

Authoritarianism in context and as context. A meta-analytic and cross-cultural examination

Authoritarianism—the tendency to follow rules, respect authorities, and punish people who break social norms—is often viewed as a psychological predisposition that makes people more prejudiced toward minority groups and more supportive of social inequality. But is this always the case?

Most of what we know about authoritarianism comes from research in Western countries like the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. However, these societies may actually be unusual on a global scale—especially when it comes to values like personal autonomy, equality, and tolerance. This project challenges the assumption that authoritarianism always leads to prejudice and asks whether the relationship depends on the cultural context in which people live.

Authoritarianism as a Cultural Trait

One of the main goals of this project is to understand whether authoritarianism exists not just as a personal trait, but also as a broader cultural pattern. Some societies may promote authoritarian values like obedience, tradition, and group loyalty more strongly than others. This shared cultural tendency is what I call *Authoritarian Culture*. The project explores whether countries differ in their levels of Authoritarian Culture, and whether this difference helps explain how people relate to others who are different from them.

Where Does Authoritarian Culture Come From?

I propose that societies develop more Authoritarian Cultures when they face certain kinds of threats—such as high rates of disease, frequent natural disasters, or scarce resources. In such environments, strong social rules and respect for authority may be useful for survival. I also explore how political systems and cultural traditions (like religious values or childrearing practices) may shape Authoritarian Cultures over time.

Does Authoritarianism Always Lead to Prejudice?

New evidence suggests that authoritarian people are *not* always more prejudiced—especially in non-Western countries where authoritarian values are more common. In fact, in more authoritarian societies, they may feel accepted and validated, and thus be less likely to express hostility towards others. In contrast, in liberal Western societies that emphasize autonomy and diversity, authoritarian individuals may feel threatened by changing cultural norms, which could fuel prejudice.

Two Global Studies

To explore these questions, I will conduct two large studies. The first is a meta-analysis—a comprehensive review of studies from around the world, to see how authoritarianism, prejudice, and support for inequality vary between countries and over time. The second is a cross-cultural survey in over 50 countries, using a newly developed, culturally sensitive measure of authoritarianism.

Why It Matters

Understanding how authoritarianism functions around the world can help us make sense of why prejudice persists in some places more than others—and how people's beliefs interact with their social and cultural environments. The findings could guide more effective strategies to reduce discrimination and social conflicts, especially outside of the Western world, where research is still limited.