**Abstract**

Right Wing Authoritarianism refers to an individuals’ deference toward authority figures, tendency to act out in said authority figure’s name, and tendency toward conformity. The current research examined how individuals Right Wing Authoritarian orientations are related to individuals’ feelings of safety in their local community. Participants completed a Right Wing Authoritarianism, Feelings of Safety, and Police Legitimacy scale. The results indicated that the higher the individual is in Right Wing Authoritarian orientations, the safer they feel; however, that effect is mediated by how legitimate they believe law enforcement to be. Implications for violent criminal behavior and law enforcement are discussed.

***The Relationship Between Right Wing Authoritarianism and Perceived Feelings of Safety***

The Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) scale (Altemeyer 1981, 1988, 2006, 2022), is an individual difference variable that measures attitudes regarding three covarying factors including, authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism. Authoritarian submission refers to the degree to which individuals defer to established authorities (government leaders, law enforcement, military personnel). Authoritarian aggression, meanwhile, focuses on individuals’ disdain toward out-groups when authorities sanction said aggression. Lastly, conventionalism refers to how individuals support traditional values, particularly those sanctioned by authorities (Saunders & Ngo, 2017). Individuals high in RWA are more likely to demonstrate aggression, hostility, and/or punitive control toward those who they view as “social deviants” when they believe that doing so is supported by authority figures. Furthermore, people who deviate from societal norms may be seen as suspicious and threatening characters by resisting tradition and/or criticizing the system. Those high in RWA tend to conform to traditional religious, social, and moral standards (patriotism, marriage, sex), which further reinforces their feelings of uncertainty to change (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2018). RWA is a frequent predictor of multiple research areas in the legal system including violence (Benjamin, 2006), prejudice (Altemeyer, 1981), and jury decision making (Sivasubramaniam, 2020).

The purpose of this study is to examine how individuals Right Wing Authoritarian (RWA) orientations are related to their feelings of safety in their local community. Individuals with higher RWA scores perceive the world as a threatening and dangerous place. They are motivated by their need for safety and security in their community, as can be seen in their preference toward crime control orientations (Miller & Peters, 2021). Therefore, they attempt to maintain social order by deferring to those whom they view as legitimate societal leaders with legal and moral authority over the behavior of others (Altemeyer 1988). Given this view of the world being dangerous, one possible outcome of this study is that individuals high in RWA could feel less secure in their safety. Another possibility is that individuals high in RWA would actually feel safer in their local community due to their trust in authority figures; however, this would only be true insomuch as they believe said authority figures (in this case law enforcement) to be legitimate.

**Methods**

**Participants**

Participants consisted of 503 (47.2% female, 47% male, 4.3% other, Mean Age = 37.01, SD = 12.91) adult collected online via Prolific.

**Materials**

After agreeing to the consent form, participants were presented with the following scales: 10 item Right Wing Authoritarian (RWA), Feelings of Safety (FOS), and Police Legitimacy (PL). The RWA scale (Cronbach’s alpha = .889, note all Cronbach’s alphas are for the current study), measures the authoritarian follower personality. The ten question scale prompts participants to respond with statements such as “Our country desperately needs a mighty leader who will do what has to be done to destroy the radical new ways and sinfulness that are ruining us” and “Everyone should have their own lifestyle, religious beliefs, and sexual preferences, even if it makes them different from everyone else\*” (Altemeyer, 2022) and prompting them to respond by indicating their agreement with each statement on a Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The FOS scale (Cronbach’s alpha = .869) asks participants to report on their feelings of safety about the block they live on through questions including “You are afraid of being attacked on your block” and “In general it is safe to walk on your block at night” with higher scores indicating feeling safer (Goldberg, White, & Weisburd, 2019). The PL scale assesses feelings regarding the legitimacy of local law enforcement figures and consists of four components: lawfulness, procedural fairness, distributive fairness, and police effectiveness. These scales are assessed though statements such as “People should obey the law even if it goes against what they think is right” and “It is difficult to break the law and keep your self-respect” with higher scores indicating higher trust in law enforcement (Tankebe, Reisig, & Wang, 2016).

**Results**

Hayes (2022) PROCESS macro (model 4) was utilized to examine the relationship between RWA (*M* = 18.42, *SD* = 12.27) and FOS (*M* = 78.13, *SD* = 21.57) as mediated by PL (*M* = 42.65, *SD* = 22.22). The effect RWA on PL (path a) was significant: *b* = 1.01, *se* = 0.07, *t* = 14.95, *95% CI* [0.87, 1.14]. The effect PL on FOS (path b) was also significant, *b* = 0.75, *se* = 0.30, *t* = 25.44, *95% CI* [0.70, 0.81]. The direct effect of RWA on FOS (path c) was significant, *b* = 0.14, *se* = 0.54, *t* = 2.63, *95% CI* [0.04, 0.25]. The indirect effect of RWA on FOS through PL (path c’) was significant, *Effect* = 0.77, *se* = 0.06, *95% CI* [0.66, 0.88], indicating PL was a significant mediator.

**Discussion**

The results found that the higher one is in Right Wing Authoritarian orientations, the safer they feel; however, that effect is mediated by how legitimate they believe that they police are. This finding has significant implications for both politics and law enforcement. A recent strategy in politics, on both the right (Fried, 2020) and left (Weichselbaum, 2021), has been to question the legitimacy of law enforcement figures. These findings suggest that, at least for those on the right side of the political spectrum, it could result in increased fear and anxiety. While the effects of political success are less clear, we do know from a considerable amount of previous research (e.g. Zhan et al, 2015) that fear and anxiety increases aggression and reduces critical thinking. This in turn could lead to increases in violence and crime, especially with the prevalence of firearms among right leaning populations, creating further difficulties for law enforcement to reduce criminal activity. Further research should examine if similar results would be found on the left side of the spectrum by utilizing a Left Wing Authoritarian scale (Costello et al, 2022).