

# Subcomponents of Right-Wing Authoritarianism Differentially Predict Attitudes Toward Obeying Authorities

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## Abstract

Previous theory and research has suggested that right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) is a unitary construct related to attitudes regarding obedience to authority. Recently, scholars have suggested that RWA is multidimensional. To adjudicate these competing notions, we test whether the associations between RWA components and moral attitudes regarding obedience differ depending on the ideology of the authority. Across three studies and an integrative data analysis, we found that the RWA component capturing obedience to and respect for authorities (i.e., submission) related to judgments that it is moral to obey all authorities, and perhaps also nonauthorities, regardless of the targets' political ideologies. In contrast, the RWA component capturing socially conservative beliefs (i.e., traditionalism) related to judgments that it is moral to obey conservative authorities and immoral to obey liberal authorities. These results suggest that RWA is not a unitary construct and that its components differentially relate to moral judgments regarding obedience to authorities.

## Keywords

right-wing authoritarianism, obedience to authority, moral judgments, political ideology

Why do people think that it is good and right to obey authorities? Events such as the Holocaust exemplify individuals' tendencies to carry out orders of their superiors, at times regardless of the harm it may cause to others. For decades, the public and researchers have wondered how and why people could believe it is acceptable to carry out such repugnant orders. One line of inquiry has examined whether people with certain characteristics are more likely than others to support obedience to authorities. Researchers have identified *right-wing authoritarianism* (RWA) as one such characteristic (e.g., Altemeyer, 1981; Blass, 1991; Dambrun & Vatiné, 2010; Danso, Hunsberger, & Pratt, 1997; Elms & Milgram, 1966).

RWA is a social attitude dimension characterized by believing in submission to perceived legitimate authority, aggression against those who would question those authorities, and adherence to traditional norms and values (Altemeyer, 1981). Institutional authorities such as the police, the courts, and the military serve to protect the functioning of society. RWAs thus believe that people ought to obey those in positions of authority as a means of preserving traditional social order.

Notably, the three characteristics of RWA—submission, traditionalism, and aggression—were originally thought to make up a single psychological construct. However, RWA might not necessarily be unidimensional. The original RWA Scale contains triple-barreled items that simultaneously assess authoritarian aggression, authoritarian submission, and

traditionalism (Duckitt, Bizumic, Krauss, & Heled, 2010), which could obscure distinctions between the three components (e.g., “The only way our country can get through the crisis ahead is to get back to our traditional values, put some tough leaders in power, and silence the troublemakers spreading bad ideas.”). To broaden the scope of the authoritarianism construct, some researchers examined left-wing authoritarianism (LWA; Van Hiel, Duriez, & Kossowska, 2006). LWA comprises the aggression and submission characteristics of RWA without the conventionalism component, as left-wing extremists (e.g., anarchists) support aggressing against those who oppose their viewpoints and submitting to left-wing authorities (Van Hiel et al., 2006). Although there is debate regarding the existence of LWA (e.g., Eysenck, 1981; Stone, 1980), these findings suggest that some liberals possess authoritarian characteristics, something that is not possible to capture using

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traditional RWA scales that necessitate adherence to conventionalism.

Other researchers addressed the conceptual and psychometric issues with the RWA scale by parsing it apart rather than creating a left-wing parallel. Duckitt, Bizumic, Krauss, and Heled (2010) developed the Authoritarianism–Submission<sup>1</sup>–Traditionalism scale, which divides the RWA scale into separate Authoritarianism (i.e., authoritarian aggression), Submission (i.e., authoritarian obedience), and Traditionalism (i.e., conventionalism) scales. This allows for examination of the unique contributions of each dimension to attitudes and behaviors that might have otherwise appeared to be associated with the full construct. Our goal is to test whether these components of RWA similarly or differentially relate to attitudes regarding obedience to authorities.

### Differences Between Submission and Traditionalism

Initial validation of the three-factor scale and other work taking a multidimensional approach to RWA suggest that these components, specifically Submission and Traditionalism, have differential effects on political and intergroup attitudes (Crawford, Brady, Pilanski, & Erny, 2013; Crawford, Mallinas, & Furman, 2015; Duckitt & Bizumic, 2013; Duckitt et al., 2010; Mavor, Louis, & Laythe, 2011; Mavor, Louis, & Sibley, 2009). People high in Submission value obedience to authority (e.g., support efforts to maintain social order, cohesion, and consensus), and people high in Traditionalism conform to traditional norms and values (e.g., support efforts to maintain traditional lifestyles and morals; see Duckitt & Bizumic, 2013). This suggests that the underlying features of Submission and Traditionalism are conceptually distinct—whereas people high in Submission are concerned with maintaining social order by respecting authorities, people high in Traditionalism are concerned with promoting and defending traditional values.

Further, whereas people high in Submission express prejudice against dissident groups (e.g., protestors), people high in Traditionalism express prejudice against groups that violate traditional values (e.g., prostitutes; Duckitt & Bizumic, 2013). In line with this work, additional findings propose that Submission and Traditionalism are also differentially related to prejudice (i.e., negative attitudes) and political intolerance (i.e., willingness to suppress others' rights, such as protesting) and that these relationships specifically depend on the political orientation (liberal, conservative) of the target groups (Crawford et al., 2015). This work found that people high in Submission were politically intolerant toward all groups regardless of their political ideology. However, people high in Traditionalism expressed prejudice and political intolerance against left-wing groups, whereas people low in Traditionalism expressed prejudice and political intolerance against right-wing groups. This suggests that Traditionalism is the more political component of RWA and essentially captures social conservatism.

Based on these findings, the “right-wing” part of RWA might derive largely from the Traditionalism component. This could in part be responsible for the conflation of RWA with

political conservatism. If certain dimensions such as submission do not capture a left–right divide but dimensions such as Traditionalism do, conceptualizing and measuring RWA unidimensionally would obscure important nuances. When accounting for the ideological effects of traditionalism, it is possible that people high in Submission do not differentiate based on political ideology. According to this work, Submission appears somewhat ideologically neutral and perhaps captures the “anti-democratic sentiment” typically considered characteristic of RWA (Crawford et al., 2015). Thus, the converse may also be true; that is, people high in Submission might feel positively toward authority figures, regardless of their ideology.

### Implications for Obedience

Hence, Submission and Traditionalism might differentially relate to whom people judge as moral to obey. Submission can be nonpolitical in the sense that submissive people might value obedience in general. Because people high in Submission support obedience to authorities, they might judge it to be moral to obey all authorities, regardless of their political orientation. This would also indicate that people low in Submission would judge it to be *immoral* to obey all authorities. However, Traditionalism is political in the sense that it prescribes adherence to a set of religious, institutional, and generally right-wing norms, at least in Western contexts (e.g., Crawford et al., 2015). Because people high in Traditionalism are socially conservative, they might judge it to be moral to obey only politically conservative authorities, and perhaps might even judge it to be *immoral* to obey politically liberal authorities. Considered another way, people low in Traditionalism (i.e., progressives and social liberals) might judge it to be moral to obey politically liberal authorities and *immoral* to obey politically conservative authorities.

Indeed, recent work demonstrates that liberals value obedience toward liberal authorities and conservatives value obedience toward conservative authorities (Frimer, Gaucher, & Schaefer, 2014). This challenges the traditional view that liberals are fundamentally opposed to authorities whereas conservatives strictly adhere to them (e.g., Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). Since it appears that liberals are also willing to obey their group's authority figures, authoritarian submission might not be solely and inherently characteristic of the political right. It is possible that people high in Submission are loyal to authority, whereas people both high and low in Traditionalism are loyal to ideology.

### The Present Studies

Across three samples, we tested whether Submission and Traditionalism are differentially associated with judgments about obeying various authorities. We based our hypotheses on findings from previous work, which indicated little effect of Authoritarianism (Crawford et al., 2015). As such, we focus on submission and traditionalism in the current work but report the analyses including Authoritarianism in Supplemental

Materials.<sup>2</sup> Participants in all three samples evaluated the morality of obeying right-wing (e.g., religious authority), left-wing (e.g., civil rights leader), neutral (e.g., judge), and nonauthorities (e.g., cashier). We predicted that people high in Submission would judge obedience to authority to be more moral than people low in Submission, regardless of whether the authority was left wing, right wing, or ideologically neutral, but that they would not differ in their opinions regarding nonauthorities. Stemming from their political nature, people high in Traditionalism should judge obedience to right-wing authorities as more moral than people low in Traditionalism, and vice versa for left-wing authorities. People high and low in Traditionalism should not differ in their opinions regarding obedience to ideologically neutral or nonauthorities.<sup>3</sup> We first report tests of these hypotheses across three samples, then report an integrative data analysis of the effects for our key predictions.

## Method

### Participants

**Sample 1.** We recruited 256 participants (58% male;  $M_{\text{age}} = 34$  years; 56% liberal, 25% moderate, 19% conservative) from Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), who were compensated 50 cents. Post hoc power analyses using G\*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) indicated that we attained .98 power to detect our smallest significant predicted effect ( $pr^2 = .05$ ).

**Sample 2.** We recruited 258 participants (45% male;  $M_{\text{age}} = 34$  years; 57% liberal, 22% moderate; 21% conservative) via MTurk who were compensated 50 cents. Post hoc power analyses using G\*Power indicated we had .95 power to detect our smallest significant predicted effect ( $pr^2 = .04$ ).

**Sample 3.** We preregistered this study on the Open Science Framework (<http://osf.io/gds4q>). We conducted an a priori power analysis using G\*Power based on the average of the smallest observed effect sizes for predicted effects (regardless of significance) from Samples 1 ( $pr^2 = .0001$ ) and 2 ( $pr^2 = .04$ ), which gave us a partial  $r^2$  of .02. Based on this effect size, we determined that we needed 421 participants to attain .90 power to detect our smallest predicted effects with an  $\alpha$  of .05. Thus, we recruited 467 participants from MTurk to account for participant attrition. Eighteen participants failed an attention check,<sup>4</sup> four had missing data, and 33 cases came from repeated IP addresses, leaving a sample of 422 (48% male;  $M_{\text{age}} = 41$  years; 43.1% liberal, 22.7% moderate, 34.2% conservative).

### Materials

**Obedience to authorities.** Participants in all samples viewed a list of right-wing authorities (religious authority; commanding military officer), left-wing authorities (civil rights leader; environmentalism movement leader), ideologically neutral authorities (judge; office manager), and nonauthorities (cashier; janitor).

In Samples 2 and 3, participants completed the same ratings and also rated the morality of obedience to one additional right wing (prolife activist group leader) and one additional left wing (prochoice activist group leader). For each target, participants rated how morally bad or good it was to *obey/respect* each authority as well as how morally bad or good it was to *disobey/disrespect* each authority (1 = *morally bad or wrong*; 7 = *morally good or right*). Both targets and the type of rating (obey/respect and disobey/disrespect) were presented in random order (adapted from Frimer et al., 2014). The disobey/disrespect items were reverse scored and averaged with the obey/respect items to form ratings of the morality judgments regarding obedience to right-wing, left-wing, neutral, and nonauthorities (see Tables 1–3 for aggregation statistics).

**Submission and Traditionalism.** Participants also completed a 36-item scale that Duckitt et al. (2010) devised to capture the components of a=Authoritarianism (e.g., “We should smash all the negative elements that are causing trouble in our society.”), Submission (e.g., “Our leaders should be obeyed without question.”), and Traditionalism (e.g., “It is important that we preserve our traditional values and moral standards.”) Scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*).<sup>5</sup> Items were randomized within the scale (see Tables 2–4 for aggregation statistics).<sup>6</sup>

**Manipulation checks.** Participants in all three samples rated how much influence they thought each target had (1 = *no social influence at all*; 7 = *a great deal of social influence*) as well as the political agenda of each target (1 = *strongly liberal agenda*; 7 = *strongly conservative agenda*).<sup>7</sup>

**Demographics.** Participants in all samples reported their political ideology (1 = *very liberal*; 7 = *very conservative*), party affiliation (1 = *strong democrat*; 7 = *strong republican*),<sup>8</sup> gender, age, religious affiliation, education level, and socioeconomic status.

### Procedure

Participants in all samples completed each measure (i.e., morality of obedience ratings, the componential RWA Scale, manipulation checks, and demographics) on separate pages.

**Sample 1.** Participants in Sample 1 first rated the morality of obeying left-wing, right-wing, neutral, and nonauthorities. They then completed the componential RWA Scale, followed by manipulation checks. Participants lastly reported demographic information.

**Samples 2 and 3.** Participants in Samples 2 and 3 first completed the componential RWA Scale. They next rated the morality of obeying left-wing, right-wing, neutral, and nonauthorities. Participants then completed manipulation checks and reported demographic information.

**Table 1.** Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Sample 1 Variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. RWA										
2. Authoritarianism	.87***									
3. Submission	.92***	.73***								
4. Traditionalism	.91***	.65***	.76***							
5. SDO	.31***	.33***	.22***	.28***						
6. Right-wing obedience	.46***	.37***	.48***	.38***	-.06					
7. Left-wing obedience	-.01	-.02	.09	-.06	-.20**	.44***				
8. Neutral obedience	.21**	.22**	.24***	.12 <sup>†</sup>	-.23***	.55***	.34***			
9. Nonauthority obedience	.02	.01	.05	-.02	-.30***	.40***	.48***	.65***		
10. Political ideology	.59***	.49***	.44***	.62***	.39***	.24***	-.10	.06	.00	
M	3.39	3.59	3.35	3.25	2.44	4.90	4.60	4.26	5.17	3.28
SD	1.13	1.14	1.12	1.46	1.35	1.03	0.86	0.94	0.88	1.53
$\alpha$	.96	.89	.91	.95	.88	.78	.76	.65	.71	—

Note. RWA = right-wing authoritarianism.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \* $p < .05$ . <sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ .

**Table 2.** Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Sample 2 Variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. RWA										
2. Authoritarianism	.92***									
3. Submission	.92***	.80***								
4. Traditionalism	.92***	.76***	.75***							
5. SDO	.29***	.24***	.20**	.32***						
6. Right-wing obedience	.63***	.55***	.60***	.55***	.09					
7. Left-wing obedience	-.04	-.03	.05	-.12 <sup>†</sup>	-.23***	.19**				
8. Neutral obedience	.28***	.30***	.30***	.21**	-.08	.53***	.14*			
9. Nonauthority obedience	.08	.08	.10	.04	-.18**	.34***	.28***	.61***		
10. Political ideology	.56***	.50***	.41***	.60***	.48***	.35***	-.18**	.07	-.03	
M	3.40	3.65	3.33	3.23	2.41	4.50	4.36	5.11	5.08	3.25
SD	1.16	1.17	1.16	1.46	1.31	.88	.76	.94	.89	1.66
$\alpha$	.97	.90	.93	.94	.87	.73	.71	.67	.71	—

Note. RWA = right-wing authoritarianism.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \* $p < .05$ . <sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ .

**Table 3.** Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Sample 3 Variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. RWA										
2. Authoritarianism	.91***									
3. Submission	.92***	.82***								
4. Traditionalism	.94***	.74***	.80***							
5. SDO	.50***	.49***	.45***	.47***						
6. Right-wing obedience	.55***	.46***	.55***	.51***	.15**					
7. Left-wing obedience	-.11*	-.05	-.05	-.16**	-.17***	.22***				
8. Neutral obedience	.29***	.23***	.33***	.27***	-.04	.52***	.24***			
9. Nonauthority obedience	.11*	.10 <sup>†</sup>	.14**	.09 <sup>†</sup>	-.13*	.42***	.34***	.67***		
10. Political ideology	.69***	.63***	.66***	.64***	.57***	.38***	-.19***	.19***	.06	
M	3.66	3.88	3.59	3.51	2.47	4.62	4.34	5.32	5.08	3.75
SD	1.22	1.29	1.24	1.44	1.41	0.86	0.73	0.91	0.84	1.76
$\alpha$	.97	.92	.93	.94	.96	.77	.73	.70	.67	—

Note. RWA = right-wing authoritarianism.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \* $p < .05$ . <sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ .

## Results

See Tables 1–3 for correlations and descriptive statistics for all study variables.

### Manipulation Checks

Manipulations of the authorities' social power and ideology were successful. We expected social power ratings to be higher for left-wing, right-wing, and neutral authorities than they would be for non-authorities. We tested this using a repeated measures analysis of variance on each sample (see Table 4 for descriptive statistics). For perceived power, the omnibus tests were significant in Sample 1,  $F(3, 756) = 477.89, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .66$ ; Sample 2,  $F(3, 732) = 399.40, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .62$ ; and Sample 3,  $F(2.34, 983.29) = 748.27, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .64$ .

**Table 4.** Descriptive Statistics for Manipulation Checks.

Variables	Sample 1		Sample 2		Sample 3	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<b>Influence</b>						
Right-wing authority	5.17	1.16	4.89	1.18	3.77	0.73
Left-wing authority	4.88	1.23	4.85	1.24	3.63	0.76
Neutral authority	4.41	1.11	4.40	1.11	3.44	0.71
Nonauthority	2.21	1.30	2.10	1.27	1.88	0.87
<b>Ideology</b>						
Right-wing authority	5.62	1.08	5.50	1.11	3.95	0.69
Left-wing authority	2.43	1.55	2.57	1.43	1.92	0.87
Neutral authority	4.26	0.76	4.32	0.71	3.12	0.40
Nonauthority	3.76	0.88	3.95	0.75	2.95	0.35

As expected, post hoc contrasts revealed that in all three samples, participants judged right-wing, left-wing, and neutral authorities to have more social power than nonauthorities (all  $ps < .001$ ; see Table 5 full statistics).

For the ideology manipulation, ratings for right-wing authorities should be more conservative than for left-wing, neutral, and non-authorities, and ratings for left-wing authorities should be more liberal than for neutral and non-authorities. The omnibus tests for perceived ideology were significant in Sample 1,  $F(3, 750) = 329.68, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .57$ ; Sample 2,  $F(3, 747) = 309.14, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .55$ ; and Sample 3,  $F(1.78, 745.52) = 723.77, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .63$ . Post hoc contrasts revealed that participants in all three samples perceived right-wing authorities to be more conservative than left-wing, neutral, and non-authorities, and left-wing authorities as more liberal than neutral and non-authorities (all  $ps < .001$ ; see Table 5 for full statistics).

### Obedience to Authority

To test whether different constructs theorized to underlie the subscales of the RWA scale similarly or differentially predict attitudes regarding obedience to authorities, we regressed morality judgments regarding obedience to right-wing, left-wing, neutral, and non-authorities on Submission and Traditionalism in four separate models for each sample. To allow for comparison of the strength of effects across samples, we ran these analyses using  $z$ -scored variables to get confidence intervals (CIs) for standardized  $\beta$ s. Table 6 reports the results of these regression analyses.

**Table 5.** Repeated Measures ANOVA Contrast Tests for Manipulation Checks.

Variables	Sample 1			Sample 2			Sample 3		
	MD	SE	$p$	MD	SE	$p$	MD	SE	$p$
<b>Influence</b>									
Right wing									
Left-wing	0.29	.08	<.001	0.05	.07	.487	0.14	.03	<.001
Neutral	0.76	.07	<.001	0.49	.08	<.001	0.33	.04	<.001
Non	2.96	.10	<.001	2.80	.11	<.001	1.90	.06	<.001
Left wing									
Neutral	0.47	.08	<.001	0.45	.09	<.001	0.19	.04	<.001
Non	2.66	.10	<.001	2.75	.11	<.001	1.76	.05	<.001
Neutral									
Non	2.20	.09	<.001	2.31	.09	<.001	1.57	.05	<.001
<b>Ideology</b>									
Right wing									
Left wing	3.18	.14	<.001	2.92	.14	<.001	2.03	.06	<.001
Neutral	1.36	.07	<.001	1.18	.08	<.001	0.83	.04	<.001
Non	1.86	.09	<.001	1.54	.09	<.001	1.00	.04	<.001
Left wing									
Neutral	-1.83	.11	<.001	-1.74	.10	<.001	-1.19	.04	<.001
Non	-1.33	.12	<.001	-1.38	.10	<.001	-1.03	.05	<.001
Neutral									
Non	0.50	.07	<.001	0.36	.06	<.001	0.17	.03	<.001

Note. MD = mean difference; ANOVA = analysis of variance.

**Table 6.** Regression Analyses for the Three Samples.

Variables	Right-Wing Authorities				Left-Wing Authorities				Neutral Authorities				Nonauthorities									
	$\beta$	SE	$p$	sr	95% CI	$\beta$	SE	$p$	sr	95% CI	$\beta$	SE	$p$	sr	95% CI	$\beta$	SE	$p$	sr	95% CI		
Submission																						
Sample 1	<b>.47</b>	<b>.08</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.31</b>	<b> [.30, .64]</b>	<b>.33</b>	<b>.07</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.22</b>	<b> [.15, .51]</b>	<b>.35</b>	<b>.08</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.23</b>	<b> [.16, .54]</b>	<b>.14</b>	<b>.08</b>	<b>.150</b>	<b>.09</b>	<b>.10</b>	<b> [-.05, .33]</b>	
Sample 2	<b>.42</b>	<b>.06</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.28</b>	<b> [.27, .57]</b>	<b>.31</b>	<b>.06</b>	<b>.002</b>	<b>.20</b>	<b> [.12, .49]</b>	<b>.35</b>	<b>.08</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.23</b>	<b> [.17, .54]</b>	<b>.14</b>	<b>.07</b>	<b>.140</b>	<b>.10</b>	<b>.10</b>	<b> [-.05, .34]</b>	
Sample 3	<b>.40</b>	<b>.05</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.24</b>	<b> [.26, .53]</b>	<b>.26</b>	<b>.05</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>.16</b>	<b> [.10, .41]</b>	<b>.33</b>	<b>.06</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.20</b>	<b> [.18, .48]</b>	<b>.20</b>	<b>.06</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.12</b>	<b>.12</b>	<b> [.04, .36]</b>	
Traditionalism																						
Sample 1	.01	.06	0.91	.01	[-.16, .18]	<b>-.32</b>	<b>.06</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>-.22</b>	<b> [-.50, -.13]</b>	<b>-.14</b>	<b>.06</b>	<b>.140</b>	<b>-.09</b>	<b> [-.33, .05]</b>	<b>-.13</b>	<b>.06</b>	<b>.190</b>	<b>-.09</b>	<b>-.09</b>	<b> [-.32, .06]</b>	
Sample 2	<b>.24</b>	<b>.05</b>	<b>.002</b>	<b>.16</b>	<b> [.09, .40]</b>	<b>-.34</b>	<b>.05</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>-.23</b>	<b> [-.53, -.15]</b>	<b>-.08</b>	<b>.06</b>	<b>.430</b>	<b>-.05</b>	<b> [-.27, .11]</b>	<b>-.06</b>	<b>.06</b>	<b>.530</b>	<b>-.04</b>	<b>-.04</b>	<b> [-.26, .13]</b>	
Sample 3	<b>.19</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b>.006</b>	<b>.11</b>	<b> [.06, .32]</b>	<b>-.38</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>-.23</b>	<b> [-.54, -.23]</b>	<b>-.00</b>	<b>.05</b>	<b>.971</b>	<b>-.00</b>	<b> [-.16, .15]</b>	<b>-.07</b>	<b>.05</b>	<b>.363</b>	<b>-.05</b>	<b>-.05</b>	<b> [-.23, .09]</b>	

Note. This table reports results of multiple regression analyses with z-scored conservatism and traditionalism entered simultaneously with z-scored outcome variables. Boldface test values are significant. sr = semipartial  $r$ ; CI = confidence interval.

*Submission.* We hypothesized that people high in Submission would judge obedience to left-wing, right-wing, and neutral authorities to be more moral than people low in Submission, but that people high and low would not differ in their ratings of non-authorities. Thus, Submission should positively relate to morality judgments regarding obedience to left-wing, right-wing, and neutral authorities but should be unrelated to non-authorities. As expected, Submission was significantly and positively related to morality judgments regarding obedience to right-wing, left-wing, and neutral authorities in all three samples. Also as expected, Submission was unrelated to morality judgments regarding obedience to non-authorities in Samples 1 and 2. However, Submission was unexpectedly related to judging obedience to non-authorities as moral in Sample 3. Notably, none of the significant effects differed from one another in strength (see Table 6 for standardized  $\beta$  CIs). That is, across all samples, Submission was equally strongly related to morality judgments regarding right-wing, left-wing, neutral, and, in Sample 3, non-authorities.

*Traditionalism.* We predicted that people high in Traditionalism would judge obedience to right-wing authorities to be more moral than people low in Traditionalism, whereas people low in Traditionalism would judge obedience to left-wing authorities to be more moral than people high. Thus, Traditionalism should positively relate to the moral judgments regarding obedience to right-wing authorities, negatively relate to the morality judgments regarding obedience to left-wing authorities, and not relate to neutral or non-authorities. As expected, Traditionalism was significantly positively related to morality judgments regarding obedience to right-wing authorities (in Samples 2 and 3 only) and negatively related to morality judgments regarding obedience to left-wing authorities in all three samples. Moreover, Traditionalism was unrelated to morality judgments regarding neutral and non-authorities in all three samples. None of the significant effects differed from one another in strength (see Table 6 for standardized  $\beta$  CIs). That is, in all samples, Traditionalism was equally strongly related to morality judgments regarding right-wing and left-wing authorities.

### Integrative Data Analysis

Because we had access to the raw data, we also conducted an integrative data analysis to test our key predicted effects (Curran & Hussong, 2009).<sup>9</sup> To account for the nonindependence of the data (i.e., data were nested within sample), we conducted analyses using HLM 7.03 (Raudenbush, Bryk, & Congdon, 2017). We entered grand mean-centered Submission and Traditionalism in Level 1 and controlled for study on the intercept using dummy codes in Level 2.<sup>10</sup> Table 7 reports the results of this analysis.

Consistent with individual sample findings, Submission was significantly positively related to morality judgments regarding right-wing, left-wing, neutral, and non-authorities. Traditionalism was significantly positively related to morality judgments regarding right-wing authorities, negatively related to left-

**Table 7.** Integrative Data Analysis of Effects for Obedience to Authorities.

Variables	Submission				Traditionalism			
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	CI	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	CI	<i>p</i>
RW	<b>.33</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b> [.25, .40]</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.09</b>	<b>.03</b>	<b> [.03, .16]</b>	<b>.003</b>
LW	<b>.19</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b> [.11, .26]</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>-.19</b>	<b>.03</b>	<b> [-.25, -.13]</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Neutral	<b>.27</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b> [.20, .35]</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	-.04	.03	[-.11, .02]	.171
Non	<b>.12</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b> [.04, .21]</b>	<b>.002</b>	-.05	.03	[-.12, .01]	.098

Note. Boldface test values are significant. RW = right-wing authority obedience; LW = left-wing authority obedience; Neutral = neutral authority obedience; non = nonauthority obedience; CI = confidence interval.

wing authorities, and not significantly related to neutral or non-authorities.

This aggregated analysis suggests that our key predictions are generally supported. Submission was associated with judging obedience to all authorities to be moral, regardless of their ideology. Surprisingly, Submission was also associated with judging obedience to nonauthorities to be moral, suggesting that perhaps the construct captures a general sense of obeying orders, particularly but not exclusively when those orders come from an authority figure. In contrast, Traditionalism was associated with judging obedience to ideologically similar authorities to be moral but not ideologically irrelevant authorities or nonauthorities.

## Discussion

Across three studies and an integrative data analysis, we found that components of RWA were differentially related to attitudes regarding obedience to authorities, challenging the notion that RWA is a singular construct. Submission was related to judgments that it is moral to obey all authorities regardless of the authorities' political ideology. Traditionalism, in contrast, was related to judgments that it is moral to obey right-wing authorities, immoral to obey left-wing authorities, and was unrelated to neutral and non-authorities. Considered another way, people high in Submission judged it to be more moral to obey right-wing, left-wing, neutral, and at times, non-authorities than did people low in Submission. In Sample 3, Submission was also associated with judging obedience to nonauthorities as moral. Along with evidence from an integrative data analysis, this suggests that Submission might be associated with judgments that obeying all people is moral. In contrast, people high in Traditionalism judged it to be more moral to obey right-wing authorities than did people low in Traditionalism, who judged it to be more moral to obey left-wing authorities than did people high in Traditionalism. Neither people high nor low in Traditionalism had opinions regarding obedience to neutral or non-authorities. These findings provide initial evidence that whom people high in RWA obey depends on the component in question and the characteristics of the target.

Traditionally, RWA has been defined as submission to authority, adherence to traditional norms, and aggression against those who violate these values (Altemeyer, 1981). It has

historically been associated with politically conservative obedience and beliefs. However, these studies show that RWA is not uniformly related to judging obedience as moral. Our findings provide further support for the idea that the RWA components have important and distinct effects on political attitudes. We find that Submission appears to capture a valuation of obedience, regardless of the target's ideological leaning, whereas Traditionalism appears to track loyalty to ideologically similar authorities. This builds on work suggesting that the Submission component of RWA is associated with political intolerance across the political spectrum, whereas the Traditionalism component is associated with left-right ideological considerations (Crawford et al., 2015). Thus, Traditionalism appears more political than Submission.

In addition, our findings support evidence that obedience is characteristic of individuals on both the right and the left (Frimer et al., 2014). Specifically, previous work found that liberals and conservatives each obey ideologically similar authorities. Considering that Traditionalism essentially captures political conservatism, we replicate these findings by showing that people high in Traditionalism (i.e., political conservatives) judge it as moral to obey right-wing authorities, whereas people low in Traditionalism (i.e., political liberals) judge it as moral to obey left-wing authorities. We also extend this work by showing that Submission, the component of RWA capturing obedience, is not necessarily political in nature and is associated with valuing submission to authorities regardless of political ideology. This suggests that a predisposition for submission to authorities might not be exclusive to the political right. Thus, examination of two different components of RWA suggests that judgments regarding obedience to authority exist across the political spectrum, though differently depending on the component of RWA.

Similarly, the present work challenges the idea that RWA is a proxy measure of political conservatism and that its characteristics are almost exclusively representative of political conservatives (e.g., Crawford et al., 2015; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Leone & Chirumbolo, 2008). Despite these assumptions, Altemeyer (1981) originally argued that RWA captures a psychological (rather than political) right-wing disposition; that is, "right wing" refers to support for existing authorities (Altemeyer, 2006). Indeed, recent work found that in Singapore, a country where ethnic diversity is the status quo and encouraged by the government, RWA related to support for

multiculturalism and positivity toward out-groups (Roets, Au, & Van Hiel, 2015). These findings suggest that valuing authority overrides political ideology, resulting in different outcomes depending on the authority in question—the so-called party-over-policy effect (Cohen, 2003). Our work is in line with these findings and supports the idea that RWA as a whole is not necessarily politically “right wing.” The Traditionalism component is political in nature, whereas the Submission component appears more psychological. Considered this way, the original RWA scale captures both political and psychological characteristics. However, when separating the political from the psychological, we find that distinct patterns emerge. The associations between RWA and obedience to authorities are rather nuanced—they depend on the component of RWA and the political ideology of the authority in question.

More broadly, these studies provide additional support for the predictive validity of Duckitt et al.’s (2010) componential RWA scale. Although the unidimensional RWA scale remains the most popular measure of authoritarianism in the psychological sciences, accumulating evidence suggests that the multidimensional RWA scale is better able to illustrate nuanced relationships by differentiating between RWA components (Crawford et al., 2015; Duckitt et al., 2010). The present studies add to this evidence by suggesting that RWA components are differentially related to obedience to authorities, a key component of RWA. Further, the components relate to morality judgments regarding obedience in theoretically sensible ways, providing additional evidence for the componential RWA scale’s predictive validity.

### Limitations and Future Directions

Although informative, these studies are not without limitations. First, they are correlational. Although we believe it makes conceptual sense that the RWA components, which typically capture dispositional beliefs, would lead to judgments about authority figures, we cannot rule out the possibility of the reverse pattern. We also only considered how these components relate to obedience in the United States. Given that RWA appears to vary cross-culturally (Roets et al., 2015), it is possible that the patterns we observed might differ in other contexts, which is an important avenue for future research. Our samples were also nonrepresentative, and we only had participants rate a select few authorities and non-authorities. It would be beneficial to increase generalizability by examining a representative sample and including additional authority and non-authority targets.

In addition, we relied on self-reported perceptions of the morality of obeying authorities. Although self-reports are an accurate way to assess moral judgments, our findings cannot necessarily extend to behavioral obedience.<sup>11</sup> For the purposes of this article, we focus on the attitudinal aspects of obedience. Our findings do clarify associations between RWA and moral judgments regarding obedience, which we believe to be an important question in itself. However, future work should examine obedience behaviors.

## Conclusion

Taken together, these findings suggest that RWA and its association with obedience to authorities are not solely targeted toward supporting the political right. Thus, the widely used unidimensional RWA scale might obscure important nuances. In particular, Submission, the obedience component of RWA, relates to the perception that obeying all authorities, and perhaps also non-authorities, is moral. In contrast, Traditionalism, the ideological component of RWA, relates to judging obedience to ideologically similar authorities as moral and ideologically dissimilar authorities as immoral. Thus, whom people believe it is moral to obey depends on both the component of RWA and the ideology of the authority figure.

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### Supplemental Material

The supplemental material is available in the online version of the article.

### Notes

1. Duckitt, Bizumic, Krauss, and Heled (2010) used “Conservatism” to refer to the construct that we call “Submission.” To avoid confusion between their version of Conservatism and political conservatism, we refer to it as Submission throughout.
2. These results varied by sample. In Samples 1 and 2, Authoritarianism was related to perceiving obedience to neutral authorities as moral. In Sample 2, Authoritarianism was also related to perceiving obedience to right-wing authorities to be moral. Authoritarianism was unrelated to all outcomes in Sample 3.
3. These predictions derive from our expectations in Western samples. The patterns for Traditionalism would likely vary cross-culturally depending on what is considered “traditional” in a given society (see Roets et al., 2015).
4. We unfortunately did not include attention check items in Samples 1 and 2. However, these studies were collected in early 2015 before the recent spike in Amazon.com’s Mechanical Turk data quality issues (e.g., bots).
5. Although participants completed the full scale, we focus on the Submission and Traditionalism subscales.
6. Participants also completed a 4-item social dominance orientation (SDO) scale (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) in random order with the 36-item RWA scale. In Samples 1 and 2, participants also completed a series of exploratory scales, including a 4-item measure of child-rearing values (CRV; Feldman &

Stenner, 1997) and a 4-item traditionalism measure from the American National Election Survey (ANES-T) in random order, followed by a 3-item political engagement measure (Malka, Soto, Inzlicht, & Lelkes, 2014), all on separate pages. In Sample 2, they also completed an ad hoc measure of obedience to authorities. For all samples, we conducted additional analyses including Authoritarianism (i.e., aggression) and SDO as covariates. The patterns of results for Submission and Traditionalism remained the same. We also conducted analyses using the alternate measures of authoritarianism (e.g., CRV, ANES-T). We report both sets of analyses in the Supplemental Materials.

7. In Samples 2 and 3, participants also rated the perceived trustworthiness of all targets (1 = *not at all trustworthy*; 7 = *very trustworthy*) after reporting morality of obedience perceptions.
8. We also conducted all analyses controlling for political ideology to ensure our findings were unique to the right-wing authoritarianism construct. This did not change any results. We report these analyses in the Supplemental Materials.
9. We also tested for possible quadratic effects using this technique. However, we did not have theoretical reasons to predict quadratic effects, so we do not report the results here. Full results of these analyses are reported in Supplemental Materials. Some quadratic effects were significant but generally do not change the interpretation of the effects reported in the main text. However, there were interesting quadratic effects for the associations between Traditionalism and morality of obeying neutral and non-authorities. At low levels of Traditionalism, Traditionalism is unassociated with morality of obeying neutral and non-authorities. At higher levels of Traditionalism, Traditionalism is positively associated with morality of obeying neutral and non-authorities, which strengthens as Traditionalism increases. Due to the exploratory nature of these analyses, we interpret these findings with caution.
10. Because our data came from the same population (i.e., Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk workers), we did not expect heterogeneity across samples, but we tested for possible random effects by allowing the sample dummy codes to interact with both of our predictors. None of these interactions were significant ( $ps > .091$ ), suggesting that effects did not vary by sample. Thus, we report the simpler analyses (West, Welch, & Galecki, 2007), which control for sample on the intercept without allowing it to interact with predictors.
11. We conducted two additional studies designed to measure behavioral obedience, but these studies did not produce consistent results. In these studies, we examined how Submission and Traditionalism related to obedience using the task developed by Haslam, Reicher, and Birney (2014). This task, which required participants to ascribe negative adjectives to increasingly pleasant groups after being prodded that they must continue, produced ceiling effects in both studies. Thus, we do not report the studies in this article. Future research should examine the question of behavioral obedience by other means.

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