

BOOK REVIEW

Title: 'Authoritarianism. Conclusions based on a cross-national perspective'. By Dr. Sabrina de Regt (doctoral dissertation). University of Antwerp, Faculty of Political and Social Science, Belgium. 2012, 160 pp. ISBN: 9789057283680.

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My own brief comments on the scope, research, findings, scholarly contributions, and follow up research are as follows:

This effort examines correlates of RWA and SDO orientations, religiosity as a moderator, left wing authoritarianism, trends in the field, and class and RWA. All of these factors are cross nationally in as few as 13 and as many as 31 European countries tested for convention, submission, and aggression (RWA) as well as for in group superiority, obedience, and obsession with security/threats for SDO. Where ideological contrast is high, as in Germany, RWA, SDO and EVS authoritarianism scales were intercorrelated, but results varied according to former communist linkages, current events, education levels, and religiosity.

Related differences in Italy, Finland and Estonia regarding religion, SDO, and RWA vary because of economics, secularism, former communist ties, and other factors.

The study also found that left wing authoritarianism is no myth but rather a disturbing reality. This is especially true in Eastern European states which are increasingly anti-democratic/pro-communist, such as Russia and Belarus, but not in Hungary or Poland, for example.

However, in the last 10 years the levels of RWA have increased in 11 and decreased in 18 countries, e.g., Ukraine and Germany/Scandinavia, respectively. Mixed results occur in re high RWA scores, stronger anti-democracy sentiments, and self-identification in Europe as a whole from 1999-2008, but higher RWA is related to anti-democratic and rightist movements in Europe.

Class differences in terms of RWA indicate that workers are more authoritarian cross-nationally, but this is not true of SDO as a universal characteristic. As a generalization, both educational levels and GNP moderate RWA scores. Rich countries, using national samples, are less authoritarian than poor countries and class and RWA levels are related cross-nationally. The effect of class, in contrast to Lipsett's assertion/hypothesis, in the 1950's, is stronger on authoritarianism in richer than in poorer countries. However, other variables such as political media, education, income, and insecurity influence RWA levels for the working class.

A few other conclusions/findings are worthy of mention in passing. Using cross-national representative samples, RWA and SDO are negatively correlated and SDO levels do not always lower SDO correlations. SES analysis and left wing authoritarianism are still viable constructs to use in international surveys.

Comparing western and eastern Europe from the 1990's, the former has become less and the latter more authoritarian over time. There are interesting overlaps among conventionalism and conservatism/RWA. For eastern Europe, RWA is negatively correlated with SDO and positively related to left wing/communist ideology. In the west, RWA is positively related to right wing ideology and higher SDO scores. RWA is a multi-dimensional social attitude, not a personality construct. Its' source (e.g., home, genetic, society, etc.) is still an open question. Studies using student and national/representative samples will yield different results. For example, the negative correlation between SDO and religiosity disappears if student samples alone are used.

One last question asked and answered is why does religiosity lower SDO/RWA in Italy and Finland but not in Estonia? And what would the newest WVS data tell us about many of these relationships in Asia, for example. Useful questions, indeed, for beginning another round of RWA research which probably will yield vastly different results.