# CAN IT HAPPEN HERE?

## Authoritarianism in America

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THE WORLD ACCORDING TO STAR WARS

institutions. That's true for purposes of conserving critical resources. But it's also true for purposes of drawing public attention and debate.

In today's Western liberal consumerist democracies, citizen engagement can't be taken for granted. It must be husbanded and preserved, treated as a resource to be deployed when the stakes are high and the polity is in some danger. Our "it" is not what it was. Nor is our "here."



# AUTHORITARIANISM IS NOT A MOMENTARY MADNESS, BUT AN ETERNAL DYNAMIC WITHIN LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES

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## INTRODUCTION

Western liberal democracy seems to be in the grip of a momentary madness, or so the story goes. All across the West, publics we might have hoped were evolving in linear fashion into more perfect democratic citizens have "suddenly" been overcome by a "wave" of "far-right" fervor. They bristle with nationalism and anti-globalism, xenophobia, and isolationism. There are calls to ban immigration, to deport "illegals," and to abandon asylum obligations. Migrants and refugees are seen as threats to national security: as terrorists in waiting or in the making. Significant public resources are to be diverted to their surveillance and to thwarting the evils they would otherwise surely perpetrate. Beyond their depiction

as "the enemy within," they are deemed an existential threat to culture and national identity, competitors for jobs, and a brake on national prosperity. Leaders are exhorted to favor their own countrymen over "aliens" and outsiders, and to shield them from the brutal forces of global trade with protectionism.

These unexpected public demands seem to travel with an angry rejection of the leaders and institutions that pulled these "politically incorrect" options from the policy menu. There is a fundamentally antidemocratic mood afoot that has lost patience, in particular, with the strictures of political correctness. In these conditions, formerly reviled parties and movements that once languished on the fringes have become viable—acceptable if not quite respectable. The newfound popularity of these parties—some with past or present ties to Nazi ideology—is fueled by perceptions that the political mainstream has lost touch with those they are meant to represent. "Self-serving" political elites, leaders viewed as remote from regular folk but "pandering" to minorities, seem to feed into a growing sense that "this is not my government" and "these are not my people." This may well be the animating spirit at the heart of what has come to be called "far-right populism."

While the origins of these developments are open to question, the purported outcomes have unquestionably been shocking to many. Donald Trump ascended to the American presidency. Partisanship and ideology aside, it is hard to imagine that Trump's temperament and experience equip him for leadership of the free world. Britain voted to





exit the European Union in a history-changing referendum. And the French flirted dangerously with Le Front National. While (to many commentators' palpable relief) Marine Le Pen was ultimately held to "just" 35 percent of the presidential vote, this can be seen as a victory over far-right populism only compared with what might have been. The same can be said regarding the recent performance of the Freedom Party's Norbert Hofer in Austria's presidential election. In both cases, the far-right populist candidate came close to winning the presidency of a major Western nation, and note, in neither case facing off against a contender from the traditional "left" or "right." Geert Wilders's Party for Freedom was blocked from the Dutch governing coalition, despite placing second, only via the determined collusion of all his mainstream opponents. Recent general elections in Germany and Austria have likewise seen a marked "populist" surge that upended "normal" politics. Whatever these political brands might once have represented, "left" versus "right" is being overturned in a new game of "insiders" versus "outsiders" . . . or so it seems.

## POPULISM AS A PERSON–SITUATION INTERACTION

So what is this far-right populism? And where has it "suddenly" come from? From its alleged suddenness, many analysts have arrived at explanations that are redolent of sudden ill health. By this account, far-right populism is a momentary madness brought on by recent environmental stressors (the global financial crisis, the decline of manufacturing, the inevitable dislocations of globalism) and exploited by irresponsible leaders who deflect the patients' anxieties onto

easy scapegoats (migrants, refugees, terrorists) for their own political gain. Central to this diagnosis is the notion that the patients' fears are irrational and can be alleviated by more responsible treatment and the reduction of stress (by boosting the economy or increasing social supports). With appropriate interventions and the removal of toxic influences, it is thought that our populists will eventually "snap out of it" and come back to their senses.

The social scientific literature on populism crosses many disciplines, and the concept is frequently and casually deployed in both academic and popular commentary. We cannot do justice to it here. Many accounts converge on the idea that populism is a kind of "zeitgeist" in which the pure/real/true people are seen to be exploited by a remote/corrupt/self-serving elite (e.g., Mudde 2004: 560). In what is perhaps the most explicit and detailed definition, populism is seen as "pit[ting] a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous 'others' who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity, and voice" (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008: 3). From our perspective, the addition of these details—regarding the goodness and sameness of the ingroup, and the outgroup's intent to undermine their values and identity—serves mostly to reinforce our sense that populism per se is really more "zeitgeist" than political ideology or enduring predisposition. On its own, it seems to us more a complaint about the current state of the world (a perception of contemporary conditions) rather than a vision of the good life. It gains substance





and meaning only when fleshed out and prefixed by something else, like *far-right* populism: what Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) would call a "host ideology." Only then do we know *both* what our populists actually want (virtue and homogeneity: the one right way for the one true people) and how they presently feel (that elites and dangerous "others" are thwarting those desired ends).

Broken down in this manner, we can see that the present phenomenon of far-right populism fits easily into the framework of a "person-situation interaction" that is at the heart of social psychology. This is the notion that *B*ehavior is a function of the *P*erson (stable personality and enduring traits) interacting with their current (ever-shifting) *E*nvironment: $B = f(P, E)$. More pointedly, it is neatly encompassed by an interaction that Stenner (2005) labeled the "authoritarian dynamic": *intolerance of difference = authoritarian predisposition x normative threat*. In this essay, we contend that the political shocks roiling Western liberal democracies at present—which in reality began with rumblings in the 1990s—are more appropriately and efficiently conceived as products of this authoritarian dynamic.

## THE "AUTHORITARIAN DYNAMIC": A PARSIMONIOUS ACCOUNT OF "FAR-RIGHT POPULISM"

In the opening paragraphs of this paper, we took care to draw out two distinct but seemingly entangled components of the current wave of far-right populism. These were (i) a multifaceted demand for less diversity and difference in society (the "far-right" component: a particular conception of the

good life) and (ii) a critique of the faithless leaders and institutions currently failing to deliver this life (the "populism" component), presumably due to their political correctness and fidelity to values remote from what The People actually want. Tangled up together, the two components fuel the populist fervor that now besets the West. From the perspective of Stenner's "authoritarian dynamic," this "far-right populist" tangle simply represents the activation of authoritarian predispositions (in the roughly one-third of the population who are so inclined) by perceptions of "normative threat" (put most simply: threats to unity and consensus, or "oneness and sameness"). The predictable and well-understood (not sudden or surprising) consequences of activating this authoritarian dynamic—of "waking up" this latent endogenous predisposition with the application of exogenous normative threat—are the kinds of strident public demands for greater oneness and sameness that we now hear all around us. Stenner explicitly noted that the theory of the authoritarian dynamic was intended to explain "the kind of intolerance that seems to 'come out of nowhere,' that can spring up in tolerant and intolerant cultures alike, producing sudden changes in behavior that cannot be accounted for by slowly changing cultural traditions" (Stenner 2005: 136).

In the remainder of this paper we will outline the theory of the authoritarian dynamic, briefly review available evidence, and then examine whether this alternative account provides a more compelling and simpler explanation of populism across the seemingly diverse cases of Trump, Brexit, and the National Front. We take advantage of an extraordi-





nary data set collected by EuroPulse in December 2016 that gives us deep insights into voting for populist candidates and causes in the United States, Britain, and France.

## THE AUTHORITARIAN DYNAMIC

### HOW AUTHORITARIANISM IS DIFFERENT FROM CONSERVATISM

Stenner (2005, 2009a) identified three distinct psychological profiles of people who are typically lumped together under the unhelpful rubric of "conservative," and who tend to vote for candidates designated as "right-wing." The latter is a largely content-free self-placement, whose meaning is inconsistent across cultures and times. On this so-called right wing of politics, Stenner distinguished between what she called "laissez faire conservatives," "status quo conservatives," and "authoritarians." It is vital to keep this distinction in mind because it is only the authoritarians who show persistent antidemocratic tendencies and a willingness to support extremely illiberal measures (such as the forced expulsion of racial or religious groups) under certain conditions (i.e., normative threat).

Laissez faire "conservatives" are not conservative in any real sense. They typically self-identify as classical liberals or libertarians. They strongly favor the free market and are usually pro-business, seeking to thwart "socialist" or "left-wing" efforts to intervene in the economy and redistribute wealth. Psychologically speaking, they have nothing in common with authoritarians (Haidt 2012). Authoritarians—those who demand authoritative constraints on the individual

in all matters moral, political, and racial—are *not* generally averse to government intrusions into economic life. Empirically, laissez faire conservatism is typically found to be either unrelated to authoritarianism or else inversely related to it, and not implicated in intolerance or populism to any significant degree.

## AUTHORITARIANISM VERSUS "STATUS QUO CONSERVATISM"

Status quo conservatives are those who are psychologically predisposed to favor stability and resist rapid change and uncertainty. They are in a sense the true conservatives: the heirs of Edmund Burke. Status quo conservatism is only modestly associated with authoritarianism and intolerance, and only under very specific conditions. It tends to align with intolerant attitudes and behaviors only where established institutions and accepted norms and practices are intolerant. In a culture of stable, long-established, institutionally supported and widely accepted tolerance, status quo conservatism and authoritarianism will essentially be unhitched, and status quo conservatism will lend little support to intolerant attitudes and behaviors.

Contrast status quo conservatism then with authoritarianism: an enduring predisposition to favor obedience, conformity, oneness, and sameness over freedom and difference. Bear in mind that we are speaking here of a *psychological* predisposition and not of political ideology, nor of the character of political regimes. (Note also that we make no claims about the psychological predispositions of Donald Trump,





Marine Le Pen, or any other political leader. Authoritarianism is an attribute of the follower, not necessarily of the leader, and one does not need to be an authoritarian to successfully deploy authoritarian rhetoric and attract authoritarian followers.) Authoritarianism is substantially heritable (McCourt et al. 1999; Ludeke, Johnson, and Bouchard 2013) and mostly determined by lack of "openness to experience" (one of the "Big Five" personality dimensions) and by cognitive limitations (Stenner 2005); these are two factors that reduce one's willingness and capacity (respectively) to tolerate complexity, diversity, and difference.

In contrast to status quo conservatism, authoritarianism is primarily driven not by aversion to *change* (difference over time) but by aversion to *complexity* (difference across space). In a nutshell, authoritarians are *"simple-minded avoiders of complexity more than closed-minded avoiders of change"* (Stenner 2009b: 193). This distinction matters for the challenges currently confronting liberal democracy because in the event of an "authoritarian revolution," authoritarians may seek massive social change in pursuit of greater oneness and sameness, willingly overturning established institutions and practices that their (psychologically) conservative peers would be drawn to defend and preserve.

To avoid tautology with the dependent variables we are trying to explain—a problem that plagued earlier research on *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al. 1950)—Stenner (2005) usually gauges "latent" authoritarianism with a low-level measure of fundamental predisposition: typically, respondents' choices among child-rearing values.

For example, when asked what qualities should be encouraged in children, authoritarians tend to prioritize obedience, good manners, and being well behaved over things like independence, curiosity, and thinking for oneself. Pitting this "bare bones" measure of authoritarianism against *any* variety of "conservatism," and the whole roster of sociodemographic variables—including education, income, gender, class, and religiosity—Stenner (2005: 133; 2009a: 152) has shown via the *World Values Survey* that authoritarianism is the principal determinant of general intolerance of difference around the globe.

## WHAT AUTHORITARIANISM DOES[1]

Authoritarianism inclines one toward attitudes and behaviors variously concerned with structuring society and social interactions in ways that enhance sameness and minimize diversity of people, beliefs, and behaviors. It tends to produce a characteristic array of *functionally related* stances, all of which have the effect of glorifying, encouraging, and rewarding uniformity and disparaging, suppressing, and punishing difference. Since enhancing uniformity and minimizing diversity implicate others and require some control over their behavior, ultimately these stances involve actual coercion of others (as in driving a black family from the neighborhood) and, more often, demands for the use of group authority (i.e., coercion by the state).

In the end, then, suppression of difference and achievement of uniformity necessitate autocratic social arrangements in which individual autonomy yields to group





authority. In this way, authoritarianism is far more than a personal distaste for difference. It becomes a normative worldview about the social value of obedience and conformity (versus freedom and difference), the prudent and just balance between group authority and individual autonomy (Duckitt 1989), and the appropriate uses of (or limits on) that authority. This worldview induces bias against different others (racial and ethnic outgroups, immigrants and refugees, radicals and dissidents, moral "deviants"), as well as political demands for authoritative constraints on their behavior. The latter will typically include legal discrimination against minorities and restrictions on immigration, limits on free speech and association, and the regulation of moral behavior (e.g., via policies regarding abortion and homosexuality, and their punitive enforcement).

## WHEN AUTHORITARIANISM DOES THIS

Stenner's theory of the "authoritarian dynamic" tells us exactly *when* authoritarianism does these things, making it a useful tool for understanding the current wave of populism. As noted earlier, the authoritarian dynamic posits that intolerant behavior is a function of the interaction of an enduring psychological predisposition with transient environmental conditions of normative threat. Stenner contends that in the absence of a common identity rooted in race or ethnicity (the usual case in our large, diverse, and complex modern societies), the things that make "us" an "us"—that make us *one and the same*—are common authority (oneness) and shared values (sameness). Accordingly, for authoritarians,

the conditions most threatening to oneness and sameness are questioned or questionable authorities and values, e.g., disrespect for leaders and institutions, authorities unworthy of respect, and lack of conformity with or consensus in group norms and beliefs. This is what Stenner has termed "normative threat," or "threats to the normative order."

Stenner (2005) demonstrated the prevalence and significance of this authoritarian dynamic with many different kinds of data, showing that the intolerance produced by authoritarianism is substantially magnified when respondents:

- *perceive* that the public and political elites are ideologically distant, or that leaders on all sides have let them down (see Stenner 2005: 57, from the *Durham Community Survey, 1997*)
- are *experimentally* exposed to seemingly real news coverage about "leaders unworthy of our trust," or "fractured public opinion" where "no one agrees on anything anymore" (see Figure 1 below, from the *Cultural Revolution Experiment 1995*, reported in Stenner 2005)
- are being interviewed *at a time* of high variance in public opinion (e.g., during some particularly fractious week in US history, as determined by the actual variance in survey responses to the *General Social Survey 1972–2000*; see Stenner 2005: 314)
- are living *in a place* (e.g., some nation of the world) marked by high variance in public opinion (see Stenner 2005: 314, from the *World Values Survey 1990–1995*).





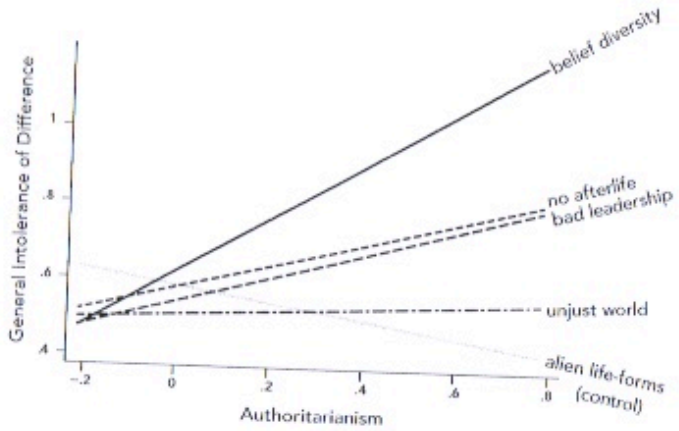


**FIGURE 1.** Effects of authoritarianism on general intolerance of difference given experimental manipulation of threat. Reprinted from Stenner (2005).

In every case, normative threat dramatically increased the influence of authoritarianism on general intolerance of difference: racial, political, and moral. The latter constitute the authoritarian's classic "defensive arsenal," concerned with differentiating, defending, and glorifying "us," in conditions that appear to threaten "us," by excluding and discriminating against "them": racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants and refugees, political dissidents, radicals, and moral "deviants." Notice that the activation of the authoritarian dynamic by collective threat in *one* domain will typically boost the display of these classic attitudes and behaviors across *all* domains. Thus, should fears about Muslim immigration activate authoritarian predispositions, this will usually provoke authoritarians to a whole panoply of sympathetic "vibrations," which might include strident demands to limit rights and protections for "domestic"

racial/ethnic minorities, to restrict free speech and assembly, and to deploy state authority to write moral strictures into public policy, e.g., to roll back gay rights and "crack down" on criminals.

Without a theoretical framework that pulls all these seemingly disparate behaviors together—as functionally related elements of the authoritarian's classic defensive stance—contemporary analysts can be left puzzling over (for example) why support for the death penalty and for the public whipping of "sex criminals" should turn out to be the strongest "predictors" of a vote in favor of Brexit (Kaufmann 2016). The authoritarian dynamic offers such a framework, which here we will test using recent EuroPulse data on populist voting across the US, UK, and France.

## THE EUROPULSE DATA SET AND OUR ANALYSIS PLAN

### DATA: EUROPULSE DECEMBER 2016

The EuroPulse survey is conducted each quarter by Dalia Research (Germany). Dalia uses a proprietary software platform to reach respondents through web-enabled devices as they interact with a wide range of websites and apps. Dalia seeks out users fitting the required profile for the task and offers them access to premium content in exchange for survey completion.[2] This should reach a more representative slice of the relevant population and interview them under more natural conditions than is possible (for example) issuing email invitations to that atypical portion of a population that has sufficient interest, time, and energy to register for





research panels and complete surveys on any topic for modest material rewards.

One of the world's largest omnibus surveys, EuroPulse is conducted across all twenty-eight EU countries, in twenty-one different languages. Four times a year, the EuroPulse survey interviews a census representative sample of 10,000 Europeans to track public opinion on a variety of topics. In the unique instance of the EuroPulse survey conducted over December 2–11, 2016—just a few weeks after US voters elected President Trump on November 8—Dalia added a representative US sample to the EuroPulse mix. Their stated purpose was to enable researchers to detect any commonalities in populist support across the US and Europe (including voting for Brexit in the UK and for the National Front in France), publicly issuing a "Research Challenge" to that effect.

### EXCLUDING NON-WHITES FROM ANALYSES

The EuroPulse-plus-US data set of December 2016 included 12,235 respondents: n=1,052 in the US sample, and n=11,283 across the European Union. However, given the nature of our research questions, we excluded non-whites from the current investigation, leaving n=661 in the US (which also excluded Hispanics) and n=10,500 across the EU. As explained elsewhere (Stenner 2005), this is not to say that authoritarianism is necessarily expressed in a fundamentally different manner depending on race/ethnicity, or majority/minority status, than among whites across Europe and the US. It is just that the demarcation of ingroups and outgroups, and delineation of the norms

and authorities to which one owes allegiance, might vary. We would not expect, for example, any authoritarianism among African-American leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement to propel them toward a vote for Donald Trump, nor North African Muslim immigrants in France to be attracted (by any predisposition to authoritarianism) to the National Front. Excluding non-whites left us a sample of 11,161 respondents from twenty-nine countries, with 3,202 of those of special interest in our present search for a common dynamic in populist voting across the US (n=661), UK (n=1,256), and France (n=1,285).

## DEPENDENT VARIABLE: POPULIST VOTING

The dependent variable throughout our analyses—our principal outcome of interest—was the probability of voting for populist candidates and causes. For the US sample, this was reflected by respondents' self-report (in early December) of having voted for Donald Trump in the presidential election just a few weeks prior. For the UK, the dependent variable was respondents' self-report of having voted a few months earlier in the British referendum of June 23 in favor of leaving the European Union. For our French sample, populist voting was indicated by self-reports of intended vote in the upcoming election, which would be the presidential election of April/May 2017.

There is mostly good correspondence between these self-reports and the real incidence of both vote turnout and vote choice in these elections, although our starting sample does seem to over-represent Americans who turned out to vote,





and to under-represent Britons voting to leave the European Union, probably due to some combination of selection and social desirability bias (Karp and Brockington 2005). Survey respondents are disproportionately likely to vote, and people tend to over-report engaging in civic behaviors such as voting. Similarly, it may be that those groups that leaned toward exiting Europe were disinclined subsequently to broadcast that, as well as generally less disposed to answering surveys.[3]

In any case, only those who said they voted (or intended to vote, in the case of France) were retained in the following analyses, leaving final sample sizes of 451, 858, and 1,045 for the US, UK, and France, respectively. Our dependent variable was scored "1" for a vote in favor of Trump, Brexit, or Le Pen, and "0" otherwise. We analyzed each of these three vote choices separately, since they reflect very different decision contexts. But we synthesized our findings across the three countries, since our main goal was ultimately to identify commonalities in the forces driving populist voting across liberal democracies.

## MAIN EXPLANATORY VARIABLE: AUTHORITARIAN PREDISPOSITION

We followed our previous practice in forming a "bare bones" measure of authoritarianism from respondents' choices among pairs of child-rearing values. As always, we sought a measure that reflected something more akin to a deep-seated, enduring political "personality" than a current policy attitude; that could do so across widely varying cultures with different ingroups and outgroups, dissidents and

deviants; and that did not make specific reference to objects, actors, or events that featured in current political contests and might be the very subjects of our inquiries.

We formed our measure of authoritarian predisposition from responses to the following four EuroPulse items: "Which is more important for a child to have? Independence / Respect for elders? Obedience / Self-reliance? Consideration for others / Good behavior? Curiosity / Good manners?" Responses considered authoritarian (each scoring "1") were respect for elders, obedience, good behavior, and good manners. Alternatively, preference for children being independent, self-reliant, considerate, and curious reflected the inverse of authoritarianism (each scoring "0").[4] Any inability or refusal to choose between a pair of values ("don't have an opinion") was considered a neutral response (scoring "0.5"). After summing these four components, re-scoring the resulting scale to be of one-unit range, and centering its midpoint on "0" (to ease interpretation of interaction coefficients), our final measure of authoritarian predisposition ranged across nine points from –0.5 to +0.5.

According to this measure, about a third of white respondents across these twenty-nine liberal democracies proved to be authoritarian to some degree, in the sense of passing the neutral midpoint of the scale and leaning toward authoritarianism in their value choices. Specifically, 33 percent were authoritarian, 37 percent were non-authoritarian, and 29 percent were "balanced" or neutral.[5]





### KEY INTERACTION CONDITION: NORMATIVE THREAT

We constructed an overall measure of "normative threat" from several key sentiments found in the EuroPulse survey. We sought to reflect three core components of threat to the normative order: loss of societal consensus, loss of confidence in leaders, and loss of confidence in institutions.

First, the closest sentiment we could find in the EuroPulse survey to perceived loss of consensus was the express feeling that one's country was "going in the wrong direction" (either "*very wrong*" or "*somewhat wrong*") in response to the question "*Over the past 5 years, has [the United States / the United Kingdom / France] gone more in the right or wrong direction?*"

Second, we measured general loss of confidence in leaders by means of strong agreement with the statement "*Government is controlled by the rich elite,*" which readers might recognize as an item sometimes deployed in measures of populism. (Recall our earlier assertion that so-called populist sentiments might more simply be understood as perceptions of normative threat.)

Third, we wanted to measure loss of confidence in government institutions in a way that captured both dissatisfaction with the current government and disillusion with democratic government more generally. To this end, we combined ordinal scale responses to two questions: "*How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in your country?*" (which ranged across four points from "*very satisfied*" up to "*not at all satisfied*"), and "*What is your opinion of the government in [the United States / the United Kingdom / France]?*" (which

ranged across five points from "*very positive*" to "*very negative*"). Summing these two equally weighted components created a finely graduated nineteen-point measure reflecting "dissatisfaction with democratic government."

Finally, our overall measure of normative threat standardized and summed these three equally weighted components and re-scored the result to be of one-unit range. This overall scale (deployed in all subsequent analyses) ranged across seventy-five points from "–.5" to ".5," centered on a midpoint of "0."

## OTHER EXPLANATORY VARIABLES: ECONOMIC EVALUATIONS

An adequate test of the explanatory power of the authoritarian dynamic in this domain must necessarily also control for the economic "distress" that is traditionally cited as fueling populist sentiments and voting behavior. A number of scholars have noted recently that economic factors actually seem rather weak and inconsistent predictors of populism and intolerance, particularly compared with value conflict and cultural "backlash" (see Inglehart and Norris 2017). Stenner (2005) previously found that, to the extent that economic factors did predict expressions of intolerance, the effect tended to be confined to negative retrospective evaluations of the national economy, which might be felt as a kind of collective threat by authoritarians (although the effects of such threats were rarely as powerful or consistent as the classic normative threats). In contrast, Stenner found that personal economic distress tended to either be inconsequen-





tial or actually *diminish* the impact of authoritarianism on intolerance, perhaps by distracting authoritarians from their problematic concern with the fate of the collective, thereby "improving" their behavior.

Fortunately, the EuroPulse survey measured the standard array of economic evaluations, including four items asking for retrospective and prospective evaluations of both the national economy and one's own household finances, as follows:

Retrospective evaluation–national economy: "How do you think the general economic situation in [the United States / the United Kingdom / France] has changed over the past 12 months? (It has . . . got a lot better, got a little better, stayed the same, got a little worse, got a lot worse, I don't know)."

Prospective evaluation–national economy: "How do you expect the general economic situation in [the United States / the United Kingdom / France] to change over the next 12 months? (It will . . . get a lot better, get a little better, stay the same, get a little worse, get a lot worse, don't know)."

Retrospective evaluation–household finances: "Compared to 12 months ago, your household financial situation is . . . (a lot better, a little better, the same, a little worse, a lot worse, don't know)."

Prospective evaluation–household finances: "How do you expect the financial position of your