

**The Cross-Cultural Validity of the Child-Rearing Authoritarianism Scale:  
Evidence from Mass and Elite Surveys in Russia**

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## **Abstract**

The child-rearing values scale holds promise for public opinion research in comparative politics and international relations. However, its cross-cultural validity has never been investigated. We address this gap by studying the scale's validity in Russia, a particularly interesting case due to its long history of a left-wing authoritarian regime. We also combine data from mass and elite surveys conducted in 2020 to explore the structure and performance of the child-rearing authoritarianism scale across different sub-populations. Using these data, we replicate the overall structure of the scale and confirm the scale's validity. However, we also show that some indicators perform differently across masses and elites. Our findings suggest that child-rearing values are a valid measure of authoritarianism outside the United States but also show that its external linkages can vary across specific groups, depending on the country under examination.

*Keywords:* authoritarianism, child-rearing values, cross-cultural validity, Russia

Authoritarianism, defined as a personality orientation emphasizing social conformity, has been seen as the primary psychological driver of political intolerance and radicalism. However, previous attempts to study the political implications of the authoritarian personality type have faced important measurement challenges. Popular instruments, such as the right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) scale, do not isolate the authoritarian predisposition from political conservatism (Duckitt et al. 2010), thus effectively ignoring the phenomenon of left-wing authoritarianism (Federico, Fisher, and Deason 2017). The child-rearing values scale overcomes this limitation by measuring authoritarianism without asking about explicitly political attitudes (Feldman and Stenner 1997).

Research on the political implications of authoritarianism that uses this measurement strategy has been primarily concentrated in the field of American politics. At the same time, there are reasons to believe that it can be of use in answering important questions in comparative politics and international relations. For instance, the recent anti-democratic backlash and rise of far-right politics in industrial democracies is often attributed to an authoritarian reaction (Norris and Inglehart 2019). Similarly, authoritarianism predicts foreign policy attitudes (Hetherington and Suhay 2011), making it potentially relevant for understanding phenomena like anti-Americanism among international publics.

However, in order to use the child-rearing authoritarianism scale in comparative research, its cross-cultural equivalence should be investigated (Davidov 2009). It is particularly surprising that such tests have not yet been conducted, since there is evidence that the scale is not even perceived similarly by different groups within the United States (Perez and Hetherington 2014).

In this paper, we address this gap by testing the validity of the child-rearing authoritarianism scale in Russia. Russia constitutes an interesting test case for the child-rearing

scale since the performance of the earlier authoritarianism measure, the RWA scale, in the Russian public has been shown to deviate from what is usually found in the United States (McFarland, Ageyev, and Djintcharadze 1996). In our analyses, we also combine elite and mass survey data that allow us to test additional dimensions of the scale's validity by exploring whether it performs similarly within different segments of the population.

We demonstrate that the structure of the child-rearing authoritarianism scale is mostly reproduced in the Russian sample, thus verifying the validity of the measure outside of the U.S. context. At the same time, we document some important differences between Russian masses and elites in the scale's performance. We discuss the implications of our findings for comparative research on the political implications of the authoritarian predisposition.

## **Data**

We used data on elites from the Survey of Russian Elites (SRE) conducted in February–March 2020 by the firm Bashkirova and Partners. Individuals were selected on the basis of positional criteria using a quota sample, with an emphasis on identifying those connected in some way with foreign policy issues (Rivera and Zimmerman 2019). The sample included individuals in Russia's federal bureaucracy, parliament, military and security agencies, state-owned enterprises, private businesses, scientific and educational institutions, and media outlets. The 2020 survey included 245 respondents. The elite sample was 25.3% female and highly educated (with 100% possessing a college or university degree). The mean age was 50.4 years, and 80.7% of respondents identified as ethnic Russians.

The 2020 SRE included a Russian translation of the child-rearing authoritarianism scale. Drawing on the existing literature and previous validity tests, we chose the following covariates for our analysis: disapproval of homosexuality, opposition to abortion, religiosity, national pride,

and anti-immigrant attitudes. Given its importance in the context of Russian politics, we also estimated the relationship between authoritarianism and opposition to political expression. See Online Appendix for the English translations of the survey questions and responses.

The mass survey was conducted online in March 2020; it included only the authoritarianism scale and the selected covariates. The Russian translations of the questions and responses were identical to those in the elite survey and the relative question order was preserved. Respondents were recruited from a panel maintained by the Russian survey firm Anketolog. The mass sample was 61.7% female and highly educated (with 74.4% reporting having a college or university degree).<sup>1</sup> The mean age was 39.6 years, and 88.2% of respondents identified as ethnic Russians.

## Model

We estimate a simple confirmatory-factor analytic (CFA) model with binary indicators. Our data consist of four dichotomous indicator variables  $y_{ki} \in \{0,1\}$  indexed  $k = 1, \dots, 4$  on individuals indexed  $i = 1, \dots, I$ . They are assumed to represent unobserved continuous indicator variables  $y_{ki}^*$  such that:

$$y_{ki} = 0 \text{ if } y_{ki}^* < \tau_k \text{ and } y_{ki} = 1 \text{ if } y_{ki}^* \geq \tau_k,$$

where  $\tau_k$  is the threshold for indicator  $k$ . Unobserved continuous indicators are related to the same unobserved continuous factor:

$$y_{ki}^* = \lambda_k \eta_i + \varepsilon_{ki},$$

where  $\lambda_k$  is the factor loading for indicator  $k$ ,  $\eta_i$  is the latent factor score for individual  $i$ , and  $\varepsilon_{ki}$  is the residual. Assume that the residuals have a standard normal distribution and constrain factor

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<sup>1</sup> In 2016, 54% of Russian adults had tertiary education, the second-highest percentage of OECD countries ([https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2016/russian-federation\\_eag-2016-76-en](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2016/russian-federation_eag-2016-76-en)).

loading for the first indicator:  $\lambda_1 = 1$ . Then the factor loading and threshold parameters can be estimated from the data at hand.

The model parameters have intuitive interpretations. The factor loading represents the quality of an indicator—that is, how closely it corresponds to the underlying latent factor. The threshold represents the “difficulty” of an indicator—that is, the score on the latent factor that is needed to score a “1” on the respective item.

## Results

First, we estimate the CFA models. We begin by running the model separately for the mass and elite samples (columns 1 and 2 in Table 1). The results show that the factor loadings are positive and non-trivial in magnitude. There is an exception, however: the factor loading for being well-behaved in the mass sample is low and not reliably different from zero. Moreover, there are differences in the relative importance of the indicators: respect for elders works best in the mass sample while obedience works best in the elite sample. Finally, a preference for good manners has a negative threshold in the mass sample but a positive threshold in the elite sample.

**Table 1.** Results of the CFA model

	(1) Masses	(2) Elites	(3) Pooled 1	(4) Pooled 2
Factor loadings ( $\lambda$ )				
Respect for elders (vs. independence)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Good manners (vs. curiosity)	0.80 (0.19)	1.03 (0.22)	1.85 (0.46)	0.91 (0.21)
Obedience (vs. self-reliance)	0.72 (0.18)	1.69 (0.35)	1.14 (0.23)	0.69 (0.17)
Being well-behaved (vs. being considerate)	0.22 (0.14)	1.18 (0.23)	0.64 (0.17)	0.36 (0.10)
Thresholds ( $\tau$ )				
Respect for elders (vs. independence)	-0.72 (0.09)	-0.44 (0.08)	-0.83 (0.08)	-0.73 (0.09)
Good manners (vs. curiosity)	-0.30 (0.08)	0.45 (0.08)	-0.22 (0.08)	See note
Obedience (vs. self-reliance)	0.80 (0.09)	0.61 (0.09)	0.76 (0.09)	0.83 (0.09)
Being well-behaved (vs. being considerate)	0.67 (0.09)	0.58 (0.09)	0.62 (0.08)	0.64 (0.08)
Fit indices				
$\chi^2$ (degrees of freedom)	6.94 (2)	9.82 (2)	57.3 (6)	17.1 (5)
RMSEA	.098	.126	.185	.098
CFI	.944	.940	.765	.945
<i>N</i>	255	245	500	500

*Note.* Standard errors are in parentheses. The “respect for elders” factor loading is constrained to achieve identification. The “good manners” threshold estimates in “Pooled 2” model are -0.30 (0.08) in the mass sample and 1.37 (0.44) in the elite sample.

Next, we explore the CFA model performance in the pooled sample. We start by estimating the model in which indicator-specific factor loadings and thresholds are constrained to be equal for mass and elite respondents (column 3 in Table 1). Since it shows a poor fit (e.g., CFI < .8), we re-estimate it with the threshold for good manners varying across the two subsamples (column 4). This model shows good fit indices comparable to those obtained when the CFA models for the mass and elite samples are run separately (e.g., CFI  $\approx$  .95). These results suggest that, while the factorial structures for mass and elite respondents are close, the response thresholds are clearly different—with a preference for good manners being the problematic item.

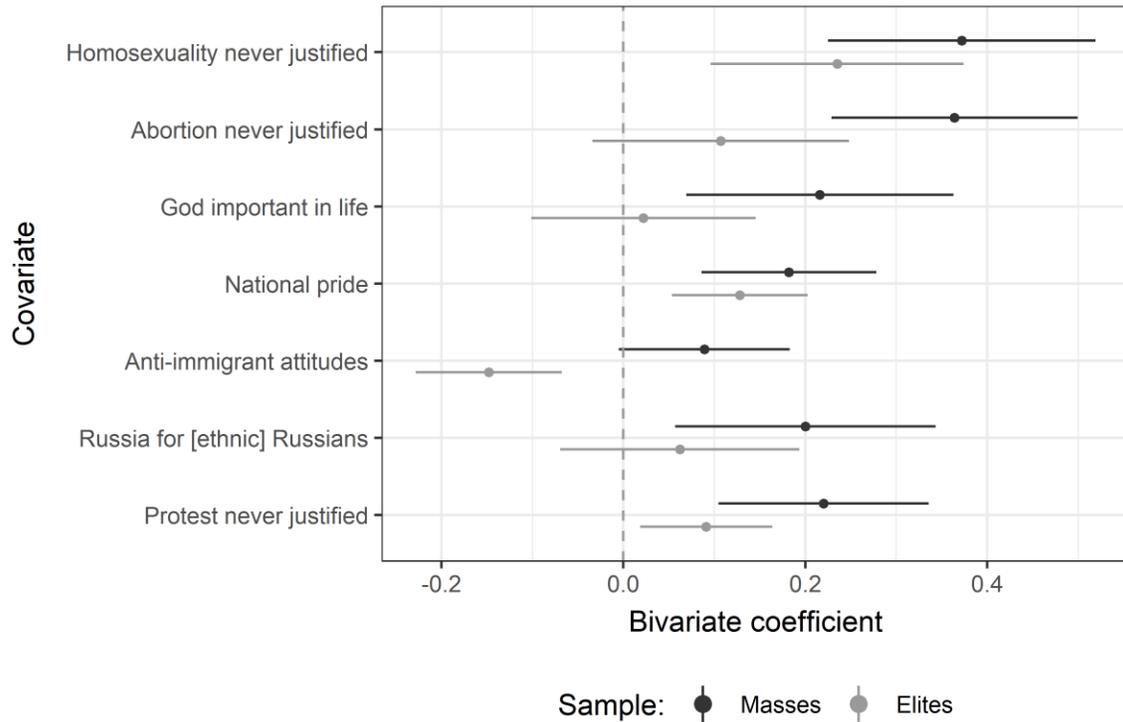
Figure 1 then compares external linkages of the authoritarianism scale as usually constructed by applied researchers—the simple average of the four indicator items—in the mass and elite samples. For this analysis, all variables are recoded to the same 0–1 range for comparability reasons. Bivariate relationships are estimated using simple OLS regressions. The results show that, in general, authoritarianism is positively related to moral conservatism, religiosity, national pride, and opposition to political protests. At the same time, the coefficient estimates are consistently lower in the elite sample—with some (opposition to abortion, importance of God) being not reliably different from zero.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the relationship between authoritarianism and anti-immigrant attitudes is negative in the elite sample and very low in the mass sample. As a robustness check, we include a popular measure of ethnic exclusionism in the Russian context: respondents’ support for the slogan, “Russia is for [ethnic] Russians!”<sup>3</sup> This measure is positively related to authoritarianism in the mass sample—but not reliably different from zero in the elite sample. Overall, these findings are in line with previous research on the

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<sup>2</sup> Importantly, these differences are not due to unequal levels of attitudinal consensus in the two samples: the variances on all variables are comparable for masses and elites (see Table A1 in Online Appendix).

<sup>3</sup> In Russian, there are different terms for citizens of Russia (*rossiyane*) and ethnic Russians (*russkie*). However, they are both conventionally translated into English as simply “Russians.”

United States demonstrating that external linkages of the child-rearing authoritarianism scale, especially ones concerning attitudes to immigration and ethnic minorities, may differ across certain sub-populations (Perez and Hetherington 2014).



**Figure 1.** Covariates of the child-rearing scale in the mass and elite samples

## Conclusion

The results in this paper suggest that the child-rearing scale is a cross-culturally valid measure of the authoritarian predisposition. We replicate the structure of the scale in Russia—a particularly interesting case due to its history of left-wing authoritarianism. Moreover, the factorial structure of the child-rearing authoritarianism scale is found to be the same in both the mass and elite survey data. Therefore, according to our results, the child-rearing authoritarianism scale is a suitable instrument for conducting research on political consequences of personality orientations outside of the United States.

At the same time, we find a few important differences between Russian masses and elites regarding the way in which the scale operates. First, one's preference for a child to be well-behaved seems to be a relatively weak indicator of authoritarianism in the mass sample. Second, one of the four indicators, preference for good manners vs. curiosity, returns highly disparate thresholds, with mass respondents preferring good manners and elite respondents preferring curiosity. In practical terms, this means that the mean authoritarianism scores across Russian masses and elites are not perfectly comparable. It is worth exploring whether the same mass–elite divide on good manners vs. curiosity in child-rearing values is found in other societies. Third, the connection between authoritarianism and anti-immigrant attitudes is different across the two samples: the relationship is positive but weak for mass respondents and negative for elite respondents. The reason for this finding is unclear. It might be due to the elite sector being more attuned to president Vladimir Putin's negative view of ethnic nationalism; after all, as Taylor (2018, 21) writes, “nationalism should not be thought of as a core part of the [Putinist] code.”

In conclusion, we caution readers against interpreting the latter finding as an indication that the child-rearing scale is not a valid measure of authoritarianism in Russia, or among Russian elites in particular. On the contrary, recent findings suggest that the relationship between authoritarianism and prejudice is conditional: authoritarians express prejudiced views when such expression is perceived as socially sanctioned (Oyamot et al. 2017). The precise mechanisms underlying the non-conventional relationships between authoritarianism and anti-immigrant attitudes exhibited by Russian masses and elites should be addressed in future research.

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## Online Appendix

The surveys were fielded in Russian. These are English translations. The wording of the questions, as well as their relative order, are identical in the elite and mass surveys. Items are presented here in the same relative order as shown to respondents in the surveys.

### **Moral conservatism and ethnic exclusionism**

“Below are some statements about which there are various points of view. To what degree do you agree or disagree with each of them?”

- The idea of “Russia is for Russians [*russkikh*]!”
- Homosexuality can never be justified.
- Abortion can never be justified.

Responses were coded from 1 = *Completely agree* to 5 = *Completely disagree*.

Responses were recoded so that greater values indicate higher levels of moral conservatism and ethnic exclusionism.

### **Opposition to political protests**

“Below you can see various types of political protest activity in which people can engage. Rate each of these activities on a ten-point scale according to how justifiable they are.”

- Submitting petitions
- Participating in a boycott
- Attending demonstrations sanctioned by the government
- Attending unsanctioned demonstrations
- Participating in a strike
- Protesting on social media

Responses were coded from 1 = *Completely unjustifiable* to 10 = *Completely justifiable*.

The index of opposition to political protests was calculated as the simple average of these items.  
Scale reliability is 0.88 (Cronbach's alpha).

### **National pride**

“Are you very proud, proud, not very proud, or not proud at all of each of the following?”

- The state of democracy in Russia
- Russia's political influence in the world
- Russia's economic achievements
- Russia's armed forces
- Russia's history

Responses were coded from 1 = *Very proud* to 4 = *Not proud at all*.

Responses were recoded so that greater values indicate higher levels of national pride.

The index of national pride was calculated as the simple average of these items.

Scale reliability is 0.84 (Cronbach's alpha).

### **Anti-immigrant attitudes**

“At the present time, immigrants—citizens of other countries, including the former Soviet republics—live in Russia. Do you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements?”

- Immigrants make Russia more open to new ideas and cultural influences.
- Immigrants cause an increase in the crime rate.
- Immigrants are helpful for the development of the Russian economy.
- Immigrants take jobs away from Russians.

Responses were coded from 1 = *Completely agree* to 4 = *Completely disagree*.

Responses were recoded so that greater values indicated higher levels of anti-immigrant attitudes.

The index of anti-immigrant attitudes was calculated as the simple average of these items.

Scale reliability is 0.73 (Cronbach's alpha).

### **Authoritarianism**

“Although there are a number of qualities that people feel that children should have, every person thinks that some qualities 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.”

- Independence or respect for elders
- Curiosity or good manners
- Obedience or self-reliance
- Being considerate or well-behaved

Responses were coded as 1 if a pro-authoritarian quality is selected (respect for elders, good manners, obedience, being well-behaved) and 0 otherwise.

### **Religiosity**

“How important is God in your life? Please use this scale to indicate: 10 means ‘very important’ and 1 means ‘not at all important.’”

**Table A1.** Descriptive statistics

	Range	Mass sample		Elite sample	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Authoritarianism indicators</b>					
Respect for elders (vs. independence)	0–1	0.76	0.43	0.67	0.47
Good manners (vs. curiosity)	0–1	0.62	0.49	0.33	0.47
Obedience (vs. self-reliance)	0–1	0.21	0.41	0.27	0.46
Being well-behaved (vs. being considerate)	0–1	0.25	0.43	0.28	0.45
<b>Covariates</b>					
Homosexuality never justified	1–5	3.67	1.35	3.69	1.28
Abortion never justified	1–5	2.69	1.26	2.83	1.23
God important in life	1–10	6.48	2.95	5.76	2.68
National pride	1–4	2.47	0.65	2.95	0.55
Anti-immigrant attitudes	1–4	2.29	0.62	2.26	0.60
Support “Russia is for [ethnic] Russians”	1–5	2.76	1.28	2.51	1.26
Oppose political protest	1–10	4.73	2.35	5.18	1.60

*Note.*  $N = 255$  (mass sample) and 245 (elite sample)