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# PAPERS IN POLITICAL ECONOMY

**Paper No. 54**

**“Right-Wing Authoritarianism and  
Economic Philosophy Among North  
American Legislators”**

**Bob Altemeyer**

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Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Economic Philosophy Among North American Legislators

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In 1950, when I was ten and afraid of the "colored people" who lived down the streetcar tracks in St. Louis, one of the most influential books in the behavioral sciences appeared. The Authoritarian Personality, written by a research team at Berkeley headed by Nevitt Sanford, said prejudice mainly arose in a certain kind of person, the "authoritarian prefascist." Such a person had grown up authoritarian because of early experiences with harsh, cold parents who had severely punished disobedience. The child had necessarily repressed any rebellious tendencies and anger at his parents, and covered his tracks with a reaction formation of abject submission. The repressed hostility was then projected onto safe targets, such as the "colored people who lived down the streetcar tracks," and the hatred felt toward tyrannical authority was displaced onto minorities.

This model, which you can see was rooted in psychoanalytic theory and employed nearly all of the classic ego defense mechanisms, seemingly explained the most horrible events of World War II. It quickly captured the attention of personality researchers and social psychologists, and studies based upon its measure of authoritarianism, the Fascism Scale, dominated the relevant journals for the next 15 years. Most social scientists, I imagine, have heard of it (even though I had not by the time I wrote my Ph.D. candidacy exams).

Not as many people have heard of the heavy criticisms directed almost immediately at the "Berkeley theory" (Christie & Jahoda, 1954). The original studies were chopped to tiny bits on methodological grounds. The findings with

the Fascism Scale appeared mostly due to response sets such as "yea-saying," not authoritarianism. The research team had seemingly ignored the possibility of an "authoritarian on the left." Some scientists balked at an early-childhood, Freudian explanation of prejudice as surely as they doubted the Oedipus Complex.

Over the years, the critics have largely been proven right as research has not supported the Berkeley theory. Rokeach (1960) proposed an alternate model of "general authoritarianism" that also spawned many studies. But it suffered from many of the same problems, and has not taken us very far. Much research has been done on personality and political orientation, of course. But nothing has produced the scope and sweep of "Nevitt Sanford et al."<sup>1</sup>

#### Right-Wing Authoritarianism

Because I failed that Ph.D. candidacy exam question in 1965 on the Berkeley theory, I was required to write a redemptive paper before I could be safely sent on my way. (If you are familiar with Alfred Adler's notion of overcompensation, you can have a chuckle at how I have spent the thirty years since.) As I plowed through the accumulated literature, I thought I spotted a "kernel of truth" in the findings that led to a different conceptualization of the matter, right-wing authoritarianism. By which I mean the covariation of three attitudinal clusters:

Authoritarian submission--a high degree of submission to the authorities who are perceived to be established and legitimate in the society in which one lives;

Authoritarian aggression--a general aggressiveness, directed against various persons, which is perceived to be sanctioned by established authorities;

and Conventionalism--a high degree of adherence to the social conventions which are perceived to be endorsed by society and its established authorities.

You will find elaborations upon the terms of this definition in Altemeyer (1981). But I would emphasize here that I do not use "right-wing" in a political or economic sense, but in a psychological one. The right-wing authoritarian submits to the established authorities in her life, the "Establishment" if you would. Are there psychological "left-wing" authoritarians too, who submit to a revolutionary authority, aggress in its name, and insist upon strict adherence to the conventions of a revolutionary movement? Maybe so. But that is a story for another time.

#### The RWA Scale

I measure right-wing authoritarianism with the RWA Scale, a 30-item Likert-type attitude scale answered on a -4 to +4 basis. Most of the items tap at least two of the three defining sentiments. For example, "It is always better to trust the judgment of the proper authorities in government and religion than to listen to the noisy rabble-rousers in our society who are trying to create doubt in people's minds." Half the items are written in the protrait direction, where the authoritarian response is to agree. The others are contrait, such as "A lot of our rules regarding modesty and sexual behavior are just customs which are not necessarily any better than those which other people follow." (It is extremely important to balance scales in this way, to keep the effects of response sets from accumulating when answers are summed.) These and a few other sample items are given in Exhibit 1.

The RWA Scale covers a lot of ground, from nudist camps to child rearing to punishing drug crimes to atheists to sex roles to "stomping out the rot." This apparent lack of focus, and the balanced wording of the items, means persons answering it can almost never guess what it is measuring. It looks like a survey of opinions on a lot of different social issues, which is how it is described to participants.

Exhibit 1. Sample Items From The RWA Scale

1. It is always better to trust the judgment of the proper authorities in government and religion than to listen to the noisy rabble-rousers in our society who are trying to create doubt in people's minds.
2. A lot of our rules regarding modesty and sexual behavior are just customs which are not necessarily any better than those which other people follow.\*
3. The way things are going in this country, it's going to take a lot of "strong medicine to straighten out the troublemakers, criminals and perverts.
4. There is nothing wrong with nudist camps.\*
5. Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn.
6. The courts are right in being easy on drug users. Punishment would not do any good in cases like these.\*
7. It may be considered old-fashioned by some, but having a decent, respectable appearance is still the mark of a gentleman and, especially, a lady.
8. Atheists and others who have rebelled against the established religions are no doubt every bit as good and virtuous as those who attend church regularly.\*
9. The sooner we get rid of the traditional family structure, where the father is the head of the family and the children are taught to obey authority automatically, the better. The old-fashioned way has a lot wrong with it.\*
10. Once our government leaders and the authorities condemn the dangerous elements in our society, it will be the duty of every patriotic citizen to help stomp out the rot that is poisoning our country from within.

Note - Items are answered on a -4 to +4 basis.

\*. indicates item is written in the contrait direction, for which the scoring key is reversed.

Reliability. Nevertheless, the responses to these far-ranging items show an underlying organization. A 30-item test produces 435 inter-item correlations, and these average about .20 in university student and ordinary older samples. If that looks puny, it actually ranks pretty high for an unfocused, balanced test. The estimate of internal consistency known as Cronbach's "alpha coefficient" comes in about .90 or higher. This means the test has a "signal-to-noise" ratio of at least 9:1. Test-retest reliability hangs in even higher.

Validity. Studies over the years indicate RWA Scale scores have considerable empirical validity (Altemeyer, 1981, 1988). Right-wing authoritarians tend to accept unfair government acts, such as illegal wiretaps and J. Edgar Hoover's attempts to blackmail Martin Luther King into committing suicide. High RWAs believed Richard Nixon longer during "Watergate" than most people did, to the bitter end and beyond. Such people are also relatively in favor of abolishing the Bill of Rights in the United States, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada. They tend to endorse traditional sex roles, and believe more in conformity to group norms. They oppose abortion, are hostile toward homosexuals and highly punitive toward ordinary lawbreakers. High RWAs tried to hurt peers more in an electric-shock learning experiment. As the Berkeley model predicted, they also turn out to be among the most prejudiced people in our society. (They dislike so many racial and ethnic minorities, I have called them "equal opportunity bigots.") And when asked if they would help the government persecute almost any imaginable group, including "right-wing authoritarians," the High RWAs in a sample are most likely to volunteer for "posse" duty.

The RWA Scale showed it could predict such behaviors better than other measures of authoritarianism, such as the Fascism Scale, over 20 years ago. It has continued to put up respectable validity numbers since. Most of the correlations described above fall in the .40 to .60 range, which behavioral scientists often call "strong relationships."



I have been surprised at how often the scale has proven useful outside North America. A series of studies in the former Soviet Union proved especially interesting. As predicted, Communists and other supporters of the traditional regime tended to be High RWAs. (Remember, we are not talking about political or economic sentiments, but a psychological orientation to the established authorities in one's society.) In another interesting experiment, High RWAs in both the USA and the USSR tended to be the fiercest "cold war warriors," believing most their government's account of events, and showing the strongest hostility toward the enemy. (This was recently replicated in a study of Jews and Palestinians living in Israel.) If High RWAs had grown up on the "other side," and become the same kind of person, they would presumably have loved what they presently hated, and hated what they loved.

You might infer from this that High RWAs have little self-insight. This has been verified in several experiments. For one thing, if you describe the trait to a group of students, as I have described it here, and then ask everyone to estimate where they would land in the distribution of RWA Scale scores, the Low RWAs usually know they would be Lows, the Moderates usually guess they would be average, and the High RWAs have not got a clue. Nearly all of them think they would score "normal" or be Low RWAs.

You can find many examples of this blindness to themselves. For example, while they tend to think of themselves as "rugged individualists," conformity experiments have found they are more likely to be swayed by group norms than Low RWAs are. Also, while experiments have shown they are as likely as other people to cheat to get higher marks on exams, High RWAs think they are morally superior.

If you think this betrays a certain defensiveness, you are again right. Several experiments have shown that, if Lows and Highs are given "good news" about themselves, they want to know more. If Lows are given "bad news," they still want to know more. But if Highs receive bad news, such as being told they

are low in self-esteem or high in prejudice, they want the subject dropped. In fact, when I asked students if they wanted to be told if it turned out they scored relatively high in prejudice, Lows said "Yes!" and Highs said "No!"

How do authoritarians hide themselves from the truth? In short, their thinking is highly compartmentalized. They have separate "boxes" for many of their ideas, and disturbing material is easily "put away." Because they often do not connect relevant ideas together, their behavior frequently betrays double standards. For example, in one experiment students were asked to evaluate an NDP provincial government that was unfairly using its power to intimidate Conservative party supporters. Both Low and High RWA subjects thought this was wrong. But when the roles were reversed, and a Conservative government was said to be putting the screws to NDP backers, Lows thought that was also wrong, but High RWAs did not. Many such double standards have been found in authoritarians' thinking.

#### Why Do Authoritarian Submission, Authoritarian Aggression and Conventionalism Covary?

One can easily see why authoritarian submission and conventionalism would tend to covary in people's thinking. Established authorities tend to endorse the conventions that make them established authorities. But why should people who buy both of these also end up being so aggressive in the name of authority?

You can drum up many explanations from our various psychological theories of aggression (e.g. psychoanalytic, frustration-aggression). But the most data-blessed comes from Bandura's (1973) social learning theory, which proposes that aggressive acts are 1) instigated by aversive experiences, but 2) must also be disinhibited somehow, as society generally teaches us that aggression is wrong. In the case of High RWAs, fear usually places their fingers on the triggers, and self-righteousness releases the safety. High RWAs generally think the world is falling apart around them, but since they are the "good people," whatever they do is all right. They think of themselves as God's Designated Hitters, even though their acts of aggression tend to be extraordinarily cowardly.

### How Do People Become Right-Wing Authoritarians?

Contrary to the theory advanced in The Authoritarian Personality, little evidence exists that High RWAs come from harsh, cold, tyrannical family backgrounds. The parents sometimes seem as warm, nurturing and interested in their children as Tiny Tim's. But they do tend to have authoritarian attitudes themselves, and as Mark Twain put it, you get your attitudes where you get your corn pone. I didn't start calling those people down the tracks "colored" because I was beaten as a child.

Having said that, I must also point out the correlation between university students' RWA Scale scores and those of their parents pllops down around .40. That is appreciable, but still short of ending the discussion. Research shows that religion (particularly "fundamentalist religion") sometimes plays a role in developing authoritarianism. Peer groups, schooling, the media seem able to push one either way.

Well, what does determine someone's RWA Scale score? In a word, experiences; or in a phrase, psychology's Law of Effect. People's experiences, both personal and vicarious, with authority, outgroups, and conventions largely determine how authoritarian they will be as they enter adulthood. (And again, Bandura's social learning theory fits the data best.)

Generally, young children seem to have authoritarian attitudes. When they reach adolescence, a fair amount of re-evaluation can occur (as you may have noticed from the slamming doors in your house; or from remembering the doors you slammed). Some teenagers tend to search, experiment, and slam doors more than others. They may conclude authorities are frequently wrong, "bad people" are sometimes good, forbidden fruits are often tasty. These people tend to become Lows. Others, like my children, discover their parents are all-wise. They do not meet homosexuals who have come out, they do not discover how quiet you can be after the parents are asleep. And they do not change much, remaining pretty authoritarian.

To be pithy, I have developed a 24-item Experiences Scale, which finds out what sort of experiences incoming university students have had with the authorities in their lives, "radicals," unconventional behavior, and so on. When I know the answers to those questions, I can do a pretty good job predicting individual RWA Scale scores, for the two measures correlate about .70.

One thus sees adolescence, not early childhood, as the "critical period" in the development of authoritarian personalities. I do not want to imply, however, that the story ends there, that the "teenager is the parent of the adult."

For one thing, it seems clear that normal life changes continue to affect us. University education usually takes RWA Scale scores down several notches, especially if the student majors in the Liberal Arts. (It may have more to do with meeting people from many different backgrounds, than from their professors' great classes. High RWAs, who have tended to travel in pretty small circles up until then, particularly benefit from attending a secular university.) Studies of alumni also reveal that the change lasts. People do not inevitably become more authoritarian as they grow older. However, one factor does seem to push RWA scores back up again, and it is not acquiring a mortgage. If you have children, you are entitled to blame your rising RWA Scale score on them. I do.

Other factors also seem to push adult right-wing authoritarianism around. Social crises appear to have significant effects, particularly if a violent "left-wing" movement has appeared (the 1968 "Nixon trap"). But beyond that, role-playing experiments have revealed that even violent "right-wing" movements seem to increase the desire for a crack down that will restore law and order. (Historians will probably think of one particular example immediately.) Overall, people seem inclined to become more authoritarian, than less so, during periods of social upheaval. The one exception I have discovered in my experiments is when a government uses violence against a nonviolent protest movement (the "Ghandi trap"). Then people become less authoritarian.

Political affiliation.

You can probably guess which parties in North America draw the support of right-wing authoritarians. In Canada, RWAs tend to like the Conservative and Reform Parties. In the United States, Republicans get more than their share of Highs' support. But these relationships prove quite weak in ordinary samples, corresponding to correlations of about .20. Interest in politics turns out to be an important moderator variable, as many people have little or none, and accordingly just as much idea what the different parties stand for. (As if that were easy to tell.) When you look just at people who say they are interested in political goings-on, the RWA-Party relationship climbs to a more appreciable .40.

1983-5 Studies of Canadian Provincial Legislators

I wondered what the "RWA Connection" would amount to among persons intensely interested in politics: politicians. So during the period from November 1983 to May 1985 I sent a solicitous letter and the RWA Scale to each member of the Legislative Assemblies of Manitoba, Ontario, British Columbia and New Brunswick. I played my request sotto voce. I was studying the opinions of Canadians from all walks of life, and theirs were naturally very interesting. (All perfectly true, if you think "psychologists always lie.") But they should only participate if they truly wanted to.

Response rates, as you might imagine, were not overwhelming; but I heard from 100 lawmakers, about a third of the MLAs I wrote.

Manitoba and British Columbia were politically polarized at the time, with only NDP and Conservative/Social Credit members sitting in the House. In both cases, the RWA Scale scores bore out the separation, as the distributions formed two separate camps. NDPers scored very low on the test overall at both sites, while the BC Social Creditors were fairly high and the Manitoba Tories scored quite high. In both legislatures, the most authoritarian NDPer was still less authoritarian than the least authoritarian "conservative."

In Ontario and New Brunswick, on the other hand, Liberals were present in the House, and scored between the low NDP and high Conservative means. The Liberals, as a "centrist party," had a very high range of scores within their ranks, compared with the other caucuses. There were some Liberals whose RWA scores clearly put them in the "NDP camp," and others who were as authoritarian as the most authoritarian Tory. (I once saw a Liberal minister nearly fall out of his chair laughing at a song entitled "The Liberal Shuffle," built around the line, "You just shuffle to the left, you just shuffle to the right.")

Setting aside the Liberals, the point-biserial correlation between RWA Scale scores and membership in the "left-wing" vs. "right-wing" party averaged .87-- one of the strongest findings ever obtained in the behavioral sciences. You could tell who belonged to the NDP vs. Tory caucuses almost as accurately from their RWA Scale scores as you could from their party membership.

When I looked closely at the data, I found the Conservatives had scored significantly higher than the New Democrats on every item on the RWA Scale. Thus the Tories had not just proven more conventional, which would not knock anyone off his horse. They also were just as likely to endorse items advocating authoritarian submission and authoritarian aggression.

As striking as that finding was, I was even more impressed with the internal consistency of the lawmakers' responses to the scale. The average inter-item correlation was .41, fully twice the level I was used to finding in normal samples, and easily the highest value I had ever seen on the test. The alpha index of internal consistency was a ~~neatly~~ <sup>slam-dunked</sup> .95 overall. The scale, as diverse and unconnected as it seemed to be, was clearly tapping a very powerful ideological dimension in the thinking of these lawmakers. (In fact the only "general" test I know that puts up better numbers is the Christian Orthodoxy Scale, which is quite focused and measures the best-taught ideology in our society.)

### Initial American Legislator Studies

I next sent the RWA Scale to the California legislature, and the state senates in Minnesota, Connecticut and Mississippi. I did not expect to find nearly as large a difference between Democrats and Republicans as I had discovered between New Democrats and Conservatives. Both entries in the two-party, less ideological American system entail large coalitions striving to capture the political center. While I expected Republicans to score higher overall, I believed the distributions of RWA Scale scores would overlap considerably within any legislature. I also expected to find powerful regional differences, which had not occurred in Canada. Southern Democrats would prove much more RWA than northern Republicans, I thought.

#### Results

Responses came in at a somewhat lower rate, as I heard from 68 of the 276 persons I wrote. Overall, the party results proved quite uninformative. California Democrats scored pretty low on the RWA Scale, and Republicans pretty high. The correlation equalled .59, about twice as high as I had expected. The figure in the Minnesota Senate was but .20, attenuated considerably by one Democrat who produced the highest RWA Scale score I had ever seen. None of the Democrats in the Connecticut Senate answered my scale; the Republicans who did looked quite moderate. In Mississippi only one Republican replied. The Democrats scored very highly on the test.

While the party data were inconclusive, the consistency of the politicians' answers again amazed me. Inter-item correlations averaged .47, even higher than the figure found among the Canadian lawmakers. So the test had again tapped a powerful ideological dimension underlying seemingly diverse social attitudes, even though you could not always tell from the test scores who belonged to what party.

### The April, 1990 American Legislature Study

In the spring of 1990 I sent a survey to the Houses of Representatives in Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Michigan, New York, and Virginia, and also to the Michigan Senate. This survey began with the RWA Scale, and ended with a 10-item Economic Philosophy Scale I had developed in a few studies using student samples (Exhibit 2). These items assessed attitudes toward balanced federal budgets, the role of government in the economy, and the distribution of wealth in a country. Half the items are worded such that agreement indicates a "conservative" outlook; on the other half, you have to disagree to look that way. The items are keyed such that a high score indicates a "right-wing" economic philosophy.

#### Results

I heard from 153 of the legislators I contacted, being 24% of the 348 Democrats and 24% of the 287 Republicans. Republicans scored higher than Democrats on the RWA Scale in every body tested, significantly so in every state except Arizona. The overall party-RWA correlation equalled .57--close to the California result, and much higher than I had expected. GOP legislators scored significantly higher than Democrats on all 30 of the authoritarianism items, just as the Conservatives had in Canada. The mean inter-item correlation on the test equalled another very high .41.

There were appreciable regional differences among the Democrats, who showed a range of 50 points in their means from state to state. Republicans were much more homogeneous, almost always putting up high authoritarianism means over a range of only 22 points.

Answers to the Economic Philosophy Scale also showed appreciable intercorrelation, with a mean inter-item correlation of .33 ("alpha" = .85). As you would probably predict, Republicans scored significantly higher than Democrats at every site. The overall party-philosophy correlation equalled .75, which was significantly higher than the .57 party-RWA figure..



Exhibit 2. The Economic Philosophy Scale<sup>2</sup>

33. The biggest problem we have in the United States is that, even though the federal government takes most of our money, it still can't balance its budget.
34. The American economy will perform best if the government basically decides what should be made, and how much things will cost.\*
35. Whatever is good for business is good for America.
36. The more government gets involved in the economy, the more red tape, waste, and inefficiency will drag us down.
37. The wealth of the United States should be spread out much more evenly; right now, too much is owned by too few.\*
38. The less government interferes with business and tries to regulate it, the better.
39. The government should increase the federal deficit to create jobs, rather than waiting for business and industry to create them.\*
40. There should be higher taxes on corporate earnings in the United States than there are now.\*
41. If you let capitalism and the "free market" run unchecked and unregulated, the country will be controlled by the greediest and most dishonest people among us.\*
42. People in the United States who earn lots of money should have their taxes lowered, so they can still have a reason to keep on striving.

Note--Items are answered on a -4 to +4 basis.

\* Item is worded in the contrait direction, for which the answer key is reversed.

A high score on the scale indicates a "conservative" economic philosophy.

GOP lawmakers scored significantly higher on all ten of the Economic Philosophy items, with especially large differences occurring on Items 35, 36, 37, 39, 40 and 41. So the Republicans especially wanted support for business and capitalism, with a minimum of government involvement in the economy. They did not want corporate taxes increased, and they were against the redistribution of wealth in the United States. Only ten (14%) of the GOP legislators thought that "The wealth of the United States should be spread out much more evenly; right now, too much is owned by too few." Instead, most of the 69 Republicans either strongly disagreed (N = 17), or very strongly disagreed (N = 22) with that sentiment.

Having a "conservative" economic philosophy correlated .61 with RWA Scale scores across the 153 lawmakers.

### Discussion

Possible self-selection sample bias. Before discussing these results, I should deal with the reservation that has probably been building in your mind for the past few pages: self-selection sample bias. I do not believe for a second that the people who responded to my gentle request perfectly represented their caucuses. Perhaps the better educated, or the more altruistic, or the less wary, or the less busy legislators tended to invest the 15 minutes it took to answer my questionnaire. Maybe the respondents enjoyed stating their opinions more, or maybe they are more compulsive about answering all the mail they get. Perhaps all these factors, and others, operated here and there.

Such things affect almost every poll taken. The question becomes, how did the self-selection factors influence the results? One cannot say directly, because we do not have answers from those from whom we do not have answers. But we can look for trends in the data, and a definite trend appeared in this study.

The larger the response rate from a legislature, the stronger the results tended to be. The rank-order rho for 1) return rate and 2) the party-RWA correlation across the seven bodies was .43. That for the return rate and the party-philosophy correlation was .84. So while we cannot say exactly what the party differences would have been if we had heard from everyone, we have good reason to believe they would be bigger, not smaller. As large as the obtained relationships were, whatever self-selection sample biases operated apparently kept them from being even larger.

So what can we make of the results obtained? I doubt you are surprised that Republican lawmakers generally had a more "conservative" economic philosophy than Democrats did. But I was struck by the magnitude of the difference. A correlation of .75 cannot easily be waved aside. I conclude that the major difference between being a Republican vs. being a Democrat state lawmaker is the underlying economic philosophy--at least until a bigger difference is demonstrated. Certainly it distinguished between the two caucuses better than the RWA Scale did.

But beyond that, I was surprised that "conservative" economic thinkers were so opposed to greater equality. Their usual argument is that government interference hurts the economy, only business can create real wealth, and so on. But they also revealed, on this scale, that they (strongly) want the rich to stay rich, and the poor to stay poor. Given the enormous disparity in wealth in the United States, this is quite an admission.

Although the RWA Scale did not distinguish between the parties as well as economic philosophy did, its interitem correlations were significantly higher. I find this striking for several reasons. First, it is a much longer test, producing 435 intercorrelations as compared to but 45 for the Economic Philosophy Scale. It is normally harder to maintain internal consistency as the number of items increases on a scale. Secondly, the statements on the RWA Scale go, as I

have noted before, all over the place "on the surface." Those on the Economic Philosophy Scale are much more focused upon basically one thing: the operation of the nation's economy. It is much harder to produce internal consistency on multiple-topic scales. Thirdly, I know from personal suffering in my undergraduate economic courses that economic ideologies have been formalized, become known as "schools," been taught to tons of people, and debated in many public forums. (All I heard about in Econ 10 was Keynes; all I heard about in Econ 20 was Adam Smith.) I doubt anyone ever taught these state legislators a catechism relating to authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism. Yet the responses to the RWA Scale proved better organized, increasing the impression that the test taps a powerful ideological dimension in the thinking of politicians--even more powerful than their economic philosophy.

Finally, I should comment upon the number of extraordinarily high RWA Scale scores I uncovered in this study. People who role play Hitler's answers to the test give him a score of about 230-240, where the maximum possible is  $(30 \times 9 =) 270$ . The highest score I obtained among my 100 Canadian provincial legislators was a 220. That was beaten in all of the state assemblies by at least one person, and usually by several. Three state lawmakers scored over 240, higher than Hitler supposedly would have, including a Virginia Republican who punched up a record 257.

The overall Canadian legislators' mean ( $N = 100$ ) was 141.9; the overall American mean from this study ( $N = 153$ ) was significantly higher at 153.2.

### The 1994 Alberta Legislative Assembly Study

Early in 1994 I sent a survey to the newly elected 83 members of the Alberta Legislative Assembly. The Conservative's 51 seats controlled the legislature, with the Liberals providing Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Besides the RWA and Economic Philosophy Scales, the one-page survey included eight of the items Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth & Malle (1994) had used in an early version of their Social Dominance Orientation Scale: "Group equality should be our ideal."\* "If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems." "We should strive to make incomes as equal as possible."\* "It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom." "All groups should be given an equal chance in life."\* "We would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally."\* "Sometimes other groups should be kept in their place." (An asterisk indicates a contrait item, as usual.)

### Results

I received completed surveys from nine (28%) of the Liberal lawmakers, and from eight (16%) of the Conservatives. Liberal RWA scores came in significantly lower than the Tories', with slightly overlapping distributions. The point-biserial correlation was .69. The 435 inter-item correlations averaged .35.

Conservative lawmakers scored higher on all ten of the Economic Philosophy items, with significant differences appearing (despite the tiny sample sizes) on Items 35, 37, 38 and 41 of Exhibit 2. Having a "conservative" economic philosophy correlated .69 with party affiliation and .43 with RWA Scale scores. The 45 inter-item correlations averaged .21.

Conservatives also ended up higher on all but the first of the Social Dominance items, significantly so (again, despite the minimal power of the test) on the second, third, seventh and eighth statements. These deal with the ideal

of group equality, whether our problems would be alleviated if we treated people more equally, and whether "certain groups" should be "kept in their place." Summed scores on the eight Social Dominance items correlated .47 with party affiliation, .74 with RWA, and .32 with Economic Philosophy. The 28 Social Dominance inter-item correlations averaged .32.

Compared with the six-state American sample, the Alberta lawmakers were less authoritarian (mean = 142.1) but equally "conservative" in economic outlook (56.7 in both cases). We have no clues about self-selection bias in this one-site study, except that the Conservatives proved less likely to respond. This has been true in all my Canadian legislator studies.

#### Discussion.

With one exception, the results reinforce the American findings. Economic philosophy did not distinguish the parties more powerfully than RWA Scale scores did here. Instead, both scales showed an equally strong ability to call a Liberal a Liberal, and a Tory a Tory.

Otherwise, we again find the RWA Scale has higher internal consistency, and that economic "conservatives" tend not only to be political Conservatives, but also right-wing authoritarians. The answers to the Pratto et al. (1994) items support the impression that an attitude of social dominance accompanies Conservatives' economic philosophy. Tories, like Republicans in the previous study, were against a significant redistribution of wealth. (Only two of them thought that "right now, too much is owned by too few.") Why? Because they were less in favor of group equality as an ideal, and more in favor of "keeping certain groups in their place."

These are essentially the attitudes of right-wing authoritarians. And indeed, the Conservatives scored much higher on the RWA Scale than the Liberals did. But that is an old story by now.

### Challenging the Data

Before reaching any conclusions, let us take a hard look at the procedures used. Have the results resulted from some methodological blunder? I have made them before.

Well, procedures were quite standardized. All the lawmakers were approached identically, in all the legislatures. They all answered the same RWA Scale, sent by the same researcher with the same explanation of the study and low-key invitation to participate.

Could the results simply be due to people interpreting items on the survey in different ways--a constant problem with questionnaire research? Possibly. But it takes an enormous amount of alternate interpretation to produce differences such as we have found. Besides, if items are ambiguous and subject to lots of different meanings, that introduces measurement error and lowers internal consistency. The internal consistency of these legislators' responses has broken all the records.

Did the politicians even answer the surveys? Maybe an aide did. We cannot say, since we were not there when the questionnaires were answered. But the legislators were asked not to participate if they were too busy, or thought the study a waste of their time.

Did the respondents tell the truth? Again, there is no way to know. But they knew they were answering anonymously, and prior research indicates people cannot tell what the RWA Scale is really measuring. That is, the "right" answers are not obvious, and besides people tend to think their social attitudes are the right ones. Furthermore, I did not ask the politicians for their party affiliation until the very end of the survey, so they would not have thought they were answering as a "Democrat," etc. instead of as a legislator, as they gave their opinions.

Are the samples representative? Probably not. But we have reason to believe the results would have been even stronger if we had heard from a more representative bunch.

I have trouble, therefore, finding any big flaws in the studies, and will have to rely upon others to point them out. To me, the results appear to give us a better idea of who these legislators really are, and what they truly stand for, than we could ever get during an election campaign, or even during an interview "off the record" when self-presentation biases would still be strong. As we know from the Watergate tapes, and the diary of William Lyon Mackenzie King, the actual person is often quite a stretch from the public persona.

#### Conclusions

1. Political "conservatives" in these populations tend very strongly to be psychological right-wing authoritarians, with all that implies.
2. So do economic "conservatives," to a considerable extent.
3. More theoretically, I propose that when people talk about a "liberal-conservative" dimension in politics, they are really talking about the dimension measured by the RWA Scale. That is, when journalists, scholars and politicians themselves talk about "liberals" in North America, they are usually talking about Low RWAs. And when people talk about "conservatives," they are very typically talking about High RWAs.

The terms "liberal" and "conservative" have many different meanings, which is why I keep putting them in those tiresome quotation marks. No one to my knowledge has given a very good scientific definition of the construct. It is too easy to punch holes in vague statements such as "Conservatives want to keep things as they are." (They seem to want to change some things a great deal.) Whereas the "RWA approach" has three distinct advantages. Conceptually we have a fairly detailed definition of right-wing authoritarianism, that no one has



found any fault with so far at least. Psychometrically we have a sturdy, balanced measure of right-wing authoritarianism that has shown good internal consistency and reliability in almost every North American sample tested thus far (and in samples from other countries as well). Which we do not have for any measure of "L-Word--C-Word." And empirically, its measurements have correlated well with a wide range of attitudes, behaviors and affiliations that people commonly identify with being "liberal" or being "conservative." Which we do not have for any measure of "L--C" that I know of.

For me, the most amazing feature of the legislators' data, as you probably have noticed, has been the extraordinary internal consistency of their responses to the RWA Scale. I suspect they answered so consistently partly because lawmakers tend to answer things more carefully than most people do. That cuts down on measurement error, and increases "alpha." Also, they have probably thought about issues more than most people have. But still, they did not answer the much more focused Economic Philosophy Scale as consistently as they did the RWA Scale. And I would have bet that lawmakers had thought about political economics a lot more than all that stuff on the RWA Scale.

No, to me the data say very loudly that when legislators think about many social issues, their thinking is organized around sentiments of authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression and conventionalism. Some are against these things, some have moderate views, others strongly favor them. The people who write the laws for us perhaps do not realize this, any more than people in general realize how strongly their sentiments regarding authoritarian submission, etc. predict so much of their other behaviors. But the proof is at hand.

So when Rush Limbaugh condemns "Liberals," I think he is condemning Low RWAs; and when he praises "Conservatives," I think he is glorifying High RWAs. And the results of many scientific experiments show that Lows tend to be democratically oriented individuals, and Highs tend to be anti-democratic.

As I close, I should add that I have now collected survey data from over 1200 lawmakers in almost all the state legislatures in the United States, and done a study of Saskatchewan candidates for election, and Members of Canada's Parliament from the western provinces. These studies have correlated RWA Scale scores with opinions on such issues as abortion, gun control, the death penalty, the "mirror-image" in USA-USSR relations, the values of freedom and equality as the foundation of democracy, willingness to pass laws that would violate the Bill of Rights, and the personality characteristics of dogmatism and ethnic/racial prejudice.

Obviously these studies extend beyond the scope of this paper, and will have to await the publication of my next book. I will simply say here that they thoroughly and powerfully reinforce the conclusions reached above.

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1. The Authoritarian Personality is traditionally referred to as "Adorno et al." which carries a certain injustice. The original investigator was Nevitt Sanford, who involved Daniel Levinson in the first studies. Else Frenkel-Brunswik joined the team later, and then T. W. Adorno was included at the urging of the funders. Adorno lived in Los Angeles, and only consulted with the others on weekends.

When it came time to assign place of authorship on the emerging book, a dispute broke out over the order following Sanford. Who generously suggested the alphabetical ordering that put him and Daniel Levinson last. (Levinson has also generously said he did not mind, and that the work truly was a collaborative effort.)

There is an ultimate irony to the fame of "Adorno et al." Adorno's original name was Wiesengrund-Adorno, until he shortened it in 1943 (Stone, Lederer & Christie, 1993, p. 13)

2. Following a conversation with Professor Larry Morse at North Carolina A & T University, I experimented with a few more items in a fall, 1994 study of Manitoba adults. This led to two additional items for the Economic Philosophy Scale: "Most consumer-centered" activities by government amount to an unjustified interference with the marketplace and the laws of supply and demand." And a contrait, "Labor unions should be encouraged. They have established the rights of workers and raised their standard of living in a way that the whole country has benefitted."