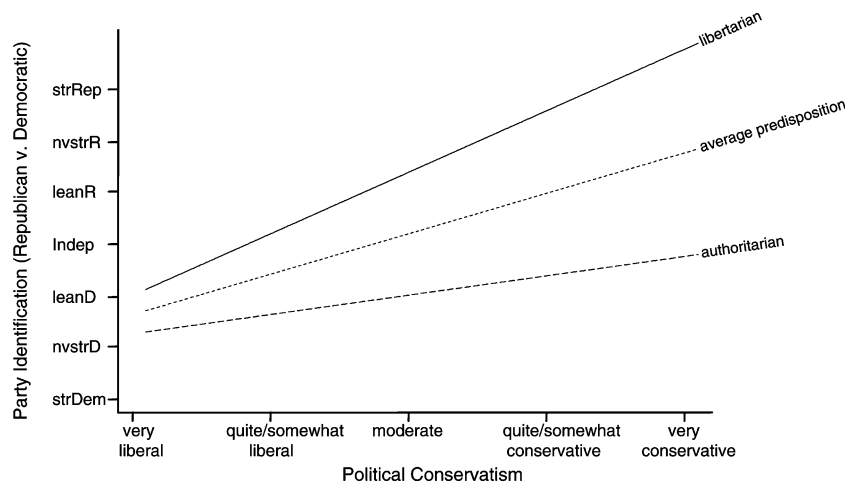


Figure 4. Effects of “political conservatism” on party identification given varying authoritarianism. Source: *Multi-Investigator Study 1999* (non-Hispanic Whites only), $N = 844$; see Table 3 in text and Appendix B at <http://www.karenstenner.com> for further details.

But there may be no greater instance of closed-mindedness than political commentators' determination that there is something persistent out there—a "right wing," "conservative" *something*—that permanently wed certain inclinations, none of which has anything much to recommend it.

But these are discrete dispositions, not eternally wed: they can be divorced, even lined up with different partners. It is our political and social contexts that provide the critical outside meddling that drives one character into the arms of another. It is evident that our three "conservatisms" are very different things and that the relationships between them are highly contingent: swinging from positive, to insignificant, even negative association, depending on changing environmental conditions. Shifts in the political and social context serve to align, realign, or disassociate these orientations toward change, diversity, and redistribution; cause interests and concerns to converge or diverge; and fundamentally alter the relationships between the characters.

Once we separate out these different things, we can also more clearly distinguish and exploit the "good" and the "bad" within each character. Thus we discovered that status quo conservatism lends little support to intolerance in the context of tolerant cultural traditions. This aversion to change can be rallied in defense of liberal democratic protections for autonomy and diversity, even of liberal democracy itself, at critical historical junctures. We found that free market values—so often employed in the United States to *mobilize* (not generate) intolerant sentiments "under cover"—more typically align with tolerance as part of a general commitment to individual freedom, which naturally excludes any push for moral regulation and political repression. We saw that even a hateful distaste for difference can be mobilized behind contentious schemes of equalization and redistribution.

Of all three characters, authoritarians are truly the most changeable, the most readily malleable, the most easily exploitable, for better or worse. They are simple-minded avoiders of complexity far more than closed-minded avoiders of change (cf. Rokeach, 1960). We witnessed here a complete shift in authoritarians' goals and stance toward government given perceptions of value conflict and leadership failure, with vastly different aims pursued given widespread consensus and confidence in authorities. Indeed, in all my prior investigations of the "authoritarian dynamic," it has proved alarmingly easy to shift authoritarians from positions of indifference, even modest tolerance, to aggressive defense of oneness and sameness employing the full force of state authority (see Stenner, 2005, esp. chap. 9). Yet by the same token, it is reassuringly easy to redefine for authoritarians the boundaries of "us" and "them" (Stenner, 2005, pp. 276–281) by creating—above and beyond their

majority/minority distinctions—a "common ingroup identity" at a superordinate level (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993, pp. 1–26). These are all things that political elites might choose to exploit as they go about the business of repackaging issues, of de-aligning and realigning our different "conservative" characters.

One thing is certain: the manner in which political elites choose to package and sell issues in the current political context, to maximize their electoral appeal to multiple constituencies, must not be confused with the manner in which different values tend to "go together" *within* individuals, universally and perpetually. Clearly, the way in which preferences regarding change, diversity, and redistribution are currently packaged in the American party system is different from the way in which those preferences are packaged *in Americans*, not to mention how they might be packaged by the system in the future.

That future *may* be a whole new landscape. Election 2008 certainly felt like a significant political crossroads for America. And Barack Obama quite evidently understands the power of "mixing it up":

In one week, we can choose hope over fear, unity over division, the promise of change over the power of the status quo. In one week, we can come together as one nation, and one people, and once more choose our better history. (Obama, 2008)

Note

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