THE AUTHORITARIAN DYNAMIC

What are the root causes of intolerance? This book addresses that question by developing a universal theory of what determines intolerance of difference in general, which includes racism, political intolerance (e.g., restriction of free speech), moral intolerance (e.g., homophobia, supporting censorship and school prayer), and punitiveness. It demonstrates that all of these seemingly disparate attitudes are principally caused by just two factors: individuals' innate psychological predispositions to intolerance ("authoritarianism") interacting with changing conditions of societal threat. The threatening conditions – particularly resonant in the present political climate – that activate authoritarian attitudes include, most critically, great dissension in public opinion and general loss of confidence in political leaders. Using purpose-built experimental manipulations, cross-national survey data, and in-depth personal interviews with extreme authoritarians and libertarians, the book shows that this simple model provides the most complete account of political conflict across the ostensibly distinct domains of race and immigration, civil liberties, morality, crime and punishment, and of when and why those battles will be most heated.

Karen Stenner is Assistant Professor of Politics at Princeton University, where she has been teaching since 1998. She was previously on the faculty at Duke University. Professor Stenner is the coauthor of *Electoral Behaviour: Introduction to Theories, Methods, and Data* (1992) and has coauthored articles in *Political Behavior*, *Political Psychology*, and the *Australian Journal of Political Science*, among others.
CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN PUBLIC OPINION
AND POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Series Editors
Dennis Chong, Northwestern University
James H. Kuklinski, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Cambridge Studies in Public Opinion and Political Psychology publishes innovative research from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives on the mass public foundations of politics and society. Research in the series focuses on the origins and influence of mass opinion, the dynamics of information and deliberation, and the emotional, normative, and instrumental bases of political choice. In addition to examining psychological processes, the series explores the organization of groups, the association between individual and collective preferences, and the impact of institutions on beliefs and behavior.

Cambridge Studies in Public Opinion and Political Psychology is dedicated to furthering theoretical and empirical research on the relationship between the political system and the attitudes and actions of citizens.

Books in the series are listed on the page following the Index.
THE AUTHORITARIAN DYNAMIC

KAREN STENNER

Princeton University
To Whimsy and Boo, my tiny little comets,
who tore a hole in the sky
and let all the magic of the universe pour through.
## Contents

**List of Tables**  
page xii  
**List of Figures**  
xiv  
**Acknowledgments**  
xvii

1. **Introduction: The Authoritarian Dynamic**  
   - *The Concept of Authoritarianism*  
   - *The Philosophy of the Book*  
   - *Data, Methods, Models, and Literature: What to Expect*  
   - *Organization of the Book*  
   1

2. **Kindred Spirits, Common Spark: The Theory of the Authoritarian Dynamic**  
   - *Unresolved Issues*  
   - *Societal Threat and Authoritarianism*  
   - *Threat and Constraint in the Intolerance Domain*  
   13

3. **Manipulating Threat and Reassurance: Data and Methods**  
   - *The Durham Community Survey 1997*  
   - *The Multi-Investigator Study 1999*  
   - *The Cultural Revolution Experiment 1995*  
   37

4. **The Authoritarian Dynamic and the Politics of Fear: Putting the Pieces of the Puzzle Together**  
   - *The Authoritarian Dynamic: An Initial Demonstration*  
   - *Addressing Likely Misconceptions of the Theory*  
   - *Stability and Constraint*  
   - *What Have We Learned?*  
   52

© Cambridge University Press  
www.cambridge.org
## Contents

5 
Authoritarianism and Conservatism across Cultures 85  
Authoritarianism, Status Quo Conservatism, and Laissez-Faire Conservatism 86  
Authoritarianism ≠ Conservatism 89  
Authoritarianism versus Status Quo Conservatism in Western Europe 95  
Authoritarianism versus Status Quo Conservatism in Eastern Europe 106  
A Common Source and a Universal Process 115  
Measurement Error and the Apparently Varying Influence of Authoritarianism 116  
A Parsimonious Account of General Intolerance of Difference 128  
Explaining the Explanatory Gap 135  
The Future of Intolerance 136

6 
Authoritarianism and Conservatism: How They Differ and When It Matters 138  
Prior Research on the Origins of Authoritarianism and Status Quo Conservatism 140  
Prior Research on the Origins of Laissez-Faire Conservatism 151  
Simple Models of Authoritarianism and Conservatism 155  
A Fully Specified Model of Authoritarianism and Status Quo Conservatism 158  
Nature or Nurture? Identical Germanies Reared Apart 162  
Authoritarianism and “Political Conservatism” as Distinct Predispositions 163  
The Contingent Relationship of Authoritarianism and Political Conservatism 174  
Authoritarianism and Political Conservatism as Sources of Intolerance 186  
The Final Account 195

7 
One True People: Putting a Face on the Theory 199  
The Roles of the Primary Interviewer and the Interview Partner 200  
Race of Interviewers 203  
Attempts to Obtain the Interview 204  
Impressions from the Interview 208  
Overall Characteristics of the Discussion 214  
Spontaneous Revelation of Distinctions between the Characters 222  
Interview Conduct and Interactions 223  
Personality and Demeanor 229
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Capacity</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uneasy Conclusions</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 One Right Way: Fleshting Out the Portrait</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Animosity, Prejudice, and Discrimination</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnocentrism, Patriotism, and Politics</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality and Discipline, Crime and Punishment</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: Two Distinguished Characters</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Manning the Barricades: Racism and Intolerance under Conditions of Normative Threat</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Costs of a Narrow Perspective</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference-ism: The Generality and Primacy of Aversion</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Manipulation of the Authoritarian Dynamic</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activation of the Predisposition under Normative Threat</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Effects of Authoritarianism under Normative Threat</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Intolerance</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Intolerance</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Intolerance</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punitiveness</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Findings</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replication on Survey Data: Varying Public Discord across Cultures and Time</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative Threat and Attitudinal Constraint</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Politics of Ideas versus the Politics of Fear</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 The Authoritarian Dynamic: Implications</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Political Psychology of Intolerance</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarianism versus Status Quo Conservatism: Conservatives as Defenders of Freedom</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarianism versus Laissez-Faire Conservatism: Authoritarians as Social Reformers</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting and Working with Difference-ism</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Science versus the Religion of Democracy</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Requires Community</td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Paradox of American Democracy</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Stealth Democracy”: Less Is More</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy Is Bad for the Anti-Democrat</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy Is Its Own Undoing</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tables

3.1 Correlates of perceptions of threat

3.1.1 Correlates of perceptions of normative threat

3.1.2 Correlates of perceptions of economic and personal threat

3.2 Threatening/reassuring experimental stimuli – MIS99

4.1 Over-time stability of major predispositions given varying perceptions of normative threat

5.1 Influence of authoritarianism and status quo conservatism on intolerance of difference across cultures and domains: Western Europe

5.2 Influence of authoritarianism and status quo conservatism on intolerance of difference across cultures and domains: Eastern Europe

5.3 How the apparent impact of authoritarianism on intolerance of difference depends upon scale reliability, region, and normative threat

5.4 A parsimonious account of general intolerance of difference: cross-cultural

6.1 Nature or nurture? “Twin” nations reared apart


6.3 Influence of authoritarianism, “political conservatism,” and “right-wing” party identification on racial intolerance across subcultures and time: United States

6.4 A parsimonious account of general intolerance of difference: United States, GSS72–00, MIS99

7.1 Schedule of questions for the in-depth interviews

7.2 Effects of subjects’ authoritarianism on outcomes of primary interviewers’ attempts to obtain the interview
Tables

7.3 Effects of subjects’ authoritarianism on primary interviewers’ impressions from the interview 209
7.4 Effects of subjects’ authoritarianism on interview partners’ impressions from the interview 210
7.5 Differences in overall characteristics of the discussion 215
7.6 Differences in interview conduct and interactions 224
7.7 Differences in personality and demeanor 230
7.8 Differences in cognitive capacity 234
8.1 Differences in interview content – racial animosity, prejudice, and discrimination 241
8.2 Differences in interview content – ethnocentrism, patriotism, and politics 251
8.3 Differences in interview content – morality and discipline, crime and punishment 257
9.1 Internal coherence of authoritarianism given experimental manipulation of normative threat and reassurance 285
9.2 Determinants of archetypical expressions of racial, political, and moral intolerance – MIS99 290
9.3 Determinants of overall measures of racial, political, and moral intolerance – MIS99 293
9.4 Determinants of racial, political, and moral intolerance – CRE95 296
9.5 Constraint among intolerant attitudes given experimental manipulation of normative threat and reassurance 320
Figures

2.1 Constraint in the domain of intolerance

4.1.1 Experimentally manipulated normative threat increases the expression of authoritarian predisposition in authoritarian attitudes (CRE95)  

4.1.2 Perceived normative threat increases the expression of authoritarian predisposition in authoritarian attitudes (DCS97)  

4.2.1 Authoritarian predisposition changes the impact of experimentally manipulated normative threat on expressed authoritarian attitudes (CRE95)  

4.2.2 Authoritarian predisposition changes the impact of perceived normative threat on expressed authoritarian attitudes (DCS97)  

4.3.1 Effects of authoritarian predisposition on perception of a “dangerous world” given experimental manipulation of normative threat (CRE95)  

4.3.2 Effects of authoritarian predisposition on perception of a “dangerous world” given varying perceptions of normative threat (DCS97)  

6.1 Core determinants of authoritarianism and status quo conservatism (WVS90–95)  

6.2 Core determinants of authoritarianism and “political conservatism” (GSS72–00)  

6.3 Core determinants of authoritarianism and “political conservatism” (DCS97)  

6.4 Hypothesized divergence between authoritarianism and political conservatism under varying conditions  

6.5.1 Conservatives reject authoritarianism when belief diversity is the status quo and greater unity requires change (MIS99)
Figures

6.5.2 Authoritarians are less conservative if we are changing together in pursuit of common goals (MIS99) 181

6.6 Effects of authoritarianism on political conservatism given experimental manipulation of normative threat (CRE95) 182

6.7 Relationship between authoritarianism and political conservatism under varying conditions (MIS99) 184

6.7.1 Under normal conditions 184
6.7.2 If bad leadership 184
6.7.3 If belief diversity 184
6.7.4 If stable diversity 184
6.7.5 If changing together 184

6.8 Relationship between authoritarianism and political conservatism under varying conditions (CRE95) 185

6.8.1 Under normal conditions 185
6.8.2 If bad leadership 185
6.8.3 If belief diversity 185
6.8.4 If unjust world 185
6.8.5 If aliens / no afterlife 185

7.1 Grade level of authoritarians’ discussion declines 217
7.2 Authoritarians’ discussion emphasizes social exclusion 220
7.3 Payment seems critical for authoritarians’ participation 225
7.4 Authoritarians avoid interaction with black interview partner 227
7.5 Authoritarians seem psychologically/emotionally disturbed 233
8.1 Authoritarians seem to be racist 246
8.2 Authoritarians put blame on blacks themselves 249
8.3 Authoritarians express sympathy for super-patriot/militia movement 255
8.4 Authoritarians turn everything into issue of crime 260

9.1.1 Effects of authoritarianism on racial intolerance given changing conceptions of “us” and “them” (CRE95) 279
9.1.2 Effects of authoritarianism on punitiveness given changing conceptions of “us” and “them” (CRE95) 280
9.2 Effects of authoritarianism on archetypical racial intolerance given experimental manipulation of threat and reassurance (MIS99) 291
9.3 Effects of authoritarianism on racial intolerance given experimental manipulation of threat (CRE95) 295
9.4 Effects of authoritarianism on archetypical political intolerance given experimental manipulation of threat and reassurance (MIS99) 299
Figures

9.5 Effects of authoritarianism on political intolerance given experimental manipulation of threat (CRE95) 301
9.6 Effects of authoritarianism on archetypical moral intolerance given experimental manipulation of threat and reassurance (MIS99) 303
9.7 Effects of authoritarianism on moral intolerance given experimental manipulation of threat (CRE95) 306
9.8 Effects of authoritarianism on punitiveness given experimental manipulation of threat (CRE95) 308
9.9 Effects of authoritarianism on general intolerance of difference given experimental manipulation of threat and reassurance (MIS99) 312
9.10 Effects of authoritarianism on general intolerance of difference given experimental manipulation of threat (CRE95) 313
9.11.1 Effects of authoritarianism on general intolerance of difference given varying experience of normative threat (GSS72–00) 314
9.11.2 Effects of authoritarianism on general intolerance of difference given varying experience of normative threat (WVS90–95) 314
9.12.1 Effects of experience of normative threat on general intolerance of difference given varying authoritarianism (GSS72–00) 318
9.12.2 Effects of experience of normative threat on general intolerance of difference given varying authoritarianism (WVS90–95) 318
Many people have contributed in important ways to this work, and for that I am truly grateful. I first thank Stanley Feldman, my dissertation advisor, who had been thinking carefully about authoritarianism for a good while before I ever came to graduate school. The seeds of some of the ideas that I developed in my dissertation, and then subsequently in this book, were sown in his paper “Moral Values and Social Order: The Roots of Social Conservatism,” presented at the 1989 annual meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology. We went on to develop some of these ideas together in our Political Psychology paper, “Perceived Threat and Authoritarianism” (1997). The Authoritarian Dynamic represents the culmination of my own thinking on the topic, but the quality of this work undoubtedly has been improved by the serious deliberations in which we engaged during our earlier collaboration. Stanley was a more careful, thoughtful, and insightful advisor than any graduate student could have hoped for, and a good friend to boot. As I struggled to persuade him in our many debates, the quality of the arguments and evidence I would eventually marshal in support of the theory of the authoritarian dynamic soared. His wealth of experience and incisive skepticism proved to be the perfect foils for my wild imagination and intellectual stimulus seeking. For all of this I am sincerely grateful, and I happily acknowledge my considerable debt to him. I would also like to give thanks to the members of the Stony Brook faculty who contributed to my education in political psychology more generally, including Leonie Huddy, Milton Lodge, Helmut Norpoth, Chuck Taber, and, especially, Kathleen McGraw. Others in the profession provided invaluable guidance and critical support by taking notice of this research very early in my career, by offering insightful feedback and crucial opportunities for data collection, and by encouraging and publicizing the work more generally, most especially Paul Sniderman. I am particularly thankful for his early interventions.
Acknowledgments

This book has been some time in the making, during which time I have been fortunate to find myself among some very fine colleagues at both Duke University and Princeton University. For vital support – financial, technical, or moral – provided at some very critical junctures, I give thanks to Joanne Gowa, Jeff Herbst, Peter Lange, and Chris Mackie. And for their very thoughtful responses to various components of this project, I am grateful to Chris Achen, John Aldrich, Doug Arnold, Marty Gilens, Fred Greenstein, Melissa Harris-Lacewell, Jennifer Hochschild, Chris Karpowitz, Stanley Kelly, Bob Keohane, Herbert Kitschelt, Tali Mendelberg, Eric Oliver, Deborah Prentice, and Penny Visscher. Two colleagues in particular, Larry Bartels and John Brehm, have read and responded to countless renditions of this work, questioning me every step of the way. The insights they have offered or provoked have contributed in fundamental ways to the quality of the final product. More than this, they have proved to be the finest, most loyal friends. I always knew Larry and John would be fabulous colleagues, but their friendship has been a great and unexpected pleasure.

I am most grateful of all to my colleagues at large, my dearest gal pals, my wellsprings of both intellectual and social stimulation, and fellow founding members of HUBRIS: Katie Galloway, Gallya Lahav, Wendy Rahn, and Lynn Sanders. They have nurtured and inspired, motivated and excited, interrogated and challenged me all throughout this project. I am so very thankful to have their warmth and brilliance in my life. Likewise for two of my oldest and most faithful friends and colleagues – my pivotal early influences and reality checks – David Gow and Doug Tucker. I would not be in one piece, let alone an academic, let alone a political scientist, if they had not crossed my path.

This work has benefited greatly from the critical responses of audiences at many professional meetings and seminars over the years. George Marcus, in particular, has found himself a discussant of my papers on numerous conference panels and has invariably provided incisive feedback. The many seminars and conferences organized by Larry Bartels under the auspices of Princeton’s Center for the Study of Democratic Politics have provided endless opportunities for creative minds to rouse one another. I was especially stimulated by some interesting exchanges with John Hibbing. The CSDP also generously funded a fellowship that cleared some time and energy for writing at an important moment. I am similarly very grateful to Bob Shapiro, not just for his own thoughtful and encouraging responses to this project, but even more for his organizing what is easily, for our subfield, the most constructive and fruitful forum for the presentation and discussion of work in progress: the Columbia political psychology meeting. The Duke/UNC political psychology seminar has also been influential. A groundbreaking conference on Toleration and
Acknowledgments

Identity Conflict, sponsored by the Russell Sage Foundation, proved to be the crucial impetus to my thinking about the intersection of normative theory and empirical research on tolerance. I am grateful to Ingrid Creppell, John Ferejohn, Jim Gibson, Steve Macedo, and, especially, Russell Hardin for some very stimulating exchanges at that meeting, as well as for their enthusiasm and encouragement more generally.

I also want to give special thanks to two individuals I have never met, who evidently so appreciate the play of ideas that they went out of their way to provide some of the most insightful feedback I received on the project: John Duckitt and Sid Tarrow. I wish I could thank by name the Press’s anonymous reviewers of this book, who, together with the series editor, Dennis Chong, drew my attention to important literature I had overlooked, to arguments requiring clarification, and to empirical claims in need of stronger evidentiary support. The final product has unquestionably been improved by their careful reading, perceptive reactions, and thoughtful reviews. Many others, too numerous to mention individually, have probed and confronted and inquired and inspired in countless informal meetings, late night encounters, and unexpected conversations, often over dinner, sometimes over wine, and more wine. I thank Nancy Burns, George Downs, M. Kent Jennings, Don Kinder, Jon Krosnick, Laura Stoker, and John Zaller, in particular, for some of the more provocative and influential dinner conversations over the years.

This book would certainly never have been completed without the help of a veritable army of fine research assistants. Alas, they are again far too numerous to mention by name, but I must at least acknowledge, with much gratitude, the very important contributions of my major aides over those years: Amina El Sayad, Paul Gerber, Rosalind Greene, Sameeha Hussein, Karen Jordan, James McGhee, Jess Sartorius, and Dag Woubshet.

Finally, I come to my family: to the debts that could never be paid in full, no matter how long I lived or how hard I tried. For their constant love, encouragement, and support, I thank my much-loved brother and sister and, most of all, my parents. They worked so hard to give me the things that they never had, and that I regularly take for granted. While the formal education they made possible for me has been a tremendous advantage, the most critical part of my education was provided at home: there are simply no greater gifts you can give a girl than self-esteem and self-confidence. Without a doubt, these have been my greatest assets. I have my parents to thank for this, and for so much more. I am standing on their shoulders, which of course means also on the shoulders of my beloved grandparents before them. That they took us from itinerant sharecroppers and domestic help to university professors in two generations bears testament to the kind of talent and courage that neither poverty
Acknowledgments

nor chronic illness can deter, and also to the equitable and efficient use of resources made possible by a progressive welfare state in a civilized social democracy. To all of you, for all of this, and all the rest, my love and gratitude are inexpressible. I would also like to give special thanks for the reliable kindness and unwavering support of four friends so dear to me I consider them part of my family: Greg Ferkel, Frank Miano, and Michael and Michelle Teys.

My greatest debt of all is to my husband: the loveliest and sanest man who ever walked the planet, who entered my world at the very moment that love and sanity were most scarce. He has provided unfailing support, both intellectual and emotional. Nobody has read more of my work, more often, or more carefully than he, and nobody has ever taken better care of me. Mere words cannot describe what he means to me. Certainly, I would not be what or where I am today without him, and I thank him with all of my heart.
Books in the Series

Asher Arian, *Security Threatened: Surveying Israeli Opinion on Peace and War*

James DeNardo, *The Amateur Strategist: Intuitive Deterrence Theories and the Politics of the Nuclear Arms Race*

Robert S. Erikson, Michael B. Mackuen, and James A. Stimson, *The Macro Polity*

John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, *Congress as Public Enemy: Public Attitudes Toward American Political Institutions*

John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, *Stealth Democracy: Americans’ Beliefs about How Government Should Work*

John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, *What Is It about Government That Americans Dislike?*

Robert Huckfeldt and John Sprague, *Citizens, Politics, and Social Communication*

Robert Huckfeldt, Paul E. Johnson, and John Sprague, *Political Disagreement: The Survival of Diverse Opinions within Communication Networks*

James H. Kuklinski, *Thinking about Political Psychology*


Diana C. Mutz, *Impersonal Influence: How Perceptions of Mass Collectives Affect Political Attitudes*


Susan Welch, Timothy Bledsoe, Lee Sigelman, and Michael Combs, *Race and Place*