

Authoritarianism in Black and White: Testing the Cross-Racial Validity of the Child Rearing Scale

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Using a scale of child rearing preferences, scholars find that African Americans are far more authoritarian than Whites. We argue that this racial gap in authoritarianism is largely a measurement artifact. The child rearing scale now used to measure authoritarianism is cross-racially invalid because it draws heavily on a metaphor about hierarchy. Akin to someone who favors enforcing conformity in a child, the authoritarian is thought to be inclined toward enforcing conformity in social subordinates. In both cases, one's perspective is drawn from a position of relative power. We believe this metaphor is effective among members of a majority racial group because *individual* dominance at home meshes with *group* dominance in society. For members of a racial minority, we believe this metaphor breaks down. Using multi-group confirmatory factor analysis, we establish that Blacks and Whites construe the child rearing items differently. Consequently, authoritarianism correlates highly with the things it should for Whites, but rarely so for Blacks. Using an illegal immigration experiment, we then show divergent patterns of intolerance based on the same child rearing scale. Our results highlight measurement's role in producing large racial gaps in authoritarianism, while illuminating the racial boundaries of the child rearing scale.

1 Introduction

Authoritarianism—a disposition toward conformity and uniformity—has reemerged as a leading explanation of moral, political, and racial intolerance in the United States (Stenner 2005). Despite its initial scholarly acceptance as an important political behavior variable (Adorno et al. 1950), measurement problems ultimately undermined scholars' confidence in this concept (Hyman and Sheatsley 1954).¹ Its recent resurgence can be traced in large part to overcoming measurement problems through the use of a scale that gauges child rearing preferences (Feldman and Stenner 1997). The items in this scale invite people to express their preference for children who are *obedient* and *well-behaved*, and who display *good manners* and *respect for elders*. These indicators draw on a metaphor equating hierarchical thinking at home with hierarchical thinking in society: a person who prefers enforcing conformity in a child ought to favor enforcing conformity in social subordinates.

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¹Although scholars might conclude that measurement problems suggest conceptual ones, Kinder and Sanders (1996, 273) disagree: “[I]t is important to keep in mind that the powerful critical literature provoked by *The Authoritarian Personality* established only that the study failed to prove its conclusions, not that its conclusions were incorrect.”

Scholars using this innovative scale have unearthed a persistent pattern—remarkably higher levels of authoritarianism among African Americans relative to Whites (Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Henry 2011). We contend that these racial differences are largely a measurement artifact. Specifically, we argue that the metaphor behind the child rearing items is more effective among Whites than Blacks. For White respondents, *individual* dominance within a family hierarchy meshes with *group* dominance within America's racial order (Kim 2000; Sidanius et al. 1997; Omi and Winant 1994). Both Whites and parents reside in a position of relative power. Among African Americans, however, the correspondence between parental and group power is frayed because Blacks are in a subordinate position relative to Whites within America's racial hierarchy (Dawson 2000; Philpot and White 2010). Hence, whereas Whites' scores on the child rearing scale should be robustly associated with relevant political attitudes and beliefs, just as extant theory predicts (Feldman and Stenner 1997; Stenner 2005), Blacks' scores might not be. If correct, our reasoning is important because many scholars who use this scale make no racial distinctions (Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009), a practice that likely *underestimates* authoritarianism's political influence (Kam 2009).²

Our investigation reveals the unequal performance of the child rearing scale across race. Similar to other scholars, we find that African Americans score much higher than Whites on the child rearing scale of authoritarianism. However, using Multi-Group Confirmatory Factor Analysis (MG-CFA), we show that Blacks and Whites interpret the scale items differently. This lack of measurement invariance matters. The relationship between authoritarianism and an array of core values, symbolic attitudes, and issue preferences is much stronger among Whites than Blacks. In fact, many of these relationships are wholly insignificant for Blacks, even if we account for class differences between both groups (Lareau 2002). We bolster our confidence in these correlational results through an experiment on illegal immigration. Some scholars suggest that threat perceptions are a psychological trigger to authoritarianism (Stenner 2005; Feldman and Stenner 1997). We find that when faced with threatening stimuli, authoritarian Whites consistently turn against illegal immigrants, but authoritarian Blacks do not. In light of our results, we then test a potential approach that might improve the cross-racial measurement of authoritarianism by more directly asking people to assess the centrality of authority to their worldview. We conclude by discussing the implications of our results for the assessment of authoritarianism in inter-group contexts.

2 Measuring Authoritarianism

To uncover the psychological sources of intolerance, scholars have periodically turned to the concept of authoritarianism. First used to explain mass support for “a strong hand” during World War II, the concept has been refined over decades (Adorno et al. 1950; Altemeyer 1996; Feldman 2003; Stenner 2005). We define authoritarianism as a predisposition with three key characteristics: submission to proper authorities, conventionalism, and aggression toward “difference” (Altemeyer 1996). Since authoritarianism inclines people toward conformity and uniformity, the more authoritarian display intolerance toward groups and individuals perceived to violate time-honored values (Stenner 2005).

Though the concept has existed since the 1940s, measuring it has been a recurring challenge. The first effort was Adorno et al.'s (1950) F-Scale (short for Fascism), which suffered from a range of methodological problems, including response acquiescence, poor item design, and reliance on unrepresentative samples (Christie 1954; Hyman and Sheatsley 1954). Bob Altemeyer's Right Wing Authoritarianism scale (RWA) succeeded it. Though many studies show it is strongly correlated with a range of social and political attitudes and behaviors, it has been criticized for being a measure of exactly those things (Feldman 2003). Indeed, Stenner (2005) argues that any analyses using the RWA scale to explain preferences about gay rights or general preferences for diversity are tautological.

²Feldman and Stenner (1997) and Stenner (2005) limit their analyses to non-Hispanic Whites, a point of concern to Kinder (2007). Even so, their analyses do not fall prey to the underestimation problem that we identify here.

The most recent and attractive approach gauges authoritarianism by asking respondents to judge desirable qualities in children (Feldman and Stenner 1997; Stenner 2005). First introduced in the 1992 ANES, the battery begins with the following preface:

Although there are a number of qualities that people feel that children should have, every person thinks that some are more important than others. I am going to read you pairs of desirable qualities. Please tell me which one you think is more important for a child to have.

The qualities people choose between are usually independence versus respect for elders, obedience versus self-reliance, curiosity versus good manners, and being considerate versus well behaved. Those who value respect for elders, obedience, good manners, and being well behaved score at the scale's maximum. Those who value independence, self-reliance, curiosity, and being considerate score at the scale's minimum. Since these items are disconnected from politics, the measure overcomes the concerns about tautology that undermined the RWA scale. This approach also seems to work, as it robustly predicts intolerance, hawkishness, and a range of other things (Stenner 2005; Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009).

Measuring authoritarianism with child rearing questions may seem unorthodox. Yet most authoritarianism scales designed over the past fifty years have included at least some child rearing items. This is because authoritarianism's essence is theorized to reside in the hierarchical dynamics inherent in one's view of the proper way to raise children (Kohn and Schooler 1983). Better still, child rearing items appear to be an effective way to gauge authoritarianism. At least this is true of authoritarianism among Whites, who comprise a disproportionate share of U.S. survey samples. Yet whether child rearing items effectively tap authoritarianism beyond this racial group is unclear. We discuss this uncertainty below and explain why scholars should verify, rather than assume, the cross-racial validity of the child rearing scale.

3 Measurement Invariance and the Cross-Racial Validity of the Child Rearing Scale

To be valid indicators of authoritarianism across racial groups, the child rearing items must first display measurement invariance. Invariance is a statistical property that ensures observed scores on an item(s) measure the same underlying trait on the same metric across groups (Brown 2006). Put another way, non-invariant measures make it difficult to analyze statistical results between groups since "...differences in regression coefficients or in means may be due to... a different understanding of the question items and not due to 'true' differences across groups" (Davidov 2009, 68). Hence, analyses of authoritarianism in racially diverse settings demand a measure that is invariant across racial groups (cf. Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Henry 2011).

Measurement invariance holds when *observed* scores on an item do not depend on group membership, conditional on the *true* score (Meredith 1993). If two people from distinct groups have the same true score, they will report the same observed score on an item regardless of group membership. Formally, this means an observed random variable, Y , is measurement invariant with respect to selection on a group, G , when $F(y | \eta, g) = F(y | \eta)$ for all (y, η, g) in the sample space, where y is the observed score, η is the true score, and g is group membership.

When scale items are invariant, group differences in observed scores reflect actual differences in the attitude being measured. In contrast, a lack of invariance suggests group members construe items differently, which leads individuals to systematically over- or under-report their trait level, thereby distorting the true level of a trait within groups (Brown 2006).³ This challenge often arises in cross-national and cross-language studies, where items can be misinterpreted by respondents if scholars fail to fully account for cultural and linguistic nuances (Stegmuller 2011; Elkins and Sides 2010; Pérez 2009; Davidov 2009). Yet survey questions can still mean different things even to people who share the same language (Byrne and Watkins 2003; Abrajano 2012). This is due to undetected

³The term "measurement invariance" is typically used in studies employing a factor analytic framework. However, the absence of measurement invariance is akin to the presence of Differential Item Functioning (DIF) in the context of item response theory (see Brown 2006). Since we utilize a factor-analytic approach, we use the terms "invariance" and "non-invariance", consistent with current practice.

bias in items, which is likely if the observed behaviors or preferences thought to reflect a trait are more effective for some groups than others.

We suspect these dynamics exist in the measurement of authoritarianism. Although rigorous analyses of construct validity suggest child rearing items are good indicators of this trait among Americans (Hetherington and Weiler 2009), this might only *appear* true because most Americans are White and the items apply well to them. With large shares of Whites in survey samples, full sample correlations can look “right” even if their fit is poorer for smaller racial groups. This is likely true with this measure of authoritarianism because the metaphor behind it applies much better to Whites than Blacks. Those from high-status racial groups are, in fact, like parents in a family hierarchy in that both occupy a top rung. Yet unlike Whites, Blacks are not at the top of the country’s racial hierarchy (Dawson 2000; Sidanius et al. 1997; Omi and Winant 1994). Thus, individuals from low-status groups may not translate their understanding of family order to the political and social world because their group does not occupy the same station that parents do in a family.⁴

If our reasoning is correct, two observable implications follow. First, the child rearing scale should display a lack of measurement invariance, since we expect Blacks to construe the items differently than Whites. Second, the child rearing scale should perform as expected among Whites, but not Blacks, since we believe only the former group understands the scale items in the way that they were originally designed. We now turn to formal tests of these expectations.

4 Data

We test whether the child rearing items perform equivalently across Blacks and Whites. Accordingly, we employ several surveys that vary by mode: (1) the 2008 American National Election Study (ANES); (2) a 2010 YouGovPolimetrix (YGP) survey; and (3) a 2008 YGP poll. The 2008 ANES is a face-to-face survey with a true national probability sample. In contrast, the two YGP studies are online polls using opt-in designs with matching methodology. We note which items belong to which surveys in the tables later.

We focus on Blacks and Whites for two reasons. First, the 2008 ANES oversampled Blacks, yielding more than 500 respondents instead of the usual 100–200 expected in a 1000- to 1500-person national sample. We have an even larger Black sample in the 2010 YGP poll, with 1000 White and 1000 Black respondents. These oversamples yield far more precise estimates for Blacks than any other minority group.⁵ Our theoretical expectations are also strongest for African Americans. In contrast to Latinos or Asian Americans, Blacks’ collective experience with slavery, Jim Crow, and its aftermath have served to produce the chasm in inter-group status we believe is partly responsible for the poorer performance of the child rearing scale among African Americans (Philpot and White 2010; Dawson 1994).⁶

5 Results

Table 1 reveals a gulf between observed authoritarianism levels among Blacks and Whites. Blacks score significantly higher on all items in the 2008 ANES. The difference is widest on the obedience question. Forty-seven percent of Whites prefer obedient over self-reliant children, whereas 74% of Blacks do. The gaps are almost as large for other items. Although 29% of Whites favor well behaved rather than considerate children, 50% of Blacks do. Rescaling these items to a 0–1

⁴Two additional insights indirectly support this expectation. First, some prominent authoritarianism research focuses exclusively on non-Hispanic Whites and finds that the child rearing scale performs as theorized, which suggests that members of this racial group do in fact translate hierarchy in the home to politics (Feldman and Stenner 1997; Stenner 2005). Second, research on Black families finds that strict child rearing is valued by some Blacks as a way to combat the stigma associated with their group’s lower status in the racial order (Gaines 1996; Billingsley 1992). This concern unlikely affects White endorsement of the child rearing items given their group’s dominant position in the racial hierarchy.

⁵This is an acute issue for Asian Americans, who often yield less than 100 cases in a national probability sample.

⁶Though, as we explain in the paper’s conclusion, the child rearing scale also appears to perform unevenly among Latinos, who were oversampled in the 2008 ANES (see table G, Supporting Information).

Table 1 Racial differences in authoritarianism items (2008 NES)

	<i>Blacks</i> (<i>n</i> = 512)	<i>Whites</i> (<i>n</i> = 1073)	<i>Difference</i> (<i>Blacks</i> – <i>Whites</i>)
Respect for elders	76.8	71.2	5.6
Good manners	79.1	59.1	20.0
Obedient	73.7	47.2	26.5
Well behaved	50.1	29.4	20.7
Authoritarianism (0–1 scale)	0.78	0.60	0.18

range, Whites score at 0.60 and Blacks at 0.78, which is nearly a 20-percentage-point gap.⁷ The SD for Whites is also nearly a third larger than for Blacks.

It would not be surprising if racial differences in authoritarianism did exist to some degree. Early authoritarianism research uncovered racial differences using the F Scale (Smith and Prothro 1957; Noel and Pinkney 1964; see also Henry 2011). Since Blacks score significantly lower than Whites on variables that are negatively correlated with authoritarianism (e.g., education, income), finding some difference makes sense. But a nearly 20-percentage-point gap seems very large indeed. We next examine whether this pattern reflects true differences in authoritarianism or the absence of measurement invariance.⁸

5.1 Measurement Invariance

We assess the invariance of the child rearing scale by using the four items in the 2008 ANES. Responses endorsing authoritarian attributes (e.g., obedience) are set to 3. Responses endorsing nonauthoritarian attributes (e.g., curiosity) are set to 1. And, responses volunteering both attributes are coded at 2. Formally, we estimate the following general factor-analytic model:

$$x_m = \lambda_m \xi + \delta_m. \quad (1)$$

Here, each child rearing item (x_m) is a function of latent authoritarianism (ξ), plus a random error term (δ_m). This general model assumes the response variable (x_m^*) underlying an observed item (x_m) item is continuous; in other words, $x_m = x_m^*$ (e.g., Davidov 2009). However, the child-rearing items are ordinal; thus, $x_m \neq x_m^*$. To deal with this feature of our data, we modify equation (1) in two ways. First, since x_m^* is theoretically continuous, the relationship between ξ and x_m^* is estimated rather than the relationship between ξ , and x_m (e.g., Finney and DiStefano 2006; Brown 2006). Second, we estimate the thresholds (τ) attending each child rearing item (x_m). By definition, each item has $c - 1$ thresholds, where c = the number of response categories (e.g., Brown 2006; Finney and DiStefano 2006). These thresholds translate changes from the unobserved response variable (x_m^*) to the observed item (x_m). Specifically, the thresholds provide the value on the latent response variable (x_m^*) that moves a person from one ordinal level to the next in an observed item (x_m). Since a latent response variable has no intrinsic metric, its mean and SD are set to (0, 1), making thresholds nothing more than z -values.⁹

To test for invariance, the modified version of equation (1) is simultaneously estimated within Whites and African Americans. Given the ordinal nature of our data, we estimate this model using

⁷The alphas within each group are remarkably similar. For Blacks, $\alpha = .54$. For Whites, $\alpha = .60$.

⁸Unlike prior studies examining Black–White differences in authoritarianism, which often use small non-probability samples, our estimate of this authoritarianism gap draws on a large nationally representative sample of Black and White Americans, thus boosting our confidence in this result. However, with obvious caveats in place, we note that non-probability samples answering F-scale items (instead of child rearing items) reveal substantial racial gaps in authoritarianism (14% difference; Smith and Prothro 1957) and sometimes larger ones (35% difference; MacKinnon and Centers 1956). Thus, the pattern we detect here comports with prior research (cf. Henry 2011).

⁹The modeled relationship between the observed item(s) and the response variable(s) underlying it is akin to ordered logit/probit analyses familiar to some political scientists (Brown 2006). We report standardized factor loadings to ease their interpretation, since they reflect standard deviation shifts in the latent response variable underlying each item.

robust weighted least squares with polychoric correlations as input (Finney and DiStefano 2006; Brown 2006).¹⁰ In this unrestricted model, the factor loadings (λ) and item thresholds (τ) are freely estimated within each racial group.¹¹ If this effort yields a model with a strong fit, we then test for invariance by estimating a restricted model that fixes the item loadings and thresholds to equality across groups. Fixing the item loadings and thresholds to equality implies that race does not affect individual responses to the child rearing items. In other words, a Black and White person with the same level of authoritarianism will score identically on a child rearing item. But if item loadings and thresholds are statistically dissimilar, then we have evidence that the items perform unevenly across racial groups. The presence of invariance is itself assessed by gauging the difference in chi-square (X^2) between the unrestricted and restricted models. A change in X^2 that is reliably different from zero implies the absence of invariance, since restricting the item loadings and thresholds to equality across groups deteriorates the model's fit.

Table 2 shows the unrestricted model displays a very good fit, as the TLI and CFI are both above 0.90 and the RMSEA falls well below 0.10 (Brown 2006). These items also appear to tap strongly into an underlying variable. For instance, among Whites an SD shift in latent authoritarianism generates a 0.594 SD shift in the response variable underlying the item *Respects elders*, whereas among Blacks it produces a 0.692 SD shift. Most important, we find the item loadings and thresholds for Blacks and Whites are consistently different. The differences in the item thresholds are particularly telling, as they hint at the possibility that race affects observed responses on these items. For instance, consider the second threshold (τ_{12}) for the item *Respects elders*, which determines whether one chooses the authoritarian response. For Blacks this value is about -0.71 , whereas for Whites it is about -0.55 . Since these values are z -scores, the gap between them suggests that relative to Whites, African Americans more readily offer authoritarian responses, a trend generally repeated across the remaining items.

These raw estimates, however, cannot tell us whether the differences are statistically meaningful. Thus, we estimate a restricted model that fixes to equality the loadings and thresholds across both groups. This yields a significant change in chi-square ($\Delta X^2 = 43.026$, $p < .001$), which indicates these items are not invariant across race, since fixing them to equality across groups significantly deteriorates the model's overall fit.¹² This means observed scores on the child rearing items are not strictly a function of people's underlying level of authoritarianism. Race also affects the reporting of authoritarianism.¹³ We find the same pattern of results for the other data sets we employ (Table A, supplementary data).

5.2 Correlations by Race

Our tests reveal statistically meaningful differences in the loadings/thresholds attending the child rearing items in the authoritarianism scale. But are these differences substantively meaningful? Even if the child rearing items are not strictly comparable across race, as our invariance analysis suggests, one might reason that Black and White responses could still display similar patterns of association with measures of political preferences. However, since the questions do not appear to have equivalent meaning across both groups, we do not expect such an outcome. Instead, we expect authoritarianism will display either weak or nonexistent associations with Blacks' political preferences,

¹⁰All our measurement analyses were conducted using Mplus version 6.1.

¹¹Consistent with recommended practice, group means are fixed to 0.0 in this unrestricted model (cf. Muthén and Muthén 1998–2007). Thus, our pending invariance tests are unaffected by possible differences in group means.

¹²It does not appear the lack of invariance emerges because some item thresholds in the unrestricted model are statistically indistinguishable from zero and, thus, fixed to zero. Estimating an unrestricted model that freely estimates these thresholds yields a marginally acceptable model: CFI = .971; TLI = .913; RMSEA = .099. Comparing this unrestricted model to one that fixes to equality all loadings/thresholds across groups produces a reliable change in chi-square ($\Delta X^2 = 41.168$, $p < .001$). In short, the scale still displays a lack of measurement invariance.

¹³To set latent authoritarianism's metric, we fixed the item *Good manners* to 1.0. This choice does not undermine our invariance test. For instance, if we alternatively set the metric of our latent factor by fixing its variance to 1.0 (MacCallum 1995), this item yields the highest standardized loadings (Whites: .757; Blacks: .722). Hence, this item is the most strongly related to latent authoritarianism: a key criterion in selecting reference indicators (Brown 2006). Moreover, we ran three (3) more invariance tests, each one setting an alternate item as the reference indicator. These tests yielded nearly identical results and reliable chi-square changes (table H, Supporting Information).

Table 2 Measurement models and invariance test for authoritarianism scale (2008 NES)

<i>Indicators: loadings and thresholds</i>	<i>Unrestricted model: Whites</i>	<i>Unrestricted model: Blacks</i>	<i>Restricted model</i>
Good manners	1.00	1.00	1.00
τ_{11}			
τ_{12}			
Respects elders	0.594 (0.039)	0.692 (0.054)	Fixed across groups
τ_{11}	-0.986	-1.446	
τ_{12}	-0.548	-0.707	
Well-behaved	0.521 (0.036)	0.540 (0.051)	Fixed across groups
τ_{11}	<i>ns</i>	-0.567	
τ_{12}	0.558	<i>ns</i>	
Obedient	0.713 (0.035)	0.698 (0.052)	Fixed across groups
τ_{11}	-0.287	-1.153	
τ_{12}	0.079	-0.623	
TLI	0.955		0.927
CFI	0.977		0.939
RMSEA	0.071		0.090
X^2	29.976***		—
X^2 change	—		43.026***

Note: N = 1,575 (1,059 Whites; 516 Blacks). Cell entries are standardized factor loadings and standard errors in parentheses, with threshold values immediately below. All loadings/thresholds are reliable at the 5% level or better, unless otherwise indicated.

^{ns}Statistically insignificant; fixed to zero in unrestricted model. *** $p < .001$

suggesting that the lack of invariance we have uncovered matters in an applied setting. Moreover, such results would also suggest that pooled analyses of White and Black respondents likely underestimate the effect of authoritarianism, since the scale performs as theorized only among Whites (Kam 2009).

Figure 1 displays correlations broken down by race between authoritarianism and variables the literature suggests it should be strongly associated with, including core values, symbolic attitudes, affect for religious minorities, and policy preferences. We report the raw correlations in Tables B and C in the supplementary data.¹⁴ Of course, comparing correlation coefficients requires great care (Achen 1977). Specifically, the high mean and low variance of authoritarianism among Blacks might bias correlations downward for this group. We use correlations only because they are intuitive and simple to present. We provide a more rigorous comparison of regression coefficients in Tables D and E in the supplementary data, which affirm the results we discuss below.

Panel A in Fig. 1 shows the correlations for items available in the 2008 ANES, with statistically unreliable correlations displayed as zeros. It is unsurprising that racial resentment toward Blacks would evince different relationships with authoritarianism depending on race. For Whites the correlation is (0.32); for Blacks it is (0.06). More telling is the correlation between authoritarianism and moral traditionalism, which is twice as large for Whites (0.28) as for Blacks (0.13). The same is true for egalitarianism (-0.20 for Whites, -0.10 for Blacks). For feminism, the association is also quite different. We find similar gaps in partisanship and ideology. Among Whites, authoritarianism and partisanship correlate at (0.15). Among Blacks, the correlation is (-0.01). For ideology, the correlation among Whites (0.27) is twice that for Blacks (0.13).

Since core values and symbolic attitudes are highly correlated with specific policy preferences, we should also find racial gaps in associations with the latter. And we do. For example, authoritarianism is highly correlated with White preferences for gay marriage (-0.29), but less so among

¹⁴Using the larger Black and White sample sizes in the 2010 YGP survey, table C also shows that the correlations pooled across race often fall between the correlations disaggregated by race. This is consistent with our claim that racially pooled analyses that use the child rearing scale likely understate authoritarianism's political influence.

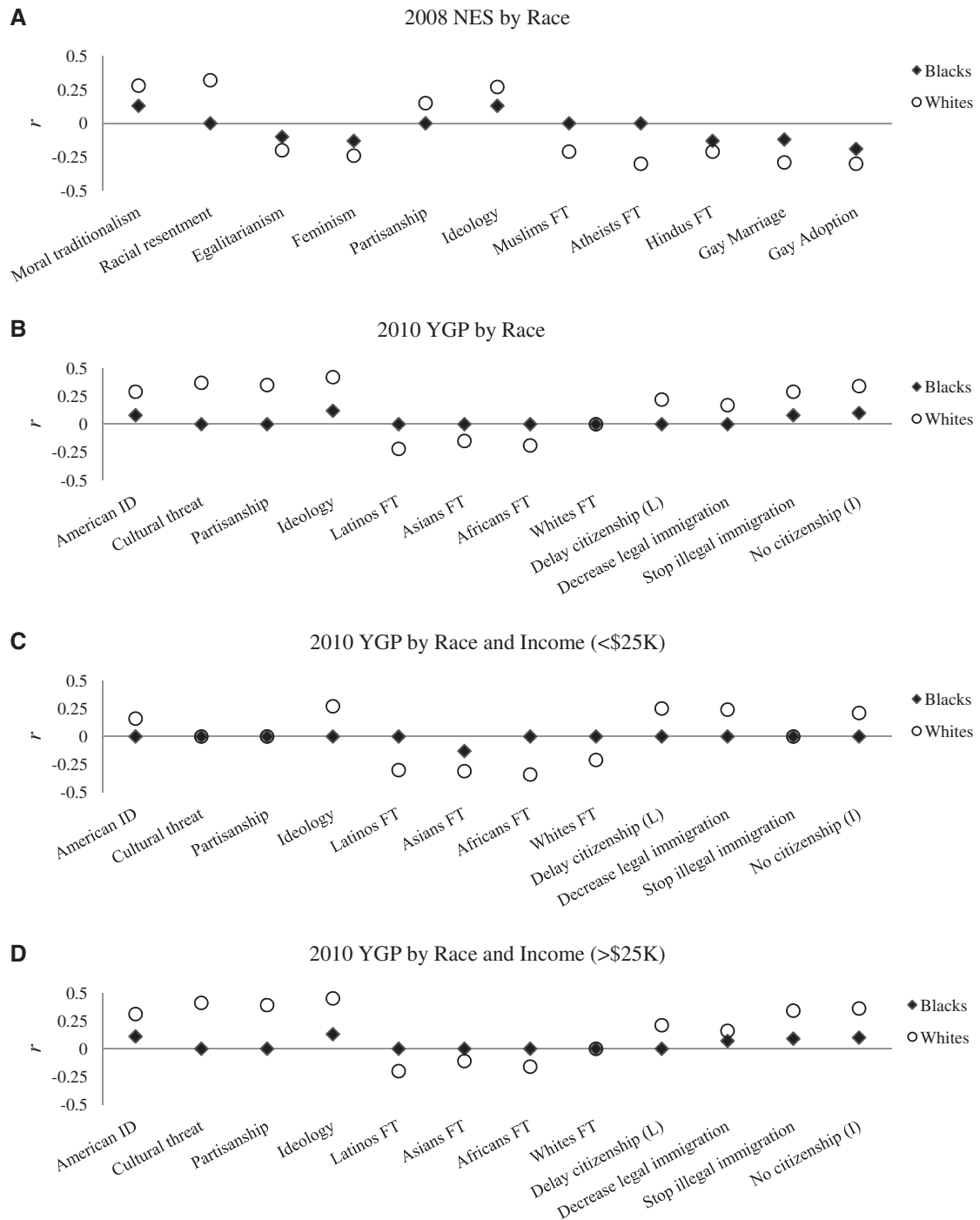


Fig. 1 Dot plots of correlations between authoritarianism and social and political predispositions (2008 NES and 2010 YGP).

Note: ID = identity. FT = feeling thermometer. L = legal immigrants. I = illegal immigrants. All variables are coded so that higher values reflect greater levels of a construct (e.g., egalitarianism, positive affect) or stronger policy support (e.g., gay marriage). Partisanship and ideology trend in a Republican and conservative direction, respectively. For further details, see page 1 in the Supporting Information.

Blacks (−0.12). We find the same pattern for gay adoption. Correlational gaps also exist between authoritarianism and affect toward religious minorities. For Blacks, the correlations for feelings toward Muslims, Hindus, and Atheists are negative as expected, but are generally weak. For Whites, these correlations reach a healthy −0.2 or more.

To increase confidence in our findings, we reproduce these broad patterns with data from another survey that employs a different mode: the 2010 YGP poll. It is well suited to our purposes in that it contains an even larger Black oversample ($n = 1000$) than the 2008 ANES.¹⁵ Though the 2010 YGP poll does not contain questions about core values or gay rights, it does have items about American identity and cultural threat, as well as preferences about illegal and legal immigration. This survey also contains thermometer ratings of several immigrant groups. All of these items ought to be robustly correlated with authoritarianism (Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Stenner 2005). Panel B in Fig. 1 displays the results. Among Blacks, the correlations between authoritarianism and these variables are often zero. Yet the same correlations for Whites are almost always robust and reliable. Moreover, even when nonzero correlations emerge among Blacks, they are usually weaker than those for Whites. For example, the correlation between authoritarianism and ideology is weak among Blacks (0.12) but is very strong among Whites (0.42). This general pattern underscores the child rearing scale's lack of measurement invariance across race.

5.3 *Correlations by Race and Income*

The analysis above leaves open the possibility that these correlational differences are driven by the socioeconomic gulf separating Blacks and Whites. Put differently, class rather than race might better explain these uneven associations. This would be consistent with some research showing that strict parenting preferences are prevalent among working class individuals, irrespective of race (Lareau 2002; Kohn and Schooler 1983). Thus, we replicated our previous analysis by comparing the correlations among Blacks and Whites based on whether they made less or more than \$25,000 a year.¹⁶ These results appear in panels C and D in Fig. 1.

The pattern of results clearly suggests that race, not class, undermines the correlations between authoritarianism and these variables. Among low-income Blacks, the correlations are often zero, yet among low-income Whites they are often moderate and statistically significant. The general pattern holds among high-income people as well. Among high-income Blacks, the correlations are often zero and, when reliable correlations emerge, they are markedly weaker than those for high-income Whites. For example, modest but reliable correlations emerge among high-income Blacks between authoritarianism and most immigration policy items. But among high-income Whites, these correlations are at least twice as strong. These results further affirm the child rearing scale's uneven performance across race.

5.4 *Experimental Results*

The child rearing scale appears to perform unevenly across race. To provide additional support for this conclusion, we draw on an experiment that tests authoritarianism's influence in light of perceived threat. Recall that authoritarianism is a predisposition toward uniformity and conformity (Feldman 2003; Feldman and Stenner 1997). Some scholars theorize that authoritarianism is activated by perceived threats to a normative order, which Stenner (2005, 17) defines as

... some system of oneness and sameness that makes “us” an “us”: some demarcation of people, authorities, institutions, values, and norms that for some folks at some point defines who “we” are, and what “we” believe in. “Normative threats” are then threats to this oneness and sameness.

¹⁵For a more rigorous treatment comparing regression coefficients, see table E (Supporting Information).

¹⁶Essentially, this analysis looks at whether racial differences in authoritarianism persist after accounting for Black–White differences in income. Thus, to ensure enough statistical power, we rely on the 2010 YGP survey, which contains 1000 African American respondents—nearly twice the size of the Black oversample in the 2008 NES.

From this angle, intolerance among authoritarians “is driven *primarily* not by . . . animosity toward any specific target . . . , but rather by a fundamental . . . desire to establish and defend *some* collective order of oneness and sameness” (Stenner 2005, 277). Thus, in the absence of a threat to a normative order, authoritarianism will be dormant, unrelated to intolerance. But in light of such a threat, authoritarianism will heighten intolerance irrespective of the threat’s source.

We manipulate threat to a normative order by cueing illegal immigrants. Per the activation hypothesis, authoritarianism should be unrelated to opposition to illegal immigration in a control group where no offending group is presented. In contrast, authoritarianism should consistently boost opposition to illegal immigration regardless of the immigrant group involved.

We utilize a survey-experiment embedded in the 2008 YGP poll, which randomly assigned respondents to one of three conditions. The control group provided no information about immigrants’ legal status or national origin. The second and third conditions identified immigrants as illegal Canadians and illegal Mexicans, respectively.¹⁷ The treatment read:

Let’s talk about a group of immigrants that has been coming illegally into the U.S. for some years. Because [Canada/Mexico] is so close to the U.S., many [Canadian/Mexican] immigrants have found it relatively easy to cross into the U.S. without American authorities detecting them. This ease of movement has permitted these [Canadian/Mexican] immigrants to settle and find jobs in the U.S. Some individuals believe that illegal immigration is beneficial to the U.S. economy because it supplies labor that employers demand. Other individuals believe, however, that the unchecked flow of illegal immigrants into the U.S. leads to more problems than benefits, such as an increase in crime.

Post-treatment, respondents answered three illegal immigration policy items using a 7-point scale: (1) increased efforts to curb the flow of illegal immigrants; (2) making it easier for illegal immigrants to obtain welfare and other public services; and (3) making it harder for illegal immigrants to become U.S. citizens. We summed these items to create a scale of opposition to illegal immigration ($\alpha = 0.65$), with higher values indicating greater opposition.

Using this design, we estimate a fully interactive regression model where authoritarianism’s effect on opposition to illegal immigration is moderated by immigrant cues and a person’s race (Table F, supplementary data). If the lack of invariance that we have uncovered in the child rearing scale is trivial, then authoritarianism should produce uniform effects across Blacks and Whites.¹⁸ Figure 2 graphs the marginal effects of authoritarianism from this analysis for each set of respondents.

We detect the predicted pattern among Whites. Specifically, the marginal effects of authoritarianism in the two treatment conditions are positive and reliable relative to the control group, yet statistically similar to each other ($\Delta_{\text{illegal}}/\Delta_{\text{authoritarianism}_{\text{control}}} = 0.097$, 90% CI: $[-0.044, 0.239]$; $\Delta_{\text{illegal}}/\Delta_{\text{authoritarianism}_{\text{illegal Mexicans}}} = 0.347$, 90% CI: $[0.193, 0.502]$; $\Delta_{\text{illegal}}/\Delta_{\text{authoritarianism}_{\text{illegal Canadians}}} = 0.283$, 90% CI: $[0.159, 0.408]$). In other words, each offending group of immigrants roils White authoritarians.

In contrast, the influence of authoritarianism among Blacks is mixed—it switches signs and is statistically reliable only when illegal Canadians are cued ($\Delta_{\text{illegal}}/\Delta_{\text{authoritarianism}_{\text{control}}} = 0.137$, 90% CI: $[-0.000, 0.275]$; $\Delta_{\text{illegal}}/\Delta_{\text{authoritarianism}_{\text{illegal Mexicans}}} = -0.007$, 90% CI: $[-0.185, 0.170]$; $\Delta_{\text{illegal}}/\Delta_{\text{authoritarianism}_{\text{illegal Canadians}}} = 0.253$, 90% CI: $[0.115, 0.390]$). In short, the expected theoretical pattern is discernibly weaker among Blacks.¹⁹

¹⁷Though Mexicans dominate the recorded flow of unauthorized immigrants in the United States, Canadians also enter the United States illegally (United States Department of Homeland Security 2011). Hence, our treatments allow a comparison of authoritarians’ behavior when cued with information about two immigrant groups—from contiguous nations—that violate the normative order around immigration law.

¹⁸This model also controls for gender, age, education, and income. These covariates run on a 0–1 interval.

¹⁹These results are robust to the exclusion of demographic covariates (Table F, Supporting Information). One might argue, however, that the racial discrepancy in these results arises because illegal Mexicans are more threatening to Whites than Blacks. Yet, given that Blacks often inhabit the same neighborhoods and labor markets as many Mexican immigrants (authorized and unauthorized), one could actually argue that Blacks should be just as threatened by illegal Mexicans, if not more so (cf. Diamond 1998; Gay 2006; McClain et al. 2007). Yet the only instance where authoritarianism has an influence among Blacks is when illegal Canadians are cued, a result that falls short of the predicted pattern of intolerance *across* offending immigrant groups.

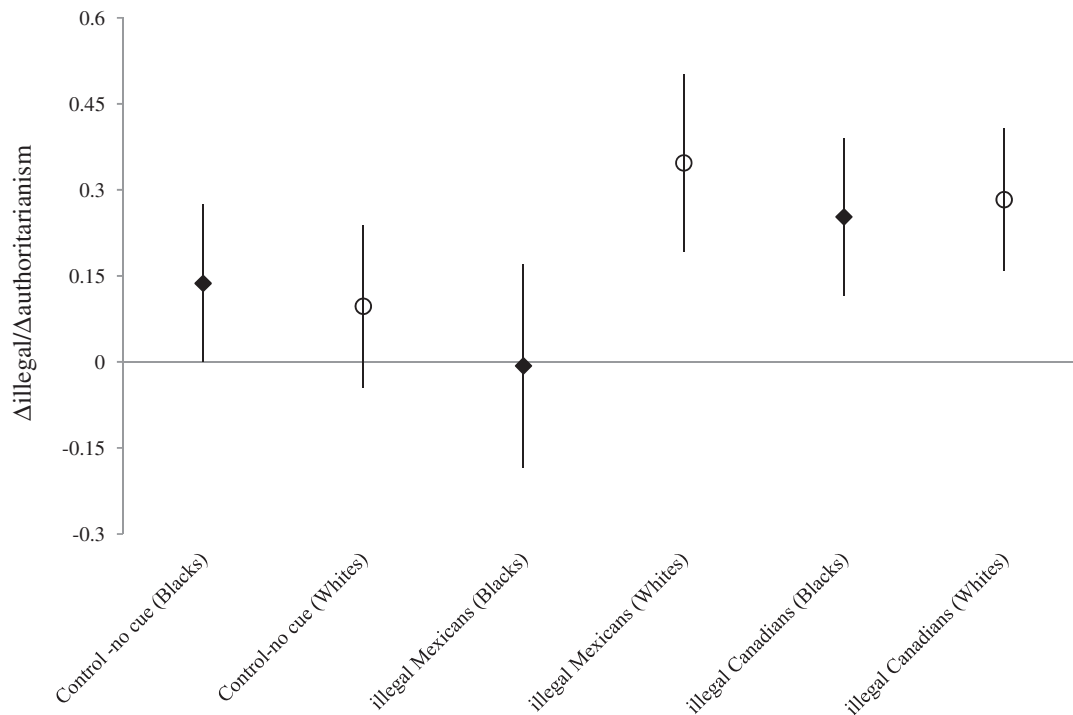


Fig. 2 Marginal effects of authoritarianism on opposition to illegal immigration by immigrant cues and race of respondents.

Note: The group in parentheses indicates the race of respondents for each marginal effect.

5.5 Alternative Explanation: Is the Influence of Authoritarianism Specific to Whites?

Although we have argued that scholars should avoid tacitly assuming that the child rearing scale works equivalently across racial groups, we, too, must admit to having made a tacit assumption—that authoritarianism, if properly measured, should uniformly affect the opinions and behaviors of Blacks and Whites. Perhaps it does not, and the reason the child rearing scale does not “work” is because its effect is race-specific. We do not believe this is the case, but we should, to the extent possible, provide evidence to support our own assumption.

To this end, we scoured academic surveys for alternative measures of authoritarianism. We deliberately avoided using the F-scale or RWA scale given their many shortcomings (e.g., Stenner 2005; Feldman 2003). Instead, we searched for face valid items that directly (rather than metaphorically) assess orientations toward authority. We found two similar items in two different surveys, which allows us to tentatively evaluate the promise of this alternate measurement strategy.

The first item, which appeared in the 1991 Race and Politics Survey (RAPS), asked a national sample of Americans to consider the following: “. . . I’m going to read some statements about things some people consider important in life. Using a number from zero (0) to ten (10), please tell me how important each one is to you.” One statement asked about “respect for authority.” The second item appeared in the 2005 World Values Survey (WVS): “Here is a list of various changes in our way of life that might take place in the near future. Please indicate for each one, if it were to happen, whether you think it would be a good thing, a bad thing, or don’t you mind.” One of the changes was “greater respect for authority.”

Although neither survey included comparable items to build a complete scale of authoritarianism, these items are attractive because they directly probe the importance of authority to people’s worldview. Moreover, even though the RAPS and WVS contain far fewer Black respondents ($n \approx 100\text{--}200$), these subsamples are still large enough to permit at least a crude test of our alternate measurement strategy. If this more direct approach to tapping authoritarianism produces more similar means across racial groups and nonzero correlations of comparable size, then it might

provide scholars with a promising lead to designing additional items that can effectively capture authoritarianism across race.²⁰

Turning first to the RAPS item, we rescale it to a 0–1 interval and find that compared to the child rearing scale, the racial gap in authoritarianism nearly vanishes ($M_{\text{Blacks}} - M_{\text{Whites}} = 0.91 - 0.88 = 0.03$). That said, the RAPS item is far from perfect: it produces a mean so high that it indicates nearly all Americans score very high in authoritarianism. Nevertheless, we find some evidence to suggest that using a more direct, rather than metaphorical, approach to measuring authoritarianism has some utility. Specifically, the RAPS item correlates with theoretically relevant variables for Blacks and Whites at more similar levels than with the child rearing scale.

For example, respondents were asked about the degree to which rules are to be followed rather than changed. The association between our authoritarianism item and this measure of adherence to established conventions is (0.20) for Blacks and (0.24) for Whites. People were also asked if they strongly opposed, somewhat opposed, somewhat favored, or strongly favored allowing prayer in public schools. Our authoritarianism item correlates with school prayer support at (0.17) among Blacks and (0.31) among Whites.²¹ Perhaps most revealing is the relationship between our (direct) authoritarianism item and the (metaphorical) child rearing scale. The RAPS data set contains three of the four child rearing items. For Whites, the correlation between our respect for authority item and the child rearing scale is (0.35), suggesting they both tap a shared sense of authoritarianism. For Blacks, however, the correlation is (0.01), indicating that the two measures are completely orthogonal to each other.²²

We find a somewhat more encouraging pattern of results when using our alternate authoritarianism item from the WVS. Rescaling this item to a 0–1 range, we again find that the large racial gap in authoritarianism disappears ($M_{\text{Blacks}} - M_{\text{Whites}} = 0.77 - 0.77 = 0.00$). Better still, asking respondents about authority in this way produces a lower mean with wider variance than with the RAPS item. Furthermore, the WVS item correlates at more similar magnitudes across race with variables authoritarianism should be related to than does the child rearing scale.

For instance, although the WVS fielded few policy items, it did ask respondents whether they agreed, disagreed, or neither agreed/disagreed with the statement “When jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to Americans over immigrants.” For Whites, the correlation is (0.15). For Blacks, it is (0.24). The WVS also posed the following: “Please indicate for each of the following statements whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between,” where 1 indicated homosexuality was “never justifiable” and 10 indicated it was “always justifiable.” The WVS asked the same about “prostitution.” The correlation between the homosexuality item and our “respect for authority” item was (–0.20) for Whites and (–0.38) for Blacks. For prostitution, the correlations were (–0.25) for Whites and (–0.31) for Blacks. Not all of the correlations we estimated using the WVS item “worked,” however. The correlation between authority preference and ideology (asked on a 0–10 scale from “Left” to “Right”) was (0.06) for Blacks and (0.23) for Whites. Similarly, when respondents were asked the degree to which they were “proud of their nationality,” the correlation for Whites was (0.28) and for Blacks it was (0.17). Even so, the overall pattern of results seems to us an improvement over the child rearing approach.

²⁰Specifically, the RAPS and WVS yielded 201 and 134 Black respondents, respectively. With relatively few Black cases, finding correlations at conventional significance levels is challenging. Thus, for these correlational tests, we use a relaxed level of statistical significance for Blacks: $p < .10$, one-tailed. We use one-tailed tests given our directional expectations. Unless otherwise indicated, all reported correlations for Blacks are significant at this level or better. For Whites, all reported correlates are significant at $p < .05$, one-tailed or better.

²¹We examined the relationship between our authoritarianism item and a 7-point ideology scale (strong liberal to strong conservative), plus a differenced measure of feeling thermometer ratings of conservatives and liberals. For the ideology scale, the correlation is (.10) among Blacks and (.26) among Whites, not much better than for the child rearing items. For the differenced feeling thermometer measure, however, the correlation is (.16) among Blacks and (.25) among Whites, a more encouraging result.

²²This last correlation is not only trivial in magnitude, but also statistically insignificant ($p > .10$, one-tailed).

Of course, we do not wish to make too much of results derived from a single indicator in two surveys with substantially fewer Black respondents. But this direct approach to tapping preferences for authority seems to yield an encouraging pattern of results, especially when using the WVS item, which significantly reduces racial differences in authoritarianism, while often correlating with the variables it should correlate with among both Blacks and Whites.

6 Discussion and Conclusions

Our study shows that using child rearing preferences to measure authoritarianism across racial groups is problematic. Specifically, we find the child rearing scale of authoritarianism lacks measurement invariance. That Blacks and Whites apparently understand the child rearing items differently leads to a response pattern that makes Blacks appear remarkably more authoritarian than Whites, and probably more authoritarian than Blacks really are. Based on research employing different authoritarianism measures (e.g., Smith and Prothro 1957; Henry 2011), it is reasonable to believe that Blacks might be relatively more authoritarian than Whites. Yet the fact that Blacks' authoritarianism—as measured by the child rearing scale—does not correlate with a range of theoretically relevant variables suggests this scale is not effectively measuring authoritarianism within this group.

By showing that race affects responses to the child rearing scale of authoritarianism, we contribute to research on measurement bias among non-Whites in the United States (e.g., Hambleton, Swaminathan, and Jane Rogers 1991). Of course, there are major differences between bias in measures like, say, the Scholastic Aptitude Test and bias in the child rearing scale. But the lesson is the same: race can affect item responses, which can then affect the inferences scholars draw. Just like bias in an academic test can misclassify someone as intelligent or not, bias in the child rearing scale can misclassify someone as authoritarian or not.

Although our results could be read as yet another indictment of authoritarianism, we favor a more positive interpretation. Our analyses *repeatedly* affirmed that the child rearing scale is a very effective measure of authoritarianism among Whites. Although its effectiveness is racially bounded, this does not imply the child rearing scale is a shoddy measure when used only among Whites. If that were the case, our invariance analyses would have yielded an unrestricted measurement model with poor fit. Yet the opposite was true. Thus, our results simply caution researchers against taking for granted this instrument's portability across race in *inter-group* settings.²³

Our findings say less about preventing this measurement issue. There are no easy answers here, but three possibilities strike us as feasible. The first is to further explore our alternate strategy of directly assessing the importance of authority to people's worldview. We uncovered provisional evidence that this approach reduces the racial gap in authoritarianism, while producing nonzero correlations with relevant variables for both Blacks and Whites. Future research might develop additional items that assess the centrality of authority to people in an effort to create a reliable scale that can withstand further scrutiny and empirical testing.

A second strategy is to build on our measurement analysis of the child rearing scale. Our results indicate the current child rearing items are too "easy" for African Americans to answer in an authoritarian direction, which helps to produce a large racial gap in authoritarianism. If the goal of researchers is to shrink this gap to a more reasonable size, while also enhancing the link between authoritarianism and other variables among Blacks, then scholars might design slightly revised items that assess preferences for different sets of desirable traits, such as "conforming to others" versus being "unafraid to be different." These modified items might also switch their focus from qualities that are desirable for children to display, to qualities deemed important for oneself.

²³In fact, the absence of measurement invariance also emerges if we analyze Latino responses on the child rearing scale. The 2008 ANES oversampled Latinos. Using the child rearing scale (0–1 interval), we find that Latinos score much higher than Whites, yet slightly lower than Blacks ($M_{Latinos} = .73$; $M_{Whites} = .60$; $M_{Blacks} = .78$). Analyzing all three groups in an MG-CFA framework also reveals an absence of invariance (table G, Supporting Information). Thus, the higher level of authoritarianism among Latinos relative to Whites is also influenced by the uneven performance of the child rearing among members of this group.

A third and final strategy would be to develop new authoritarianism items with a *conscious* focus on addressing racial nuances in people's understanding of questions meant to capture this trait. To this end, focus groups might help tighten the connections between the concept of authoritarianism and its respective measures, since focus groups often yield insight into the mental processes behind item responses (e.g., Garcia Bedolla 2005). Pretesting items on racially diverse respondents and interviewing them afterward to see how they understood the items strikes us as a useful practice.

Ultimately, our results concern one specific though politically important trait. Yet we suspect the absence of invariance might affect other critical political constructs measured in racially diverse populations. As we have demonstrated, this is an empirical question that can be directly tested. To this end, the general analytic framework we have outlined here can be used to rigorously assess the links between other political concepts and measures in inter-group settings. Indeed, we believe that in an increasingly diverse nation, our analysis can only serve as a first word, not the last, on this critical and evolving enterprise.

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