Lokaritgerð til BA-gráðu í
stjórnmálafræði

The Authoritarians
A study of politics and psychology

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Júní 2019
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Abstract

Across Europe, in Russia, the Middle East and in the United States, politicians, parties and movements of an authoritarian kind, saw electoral success in the last decade, defying expectations of a continuation of the previous trend towards the spreading of liberal democracies post-World War II.

Various competing perspectives vie for the stage to explain this development. Has pop culture and consumerism diminished the capacity of voters to understand or care about abstract, complex problems? Have previously scattered and disunited racists and sexists finally coalesced under unified banners? Is it Russian propaganda warfare that has influenced this swing towards more authoritarian styles of politics? Or the question at the heart of this thesis, can Altemeyer's theory of Right Wing Authoritarianism explain this voting behaviour? That is, are there psychological factors, either innate or socialized, through nature or nurture or a combination thereof, coupled with an environment of disasters and turmoil; financial collapse, mass corruption, war and terrorism, that contribute to the behaviour of voters, who ally themselves to authoritarian causes.

To answer this, the thesis will analyze and describe Altemeyer’s theory, provide a theoretical and literary review of other significant works that pertain to the topic of authoritarianism as well as independent research and the wealth of electoral data on voters of Donald Trump. The thesis will then conclude with a critical analysis of Altemeyer’s theory; evaluate it’s credibility as a psychometric method of measuring authoritarianism and discuss possible limitations.
Preface

This thesis is my final project for a B.A. degree in Political Science at the Political Science Department of the University of Iceland, in the spring of 2019. The thesis is valued as 12 ECTS units. My supervisor for this project was Maximilian Conrad, many thanks to his valuable feedback and patience. Additional thanks to many friends who endured so much of my thinking out loud, it was invaluable, so that I could order my thoughts.
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1 Introduction

In recent years a rise in authoritarian politics has occurred, in otherwise democratic societies, across the globe.

This rise includes various far-right authoritarian groups and parties across Eastern and Central Europe; Viktor Orbán’s turn to authoritarianism in Hungary and active undermining of democratic institutions, the majority rule of the Law and Justice party in Poland and their mission to undermine the constitution and justice system and the rise of Alternative for Germany, whose Eurosceptic origins have taken the form of an increasingly radical and extreme anti-immigration platform. National socialist parties, formerly on the extreme fringe, have moved into the mainstream with some success in Greece, Slovakia and aforementioned Hungary, to name a few. Tayyip Erdogan, the president of Turkey has cracked down on civil liberties, the press and religious freedoms, by instituting an increasingly

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1 András Bozóki. „Occupy the State: The Orbán Regime in Hungary,” *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 19, no. 3 (December 2011): 649-663, sourced 12th March 2019, doi: [10.1080/0965156X.2012.703415](https://doi.org/10.1080/0965156X.2012.703415)
5 Wojciech Sadurski and Maximilian Steinbeis. „What is Going on in Poland is an Attack against Democracy.” *Verfassungsblog – On Matters Constitutional.* (July 2016), sourced 12th March 2019, link: https://verfassungsblog.de/what-is-going-on-in-poland-is-an-attack-against-democracy/
authoritarian and religiously conservative regime and Brexit, one of the most major political events of our time, was fueled in large part by the resurgent UKIP and by far-right factions within the Conservative Party. Meanwhile, the major political lines in France seem to have fallen on the fault lines of xenophobia versus open gates minded liberalism, in Le Pen’s National Front and Macron’s En Marche.

Needless to say, the unexpected and shocking presidential win of Donald Trump is another major example, where the rhetoric of fear of the outsider; the immigrant, migrant and refugee, coincided with an ethnocentric view of a former glory that needs to be reclaimed. And last but not least, the recent win of Jair Bolsonaro, now president of Brazil, a self avowed supporter of military dictatorship, torture and killing of political opponents, as well as a host of other alarming beliefs.

One could argue that this historical period we are now witnessing, is being marked by a return to the authoritarianism of the previous century and that this current period stretches
as far back as to Putin’s rise in Russia, a man whose authoritarian style of politics is an inspiration to some of the previously named political figures.

Much unites these figures, there is a shared attitude of a rejection of social progressivism, a nationalistic appeal to a glorious past, a rejection of a corrupt political class and media and a suppression of said political class and media. With fear and hatred expressed towards the other; whether that be people of foreign descent, a different religion or sexual orientation, etc.\textsuperscript{22}

In this thesis I want to explore the literature about the followers and supporters of these figures and for the purposes of this thesis; which is to analyze Altemeyer’s theory of Right-Wing Authoritarianism, to estimate the value the theory has in measuring authoritarianism as a variable, focusing specifically, though not exclusively, on the supporters of Donald Trump.

Trump’s election win has become emblematic for a wider trend of candidates and parties from the populist and right wing fringes on the political spectrum, gaining electoral success across the globe. Trump’s campaign rhetoric was chaotic and full of comments and behaviour that most political analysts deemed to be so outside of the mainstream of acceptability that surely he had no chance of winning.\textsuperscript{22} \textsuperscript{23} \textsuperscript{24} After all, the country had just seen eight years of President Obama, a liberal progressive, of african descent, with all the signifiers that seemed to indicate that the country was itself now more liberal and progressive than ever before. Trump’s win therefore seemed unlikely at best, let alone being pitted up against the political heavyweight of Hillary Clinton, with all her name recognition, money, influence and backing of the political elite. But win he did, after a campaign whose opening volley included a statement that can only be understood as an assertion that most illegal immigrants from

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\textsuperscript{25}The Telegraph, Barney Henderson and David Lawler. „Donald Trump: the 22 wildest moments of his 2016 presidential election campaign – so far.“ (31. August 2016), thetelegraph.co.uk. Sourced 12th March 2019, link: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/donald-trump-the-20-wildest-moments-of-his-2016-presidential-ele/\end{flushleft}
Mexico were rapists.\textsuperscript{26} Let alone scandals involving sexual harassment and abuse, personal financial corruption and rhetoric that seemed set to inflame the many domestic and foreign issues at hand for the United States; his praising of torture, threatening trade wars and provoking allies, bullying and encouraging beating of protesters and members of the media etc.

The aim of the thesis therefore is to apply a theoretical lens on the question of who is it that votes for such a person and why? More specifically the question becomes, is authoritarianism a significant predictive indicator for Trump support and is Altemeyer’s theory a credible method of measuring that variable?

To aid in my search for answers, Altemeyer’s theory on Right Wing Authoritarianism or RWA for short, will be my guide. Altemeyer’s work has been aimed at analysing and researching the psychological dimension of authoritarian followers since the year 1981 and his theory of RWA has developed a psychometric questionnaire, placing individuals on a RWA spectrum, from low, to middle and to high, measuring three indicators; submission to authority, aggression on behalf of that authority and social conformity or conventionalism. He has cross referenced this spectrum with additional questionnaires on a host of issues, with decades worth of research, that show an interesting overlap between high RWA status and various attitudes and beliefs that seem to show an adherence to an authoritarian mindset and ideology.

The structure of the thesis shall begin with exploring Altemeyer’s theory and other independent theoretical perspectives, namely the works of Hannah Arendt and Timothy Snyder, in order to flesh out a more complete picture of what authoritarianism is and who authoritarians are, as well as why they seem to suddenly appear out of the woodwork and coalesce around a candidate or party. This is important to establish a theoretical foundation for a further analysis of the data and research which will be reviewed in following chapters.

Following the exploration of theory, I shall proceed by reviewing the available literature on Trump voters, as it pertains to their beliefs and attitudes, as well as comparing that data to

the copious research that Altemeyer himself and others have done, using the RWA questionnaire and related metrics to research the phenomena of authoritarianism.

Finally in the critical analysis chapter I will evaluate and analyse the validity of the data at hand, both from Altemeyer and other researchers, as well as the theory itself, with the aim of answering the guiding question in this thesis; Can Altemeyer’s theory of Right Wing Authoritarianism, explain voting behaviour?

Given what I deem to be a theory of high explanatory power, I expect to find a significant overlap between attitudes of Trump voters and those measuring as high RWAs according to Altemeyer’s theory, or a positive correlation in other words. By the end of this thesis the expectation is to have reached a deeper understanding of authoritarians and authoritarianism from a theoretical perspective spanning from psychology, to philosophy and history and to have evaluated Altemeyer’s theory by reviewing it’s application it to the voters and supporters of Donald Trump.
2 Theoretical perspectives

To start the exploration of theoretical perspectives on authoritarianism and authoritarians, this chapter will begin with a short overview of Altemeyer’s theory of Right Wing Authoritarianism, the dominant theoretical perspective of this thesis. However, to further explore the topic and to strengthen the argument of the need for Altemeyer’s theory, this chapter will examine two other perspectives, the political philosophy of Hannah Arendt and her theory on the nature of the authoritarian mindset, as well as the cyclical historical progression analysis of Timothy Snyder through his historical framework regarding the politics of inevitability and cycles of eternity. Both Arendt and Snyder provide highly independent and unique perspectives that provide a meaningful understanding of authoritarians, but critically they lack an explanation for why certain human beings will support authoritarianism and others will not. Which is where the psychological perspective of Altemeyer helps to complete the picture. Following an analysis of Arendt’s and Snyder’s contributions, a further more in depth analysis of Altemeyer’s theory will then follow, to conclude the chapter.

2.1 Overview of Altemeyer’s theory

According to Altemeyer’s theory there are three main characteristics that define a person measuring high on the Right Wing Authoritarianism spectrum outlined in his theory.

1. Submission to authority; A high degree of submission to the established, legitimate and/or perceived authorities in society.

2. Aggression on behalf of authority: High levels of aggression in the name of the authorities that they submit to.

3. Social conformity; A high level of adherence to conventionalism and identifying strongly with whichever group identifier they belong to.27

People who measure, high on these three characteristics, are by the definition of his theory, Right Wing Authoritarians.

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His reasoning for the prefix, Right Wing needs some clarification first, to properly understand his concept. He argues and shows with data, that the people he is measuring as highly authoritarian, tend to be adherents and supporters of traditional authority figures, such as established religious institutions, certain government institutions like the military, the police and the justice system, conservative leaning political parties and individuals. They particularly support nationalism and state authority against great social upheavals and changes which they reject.\(^28\)

Left Wing Authoritarians, in his view, although often supportive of authoritarian political philosophies, parties and leaders, tend to be in support of overthrowing the established order and traditional authorities, i.e. marxists of various kinds, communists and radical socialists. Additionally Altemeyer makes the point that in the current political climate; writing in the year 2006 critiquing the Bush-era United States, that Left Wing Authoritarians are near nowhere to be found in significant numbers, whilst the results of his studies show that the Right Wing Authoritarians are both numerous and politically active, vocal and influential. The same mostly holds true for today, writing in 2019, in the Trump-era United States, despite some resurgence of more far left candidates and movements, they are far away from the recent political success of the RWAs.\(^29\)

My personal note is that Altemeyer’s theory is looking at extreme social conservatives, which he calls RWAs, whereas the LWAs are extreme social radicals and progressives, both nominally authoritarian, at least in their rejection of liberal democratic values, but for different reasons and coming at it from completely opposite sides of the political spectrum. It follows as well that both would likely consider each other their worst enemy; that is RWAs and LWAs respectively.

In any case, the rise of authoritarians to power across the global stage, in recent years or even as far back as Putin’s rise in the late 1990’s, early 2000’s, has decidedly been of the right wing, i.e. far right populist and extreme conservative, side, whereas the resurgence of communist and marxist style of politics has been far less successful.

2.2 Hannah Arendt’s definition of the authoritarian mindset

In 1954 the acclaimed political theorist, Hannah Arendt wrote an essay with the title, “What is Authority?”, attempting to shed some light on the disappearance of traditional authority from the historical stage and the emergence of a new kind of authority, based in the newly developing modern political stream. As with much of her work, her focus being strongly on the authoritarian movements of the early 20th century.

In the essay she comes up with a very powerful and pertinent definition of authority and by extension authoritarians, that will lay the foundation for our understanding of authoritarianism in this thesis. She defines authority as distinct from both power and persuasion, since if power or in other words violence or coercion, is used, then authority has already failed to exert it’s influence, whilst persuasion necessitates a certain level of egalitarianism, whereby argumentation is required for a consensus to be reached. If one party is even bothering to try to convince or persuade the other, that already means that no authoritarian relationship exists between the two. Equally if the authority figure has to apply force or violence to coerce other figures, that means it’s authority either doesn’t extend to said figures or it has diminished to a point of irrelevance.³⁰

Instead, she argues, an authoritarian dynamic or relationship, is a hierarchical one where both parties, the superior and inferior position, are predetermined and perceived as legitimate by both authoritarian leader and follower. It is in this insight that Arendt’s definition is very valuable and has immense overlap with Altemeyer’s theory. The authoritarian follower, in Arendt’s conception, is indeed just that, a follower in an almost religious sense, which as we will see later on is apt due to the strong correlation between authoritarians and religious fundamentalism. The authoritarian follower has not been forced or coerced to support the authority of their choosing, though one might suggest that indoctrination and socialization is a form of coercion, but at the point at which we are analyzing the RWAs, at voting age, that is no longer present. To apply Arendt’s definition in practice, then in the political movement of a Trump or an Orbán or Law and Justice (i.e. Poland), the followers of said movements have not been held at gunpoint or violently coerced. Neither have they been persuaded by argument or discussion, because they do not follow the authorities that they do for reasons

of common agreement, but rather they obey and accept what their perceived figure of authority says and does, because they perceive them as legitimate holders of that authority. The authority figure might employ persuasion or coercion to convince or oppress non-authoritarians in order to secure its place in power, but to the true authoritarians, once they have acknowledged the holder of authority as legitimate in their minds, then their duty is clear, which is to obey.

In other words, in Arendt’s definition we see the first of Altemeyer’s three main characteristics displayed, submission to authority. Not agreement with authority or fear of authority, but willing submission. Their submission can then be channeled into aggression on behalf of their perceived and acknowledged authority, to compel and coerce the non-authoritarians around them, in order to construct and maintain the kind of social conformity in their society, which the authoritarian leader is calling for.

Following Arendt’s definition, it is precisely for this reason that such true authoritarians, in terms of their mindset and attitude towards authority, have such a disdain for democracy and liberal values and why their leaders so often undermine democratic institutions and traditions once in power. Democracy necessitates debate and tolerance of oppositely held values. To debate and disagree with the authority is anathema to an authoritarian and to accept non-conformist opinions and lifestyles as part of mainstream society, is a dangerous proposition in their minds. And danger, must sometimes be confronted with aggression.

2.3 Snyder’s argument of historical progression
The historian Timothy Snyder has written about authoritarianism, across the world, from Russia, to Europe and the United States, most notably in terms of Putin and Trump. Two concepts of his will be invaluable in setting a wider historical context and providing another insight to the rise of this neo-authoritarianism.

Those are the concepts of the politics of inevitability and cycles of eternity. The politics of inevitability describes the historical progress instituted and professed by the idealistic and/or utopian movements of liberalism and socialism. Both ideologies, he argues, profess a certain inevitable trend towards the future, where at some point utopia or a perfect system shall be born.
In Snyder’s conception, socialism sees a progression from technology creating wealth, wealth creating a capitalistic inequality, which then leads to an oppression of the masses, who in turn rise up and institute a socialist order, which inevitably leads to the withering away of the state and a perfect society.  

Liberalism/capitalism, has the progression of technology creating wealth, wealth creating markets, markets leading to democracy and inevitably through a capitalistic democracy a society of infinite progress.

These two paths have been the most dominant ones, fighting it out on the domestic and global level, for the last century or so. The socialist or communist path ran into a dead end after the fall of the Soviet Union and for a while it seemed as if the inevitable victory of liberalism loomed large. Then in the 2000’s, following mass deregulation of financial markets and explosive growth of economies worldwide, came political corruption, financial collapse and huge waves of distrust and anger towards the dominant system, its institutions and its values. Liberalism it seemed, couldn’t deliver its promised perfect society either, since when left alone at the steering wheel, it lead to ruin.

It’s in this context that the cycle of eternity begins to ramp up and take hold. The cycle of eternity is named so, since it draws its strength from the eternal past, where greatness was once, romanticized nationalism was practiced and the pure nation resided. The cycle of eternity is unable to exert much influence whilst the politics of inevitability are doing well. If a promise of an inevitable bright and perfect future seems attainable, the weight of the past is minimal. But when the ironically inevitable failure of the politics of inevitability occurs, comes the chance for the right person, party or movement at the right time, to strike.

Snyder’s point is that when the more mainstream and seemingly sensible political streams, of liberalism or socialism fail, then desperation, anger, fear and distrust, drives people, to support the cycle of eternity. That cycle thrives on creating distinctions between us and them, between the glorious past and the failure of the present, between the resurrectors of glory and the failed elite.

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What Snyder’s concepts of inevitability and eternity grant us, both for the purposes of this thesis as well as understanding this modern era of ours, is a historical perspective that illustrates why these waves of populism and authoritarianism occur with regularity in these inbetween periods of doubt, mistrust and apathy, after the inevitable shortcomings of the politics of the inevitable are made clear.

A decade or two of fear inducing terrorism, several disastrous wars, massive economic collapse and its aftermath, therefore, eroded enough people’s faith in the politics of inevitability in the United States. The beliefs that the power of their country ensured their safety, that they were able to govern world affairs without paying the costs and that their liberal capitalistic values and economic structures would deliver them infinite progress and wealth. It is in this context that the groundbreaking election of Barack Obama takes place and likewise the backlash to his continued inevitability liberal solutions and social progressivism, in combination with the events of the last decade, that lay the foundation for Donald Trump’s unexpected election win.

Snyder’s concepts therefore have an immense overlap with Arendt’s definitions and as well with Altemeyer’s theory, in that authoritarianism is not a matter of an ideology to be debated and argued with. Rather it is about the conditions that enable and compel authoritarians to unite around an authority figure, in order to submit and obey, so that said authority can restore them to the state of their glorious past. What remains to be explored then, is who are the authoritarians? To which we turn to Altemeyer’s theory.

2.4 A detailed look at Altemeyer’s theory

Whilst Arendt and Snyder both provide a valuable insight, Arendt from a political philosophy standpoint and Snyder from a historical perspective, there is something lacking. Arendt defines the philosophical nature of the authoritarian dynamic, between follower and leader. Snyder on the other hand maps out a macroscopic historical landscape to explain what events lead up to the coalescing of authoritarians and populists in certain time periods. What both lack and Altemeyer provides, is a psychological perspective.

That’s to say, what is it that makes certain people think and behave in a way that we determine as being authoritarian? Why do some individuals need persuading or coercing, where others need only a perceived authority figure and they submit? What psychological
characteristics differentiate them and can they be measured? Altemeyer’s theory tackles those exact questions, providing a microscopic psychological perspective on authoritarians. Therefore we turn to a more microscopic analysis of his theory, namely, delving deeper into the three traits that make up a high Right Wing Authoritarian.

2.4.1 Authoritarian Submission

The first of Altemeyer’s characteristics or traits is Authoritarian Submission. By which he means the way high RWAs support and obey authority figures they perceive as legitimate, even when those authorities are corrupt, dishonest or guilty of crimes. High RWAs profess a positive value in submitting to authority, in most circumstances they are presented with. They are more likely to say that the law is the law in surveys and therefore morally right, regardless of content, more likely to bow to show respect to their fathers or managers, they were more likely to trust Richard Nixon during the Watergate Crisis as well as more likely to believe George Bush’s claims of links between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaida, that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and more likely to support the invasion of Iraq. They were also more likely to support warrantless wiretaps, authorized by the Bush administration. Other examples of authoritarian submission, Altemeyer cites from his research, are support for or tolerance of

- a police burglary of a newspaper office to get confidential information.
- drug raids carried out without search warrants because judges wouldn’t give them.
- denial of right to assemble to peacefully protest government actions.
- “dirty tricks” played by a governing party on the opposition during an election.
- immigration office discrimination against radical speakers.
- placing agents provocateurs in organizations to create dissension and bad press relations.
- burning down the meeting place of a radical organization.
- unauthorized mail openings.
Authoritarian submission then, is seemingly concerned with preserving and protecting a harmonious, homogenous society and welcoming to all sorts of illegal or immoral actions by authority figures, as long as they perceive them as working to addressing their concerns.  

2.4.2 Authoritarian Aggression

The second trait or characteristic is Authoritarian Aggression. Altemeyer defines it as the urge to aggress when feeling that right and might are on your side. Right in the authoritarian context, meaning that it’s authorized by a perceived legitimate authority figure or supports said figure. Might, meaning when they have an advantage, like weaponry or numbers, that make the odds in their favour.

High RWAs, based on Altemeyer’s research, are more likely to feel morally superior when engaging in an unfair fight. They are much more likely to hand down heavier sentences in court cases for criminals, unless an authority figure is being tried, such as a police officer, then the reverse is true. That holds true across the scale of severity of the crime, from spitting on the side walk to rape or murder. They are also more likely to support capital punishment and they tend to consider both the crimes committed as more serious than low or medium RWAs do, as well as believing more strongly in the beneficial effects of punishment. They also express more joy and pleasure from the thought of punishing others and when others get into trouble with the law and authority, whether that be common criminals, or their classmates who engage in bad behaviour, they are more likely to express disgust and revulsion towards them. An experiment of Altemeyers, where subjects were told by the experimenter that they could choose the level of electric shock, delivered to a learner studying grammar when they made a mistake, revealed that the higher the RWA score a person had, the stronger the electric shock was that they selected.

Another experiment asked for support for or resistance to a government proposal to ban and suppress a number of groups, from cults, to communists, atheists, political parties on the fringe and mainstream, as well as RWAs themselves. High RWAs were more likely to want to ban and suppress all of those groups, even themselves ironically enough (being told only the description of the three traits and not that they are RWAs themselves). The key point there being that high RWAs were more likely than others to want to ban or eliminate groups,

whether groups belonging to minorities they disliked or that they themselves liked or even belonged to, because the authority called for it.

In an experiment simulating international relations where teams of students, either made up entirely of high or low RWA participants played as NATO and the experimenters as the Warsaw Pact, the results were intriguing. High RWAs were much more likely to interpret moves by the Warsaw Pact as threatening and overall, teams of High RWAs escalated threats, ten times as much as Low RWA teams, often ending the simulation on the brink of nuclear war.

Altemeyer cautions not to generalize too much however, stating that RWAs don’t always behave aggressively, any more than they always submit, the authority has to be perceived by them as legitimate, so for example High RWAs were more likely to condemn President Bill Clinton when he was faced with scandals of a sexual kind, since he was both very liberal leaning and said scandals offended their sense of morality, Altemeyer argues. Also, their aggression is tempered if it goes against the law to such a degree that they fear punishment, or when the threat they are hostile towards threatens them with counter aggression. So the behaviour of RWAs is conditional and complicated, just as any other group of humans, though some strong tendencies and patterns emerge from Altemeyer’s research, that distinguish them from other people lower on the scale.36

2.4.3 Conventionalism/Social conformity

The third and final defining trait in Altemeyer’s theory is what he calls Conventionalism or Social Conformity. The short definition of which, he gives as the belief that everybody should have to follow and conform to the norms and traditions, as well as rules and laws, that the perceived authority figure issues or supports.

This trait has enormous overlap with religious fundamentalism and High RWAs tend to be extremely religious and to take their religious values very seriously. It is then usually from these religious backgrounds that they receive the norms and customs that they want to submit to and aggress on behalf of and demand conformity of others as well. These are values like a traditional family structure with the fathers as the head of the family, the mothers and wives

subservient to their husbands, obedient and subservient children, etc. The key to the conventionalism characteristic is that they not only believe in enforcing such values upon their own families, but indeed, on everyone else’s as well.

Altemeyer cites a study using his RWA scale, done on Israeli students, both Jewish and Palestinian, where it turned out that the High RWAs among them, were the most likely to be orthodox in their religious beliefs and most unlikely to support a peace plan between Israel-Palestine.

A particularly interesting experiment Altemeyer ran to measure the conformity aspect, was to have people take the RWA scale, then the same sample, retake the test, with the average answer to each question (on a scale from -4 to +4), listed in front of them. High RWAs were twice as likely as Lows, to shift their answers toward the middle, even with questions pertaining to closely held values, such as attitudes toward homosexuals and other religious views.\(^\text{37}\)

### 2.5 Chapter conclusion

To conclude this chapter looking at theoretical perspectives on authoritarians, a summary of what understanding was gained is in order.

The combined theoretical work of Snyder and Arendt show the need for a third, psychological perspective a la Altemeyer. Authoritarians obey, Arendt argues. It is not persuasion nor coercion, but obedience to their perceived authority that defines them and from that essential nature, aggression and conformity follow. That is also precisely why Snyder’s concepts of time and inevitability/eternity are apt, because if authoritarians were defined by a political ideology akin to socialists or liberals, then they would likely not have faded away post-WWII and only so recently reemerged as they have. The authoritarian movements of the last century in the period between the two World Wars, arose from the ashes of massive economic collapse, and in the midst of the age of the romanticized nationalism that fueled much of the creation of the nation states in Europe at that time, after the collapse of so many empires in the aftermath of the first World War. When their project failed, after their defeat in World War II, the authoritarian followers were shattered and

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fragmented. The war torn and devastated countries of Europe looked to one of two shining examples of hope and progress, the economic titan of the United States and the socialist paradise of the Soviet Union. Eternity had failed and the politics of inevitability had been restored.

Similarly the events of the 2000’s and 2010’s have led to the collapse of the politics of inevitability, yet again and the window between restoring faith in those utopian ideologies has provided the right kind of authority figures, all the ammunition and opportunity that they need to surge back to power.

The pattern is therefore clear. If environmental circumstances are good and stable, then authoritarians lie dormant, spread across the political spectrum, making little noise. But if their safety is threatened and their fear is induced, in relation to disasters on such scales as the attacks of 9/11, the Iraq War and the 2008 economic collapse, then they coalesce around a banner, whether that be an individual, a political party or an ideological movement, and they submit to their authority, are willing and ready to show aggression on their behalf, since through conformity there is safety.

However if we deem this pattern and trend of a resurgent authoritarianism as worrying, then the theoretical perspective of Altemeyer, in terms of it’s psychological approach is of value. What it provides is a view inside the minds of authoritarians in a large scale quantitative way by measuring their attitudes and collecting data on them, which can be used to compare and correlate with political opinions, voting behaviour and support for particular candidates and parties, as well as to discover which variables trigger and activate them. At the same time in a qualitative sense, perhaps Altemeyer’s theory can grant us a deeper understanding of the thoughts and mindsets of authoritarians and then normatively speaking guide us out of this mess. At least that’s the hope. Now on to some data and analysis of the available literature to assess if Altemeyer’s theory has any real world application and explanatory power.
3 Literature review

For the following chapter I shall start with a brief overview of the history of research on authoritarianism and a description of the various scales that are in prevalent use in the literature to measure it as a variable. Altemeyer’s scale features prominently of course, but others are commonly used as well, so they bear elaborating on.

Then I shall proceed with presenting some results and data from the available literature on the importance of authoritarianism as a variable in assessing people’s attitudes and opinions on social issues and politics.

That will serve as a jumping off point to then go on and explore the literature on the overlap between authoritarianism and voting choice, specifically the available research on Trump voters and their attitudes as well as possible correlations with authoritarianism.

Finally we shall go over research using alternative scales which highlight the limits of Altemeyer’s theory as it pertains to its efficacy and methodology.

3.1 History and evolution of metrics and scales

Research on authoritarianism has a long history, stretching back most prominently to Adorno in 1950 with his F-scale, which was adapted into a variety of measurement methods. The theory at the heart of this thesis, Altemeyer’s RWA-scale, takes some of its influence from those preceding methods and has been widely used in research since it’s conception.

A new adapted measurement, using Altemeyer’s theory as it’s foundation, titled the ACT-scale has since been formulated by John Duckitt, measuring Authoritarianism instead of Authoritarian Aggression, Conservatism instead of Authoritarian Submission and Traditionalism instead of Conventionalism/Social conformity. In his work, Duckitt expresses some significant critiques of Altemeyer’s methodology and presents some interesting results to boot, from studies done by himself and others using his adapted ACT-scale. The main difference being that Duckitt’s ACT-scale measures each trait or facet, separately, making his

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scale multidimensional, whilst Altemeyer’s RWA-scale measures each trait as contributing to an overall, unidimensional score of authoritarianism. 39

An additional measurement, called the child rearing method is often used as a way of measuring authoritarianism in the literature. It is a short list of questions aimed at determining whether people take a more authoritarian or a more libertarian attitude towards child rearing, emphasizing the importance of obedience versus independence. It is used as a quick way of inserting an authoritarianism variable into questionnaires and supposedly measures the equivalent of authoritarian submission, one of Altemeyer’s three traits. 40

The following results and data either use some form of Altemeyer’s RWA-scale; some shortened versions and others with longer ones, the child rearing method or Duckitt’s ACT-scale, which one is used in any given study will be mentioned appropriately.

A separate scale and measurement called Social Dominance Orientation or SDO for short, is also widely used in the literature, often alongside the other authoritarianism scales and measurements. Briefly put, SDO measures a general attitude towards intergroup relations, in terms of whether one prefers a more egalitarian or a more hierarchical dynamic and structure between groups in society. A social dominator then, is someone who orders the world around them into groups of superior and inferior positions. SDO has been shown to have some positive correlation with high RWA status, meaning there is some overlap, however there seem to be distinct differences as well, both in hypothesized root causes and in research results on their effect on various attitudes and behaviours. 41

As the focus of this thesis is on Altemeyer’s theory, I will not delve any deeper into SDO, but only reference it in the following text, where relevant.

3.2 Authoritarianism as an important variable.

Authoritarianism has been shown to be an important variable, correlating with all kinds of attitudes and behaviours towards social and political issues. So to support that statement I will begin by answering the questions of, what is it that authoritarians believe and how do they view the world?

3.2.1 Authoritarian attitudes and values

Even if high RWAs are less politically informed than low RWAs and express significantly less interest in learning, they certainly have plenty of seemingly closely held beliefs, at least as far as most of the literature seems to indicate. Perhaps indicative of their attitudes and predispositions, they are closed minded and set in their ways, ways shaped and molded by their perceived authority figures for them.

A collection of 3 studies, using Altemeyer’s RWA-scale showed that the higher the score on RWA was, the more likely the person was to endorse harsh, punitive sentiments and solutions to the contemporary social problems of the AIDS crisis, drug addiction and drug related crimes. One of those three studies also showed a significantly higher probability that a high RWA would express more hostility towards environmental activists, rather than towards polluters, when presented with a scenario.

A study on a sample of individuals measuring simultaneously as high RWAs and high SDOs found them to hold more extreme prejudiced opinions than any other group measured, with traits like power hunger, a rejection of equality and being highly manipulative, amoral, ethnocentric and dogmatic individuals.

In a large study measuring the correlation between various metrics and attitudes towards the endorsement of, commitment to and restriction of human rights, high RWAs along with individuals high in ethnocentrism and SDO, emerged as very reliable indicators for support for

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restricting the human rights of minority groups and for a negative view of commitment to those rights.\textsuperscript{45}

Religiosity and RWA seem to have an interesting and complicated relationship as well. In five studies on students and their parents a strong correlation was observed between religious fundamentalism, high RWA status and prejudice toward minority groups, where RWA seemed to have a mediating effect.\textsuperscript{46,47}

Religious fundamentalism correlated strongly with being a high RWA in a 1992 study, which also showed a significant predictive relationship between high RWA scores and ethnic and racial prejudice as well as a high degree of punitiveness in prison sentencing.\textsuperscript{48}

Highly religious people correlate strongly with being high RWAs, in a different study conducted in Israel, establishing a pattern of correlation. Moreover, the same study showed that highly religious and simultaneously high RWA individuals have a demonstrably negative view towards democratic values.\textsuperscript{49}

A study of Russian authoritarians conducted in 1993 using Altemeyer’s RWA-scale adapted to the language and culture, showed a significant, but weakening (compared to earlier studies from 1991 and 1989) positive relationship between high authoritarianism and pro-communist attitudes and beliefs, whilst also showing a negative attitude towards capitalism and support for democracy. Only those measuring low in pro-communist beliefs, whilst measuring high in authoritarianism, showed high measures in religiosity. A comparison between Russian and American RWAs showed that the two shared a negative attitude towards people with AIDS and towards environmentalists, but they differed on who they

blamed for social problems like homelessness and poverty, the Russian authoritarians being more likely to blame society, but the Americans put the blame and responsibility more on the individual.\textsuperscript{50}

That study reflects in an interesting way the seemingly innate conventionalism or social conformity of the authoritarian. In Russia they seem to reflect the values and culture of their perceived authorities, whilst in the US they do the same, which leads them to a shared prejudice towards certain minority groups or political opponents of the established authorities. Whilst still having ideological differences in terms of the blamed causes, lending added strength to the argument of viewing authoritarianism through the lens of a psychological predisposition and not as an ideological movement.

3.2.2 The role of threat

Threat activation is a common variable in the literature, regarding authoritarians and their outlook on life and the world.

A study focused on the relationship between threat, authoritarianism, attitudes and voting behaviour used the child rearing method and election data on voters in the 1992 US presidential election between Clinton and Bush. It found that perceived societal level threat, magnified certain authoritarian predispositions such as prejudiced, intolerant and punitive attitudes among individuals measuring as highly authoritarian. Examples of threat that showed the strongest effect on the authoritarian mindest, were a perception of an economy in dire straits or a perception that either or both political candidates were ideologically placed far from the authoritarian individual, as well if they had a very negative view of the candidates. Authoritarians that were triggered by such perceived threats became more punitive, prejudiced and ethnocentric, whilst people measuring low in authoritarianism became less so. The same study also found that authoritarians were more likely to support the Republican party and to vote for Bush over Clinton. Authoritarians in both parties however shared prejudiced attitudes and the effects of threat on their psyches.\textsuperscript{51}


Threat plays a significant role in the authoritarian mindset. When presented with different arguments that stressed the importance of voting, high RWAs identified strongly with negative threatening arguments and weakly with positive reward focused arguments, while the exact opposite was true for low RWAs.\textsuperscript{52}

Threat also seems to impact the willingness of high RWAs to be open to new or contrary information. When exposed to threat in a study, high RWAs became averse to being exposed to sources of information contrary to their beliefs and values, whereas pre-threat they had not been. Low RWAs remained the same in both situations.\textsuperscript{53}

### 3.2.3 Warlike tendencies and aggressiveness

In terms of war and aggression there is also plenty of overlap with authoritarianism.

A study, conducted over a 6 year period, looked at the attitudes of high RWAs towards the Gulf War. They were significantly more aggressive in their attitudes and support for US foreign policy, both pre- and post-war, than low RWAs. They endorsed more aggressive responses to hypothesized Iraqi reactions and were more likely to exhibit more gloating, less remorse and even retroactively supported increasingly aggressive policies, after the war’s conclusion.\textsuperscript{54}

Another study lends support to that, showing that even though high RWAs are generally more supportive of military action than lows, they don’t necessarily become more supportive after a war or a threat has started, but remain consistent in their support for aggressive military action regardless. Low RWAs interestingly however went from restrictive attitudes to supportive ones, when triggered by a threatening atmosphere, namely in this study the threat being measured as pre- and post- the events of 9/11.\textsuperscript{55}


\textsuperscript{53} Howard Lavine, Milton Lodge and Kate Freitas. „Threat, Authoritarianism and Selective Exposure to Information,“ \textit{Political Psychology} 26, no. 2 (March 2005): 219-244, sourced 14th March 2019, doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9221.2005.00416.x


\textsuperscript{55} Marc Hetherington and Elizabeth Suhay. „Authoritarianism, Threat, and Americans’ Support for the War on Terror,“ \textit{American Journal of Political Science} 55, no. 3 (April 2011): 546-560, sourced 14th March 2019, doi:10.1111/j.1540-5907.2011.00514.x
That result might indicate the different nature of a threat like terrorism and war, from threats of an economic nature and political, if even the low RWAs can be triggered. In other words, most people fear war and terrorism. Which might also help explain a rise in support for authoritarian politicians and parties across the world, since the threat from terrorism has become borderline commonplace. So in times of extreme threat, support for authoritarian policies and responses might increase, across the RWA scale, since even the lows might temporarily become authoritarian-esque, while in a state of perceived or real danger.

A pattern of the values and attitudes that unite high RWAs has emerged. Authoritarians are, generally speaking, ingroup/outgroup minded and harsh and punitive towards those perceived outgroups. They are beholden to their authority figures and fervently support aggressive actions condoned by those authorities and equally fervently hold religious beliefs to a fundamentalist degree. They are ready to undermine and attack democratic institutions and values, since they run counter to their seemingly innate mindsets and if primed by threats they react with increasing levels of closed mindedness, ethnocentrism, punitiveness and warlike tendencies, the last of which as discussed even possibly priming the non-authoritarians.

3.2.4 Political preferences and voting choice

Now, with this pattern of attitudes and values established, do they translate into political preferences and voting choice? In other words, into actual demonstrable behaviour?

I’ve already mentioned the correlation between authoritarians, measured with the child rearing method, siding with Bush over Clinton in the 1992 United States presidential election.\(^{56}\)

Another study measured the correlation between authoritarianism and candidate support in two US presidential elections, in 1996 and 2000 respectively, using Altemeyer’s RWA scale. In 1996, supporters of Bob Dole, the republican candidate, measured significantly higher on the RWA scale than the supporters of his democratic opponent Bill Clinton and in the 2000

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election, supporters of George Bush measured even higher in RWA scores than Dole’s previously, and certainly higher than the supporters of his opponent, Al Gore. ⁵⁷

This pattern holds true outside of the United States as well, as a study done in Flanders, Belgium laid out. Measures of both RWA and SDO were found to correlate strongly with conservative beliefs and political preferences, including increased support for christian conservative and extreme right wing parties.⁵⁸

A study done on the 2012 US presidential election between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney showed an interesting result, highlighting the complicated role of social conformity in the behaviour of authoritarians. It hypothesizes that due to the somewhat unique racial context and culture in the United States, that african americans measuring as high RWAs would be more likely to support and vote for Obama over Romney, despite Obama being the more liberal candidate and Romney the more conservative one. This hypothesis proved correct in fact, in that race as a group identity played a far bigger role in the minds of african american high RWAs, than social conservative values or policies.⁵⁹

So even if on the whole RWAs might tend to vote for more right wing, conservative, religiously fundamentalist and traditionalist candidates, it’s not necessarily for ideological reasons. Far more important it seems is the role of group identity and perceptions of authority.

### 3.2.5 Authoritarians and support for Trump

How about Trump then or rather the supporters and voters of Trump? If there is general pattern of authoritarians leaning in conservative and right wing directions, with some exceptions, then does the same hold true for Trump’s election?

A non-peer reviewed polling survey, measuring authoritarianism with the child rearing method, opinions of Trump and Clinton on a feeling thermometer as well as income and

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educational level found, that authoritarianism was the defining factor in terms of Trump support. Non-authoritarians of both low and high income and the same for education, disliked Trump (a range of 14-21 out of 100), whilst authoritarians, regardless of income or educational status liked him considerably more (a range of 37-52 out of 100). The opposite was true for Clinton, albeit the range was considerably smaller and less extreme in terms of dislike.60

One of the authors of that survey also published a peer reviewed study using the same child rearing method to measure authoritarianism and along with variables like gender, education, ideology and others, tried to assess what defined the difference between supporters of the various Republican candidates, such as Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio and Jeb Bush, running in the presidential primary alongside Trump. Support for Trump was most powerfully defined by high measures on authoritarianism, vastly more than any of the other candidates, with support for Cruz coming in second, significantly more than the rest.61

A separate study used Altemeyer’s RWA scale and the SDO-scale and found both to correlate strongly with measured Trump attitudes and intentions to vote for Trump, as well as a significantly lower probability of voting for Clinton.62

A large comparative analysis was done of populist parties and candidates across the US and Europe and their recent successes, in 31 countries, wherein populism was considered as being constituted by anti-establishment, authoritarian and nativist values and attitudes. The analysis found, among other things, that overall vote share and seats in parliaments and senates, of these types of populists had gone up by a third over the period looked at, from 2002-2014. Most notably the authors looked at the influence of economic insecurity on one hand and cultural backlash on the other, those two reasons being the most commonly attributed for the success of these populists. What they found was that while economic insecurity certainly played a role, it was the cultural backlash to the increase in post-industrial


progressive values and lifestyles, higher numbers of immigrants, refugees and migrants; bringing foreign languages, customs and differing religions, that contributed far more to the support for populists, including Trump. Populist support was generally stronger with older generations, with men, with the less educated and more religious and among the ethnic majorities in the countries looked at. The variables most likely to lead to populist support were anti-immigrant attitudes, mistrust of global and national governance, support for authoritarian values, and left-right ideological self-placement. The first three of which, were certainly the focuses of Trump’s campaign and rhetoric.

The link between ingroup/outgroup thinking and Trump support continues to form a pattern, a study looked at white americans specifically, and their degree of ethnic identification, that is whether or not race/ethnicity was central to their sense of self. The subjects were primed with a fact about non-whites becoming outnumbered in the US by the year 2042, which led to individuals high in ethnic identification becoming more concerned about the future, expressing higher support for Trump, anti-immigration policies and an increased opposition to political correctness, whilst the opposite was true for whites that measured low in ethnic identification. Additionally high ethnic identifiers, across the two main political parties, Democratic and Republican party, showed the same effects and moved to the right and towards Trump support regardless of party affiliation.

That study did not measure authoritarianism specifically, but rather used various social psychological metrics to assess group status and group threat dynamics, that is how people place themselves in society based on group affiliation and how that relates to feelings of value and security. It’s easy to see, based on the literature already compiled in this thesis, the overlap with authoritarianism. Ethnocentrism and priming by way of threat perception are some of the characteristic variables already established, which key into two of Altemeyer’s traits, social conformity and aggression respectively.

Another study continues this trend, as the author compiled many different research and study results of Trump supporters and formed a list of five major social and psychological indicators that strongly predict support for Trump, which are as follows. High authoritarianism, as measured by RWA, high SDO scores, prejudiced beliefs and attitudes, limited intergroup contact; that is ethnic and racial isolation geographically speaking being a strong predictor of Trump support and finally relative economic deprivation, defined as a perception of being economically downtrodden compared to where they think they should be at or where their leader, Trump, says they should be at, in terms of economic status.65

3.2.6 Duckitt’s ACT-scale and Trump support
To conclude this portion of the literature review, a look at two studies using Duckitt’s adapted multidimensional ACT-scale is warranted. They measured authoritarianism to determine the differences between support for 2016 presidential candidates and both studies showed mutually supporting and intriguing results.

In both studies Duckitt’s ACT-scale, measuring each facet or authoritarian trait independently, showed that high measures on the Authoritarianism trait (Altemeyer’s Authoritarian Aggression) strongly predicted support for Trump, while also finding that the Traditionalism trait (Altemeyer’s Social Conformity) predicted Trump support in a significant, albeit weaker way. Traditionalism was a much stronger predictor for example, of support for the highly evangelical and religiously fundamentalist republican candidate, Ted Cruz. Conservatism (Altemeyer’s Authoritarian Submission) however, showed no significant correlation to voting preference in one study, but showed a positive correlation with support for Clinton, in the other.66 67

Those last two studies discussed, using Duckitt’s ACT-scale show a potential flaw in Altemeyer’s methodology, that is, if the three traits of the authoritarian personality can behave in such distinctly independent ways, then should they be measured as a unidimensional scale at all? And might it cast doubt as well on the use of the single trait measuring of the child rearing method, which purports to measure authoritarian submission/conservatism (RWA and ACT, respectively). Submission or Conservatism as Duckitt calls it, in particular is of interest, since if it does predict Clinton support or at least no support, then that might mean that authoritarian submissives perceived her as a more legitimate authority figure, with her long standing career in power and politics, whereas Trump was a newcomer to the political arena and by many considered an outsider. That alone might have led some authoritarians to vote for Clinton, despite the clear evidential trend of most authoritarians being solidly in Trump’s camp, if the available literature on the matter is any judge. It parallels with a study referenced earlier, where high RWA african americans supported Obama in 2012 over Romney, that is to say non-ideological values and attitudes sometimes trumping, no pun intended, ideological and partisan concerns, when it comes to the behaviour of authoritarians. Also that leads nicely into the next chapter, which aims to critically analyse the validity of all of this theory and data, including most especially Duckitt’s critiques of Altemeyer, born out by these interesting results using his adapted scale.

3.3 Chapter Conclusion
First though and lastly to summarize. Out of the available literature, here on display, a few things seem clear.

Authoritarians are united in their shared attitudes and values on certain psychological predispositions, they seem to be very sensitive to priming and activation of those predispositions by way of threat or the perception of threat. They seem to mostly lend their support to right wing and conservative causes, parties and candidates, though with meaningful exceptions as discussed previously. This might be because a lot of conservative values and policies lend themselves to their mindsets, in particular attitudes that emphasize support for traditional authority like those of a religious kind and values of a nationalistic and anti-immigration flavour, opening the window of support for more extreme versions of those policies and attitudes, in times of threat. Moreover, regarding Trump, it seems clear that the
authoritarians overwhelmingly rallied to his banner and not his opponents’s, whether from inside or outside his own party, attracted by his message, persona and style.

At the heart of most of this literature is Altemeyer’s RWA-scale, contributing powerfully to the body of evidence and data, but clearly not without flaws and neither is much of the research already discussed.
4 Critical analysis

In the last chapter I presented a lot of data and research from the literature, various studies on authoritarianism, social and political attitudes, correlations between and so on. In this chapter I will provide a critical analysis of said data, both to evaluate the validity of the research and data already provided and to examine further Duckitt’s critique of Altemeyer’s theory and methodology.

4.1 Pros and cons of the research discussed

The first thing to mention is the prevalence of small sample sizes in the literature presented. Not just in these studies I reference, but in my research for the thesis, I noticed it as a pattern writ large. It seems to be a common occurrence in political psychology studies at least.

That’s not to say all of them do, in this thesis there are certainly studies referenced that have samples with $n > 1000$, but most of them by far contained samples with $n < 400$, some even as low as $n < 100$. Having too small of a sample size risks the results not being valid to extrapolate from and infer anything useful from in regards to the general population. Too large of a sample isn’t good either, when that can make statistically insignificant factors appear more significant than otherwise, plus the resources it can consume. That however is not a noticeable issue in the studies presented, but rather the small size of samples.68

Admittedly and to be fair, most of the authors with the smaller samples note in their conclusions that the small size limits the generability of their study, rather arguing that their study’s result needs repeating with an enlarged sample, to further establish it’s conclusions.

In terms of the validity of these studies, the $r$-values for the studies reviewed, are nearly always moderate or strong, so 0.3 or higher in value, unless specifically stated as weak, in the previous chapter. The results discussed in the previous chapter are also all statistically significant. So for the variables and correlations I discuss in the previous chapter, there seems to be a pattern of relation, although the small samples might be amplifying some of those correlations. That critique is countered, at least partly by the fact that across these studies, there is a general pattern in terms of the results, as discussed in the closing of the last chapter.

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and the same holds true for those few studies using large sample sizes as well as the many who use smaller samples, lending strength to the overall picture presented.

4.2 Duckitt’s critique of Altemeyer’s methodology

The most serious of critiques however comes from the work of Duckitt as mentioned before. Duckitt argues in his work that the foundation of Altemeyer’s theory, that is the questionnaire itself and how it’s constructed, is flawed which stems from Altemeyer’s hypothesized causes and nature of authoritarianism.

To explain, Altemeyer views his scale as measuring whether or not individuals are authoritarian or not in terms of their personality, not in ideology or attitudes. He furthermore argues that this personality is formed by social learning and possibly in some sense inherited as well. Duckitt criticizes Altmeyer’s questionnaire for mostly consisting of attitudinal and ideological questions, that measure and conflate authoritarianism, religiosity and political attitudes. Which doesn’t make sense, he argues, if it’s meant to measure a personality profile and clouds the real correlation with variables like religiosity and political affiliation.

Moreover, most of the questions Altemeyer constructed are double barrelled and some even triple, measuring both submission, aggression and conformity or some mix thereof at the same time. This Duckitt says, comes from the assumption Altemeyer makes, that all three traits are unidimensional and covarying features of the authoritarian personality. That precludes however being able to measure each trait or facet independently and confirm their unidimensionality, leaving much of the research with possibly mixed results and conflated and confused variables, that are not detectable due to Altemeyer’s methodology. Duckitt in this critique he levels at the RWA-theory, comes up with an adaptation of Altemeyer’s work, correcting these flaws, the so titled ACT-scale.

In Duckitt’s conception as briefly mentioned in the literature review chapter, he still measures three traits or dimensions as he calls them, but he does so with a multidimensional questionnaire with single-barrelled questions only. He also made modifications to those questions, eliminating overtly religious and political leaning questions, preferring instead a measure of attitudes and values, which is what he believes authoritarianism is, social attitudes and values that perhaps stem from certain personality types. Not so much socially learned in child rearing as Altemeyer conceives of, but rather threat activated and perhaps with some
cultural underpinnings. In any case, in Duckitt’s scale the three dimensions measure a different attitude each towards attaining collective security as opposed to individual freedoms and autonomy and are as follows.

Authoritarianism as replacing Altemeyer’s Authoritarian Aggression, he defines and measures as favouring “the use of strict, tough, harsh, punitive, coercive social control” and disfavouring “leniency, indulgence, permissiveness, softness, to violation of social rules and laws”. This dimension he argues is most likely to be activated by “direct, real, physical threats to societal security, safety and well being”.

The next is Conservatism, an adaptation of Altemeyer’s Authoritarian Submission, which he defines and measures as favouring “uncritical, respectful, obedient, submissive support for existing societal or group authorities and institutions” and disfavouring “critical, questioning, rebellious, oppositional attitudes to them”. This dimension most likely is activated by “threats to social order, cohesion, consensus, and harmony”.

The third and final dimension, is Traditionalism, Altemeyer’s Social Conformity/Conventionalism. It is defined and measured as favouring “traditional, old fashioned social norms, values, and morality” and disfavouring “modern, liberal, secular, bohemian, “alternative” values, norms, and morality” and most likely activated by “threats of disruptive social changes that create uncertainty and insecurity about social values and morality”69

To support this adaptation of Altemeyer’s work, Duckitt conducted a series of studies to establish it’s utility. In them he references work by himself and others that showed through a confirmatory factor analysis that Altemeyer’s theory is a much better fit for at least two70 if not three factors71, not the one factor, or unidimensional, model of RWA. Going further another study showed that there was significant discriminant validity between at least one

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factor, Authoritarian Aggression and the other two, showing that it significantly predicted hostility, intolerance, punitive and militaristic attitudes, where the other two did not.\footnote{72} That rhymes with the study results discussed at the end of the last chapter, where ACT-A (Authoritarianism) and ACT-T (Traditionalism) predicted Trump support, where ACT-C (Conservatism) either predicted nothing or it predicted Clinton support.

Furthermore Duckitt presents study results, a collection of five studies, each done in different countries, that had some interesting results. The alpha coefficient for each dimension showed a high degree of internal consistency, which indicates high reliability, but showed a lower degree of consistency for the total ACT-scale score, which Duckitt argues indicates multidimensionality. To support that conclusion he measured a positive correlation between all three dimensions, but a strong correlation between Conservatism and the other two, whilst those two, Authoritarianism and Traditionalism only correlated moderately between each other. Additionally in the same collection of studies the RWA-scale correlated strongly with the ACT-scale, showing that they were in fact measuring the same phenomena.\footnote{73}

Notably those five studies referenced also suffer from the same sample size problem mentioned earlier in this chapter, the highest sample being n=344 and the lowest, n=67. A separate collection of two studies, done a few years later by Duckitt, used two medium sized samples, n=326 and n=404, which confirmed the earlier findings, that is to say internal consistency of each dimension and differing correlations between them. It also found significant national differences, one being undertaken in New Zealand and the other in Serbia, the serbian sample showing a significantly higher total ACT score as well as showing significantly higher scores on ACT-A and ACT-T dimensions, and significantly less ACT-C scores, in comparison to the New Zealand sample, as predicted.\footnote{74}

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{74} John Duckitt and Boris Bizumic. „Multidimensionality of Right Wing Authoritarian Attitudes: Authoritarianism-Conservatism-Traditionalism,” Political Psychology 34, no. 6 (February 2013): 841-862, sourced 14th March 2019, doi:10.1111/pops.12022
\end{itemize}
This lends support to Duckitt’s argument that threat and culture matter more than personality does, since the historical recent instability of Serbia and the relative stability of New Zealand, would lead to higher degrees of authoritarianism, but more importantly to Duckitt’s point, differential scores that fit the context. Serbia being a participant in a very bloody civil war and being a much more culturally conservative country than New Zealand, fitting better to scores of ACT-A and ACT-T, than the comparison country.

This whole discussion also casts the child-rearing method of measuring authoritarianism into doubt, as it purports to measure the equivalent of Authoritarian Submission or Conservatism (RWA and ACT respectively). If Duckitt is correct in stating that the three dimensions measure different things that may overlap, but exist independently as differing social attitudes, or even if Altemeyer is correct and there are authoritarian and non-authoritarian personalities, albeit plural and not singular as Duckitt’s ACT-scale seems to suggest, then research that uses the child-rearing method is at best measuring only a part of the picture or at worst providing a potentially skewed picture. Regardless, it presents a limited view and using either RWA, with traits measured independently or ACT, would better serve to understand the phenomena.

The strongest critique Duckitt makes and successfully argues for I would argue, is the criticism of Altemeyer’s methodology of using double- or triple-barrelled questions in his questionnaire. Regardless of whether or not that method is due to Altemeyer’s hypothesis regarding social learning and authoritarianism as a variable of personality, it is not empirically sound. If all the traits are indeed unidimensional, as Altemeyer suggests, then measuring them in single-barrelled questions each, would simply prove that fact, but at the very least with conflating the traits, measuring two or even three per question as covariates, makes it impossible to know, confirm or disprove. Unless of course you separate the traits or dimensions, as Duckitt has done. That adaptation is quite unequivocally an improvement, since it can only lead to a further understanding of the phenomena of authoritarianism.

Added to that, the reworking of questions Duckitt undertook, removing overt references to religious or contemporary social and political issues in Altemeyer’s questionnaire is also merited. When using these scales to measure correlations with all sorts of variables, including religiosity and political stances, it can only help to clear the data, if conflated measures such as those are not used. Also valid is the point of view of keeping the questionnaires more
abstract and not so contemporary based, such as questions regarding gay rights or feminism, in that those kinds of questions run the risk of not aging well, if societal norms change in the meanwhile, which limits their efficacy and repeatability.

Regarding their disagreement over the causes or origins of the authoritarian personality versus attitude, both make compelling arguments and I would argue that neither case has been established firmly enough to side with one or the other and regardless that is not the aim of this thesis, even if that topic is worth exploring.

4.3 Chapter Conclusion
To sum up this chapter; small sample sizes seem to be a prevalent issue in the available literature, possibly skewing some of data available. However an overall picture emerges, with a clear pattern of correlations. Altemeyer’s theory of RWA has been used to good effect to measure authoritarianism as a variable, but Duckitt’s critique is powerful and his adaptation of RWA, the ACT-scale, is a better suited method for future measurements on authoritarianism.
5 Discussion

Before final conclusions are drawn, a few points stick out that merit discussion.

Authoritarians are on the rise as previously discussed and no shortage of theories and perspectives are on offer to analyse and explain this phenomenon. In the theoretical chapter of this thesis a few perspectives are explored and now as the thesis nears it’s end, a review is in order. Arendt explained the essential nature of the authoritarian dynamic and through her argumentation it is easy to see where and what authoritarianism can lead to, most especially how and why it is such a threat to democratic institutions, values and the societies that base their governing structures on them. From that we can also glimpse why this trend of authoritarianism seems to have begun on the periphery of Europe, in countries where democracy is a much more recent historical development and therefore less entrenched. However it is increasingly rearing it’s ugly head all over Europe, in the oldest democracies on the continent as well as in the United States.

It is there that the perspective of Timothy Snyder and his historical cycles enter the fray. Why now? One might ask. Well, a decade or two of disasters, whether economic, warfare related or due to the ever present looming fear of terrorism has awakened the authoritarians, or perhaps rather, triggered and activated them. As reviewed in the literature chapter, there is a very prominent pattern that emerges of the effects of threat on authoritarians.

Authoritarians are already by their nature it seems, ingroup-outgroup minded, expressed very often in ethnocentric, nationalistic or racist terms. Threat however seems to amplify those inherent instincts of theirs, fuelling their support for harsh policies and extreme leaders and parties that express those values. So threats like the 2008 economic collapse makes them very susceptible to politicians employing rhetoric like America First or false dichotomies where assistance to immigrants and refugees is set up against support for the elderly or children of the local population.

Similarly the result of several severe wars has created a refugee crisis of massive proportions, funneling a mass of human beings away from their war torn countries into the more stable ones, seems to be creating a threat environment for the local authoritarians who rally to the banners of both opportunistic and sincere politicians of an anti-immigrant and anti-refugee variety. The threat in the eyes of the authoritarians, is both stemming from a more mainstream fear of terrorism, which they associate with certain demographics, religious and
ethnic, but also from a more authoritarian centric fear of multiculturalism, that is of the influx of competing values, traditions and norms, religious and secular, which triggers their inherent conformism, that sees the tolerance of and coexistence with differing values as eroding their own. A homogenous society, culturally, ethnically and religiously is a safer one and therefore a better one, to the authoritarian.

As previously and copiously discussed, the psychological perspective as provided by Altemeyer and others, is necessary. After all, it is not as if every single person in these countries, where authoritarians are on the rise or have already gained power, is an authoritarian. So something differentiates authoritarians and non-authoritarians, or high and low RWAs as Altemeyer labels them. Threat doesn’t seem to impact them identically for one and they are not as easily induced to action by fear. To explore that difference the RWA scale and other metrics show their value in the literature, with their wide use in research, establishing that in fact authoritarianism can be measured and has immense overlap with actual opinions and behaviours, most especially in terms of political behaviour, such as voting.

Altemeyer’s RWA scale however, is not flawless and it is far from the only available scale. The scale in Altemeyer’s conception of it was an adaptation and improvement upon a host of scales, that had already been conceived of and used as metrics in research by social scientists, all the way back to the infamous F-scale of Adorno. In a continuation of that history of ever evolving psychometric scales aimed at discovering the essential nature of the authoritarian personality, mindset, attitude or ideology, Duckitt introduced his adaption, the ACT-scale. Each successive scale has improved upon some of the limits of the scales before them and so Duckitt’s does to Altemeyer’s, contributing to a deepening understanding of the phenomena of authoritarianism.

Some questions remain however. There is a disagreement over the causes of authoritarian thoughts and beliefs. Are they a case of certain personality types that have that temperament built into their psyche, whether natured or nurtured into them, as Altemeyer conceives of? Or are we dealing with a more loosely knitted collection of mindsets, attitudes and predispositions that are learned and are magnified by threat in certain ways, as proposed by Duckitt and others? That question is at this point still up for debate in my opinion and might be running up against a larger question that psychology and related sciences are still dealing with, which is the nature of and connection between consciousness, personality and values.

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Authoritarianism as an ideology however seems to be unlikely, in terms of the evidence presented in the literature and the arguments made from a more theoretical point of view, at least as far as explaining the mass of voters who are now rallying themselves to authoritarian movements.

Then there is the question of what separates countries where authoritarians have seen recent political successes in and countries where they have not. Iceland for example, the country of origin of the author of this thesis, has not seen it’s fringe authoritarian and populist parties garner much mainstream support. The Pirate Party one can argue, employs a certain kind of populism and has enjoyed significant success, but it’s populism is of a very anti-authoritarian nature if anything. Then there is the more recent success of the populist Center Party (isl. Miðflokkurinn), which does engage in some nationalistic rhetoric, with vague undertones of anti-immigration and ethnocentrism, along with soft-Euroscepticism. It is however, in this author’s opinion, not extreme enough to be labeled as authoritarian, though perhaps that might change in the not too distant future. Regardless, there has been no apparent mainstream success of such formerly fringe elements that currently sit in governments across the world. One can hypothesize then, that perhaps the relative homogeneity of the country’s small population, coupled with a rather restrictive immigration and refugee policy has hindered such a rise as one can observe internationally. In other words that the authoritarians haven’t been so triggered and activated by threat and therefore not as susceptible to threat-focused rhetoric. Iceland did experience a rather harsh economic collapse in 2008, but has since bounced back relatively quickly and been experiencing relative boom times, in the last few years.

Then there is the question of looking ahead, where does this all lead? If it is true that we are witnessing a period marked by a growing groundswell of authoritarianism, where does it end? It is tempting to catastrophize, predict a new 1930’s with modern day Hitlers and Mussolinis on every corner. Though perhaps since we are now living in a post-nuclear world, the major powers of the world can not so readily go towards conquest and war, even with authoritarians fuelling such tendencies. We are however already seeing a rise in harsh and sometimes even inhumane policies towards immigrants, refugees and other minorities, the Trump administration’s incarceration of the children of illegal immigrants, being an especially
heinous example.\textsuperscript{75} Most notably I would argue, we are seeing the emerging importance of an axis in politics often overlooked, cross the traditional axis of left versus right, where liberal and libertarian progressive values are positioned opposite to values of an extreme conservative or authoritarian kind. Competing for votes, politicians may increasingly position themselves on this axis over the the traditional left versus right, since that may be the political battlefield of tomorrow.

All that being said, there is also an important point to note, something which the materials discussed in this thesis have shed some light on, which is, that authoritarians are not necessarily evil or morally reprehensible. Authoritarians comprise a section of human society that is the most ingroup-outgroup minded, the most submissive to authority figures and possibly under some certain conditions the most aggressive and violent even. That can express itself in a variety of ways, under conditions of threat the ugly face of racism and violence against the powerless may emerge, but under more stable conditions, at the peak of the politics of inevitability perhaps, authoritarians might just be intensely family focused and church going, community oriented individuals, spread around in society, content and calm. To that point then, it is likely not an effective strategy to demonize and chastize authoritarians for their voting behaviour, Hillary Clinton’s reference to Trump voters as a basket of deplorables\textsuperscript{76} being an example of what not to do perhaps.

The theories and research explored in this thesis do provide invaluable insight into this phenomena and perhaps through further study with adapted metrics and multiple theoretical perspectives, there is hope that some normative suggestions about how to manage the authoritarians amongst us, may emerge, short of absolute world peace and utopia, which even if feasible is nowhere on the horizon.


6 Conclusion

I began this thesis with the question of can Altmeier’s theory of Right Wing Authoritarianism, explain the voting behaviour of authoritarians or those who support authoritarians to power?

We know there are multiple perspectives through which to view this rise of authoritarianism, a few have been explored in this thesis, with Altmeier’s theory at the core. Hannah Arendt’s and Timothy Snyder’s contributions to an understanding of the phenomena of authoritarianism are valuable, but not sufficient. What a psychological and psychometric perspective, like Altmeier’s theory provides, is a means by and a method of measuring authoritarianism, reliably, to cross reference with a host of other variables.

Those measurements and cross references show a variety of correlations with views, attitudes and behaviours. Authoritarians are highly ethnocentric and ingroup-outgroup minded. They are hostile, harsh and punitive towards minorities and groups that not perceived by them to belong to the mainstream or norm. They are eager to support aggressive policies against their country’s adversaries and enemies, whether in times of war or not. They are some of the most religious of people, at least in societies where religion plays a traditional authority role and across the board they submit more readily and more intensely to authorities they perceive as legitimate. They are all too ready to undermine democratic values and human rights and care much less if their perceived authority commits crimes, moral or legal. Threat plays a fundamental role it seems in triggering these attitudes and predispositions of theirs, both amplifying them and pushing the authoritarians to act on them.

Politically they mostly ally themselves with conservative, anti-immigration and right wing parties and leaders. Not always though, since sometimes due to their ingroup-outgroup mindedness and/or submissive qualities they are swayed in a different direction, but overall a firm pattern of political leanings can be established from the available literature. Leading up to the election of Donald Trump in 2016, authoritarians rallied to his banner, overwhelmingly so, with only a few exceptions. It is no wonder though, since Trump ran a campaign that was undeniably ethnocentric, aggressive and punitive, threat triggering and hostile to democratic processes and human rights.

The exceptions matter however, some of those being measured using Duckitt’s adapted metric of ACT, showing that the three traits or dimensions of authoritarianism are not all unidimensional covariables. Though similarly plagued with small sample sizes, as the studies
utilizing the RWA-scale, which is a problem that needs addressing, the results using the ACT-scale rhyme with an overall pattern of authoritarians lending their electoral support to right wing, conservative and extreme forces, including supporting Trump. However, they do shed light on a more nuanced and complicated picture of authoritarianism and it’s many facets. Continued study, using Duckitt’s adapted metric, investing in larger studies with larger samples will only strengthen the case for the ACT-scale over Altemeyer’s RWA-scale.

All that being said, to answer the question this thesis has been wrestling with, Altemeyer’s psychometric RWA-scale is extremely useful and does provide a reliable predictive indicator for voting behaviour, despite it’s flaws, flaws that can be improved upon by following the lead of John Duckitt and his ACT-scale.
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