

ESTABLISHING PREDICTORS OF LATITUDE OF ACCEPTANCE-REJECTION AND ATTITUDINAL INTENSITY: A COMPARISON OF ASSUMPTIONS OF SOCIAL JUDGMENT AND AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY THEORIES

JAMES C. McCROSKEY and MICHAEL BURGOON

TWO different theoretical positions about the nature of attitudes and attitude change have provided the basis for a wealth of recent research. Social Judgment Theory¹ claims that people have latitudes of acceptance-rejection and attitudinal intensities which are source and/or concept-specific. That is, people have varying degrees of acceptance-rejection of sources and concepts that depend on who the source is and what the topic of communication happens to be. According to this theory, people have wide latitudes of acceptance or rejection on certain specific issues and much narrower latitudes on others. The intensity of prime attitudinal position is also claimed to be topic-dependent. Many studies have been conducted based on this assumption without empirically establishing its validity. The typical experimental paradigm uses one attitudinal issue and proceeds to test derivations of Social Judgment Theory without comparisons across topics.

Rokeach² in his development of theoretical propositions about the authoritarian personality posits what appears to be an opposite assumption. He claims that people evaluate sources and concepts without regard to topic. This theory suggests that people have an enduring personality syndrome that predicts how open or accepting they are of concepts and people in general. This focuses on global classifications for persons and *not* on specific topics and sources. An as yet untested deductive speculation from Rokeach's work would suggest that highly dogmatic people should have wider latitudes of rejection on all topics. Moreover, the highly dogmatic person would evaluate sources in a similar closed manner. In general, low dogmatic types should be more open-minded across topics and sources and have narrower latitudes of rejection.

In his original research, Rokeach sought to establish the dogmatism scale to be free of political ideology. The earlier F-Scale³ measured authoritarianism of the right. The dogmatism scale sought to measure authoritarianism across the political spectrum. The political liberal is supposedly as capable of

Mr. McCroskey is Professor and Chairman in the Department of Speech Communication at West Virginia University. Mr. Burgoon is Associate Professor of Speech at the University of Florida.

¹ See Carolyn W. Sherif, Muzafer Sherif, and Roger E. Nebergall, *Attitude and Attitude Change* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1965); and Carolyn W. Sherif and Muzafer Sherif (eds.), *Attitude, Ego-Involvement, and Change* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1968) pp. 105-139.

² Milton Rokeach, *The Open and Closed Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1960).

³ T. W. Adorno, Else/Frenkel-Brunswick, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1950).

being closed-minded as his counterpart on the right. Thus, a liberal would have a wide latitude of rejection on conservatively worded topics or conservative sources; the dogmatic conservative would have wide rejection latitudes on liberal topics and sources.

The purpose of this investigation was to test these opposing conceptions. The question of whether latitudes and prime attitudinal positions are topic-specific or are person-specific and best predicted by a personality syndrome was the prime concern in this study. A second important step was to determine if the liberal-conservative nature of the topic or source predicted either how wide the latitudes were or whether dogmatism was a predictor of evaluation of messages and sources across the political spectrum.

METHOD

Subjects were 98 undergraduates at Michigan State University. Using the Diab method,⁴ subjects reacted to 10 topics on six seven-interval semantic differential-type scales. The topics varied on political liberalism-conservatism. On each topic, latitude of acceptance, latitude of rejection, and attitude scores were computed for each subject. The attitude score had a potential range of 6 (least favorable) to 42 (most favorable).

In addition, 10 sources were selected for evaluation. On an *a-priori* basis, five sources were labeled conservative (George Wallace, Melvin Laird, Ronald Reagan, Barry Goldwater, and Richard Daly). The five other sources were called

liberal (Eugene McCarthy, Edward Kennedy, Nelson Rockefeller, George McGovern, and William Fulbright). The subjects evaluated the sources on six seven-interval semantic differential-type scales again using the Diab technique to establish latitudes and prime attitudinal positions.

The 40 item dogmatism scale was administered to all subjects and each person was asked to rate himself on two liberal-conservative semantic differential-type scales. Scores on this measure could range from 2 (most liberal) to 14 (most conservative).

RESULTS

The first statistical analysis was performed on the latitude of acceptance, latitude of rejection, and prime attitude scores. If Social Judgment Theory is correct and the latitude and attitude scores are topic-specific, two different factor structures might appear. The first alternative would be to have no interpretable results because each individual would idiosyncratically mark the scales and randomly vary across concepts and sources. A second possibility would be to have each source or concept emerge as a factor. That is, 10 concept factors would emerge with the latitude of acceptance and rejection and attitude intensity loading on the latent factor.

If the evaluations are person-specific, the latitude of acceptance scores for all 10 topics should load on one prime factor. Similarly the 10 latitude of rejection scores should form a second factor; the attitude intensity scores would emerge as a third factor.

The data were submitted to a varimax rotation to produce factors. Unities were inserted in the diagonals. Table 1 includes the rotated three factor solution for the concepts.

The factor loadings on latitude of ac-

⁴ See for example Lufty N. Diab, "Some Limitations of Existing Scales in Measurement of Social Attitudes," *Psychological Reports*, 17 (1965), 427-430, and Lufty N. Diab, "Studies in Social Attitudes: I. Variations in Latitudes of Acceptance and Rejection as a Function of Varying Positions on a Controversial Social Issue," *Journal of Social Psychology*, 67 (1965) 283-295. This measures both prime attitude position and determines mean latitude of acceptance and rejection scores.

TABLE 1
ROTATED FACTOR STRUCTURE - TEN CONCEPTS

Concept-Measure		FACTOR 1 Latitude of Acceptance	FACTOR 2 Latitude of Rejection	FACTOR 3 Prime Attitude	EXPECTED FACTOR
1	Acc	.59*	.28	.13	1
	Rej	.33	.60*	.18	2
	Att	.16	.21	.46*	3
2	Acc	.74*	.25	.03	1
	Rej	.14	.81*	.01	2
	Att	.13	.24	.48*	3
3	Acc	.48*	.46	.06	1
	Rej	.50	.55*	.01	2
	Att	.10	.10	.73*	3
4	Acc	.82*	.09	.18	1
	Rej	.04	.85*	.11	2
	Att	.35	.19	.39*	3
5	Acc	.86*	.15	.05	1
	Rej	.10	.61*	.12	2
	Att	.03	.08	.59*	3
6	Acc	.70*	.40	.03	1
	Rej	.48	.54*	.08	2
	Att	.38*	.24	.35	3**
7	Acc	.80*	.01	.01	1
	Rej	.01	.77*	.14	2
	Att	.09	.13	.45*	3
8	Acc	.84*	.09	.03	1
	Rej	.06	.78*	.11	2
	Att	.27	.27	.40*	3
9	Acc	.89*	.03	.03	1
	Rej	.20	.76*	.01	2
	Att	.12	.04	.64*	3
10	Acc	.81*	.10	.12	1
	Rej	.02	.76*	.00	2
	Att	.26	.14	.71*	3

The Expected Factor Loading is based on Rokeach's Authoritarian Personality. This assumes person-specific evaluation.

*Highest loading.

**Only one item did not load on the expected factor. Variance accounted for by three factors. 53%.

ceptance and rejection are strong and relatively pure. The 10 acceptance scores across all topics form one factor; the 10 rejection scores form another factor. This conforms to expectations that the latitudes are common to people and are not topic-specific. The attitudinal intensity factor is less strong and pure but independent of the latitude scores. In other words, peoples' attitudinal polarity does not influence widths of latitude of acceptance and/or rejection.

A similar factor analysis was performed on the two latitude scores and attitudinal position scores on the 10 sources. The results are presented in Table 2.

This factor structure in Table 2 is an almost perfect confirmation of the person-specific prediction. All five *a-priori* liberal sources loaded on one factor; moreover, the *a-priori* conservative sources loaded on an independent factor. One source on the liberal (Fulbright)

TABLE 2
ROTATED FACTOR STRUCTURE — TEN SOURCES

Source	Measure	FACTOR 1 Latitude of Acceptance	FACTOR 2 Latitude of Rejection	FACTOR 3 Attitude- Liberal Source	FACTOR 4 Attitude- Conservative Source	Expected Factor
Richard Daly	Acc	.79*	.13	.06	.08	1
	Rej	.10	.80*	.09	.15	2
	Att	.11	.07	.29	.63*	4
Melvin Laird	Acc	.90*	.07	.08	.03	1
	Rej	.05	.84*	.04	.03	2
	Att	.14	.08	.36	.45*	4
George Wallace	Acc	.87*	.15	.03	.07	1
	Rej	.25	.80*	.01	.02	2
	Att	.09	.03	.17	.64*	4
Ronald Reagan	Acc	.88*	.16	.05	.03	1
	Rej	.17	.82*	.05	.13	2
	Att	.02	.03	.03	.68*	4
Barry Goldwater	Acc	.92*	.10	.03	.06	1
	Rej	.17	.84*	.05	.13	2
	Att	.08	.17	.17	.69*	4
George McGovern	Acc	.88*	.03	.10	.06	1
	Rej	.03	.84*	.04	.06	2
	Att	.17	.10	.60*	.13	3
Nelson Rockefeller	Acc	.88*	.16	.01	.01	1
	Rej	.08	.87*	.12	.04	2
	Att	.04	.07	.77*	.09	3
Eugene McCarthy	Acc	.87*	.22	.09	.10	1
	Rej	.23	.84*	.11	.08	2
	Att	.15	.04	.80*	.12	3
William Fulbright	Acc	.87*	.15	.02	.11	1
	Rej	.09	.86*	.03	.05	2
	Att	.22	.04	.40*	.23	3
Edward Kennedy	Acc	.81*	.29	.04	.02	1
	Rej	.20	.75*	.10	.09	2
	Att	.16	.03	.58*	.15	3

*Highest loading. All items loaded on expected factor. Variance accounted for by four factors: 66%.

and one on the conservative (Laird) had less strong loadings. This is probably because these were the least well known sources and this induced variance in the evaluations. The loadings on acceptance and rejection are extremely high and pure. Obviously across *all* sources, people responded similarly on the latitude measures; this would seriously call into question the notion that the latitudes are source or topic dependent.

The preceding factor analyses merely confirm that people tend to demonstrate

regularities in width of latitude of acceptance and rejection and attitudinal intensity across sources and topics. The next step in this investigation was to determine if dogmatism predicted latitudes and attitudinal intensity. Using multiple regression techniques to covary the liberal-conservative measure and predict from dogmatism, dogmatism predicted only attitudes toward conservative topics. High dogmatics also tended to be more intensely unfavorable toward liberal sources (Beta Weight = .19, *p*

<.06). Dogmatism did not predict the size of latitude of acceptance or rejection on either source or topic.

The self-reports of liberalism-conservatism also tended to be a significant predictor. When dogmatism was covaried, significant prediction obtained on attitudes toward concepts and sources; however, this measure did not predict the width of the latitudes except in one instance.

TABLE 3
MULTIPLE REGRESSION OF
LIBERALISM-CONSERVATISM ON LATITUDES OF
ACCEPTANCE REJECTION AND ATTITUDES
TOWARD SOURCES AND CONCEPTS

PREDICTOR:	Liberalism-Conservatism	
CRITERION	BETA WEIGHT	P
Attitudes Toward Liberal Concepts	-.21	<.04
Latitudes of Acceptance Liberal Concepts	.10	NSD
Latitudes of Rejection Liberal Concepts	.10	NSD
Attitudes Toward Conservative Concepts	.37	<.01
Latitudes of Acceptance Conservative Concepts	.25	<.02
Latitudes of Rejection Conservative Concepts	-.04	NSD
Attitudes Toward Liberal Sources	-.17	<.08
Latitudes of Acceptance Liberal Sources	.11	NSD
Latitudes of Rejection Liberal Sources	.10	NSD
Attitudes Toward Conservative Sources	.45	<.01
Latitudes of Acceptance Conservative Sources	.06	NED
Latitudes of Rejection Conservative Sources	-.16	NSD

A negative beta weight indicates a negative correlation with conservatism.

The results indicate that conservatives are more favorable toward conservative concepts (Beta Weight = .37, $p < .01$) and sources (Beta Weight = .45, $p < .01$). Liberals were more favorable toward liberal concepts (Beta Weight = .21, $p < .04$) but no significant differences were found in their evaluations of lib-

eral sources. Only in one instance did the self-report measure latitude. Conservatives have a wider latitude of acceptance on conservative topics (Beta Weight = .25, $p < .02$) but there are no other significant latitude predictions. There is no indication that conservatives or liberals differ on latitudes of rejection; moreover, liberals do not have wider latitude of acceptance on liberal topics.

DISCUSSION

The results question the original assumption posited by Social Judgment Theory that latitudes of acceptance-rejection and attitude intensity are topic-specific. The factor analyses clearly indicate that people have relatively invariant widths of latitudes of acceptance and rejection across topics and sources. Moreover, absolute intensity of attitudinal position does not appear to be topic-specific but remains a constant marking behavior across topics and sources. People who have wide latitudes have them on all topics; conversely people with narrow latitudes exhibit this marking behavior across topics and sources. Those people who deviate a great deal from neutrality, whether positive or negative, polarize their judgments on sources and topics in general. This finding is important for it can allow researchers to specify variables that are person-specific to further test Social Judgment Theory assumptions.

The second part of this investigation looked at two person-specific variables to attempt to predict attitude intensity and latitude of acceptance-rejection. Only limited success in predicting from dogmatism scores obtained. High dogmatics were more favorable toward conservative topics and low dogmatics were more favorable toward liberal topics. However, no evidence demonstrated that dogmatism affected latitudes of accept-

ance or rejection. These findings indicate that more research needs to be completed to determine if dogmatism is independent of political ideology. Given the findings that high dogmatics are more favorable on conservative topics and low dogmatics are more favorable about liberal topics, this assumption must be questioned.⁵ It would also seem that high dogmatics should demonstrate differences in openness or acceptance and closed-mindedness or rejection when compared with low dogmatics. The latitude measures do not support this. In conclusion, dogmatism alone is not

a particularly useful predictor and as with previous research, a liberal bias obtained.

The self-report liberal-conservative measure did, as expected, indicate that conservatives were more favorable toward conservative topics and sources; liberals were more favorable toward liberal topics, but not liberal sources. However, this measure did not predict latitudes except in the case of conservatives having wider latitudes of acceptance on conservative topics. This measure certainly has limited utility in understanding the person-specific variables that influence the latitudes of acceptance-rejection. It does, however, have predictive utility with attitudinal position.

With all of the empirical support for Social Judgment Theory available, further research needs to search for predictors of latitudes of acceptance and rejection. The concepts of latitude of acceptance-rejection are central to the theory and their determinants need to be empirically established.

⁵ Similar results questioning the construct validity of the dogmatism scale as a measure of general authoritarianism have obtained. In fact low dogmatism has been associated with leftism and high dogmatism with rightism. See, for example, Herbert W. Simons and Nancy Neff Berkowitz, "Rokeach's Dogmatism Scale and Leftist Bias," *SM*, 36 (1969), 459-463, and Milton Rokeach, "Political and Religious Dogmatism: An Alternative to the Authoritarian Personality," *Psychological Monographs*, 70 (No. 18, whole no. 425, 1956), and Herbert W. Simons, "Dogmatism Scales and Leftist Bias," *SM*, 35 (1968), 149-153. The leftist bias found in this investigation is consistent with these prior research findings.