

**The Authoritarian Dynamic.** By Karen Stenner. 2005. New York: Cambridge University Press. 392 pp.

In *The Authoritarian Dynamic*, Karen Stenner injects new ideas and evidence into the longstanding, if in political science somewhat moribund, literature on authoritarianism. The volume offers a new account of what authoritarianism is, where it comes from, how and when it matters, and how it differs from conservatism. Stenner's explanatory objective is ambitious: "to provide a parsimonious account of general intolerance, one that is capable of explaining intolerance of all manner of difference—of racial diversity, political dissent, and moral deviance—with just one or two fundamental variables, no proper nouns, and no qualifications specific to a particular time or place" (p. 129).

The two "fundamental variables" in Stenner's account are "authoritarian predisposition" and "conditions of normative threat," which come together to produce what she calls "the authoritarian dynamic."

According to Stenner, authoritarianism "is a basic predisposition concerned with the appropriate balance between group authority and uniformity, on the one hand, and individual autonomy and diversity on the other" (p. 14). She envisions a spectrum anchored at one end by authoritarians who value uniformity among group members and the authority needed to sustain it. What matters is not their attachment to any particular group but their "fundamental and overwhelming desire to establish and defend *some* collective order of oneness and sameness . . . to identify, glorify, privilege and reward 'us'" (pp. 277–278). At the other end of the spectrum are libertarians who value difference over sameness and individual autonomy over collective authority.

This predisposition leads authoritarians (but not libertarians) to hold a constellation of intolerant and punitive attitudes on matters concerning race, civil liberties, morality, and crime—attitudes that are "functionally related elements of a kind of defensive stance concerned with minimizing difference and promoting uniformity, with instituting and preserving some collective normative order" (p. 25). At the same time, this intolerance will not always be manifest to the same extent. The predisposition becomes *activated* when circumstances of "normative threat" pose challenges to what authoritarians and libertarians hold dear, leading the two groups, respectively, to even more intolerant and tolerant extremes.

For authoritarians, these are circumstances that challenge the normative order that they so value, the most important of which are "leaders unworthy of respect, and lack of conformity to or consensus in group values and beliefs" (p. 17). One might expect different circumstances to threaten libertarians (e.g., too much deference to leaders or too much conformity) but according to Stenner, the very circumstances that threaten authoritarians threaten libertarians too, because "'culture wars' and the collapse of leadership make individual autonomy and difference look precarious" (p. 20).

This activating of the authoritarian predisposition—this “authoritarian dynamic”—marries psychology (the authoritarian predisposition) to politics (how leaders are performing and how much consensus one finds within the nation), which has important implications for how intolerance is manifest in any given polity and over time. Intolerant attitudes and behaviors may “come out of nowhere,” “spring[ing] up in tolerant and intolerant cultures alike, producing sudden changes in behavior that cannot be accounted for by slowly changing cultural traditions” (p. 136). One will find “deeply intensified value conflict across the tolerance domain, sharply polarized politics, and enormously increased demands upon the polity: for greater *and* lesser discrimination against minorities and restrictions on immigration; for stricter *and* softer policies on common rites, abortion, censorship, and homosexuality; for harsher *and* more lenient punishment” (pp. 323–324).

Stenner is eloquent in portraying her arguments as a challenge to social learning approaches to explaining intolerance and as an effort to resuscitate a functional approach. What is at work in generating intolerance “is not a ‘top down’ diffusion of cues and considerations but a ‘bottom up’ expression of primitive passions; not the politics of ideas but the politics of fear” (p. 324), and where it is “their shared function that causes the various components and manifestations of authoritarianism to cling so consistently together (rather than simple social learning of a package of attitudes that mysteriously replicates across diverse cultures)” (p. 143).

Stenner is also direct in challenging the work of Robert Altemeyer and in particular his “Right Wing Authoritarianism” (RWA) scale. She convincingly argues that Altemeyer’s RWA scale, like the original F-scale, “confounds authoritarianism with conservatism and . . . is tautological with the dependent variables it is designed to explain” (p. 21) and is best seen as a “highly reliable, empirically validated measure of authoritarian *attitudes* . . . and not of authoritarian *predisposition*” (p. 23). Consistent with this, some of her analyses use the RWA scale as a dependent variable.

Stenner analyzes experimental, survey, and survey-experimental data in the volume. In the Cultural Revolution Experiment (CRE) undergraduate students were randomly assigned to conditions where they read simulated newsmagazine stories designed to be either threatening or reassuring. The Multi-Investigator Study (MIS) introduced similar experimental manipulations into a nationally representative survey. In the Durham Community Study (DCS), a random sample of residents were interviewed on multiple occasions and asked questions specifically designed to address Stenner’s ideas about authoritarianism. Stenner also makes use of data from the National Election Studies (NES), the World Values Surveys (WVS), and the General Social Surveys (GSS). All analyses are restricted to non-Hispanic whites.

To measure the authoritarian predisposition Stenner typically relies on responses to a battery of forced-choice questions about child-rearing values. For example, respondents are asked to identify which is more important to them: “that

a child obeys his parents” or “that he is responsible for his own actions.” Stenner is convincing in arguing that these questions measure what respondents value and not what they practice and that they are in no way confounded with the dependent variables they are designed to explain.

Chapters 4 and 9 focus on providing evidence of the “authoritarian dynamic.” Stenner shows that under conditions of normative threat authoritarianism becomes more stable and reliably measured, attitudes concerning racial, political, and moral tolerance become more constrained, and most importantly, the impact of authoritarianism on those attitudes grows. The analyses vary widely in style and in the data employed. Using the experimental data (CRE and MIS), for example, Stenner contrasts subjects in conditions designed to stimulate normative threat with those in “reassuring” or control conditions, while when working with the WVS she incorporates a country-level aggregate indicator of opinion diversity.

In between the two chapters addressed to the authoritarian dynamic are chapters with different agendas. Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate the distinctiveness of authoritarianism and conservatism in terms of their determinants and consequences and the greater power of the former in shaping racial, moral, and political intolerance. Chapter 5 focuses on status quo conservatism—“an enduring inclination to favor stability and preservation of the status quo over social change” (p. 86)—and analyzes WVS data on twenty West and East European countries. Chapter 6 addresses laissez-faire conservatism again with the WVS and conservative self-identification with the GSS. These chapters are dense with analyses and findings, among them:

- Authoritarianism is a more powerful determinant of intolerance in West European than in East European countries, which is partly an artifact but is also tied to the greater diversity of public opinion in Western Europe.
- Education and other SES variables typically have oppositely signed effects on authoritarianism and conservatism, with higher SES negatively associated with authoritarianism but positively associated with conservatism. This, together with numerous other findings, supports Stenner’s contention that authoritarianism  $\neq$  conservatism.
- Authoritarianism is strongly associated with cognitive limitations, net of education, and with personality traits involving openness to experience and conscientiousness. These results support Stenner’s contention that authoritarianism is a predisposition with multiple roots but with a large innate component.

In a core set of analyses spanning the two chapters, Stenner pits authoritarianism against conservatism (in each variant) and a host of other potential explanatory variables including education, age, religious upbringing, party identification, and more, asking: How well does each explain variation in racial, political and moral intolerance? The authoritarian predisposition consistently wins this show-

down, leading Stenner to conclude that “authoritarianism is the primary . . . determinant of general intolerance of difference, both in the contemporary United States and across cultures and time” (p. 198).

Chapters 7 and 8 analyze data from in-person interviews with 22 of the most libertarian and 18 of the most authoritarian respondents to the 1997 DCS. At random, a primary interviewer and an “interview partner” were assigned to conduct the interviews, from a pool of six interviewers, four white and two black. Through statistical analyses of variables coded from the interviewers’ notes and the respondents’ remarks, Stenner explores how libertarians and authoritarians differed in their attitudes and behavior across the interview contexts.

The authoritarians, but not the libertarians, proved reluctant to be interviewed, suspicious and uncomfortable during the interview, and very concerned with getting paid. Authoritarians tended to be closed-minded, unintelligent, lacking in self-confidence, unhappy, unfriendly, unsophisticated, inarticulate, and generally unappealing. Libertarians tended toward the opposite; they seemed happy, gregarious, relaxed, warm, open, thoughtful, eloquent, and humble. In terms of their views, authoritarians expressed more animosity toward blacks, more patriotism and sympathy for militia movements, less trust of politicians and interest in politics, more concern with crime and with moral decline. Although these findings are compelling, one is left wondering whether the results would be any different if subjects had been selected on the basis of low versus high SES instead.

How the subjects’ behavior and attitudes varied by race of interviewer is less clear due to the small sample—40 subjects across three conditions—and a complex pattern of findings. What comes through clearly is that authoritarian subjects displayed more discomfort with and hostility to the black interviewers than the white interviewers, while at the same time expressing less racially intolerant views when a black interviewer was present. Stenner interprets these findings as suggesting that “authoritarians have learned as well as anybody else the norms regarding social interaction and conversation in contemporary liberal societies” (p. 244).

As the foregoing may have implied, *The Authoritarian Dynamic* is not a quick or easy read due to the complexity of the data analyzed and Stenner’s extensive empirical agenda, both within and across chapters. The fact that four chapters intervene between the two that directly address the core “authoritarian dynamic” thesis does not help. Still, Stenner does try to simplify the presentation—for example, all technical material, including the full equations that generate the findings presented as figures in the book, are relegated to online appendices—and the book is written in a clear and lively style.

At the same time, some readers may also wish for more attention to technical matters. For example, most of the analyses employ 2sIs estimation of multivariate models, frequently with reciprocal causation, and there is nothing in either the book or the appendices addressing model specification or justifying exclusion restrictions. On several occasions multilevel analysis should have been used

instead of the aggregate and individual-level analyses performed. It is also a shame that the relatively short appendices were placed online instead of being incorporated into the volume and were not organized to correspond to the analyses as presented in the book.

Stenner's analyses are also vulnerable to challenges concerning measurement. The DCS and NES indicators of belief diversity assess how different the respondent feels himself to be from parties, leaders, and "typical Americans," not how much difference of opinion the respondent sees within the country as a whole. The WVS measure of authoritarianism includes "tolerance and respect for other people" which seems to sneak the dependent variable into the measure. One of the two indicators Stenner uses to measure status quo conservatism refers to caution versus boldness in the respondent's own life, not in the polity.

Theoretically, one virtue of Stenner's concept of an "authoritarian predisposition" is that it identifies a single dimension with opposite poles clearly defined. This, of course, is a departure from the approach of *The Authoritarian Personality*, which identified an authoritarian ideal-type and a constellation of less or nonauthoritarian alternatives such that high F-scale scores were expected to manifest the characteristic authoritarian personality but low-scorers were expected to be a heterogeneous bunch. Despite Stenner's promising two-pole approach, however, her ideas about the "authoritarian dynamic" are almost always formulated with authoritarians, not libertarians, in mind. The book would have been enhanced had it given as much attention to what animates and activates libertarians as it gives to what drives authoritarians.

All in all, *The Authoritarian Dynamic* deserves a place of high regard in the political psychologist's library. It should inspire new work not only in the United States but among those studying racial, political, or moral intolerance worldwide. Scholars should introduce the "authoritarian predisposition" concept into their work, be alert for signs of the "authoritarian dynamic," and include Stenner's promising indicators in new public opinion survey designs.

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**Political Psychology.** Edited by Linda Shepherd. Opaladen, Germany: Barbara Budrich Publishers. 2006. 168 pp.

*Political Psychology*, edited by Linda Shepherd, is a collection of essays about political psychology as a discipline. As part of the International Political Science Association's series on the state of the political science discipline, the goal of the book is to examine political psychology in terms of the research political psychologists have done, as well as the status of political psychology in the field