

# Authoritarianism and political choice in France

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**Abstract** Authoritarianism is a key concept in personality psychology, with a strong impact on political behavior in the United States. Yet, it has rarely been included in studies of political behavior in Europe. Drawing on a nationwide representative sample of the French electorate, we assess the demographic correlates of authoritarianism, as well as its impact on ethnic intolerance, economic conservatism, and propensity to vote for the four major French political parties. Results suggest that authoritarianism is positively associated with both intolerance and economic conservatism. Moreover, there is a strong and positive impact of authoritarianism on the propensity to vote for the far right Front National. Finally, contrary to the common left-wing authoritarianism thesis, we find a significant and negative association between authoritarianism and voting for the far left in France, both with and without taking attitudinal factors into account. These findings extend our understanding of the personality trait of authoritarianism and its impact on vote choice and political attitudes.

**Keywords** Authoritarianism · Voting choice · Political issues · France

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## Introduction

The recent rise in the electoral appeal of authoritarian populism on both sides of the Atlantic has led to the revival of an old concept in political psychology. More than 60 years ago, Adorno et al. (1950) portrayed the Authoritarian Personality (TAP), a type of personality that was excessively prejudiced and aggressive toward minorities and at the same time was “particularly susceptible to anti-democratic propaganda” (Adorno et al. 1950, p. 1). The publication of the book was a milestone transition in the study of political behavior, bringing for the first time to the fore personality as an explanatory variable of social and political attitudes to a literature largely analyzing political choice on the basis of socio-economic status and self-interest. Subsequent theoretical and methodological criticism paled TAP into insignificance, until a resurgence in the 1980s. In the late 2000s, more than half a century since the publication of TAP, and after having been through significant refinements, the concept is currently witnessing its second revival in the United States in the context of the increasing interdisciplinary dialogue between psychology and political science (Hetherington and Suhay 2011; Hetherington and Weiler 2009, 2015; Johnston and Wronski 2015; Stenner 2005).

In Europe, in contrast, this concept has received far less attention in recent years. A number of studies on the structure of citizens’ political preferences have stressed the role of a value divide between “libertarian” and “authoritarian” preferences, which taps varying levels of adherence to traditional social norms and morals (Evans et al. 1996; Tilley 2005). Yet, the type of items used in these scales typically capture *manifestations* of authoritarianism, by measuring support for authoritarian policies, rather than aiming at measuring a psychological disposition (Feldman 2013). Moreover, these values are not conceptualized as aspects of personality stemming from psychological structures. Rather they are considered as the product of the new cleavages that arose during the transition to the postmodern society, due to transformations of personal choices, increasing affluence, and expanding levels of education that led to a questioning of the authority of traditional social institutions and norms (Flanagan 1987; Flanagan and Lee 2003; Inglehart 1997; Stubager 2008). Similarly, several studies have looked into the impact of the endorsement of authoritarian policies on the vote, and especially the far right vote in France (Lubbers and Scheepers 2002; Mayer 2013; Mayer and Perrineau 1992; Tillman 2016). The items used to approach authoritarianism in these works typically consist of attitudinal questions that touch on various epiphenomena of the authoritarian dispositions, such as attitudes toward censorship, the death penalty, or harshness of penalties for offenders. At the same time the correlates of the trait of authoritarianism, and especially its impact on voting behavior, have received surprisingly little attention. Two notable exceptions are Dunn (2015) and Aichholzer and Zandonella (2016) who studied the association of authoritarianism, perceived and measured as a personality trait, with political behavior. They find a significant impact of authoritarianism on voting for the Far Right in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.



This article focuses on several aspects of the role of authoritarianism as a psychological disposition in explaining political behavior. Focusing on the French case, it investigates authoritarianism in three ways. First, it assesses the distribution of authoritarianism across social and demographic groups. Emphasis is placed here on Lipset's thesis over the existence of potent authoritarian tendencies among the working class due to this group's specific life habits (Lipset 1960). Second, we assess the effect of authoritarianism on economic and social values, investigating the impact of authoritarianism in these key aspects of political ideology. Finally, we explore the potential of authoritarianism in explaining party choice, with a special emphasis over the existence and characteristics of left-wing authoritarianism in France.

Overall this paper extends current knowledge on authoritarianism in two ways. First, it investigates the social correlates of authoritarianism and its behavioral consequences using a refined measure of this concept, which does not suffer from the methodological flaws that undermined the validity of previous measures. Second, it investigates the time-honored hypothesis over the association of authoritarianism with economic conservatism and political identifications, by tapping into the authoritarian disposition directly, rather than relying on attitudinal products of authoritarianism, such as the endorsement of authoritarian policies or tolerance toward outgroups.

France represents an interesting case for the study of authoritarianism, for at least three reasons. First, France is experiencing a vast rise of the Far Right, as highlighted by the recent win of the Front National in the 2014 European Parliamentary election, as well as its impressive performance in the 2015 French Regional and 2017 Presidential elections. Moreover, the Far Right in France is particularly popular among the working class (Mayer 2014), a social group that has long been hypothesized to be carriers of an authoritarian disposition. Second, even though social characteristics such as social class and religiosity had been pivotal in explaining voting choices in France in the past, their influence has significantly declined.<sup>1</sup> This underlies the need for alternative explanations of voting choice, and until now, the role of authoritarianism has not been added to the puzzle. Third, there has been much speculation during the past decade in France over a possible authoritarian tendency on the far left of the political spectrum. Yet, until now, no study has investigated the attitudinal and voting preferences of authoritarians in France.

## Conceptual and methodological perspectives on authoritarianism

Authoritarianism is seen as a long-term, dispositional orientation that remains fairly stable throughout the life cycle and predicts a number of political attitudes such as prejudice toward ethnic groups, homosexuals, and women. The authors of TAP

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<sup>1</sup> In a recent study, the combined impact of age, gender, social class, church attendance, education, and income only accounted for six percent of the variability in vote choice in the first round of the 2012 French presidential election (Vasilopoulos et al. 2015).



conceptualized authoritarianism as a personality syndrome, consisting of nine inter-associated dimensions: conventionalism, authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, anti-intraception, power and toughness, stereotypy and superstition, generalized destructiveness and cynicism, exaggerated concerns of sex, and the projectivity of one's aggressive impulses toward society. By employing theoretical tools from Freudian psychology, Adorno et al. (1950) argued that authoritarianism has its roots in childhood and especially in the psychological responses of the child to the presence of a stern and distant father. Simply put, they suggested that the feelings of aggression stemming from a rigid and harsh parenthood are repressed by the child. In turn these repressed feelings transform (through the Freudian mechanism of displacement) to aggression toward outgroups.

In the years that followed its publication, TAP came under scrutiny on both theoretical and methodological grounds. A basic focus of this criticism was the employment of the Freudian framework, questionable in modern psychology research, to connect child-rearing processes with the future development of authoritarianism (Altemeyer 1981; Duckitt 1992). Moreover, Adorno et al. were criticized for failing to account for alternative explanations on the origins of TAP, such as absence of education, low intelligence, and socio-economic status (Brown 1965). Finally, according to others, the F-scale, the original instrument used in the study to measure authoritarianism, had a series of flaws that included acquiescence bias effects and weak correlations among its components (Altemeyer 1981; Brown 1965).

Despite these criticisms, the main idea of the existence of an enduring authoritarian disposition persisted. A subsequent refinement of authoritarianism as a long-term psychological orientation was proposed by Altemeyer (1981, 1988, 1996) and his concept of "Right-Wing Authoritarianism" (RWA). Altemeyer avoids defining RWA as a personality trait but rather refers to it as an *enduring orientation* or *predisposition*. RWA has three associated components: "a high degree of submission to the authorities who are perceived to be established and legitimate in the society in which one lives"; "a general aggressiveness, directed against various persons, which is perceived to be sanctioned by established authorities"; as well as "a high degree of adherence to the social conventions which are perceived to be endorsed by society and its established authorities" (Altemeyer 1981, p. 148). Essentially Altemeyer keeps only three out of the nine components set forward by Adorno et al., namely authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism. Even though Altemeyer, similarly to Adorno et al., located the roots of authoritarianism in childhood, he rejected the psychoanalytic interpretation employed in TAP in favor of social learning theory. He traces the origins of the development of authoritarianism within a person primarily from children's imitation of the behavior and attitudes of their parents. At the same time, he acknowledges the influence of agents outside the family such as teachers, neighbors, friends, and even television personalities, but the latter are secondary. Finally, similarly to Adorno, Altemeyer considers, by and large, RWA as a disposition that is maintained throughout the life cycle and is subject to major fluctuations only with dramatic changes in one's personal and social environment.



Regarding measurement, the RWA scale consists of 30 items and provides a balanced set of positively and negatively worded statements that tap authoritarian aggression, authoritarian submission, and conventionalism. The battery includes items such as “What our country needs most is discipline with everyone following our leaders in unity,” “It would be best for everyone if the proper authorities censored magazines so that people would not get their hands on trashy and disgusting material,” or “Gays and lesbians are as healthy and moral as anybody else.” The RWA scale correlates highly with several manifestations of authoritarianism such as ethnocentrism, economic conservatism, and prejudice against ethnic groups, women, and homosexuals (Altemeyer 1998; McFarland and Abelson 1996). Yet these high correlations became a point of criticism. Several scholars argued that there exists a considerable overlap between the items of the RWA scale and the target variables which it is supposed to predict. More specifically, some of the RWA items tap support for authoritarian policies and hostility toward outgroups, rather than a broad authoritarian disposition (Cohrs 2013; Feldman 2003, 2013; Stenner 2005; Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Stenner 2005). In this sense, the criticism is that despite conceptualizing authoritarianism as a disposition, RWA measures the expression of this disposition, i.e., political attitudes, and that RWA would be more suitable as a dependent variable, rather as a core disposition with explanatory merit for political attitudes (Feldman 2003; Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Stenner 2005). As Feldman (2003, p. 45) puts it, “a reasonable critique of much research using the RWA scale is that it only shows that a measure of prejudice and intolerance predicts prejudice and intolerance.”

In an effort to move away from the narrow conceptualization of authoritarianism by RWA, Feldman and his colleagues proposed a second major refinement to the concept (Feldman 2003; Stenner 2005). Feldman’s reconceptualization rests on the idea that being a member of a society creates a trade-off between the opposing values of personal autonomy and social control. This trade-off is an inescapable aspect of any society. Different individuals attach different importance to these conflicting values. On the one hand, some people will be almost exclusively concerned with personal autonomy. These individuals will overly value diversity and freedom at the expense of conventionalism and authority. In turn this inclination will lead them to be supportive of civil liberties and outgroups that do not abide to conventional norms. On the other hand, some citizens will give much weight to social conformity, favoring obedience, clinging to authority and social norms, perceiving the latter as stemming from some form of higher authority (Feldman 2003, p. 49). Consequently, they will be supportive of restrictions on various civil liberties, and will be intolerant and prejudiced toward outgroups. Moreover, according to Feldman, as people who deviate from social norms may well be perceived as a threat to social order by conformists, individuals who overly favor social conformity will both be more in favor of restricting civil liberties and at the same time exhibit punitive behavior toward non-conformists.

This novel approach of authoritarianism was accompanied by an improved measurement of this trait. The goal was to create a scale that captures the value trade-off between personal autonomy and social control with high validity and reliability. Furthermore, in order to avoid tautology (as was the case with RWA) and



be applicable across different cultures and time periods, the scale had to avoid any reference to specific targets or political arrangements (Stenner 2005). Several researchers proposed a battery based on child-rearing values. Respondents are presented with pairs of qualities that may be fostered among children, and asked each time to indicate which one they consider to be most important. More specifically, respondents have to indicate whether it is more important for a child to be independent or respectful of his/her parents or grandparents, to have an enquiring mind or be well-mannered, to be well-behaved or creative, and to be obedient or autonomous (Feldman and Stenner 1997; Stenner 2005). The key role played by child-rearing values in tapping distinct worldviews had already been highlighted since the early 1960s. As Martin (1964, p. 86) argues “how to ‘bring up’ or socialize children is a matter of profound consequence, involving basic human values and objectives.” The child-rearing values scale taps the trade-off that lies at the heart of the concept of authoritarianism, namely the dilemma between personal autonomy and submission to conventional norms, without at the same time touching on specific political objects. Moreover, the dimension has been found to exist in different cultures (Kohn and Schooler 1983). Subsequent studies have demonstrated that the scale has high validity (Hetherington and Weiler 2009), correlating highly with need for cognition, attitudes toward gay rights, religiosity, foreign policy, ethnocentrism, but also Altemeyer’s RWA scale in several countries (Hetherington and Suhay 2011; Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Stenner 2005). A growing number of scholars use the child-rearing value items to measure authoritarianism (Brandt and Henry 2012; Brandt and Reyna 2014; Federico et al. 2011; Henry 2011; Hetherington and Suhay 2011; Hetherington and Weiler 2009).

Before we proceed in our empirical analysis, a word of caution is needed. As we mentioned above, authoritarianism has been conceptualized as a personality trait (Adorno et al. 1950), a long-term, socially learned cluster of orientations rooted in childhood (Altemeyer 1981), and as a disposition (Feldman 2003; Stenner 2005). The exact nature of authoritarianism still puzzles researchers today (Hetherington and Weiler 2009). For the purposes of this article, we remain agnostic as to whether authoritarianism is a personality type or a stable disposition that complements political ideology. However, at the very minimum, and in line with all approaches on the topic, we consider authoritarianism as a dispositional trait that is causally prior to political attitudes and vote choices.

## **The social origins and political consequences of authoritarianism**

After having presented the concept and measurement of authoritarianism, we turn to the questions that relate to its social correlates and its effects on political attitudes and behavior. These are the aspects that will lie at the center of our empirical study. More precisely, we will investigate how authoritarianism varies between social classes and religious groups. Also, we consider its impact on economic and cultural attitudes, as well as on voting choice. Past research in the United States has provided evidence on the distribution of authoritarianism in specific social groups. In his famous “Working class authoritarianism” essay, Lipset (1960) posits that the socio-



economic profile as well as the life conditions faced by members of the lower social classes contribute to the cultivation of authoritarian tendencies. More specifically, he argued that lack of education, absence of thick social bonds due to geographical isolation, solitary employment, economic insecurity, and physical punishment practices within the family, all foster the development of authoritarianism. Further, Lipset argued that authoritarianism should be associated with support for left-wing economic policies, arguing that the two go hand in hand as they both are complementary facets of the Communist ideology that was predominantly endorsed by the working class (1960).

A number of studies have critically examined the Lipset thesis, and many have reassessed the expected relation between social class and authoritarianism. Scheepers et al. (1990) investigated the social correlates using the original F-scale in the Netherlands, and found evidence that, regardless of differences in education, authoritarianism runs high among unskilled workers, yet no more than farmers or the self-employed. Other scholars however suggest that education is in fact the key correlate of authoritarianism. The knowledge and development of cognitive skills that come with education makes it easier for the educated individual to cope with diversity and complexity (Stenner 2005). An additional explanation is that differences in mean authoritarianism between the high and low educated may to some extent reflect differences in cognitive ability (Hetherington and Weiler 2009). Grabb (1979), for instance, argued that differences in education are the main driving factors behind the association of working class and intolerance of outgroups, followed by levels of income and cynicism. Similarly, Dekker and Ester (1987) administered the F-scale to a representative sample in the Netherlands and found social class to be insignificant, once controlling for age, education level, and urbanity. Drawing on a World Values Survey data that included 19 countries, Napier and Jost (2008) investigated the association of facets of authoritarianism with education and income. They found that while obedience and cynicism were negatively associated with education and income, moral absolutism and conventionalism were not.

Besides social class and education, a broad stream of research argues that an additional causal antecedent of authoritarianism is religiosity, as captured by one's frequency of church attendance. Interestingly, the effect remains consistent across religious dogmas (Adorno et al. 1950; Altemeyer 1996, 1998; Canetti-Nisim 2004; Hunsberger 1995; McCleary et al. 2011; Osborne and Sibley 2014). The explanation for the positive impact of religiosity on authoritarianism is that most organized religions preach the adherence to tradition and social conformity which are both key components of authoritarianism (Osborne and Sibley 2014). In addition, church environments combine the taught intolerance toward certain groups, such as homosexuals, with an uncritical attitude and a dogmatic certainty toward the in-group's beliefs (Altemeyer 1996, 1998).

This brings us to a first set of three hypotheses, which concern the association of social characteristics with authoritarianism. Based on the research presented above, we anticipate that authoritarianism will be higher among the working class ( $H_1$ ), positively associated with church attendance ( $H_2$ ), and negatively associated with education ( $H_3$ ). In addition, following Lipset's claim, we anticipate that



authoritarianism will be associated with support for left-wing economic policies among the working class, as the economic insecurity experienced by these segments of the population may forge a higher demand both for authoritarian tendencies and economic protection ( $H_4$ ).

A further question concerns the broader relation between authoritarianism and political ideology. Several studies have indicated that authoritarianism is often associated with support for populist right or extreme right ideology (Aichholzer and Zandonella 2016; Dunn 2015). Attitudinal products of authoritarianism, such as intolerance, ethnocentrism and prejudice, are also more frequently found at the right end of the ideological scale (see Mayer et al. 2016 for the case of France). Yet, the relationship between authoritarianism and ideology is less straightforward than one could expect from these findings. This is due to two main reasons.

The first concerns the content of conservatism itself. For some researchers, the term “conservative” encompasses two independent dimensions: economic conservatism and social conservatism (Stenner 2005, 2009; see also Feldman and Johnston 2014). According to Stenner, while social conservatism is conceptually identical with authoritarianism, it is independent or even negatively associated to economic conservatism. In her own words, it is “illogical” that “those who demand authoritative constraints on the individual in all matters moral, political, and racial would tend to reject government intervention in the economy” (Stenner 2009, p. 146). On the other hand, Jost and his colleagues offer an alternative conceptualization of the relationship of authoritarianism, social, and economic conservatism. They argue that conservatism includes two associated aspects, namely the acceptance of inequality and the resistance to social change (Carney et al. 2008; Jost et al. 2003, 2008, 2009). According to them, conservatives have deep epistemic and existential needs that include a high sense of threat, an increased intolerance to uncertainty, and a strong need for order (Jost et al. 2003, 2008, 2009). Based on this approach one should expect that authoritarianism should have a positive impact on conservative policy preferences regardless whether these are social or economic in content. In fact, drawing on ESS data and using a proxy of authoritarianism consisting of four components, Napier and Jost (2008) report a positive relationship between two aspects of their authoritarianism scale (conventionalism and moral absolutism) and economic conservatism.

The second feature that makes the relationship between authoritarianism and left–right ideology puzzling concerns the hypothesized presence of authoritarian tendencies among far left groups. In fact, one of the aspects on which TAP was initially criticized is the almost exclusive focus on the “nativist-fundamentalist” aspects of authoritarianism. Several authors argued for a U-shaped distribution of authoritarianism along the left–right axis (Eysenck 1954; Rokeach 1960; Shils 1954). As Shils (1954) puts it, “at the left pole of their continuum, there is to be found an authoritarian impressively like the Authoritarianism of the Right.” The idea of the existence of a left-wing authoritarian is as old as the concept of authoritarianism itself, and rests on two main grounds. The first brings up similarities between the communist and fascist regimes. The content of the communist ideology and the totalitarian regimes that had been installed based on it epitomize authoritarian preferences for rigidity, order, and submission to authority,



all of which are, as we discussed above, central values of authoritarianism. The second line of argumentation refers to supposed similarities between the psychological profiles of adherents of far left and right ideologies. Eysenck (1954) has claimed that what connects the two extremes of the left–right continuum is a tendency to be rigid, inflexible, and tough-minded, whereas he considered moderate individuals to be more humanistic, open, and tender-minded. The bulk of studies however have refuted the existence of left-wing authoritarianism (Altemeyer 1996; Stone 1980).<sup>2</sup>

During the last decade, the idea of some form of convergence between the far left and the far right in terms both of programmatic positions and electoral support appears to be regaining ground, both in France and in the rest of Europe. The parallelism is partly grounded on the fact that both political families appeal to groups who are hurt the most by the economic crisis and sometimes appear to justify violence and aggression (Visser et al. 2014). Another line of argumentation touches on Euroscepticism and the existence of an assumed common nationalistic trait between the far left and far right. This aspect became the center of discussion in the aftermath of the 2005 referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty and the divisions inside the Socialist Party that eventually gave birth to the Far Left *Parti de Gauche*.<sup>3</sup> More recently, Halikiopoulou et al. (2012) compared party manifestos on the issue of European integration in France and Greece to conclude that “there is a trend where radical parties whether right or left are consistently nationalist and Eurosceptic” (2012, p. 523). Apart from programmatic convergence, an additional aspect concerns the overlap between the electorates of the far left and the far right. Perrineau (2016) identifies three types of overlap: The first concerns Front National voters who come from left leaning families, the second concerns FN voters who place themselves to the far left, while the third concerns FN voters who vote for the Left in the second round of Presidential elections. However, it is unclear to which extent these similarities are a reflection of authoritarianism in the far left and right electorates.

Based on this discussion, we can formulate two additional hypotheses. In line with the arguments of Stenner and Jost et al., among others, we expect authoritarians to exhibit increased ethnic intolerance ( $H_5$ ). Further, we anticipate that authoritarianism will increase the likelihood to support right-wing parties ( $H_6$ ). Given the divisions in the literature, however, we refrain from making any prediction about the impact of authoritarianism on economic conservatism and voting for the far left.

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<sup>2</sup> Altemeyer posits that since Communism was not the established authority in the Western world, the concept of left-wing authoritarianism made little sense. Studies conducted in Eastern Europe have indeed demonstrated that authoritarianism correlates positively with favorable attitudes toward communism (Hamilton et al. 1995; De Regt et al. 2011).

<sup>3</sup> See Rejnié (2005) for an overview.



## Methodology and data

Our data come from the first two waves of the 2017 French Election Study,<sup>4</sup> carried out in the period of November 20–29, 2015, and from January 22 to February 3, 2016, on a nationwide representative sample. 24,369 respondents participated in the first wave, and 21,351 (or 88%) in both waves. Interviews were conducted using computer assisted web interviewing.<sup>5</sup> The demographic, attitudinal, and authoritarianism items come from the first wave, while propensity to vote scores were measured in the second wave.

Our key variable is authoritarianism which, as described above, is an additive scale based on four items about child-rearing values. For each of these, respondents had to choose which value, linked either to personal autonomy or submission to conventional norms, they considered most important for children to acquire: being independent or respectful of their parents or grandparents, to have an enquiring mind or be well-mannered, to be well-behaved or creative, and to be obedient or autonomous. This additive scale is recoded to the 0–1 range, with higher values corresponding to a more authoritarian disposition.<sup>6</sup> (Appendix Table 5 provides descriptive statistics for all variables used in the analyses.)

Among socio-demographic variables, we construct a social class schema based on respondents' current occupation, following the categories distinguished by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies.<sup>7</sup> That is, we distinguish between the following groups: farmers, self-employed, managers, middle-level professionals, clerical and service staff, manual workers, pensioners, other non-labor force participants. Education is a three-point scale that indicates respondents' highest diploma: below "bac" (high school diploma, value – 1), at the bac level (value 0), or higher (+ 1). Age is coded in years and centered at the average (of 46 years). Gender is a dummy variable taking the value 1 for female respondents. The religiosity variable, finally, is based on the level of church attendance. It is a five-point scale that ranges between 0 "never" and 1 "at least once a week."

As far as attitudinal and political variables are concerned, our analyses include ethnic intolerance and economic conservatism attitudes, as well as propensities to vote for the four major French parties. The scale of ethnic intolerance is based on a battery of questions related to immigration and Islam. It includes four items, all measured on five-point Likert scales, that ask respondents whether they agree or disagree with the following statements: "Islam is a threat to the West," "Children of immigrants born in France are French as anyone else" (R), "Immigration is a source

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<sup>4</sup> The 2017 French Election Study began in November 2015 and was concluded in June 2017 after collecting 16 waves of responses.

<sup>5</sup> In the French Election Study, the sample was quota controlled for age, gender, professional status, and stratified by size of community and region (Ile de France, North-West, Northeast, South-West, South-East). The study was conducted for the Centre de Recherches Politiques de Sciences Po by the polling institute Ipsos.

<sup>6</sup> The scale yields a Cronbach's alpha of 0.60, which is considered sufficient given the few items of the scale (see Hetherington and Suhay 2011). A tetrachoric correlation analysis showed that all items are positively and significantly correlated yielding coefficients that range between 0.38 and 0.54.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.insee.fr/fr/methodes/default.asp?page=nomenclatures/pcs2003/pcs2003.htm>.



of cultural enrichment” (R), and “There are too many immigrants in France.” Items denoted with a R where reversed to construct the scale, which shows a high degree of consistency, with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.84. The scale of economic conservatism is based on one question capturing attitudes toward economic redistribution. Participants in the survey were invited to indicate on a five-point scale whether or not they agree with the statement “In terms of social justice, we should take from the rich and give to the poor.” Both attitudinal scales were recoded to the 0–1 range for the purpose of our analyses, with higher values corresponding to more conservative preferences.

In order to assess the impact of authoritarianism on support for right-wing populist and other parties, we rely on measures of party utilities or “voting propensities” (van der Eijk et al. 2006). These capture the perceived electoral attractiveness of various parties in competition, and have been widely used as the dependent variable in models of vote choice. These expected party utilities are measured by asking respondents to indicate how likely they are to “ever vote” for a given party. Answers are coded on an 11-point scale, ranging from “not likely at all” to “very likely,” and coded into the 0–1 range for the purpose of these analyses. Compared to traditional measures of electoral choice, they have the advantage of being measured separately for each party and respondent. This allows for a more fine-grained test of the impact of authoritarianism and other variables on party preferences. In our analyses, we focus on the expected utilities for the main two mainstream parties, the Socialist Party and the center right Les Républicains, as well as the right-wing populist Front National, and the far left Parti de Gauche. These four parties correspond to the main players in the French partisan landscape at the time in which the surveys were conducted.<sup>8</sup>

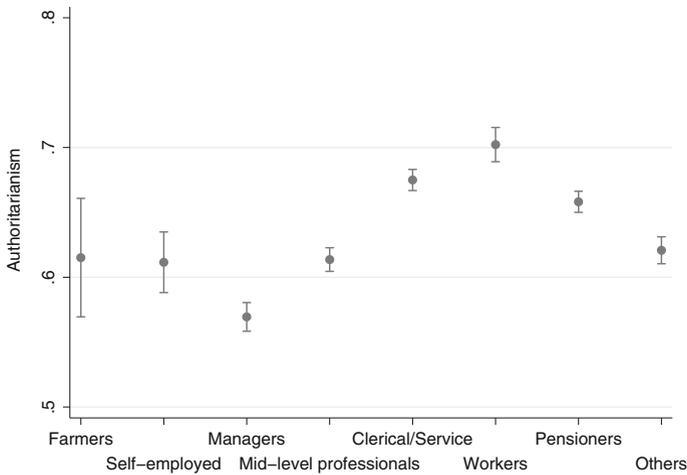
## The social correlates of authoritarianism in France

As a first step, we explore the relation between socio-demographic characteristics and authoritarianism. There are clear differences between social classes in the average levels of authoritarianism (Fig. 1). The overall sample average is at 0.64 (on the 0–1 scale), a value which is similar to that observed in other countries (see Stenner 2005, p. 92). The lowest levels of authoritarianism are found among managers (0.57) and the highest among manual workers (0.70) and clerical and service staff (0.67). Authoritarianism runs higher among the working class. This finding confirms our first hypothesis. Moreover, in line with past research in the United States (Altemeyer 1998; Hetherington and Weiler 2009) and our second hypothesis, results show a negative association of education with levels of authoritarianism (Fig. 2). The difference between the highest and lowest groups is about 0.13 points, which is similar to that between higher-grade professionals and manual workers.

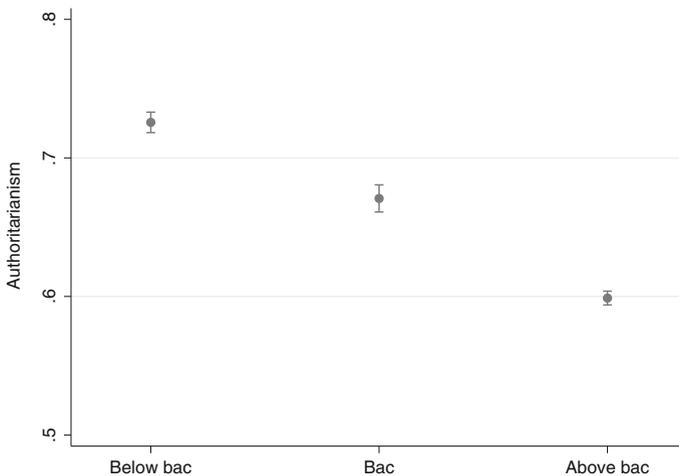
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<sup>8</sup> Note that *La République en Marche*, the party of the current French President Emmanuel Macron, did not exist yet at the time, as it was founded in April 2016.





**Fig. 1** Mean level of authoritarianism by social class, with 95% confidence intervals

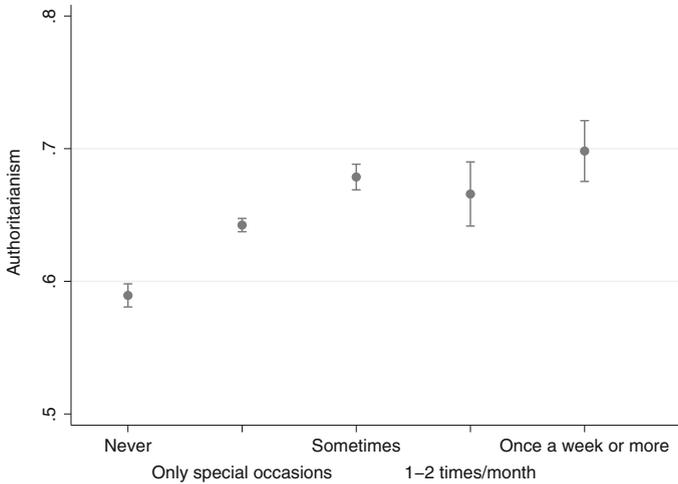


**Fig. 2** Mean level of authoritarianism by education, with 95% confidence intervals

Further, results confirm our third hypothesis as we observe a positive association between religiosity and authoritarianism, though it appears to be less systematic than in the case of education (Fig. 3). The largest contrast between religious groups is about 0.1 point. Furthermore, the largest differences are found between those respondents who never attend a religious service, and those who go at least sometimes. A further increase in the frequency of church attendance is not clearly linked with higher levels of authoritarianism.

In order to analyze the socio-economic correlates of authoritarianism in more detail, we estimate a regression model that includes social class, education, and religiosity, as well as age and gender as further socio-demographic controls. While





**Fig. 3** Mean level of authoritarianism by religiosity, with 95% confidence intervals

all of the contrasts highlighted above remain significant, we notice that the magnitude of the class differences is somewhat smaller in this multivariate analysis (Table 1). This is mainly due to the effect of respondents' education level. One of the reasons behind the higher level of authoritarianism of the working class is the lower average level of education. But nonetheless, we still observe significant differences, with authoritarian dispositions being lowest among higher-grade professionals, and highest among manual and non-manual workers.

**Table 1** Relation between socio-economic variables and authoritarianism

	Coef.	Std. err.
Social class (ref: middle-level professionals)		
Farmers	- 0.03	0.02
Self-employed	- 0.02	0.01
Managers	- 0.03***	0.01
Clerical and service staff	0.04***	0.01
Manual workers	0.04***	0.01
Pensioners	0.01	0.01
Non-labor force participants	- 0.01	0.01
Education level	- 0.06***	0.00
Religiosity	0.14***	0.01
Age	0.00***	0.00
Female	0.00	0.00
Constant	0.62***	0.01
<i>N</i>	24,325	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.05	

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ;  
 \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$



We now move to the second step of our analysis, considering the relation between authoritarianism and attitudes toward ethnic intolerance and economic conservatism. As mentioned above, our measure of ethnic intolerance is based on a battery of questions about attitudes toward immigration and Islam, while economic conservatism is captured by a question on income redistribution. At the bivariate level, authoritarianism is moderately associated with ethnic intolerance (correlation of 0.35), but only marginally related to economic conservatism (correlation of 0.05). Table 2 reports the results of more detailed regression models. When controlling for a range of socio-demographic characteristics, authoritarianism has a positive and significant impact on ethnic intolerance. Same is the case with economic conservatism, although the effect although statistically significant is so small that is not substantively important. In terms of the other individual characteristics, we see that ethnic intolerance in France is higher among male, older, less educated, and more religious citizens, as well as those with a lower professional background. At the same time, results suggest that despite controlling for these characteristics, authoritarianism bears a positive and statistically significant impact on ethnic intolerance. These results are fully in line with Napier and Jost (2008). Moreover, results suggest that opposition to economic redistribution is higher among respondents with a higher level of education, among frequent churchgoers, as well as among managers, self-employed professionals, and pensioners. The very weak positive relationship between authoritarianism and opposition to income

**Table 2** Impact of authoritarianism and socio-economic characteristics on political attitudes

	Ethnic intolerance		Economic conservatism	
	Coef.	Std. err.	Coef.	Std. err.
Authoritarianism	0.26***	0.00	0.06***	0.01
Social class (ref: middle-level professionals)				
Farmers	0.05*	0.02	0.04	0.02
Self-employed	0.07***	0.01	0.07***	0.01
Managers	- 0.01*	0.01	0.05***	0.01
Clerical and service staff	0.06***	0.00	- 0.01	0.01
Manual workers	0.06***	0.01	- 0.02*	0.01
Pensioners	0.04***	0.01	0.04***	0.01
Non-labor force participants	0.04***	0.01	- 0.01	0.01
Education level	- 0.03***	0.00	0.03***	0.00
Religiosity	0.06***	0.01	0.10***	0.01
Age	0.00***	0.00	0.00	0.00
Female	- 0.02***	0.00	0.01	0.00
Constant	0.35***	0.01	0.35***	0.01
<i>N</i>	24,304		24,321	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.16		0.03	

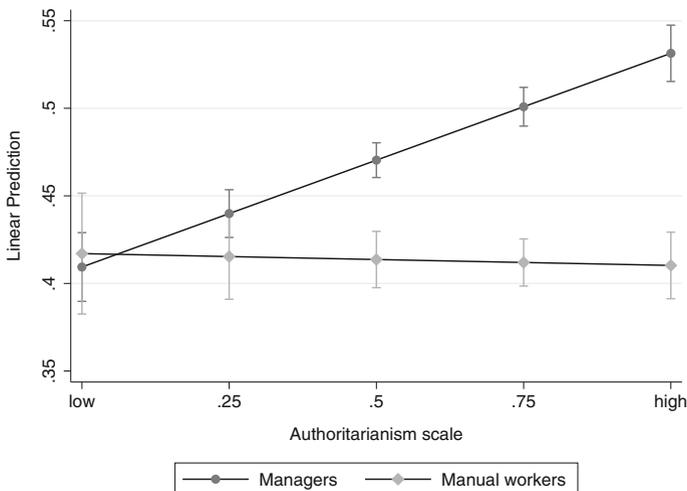
\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$



redistribution stands against Stenner's hypothesis over the association between authoritarianism and support for left-wing economic policies.

However, as we discussed in the previous section, the relationship between authoritarianism and economic conservatism may be conditioned by social class ( $H_4$ ). In line with Lipset's thesis we may expect higher levels of authoritarianism to be associated with left-wing economic policies among working-class individuals, but not among other social classes. To examine this possibility, we estimated a similar model of the impact of authoritarianism on economic conservatism, letting this effect be conditional on social class. This shows indeed that the relation between authoritarianism and opposition to redistribution differs between classes. It is strong and positive among higher social classes (managers, middle-level professionals, self-employed), while it is weaker or null among manual and non-manual workers (as well as among non-labor force participants). The full results of this model can be seen in Appendix (Table 6). Figure 4 illustrates this difference by showing the contrast between manual workers and managers. Contrary to our hypothesis ( $H_4$ ), authoritarianism is not associated with increased support for left-wing economic policies among the working class. On the contrary, we find a strong positive effect of authoritarianism on economic conservatism among the upper classes. This finding illustrates that instead of left economic attitudes reflecting working-class authoritarianism it is conservative economic attitudes that partly stem from authoritarian inclinations among the economically affluent.

We now move on to assess the impact of authoritarianism on the propensity to vote for the four major French parties: the center left incumbent Parti Socialiste, the center right Les Républicains, the far left Parti de Gauche, and the far right Front National. At the bivariate level, authoritarianism is significantly related to the propensity to vote for each of these parties. Citizens with a more authoritarian disposition have a higher expected utility for Les Républicains (correlation of 0.12)



**Fig. 4** Predicted values of Economic conservatism, by social class and level of authoritarianism



**Table 3** Authoritarianism, socio-economic characteristics, political attitudes, and support for left-wing parties

	Parti de Gauche		Parti Socialiste	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Authoritarianism	- 0.14*** (0.01)	- 0.03*** (0.01)	- 0.16*** (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Ethnic intolerance		- 0.36*** (0.01)		- 0.59*** (0.01)
Economic conservatism		- 0.25*** (0.01)		- 0.19*** (0.01)
Social class (ref: middle-level professionals)				
Farmers	- 0.02 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	- 0.03 (0.03)	- 0.00 (0.03)
Self-employed	- 0.09*** (0.01)	- 0.04*** (0.01)	- 0.13*** (0.01)	- 0.07*** (0.01)
Managers	- 0.05*** (0.01)	- 0.04*** (0.01)	- 0.01 (0.01)	- 0.00 (0.01)
Clerical and service staff	- 0.03*** (0.01)	- 0.01 (0.01)	- 0.05*** (0.01)	- 0.02*** (0.01)
Manual workers	- 0.02* (0.01)	- 0.01 (0.01)	- 0.04*** (0.01)	- 0.01 (0.01)
Pensioners	- 0.05*** (0.01)	- 0.03*** (0.01)	- 0.04*** (0.01)	- 0.01 (0.01)
Non-labor force participants	- 0.04** (0.01)	- 0.02*** (0.01)	- 0.07*** (0.01)	- 0.04*** (0.01)
Education level	- 0.01*** (0.00)	- 0.01*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)
Religiosity	- 0.14*** (0.01)	- 0.09*** (0.01)	- 0.13*** (0.01)	- 0.07*** (0.01)
Age	- 0.00*** (0.00)	- 0.00*** (0.00)	- 0.00*** (0.00)	- 0.00*** (0.00)
Female	0.03*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.02*** (0.00)
Constant	0.39*** (0.01)	0.60*** (0.01)	0.52*** (0.01)	0.79*** (0.01)
N	20,640	20,624	20,591	20,574
R <sup>2</sup>	0.05	0.21	0.05	0.25

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$



**Table 4** Authoritarianism, socio-economic characteristics, political attitudes, and support for right-wing parties

	Les Républicains		Front National	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Authoritarianism	0.13*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.22*** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Ethnic intolerance		0.22*** (0.01)		0.83*** (0.01)
Economic conservatism		0.37*** (0.01)		0.03*** (0.01)
Social class (ref: middle-level professionals)				
Farmers	0.02 (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)
Self-employed	0.10*** (0.02)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)
Managers	0.05*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)	- 0.03** (0.01)	- 0.02** (0.01)
Clerical and service staff	0.01 (0.01)	- 0.00 (0.01)	0.06*** (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)
Manual workers	- 0.02 (0.01)	- 0.03* (0.01)	0.08*** (0.01)	0.03** (0.01)
Pensioners	0.04*** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	- 0.03*** (0.01)
Non-labor force participants	- 0.00 (0.01)	- 0.01 (0.01)	0.03** (0.01)	- 0.01 (0.01)
Education level	0.03*** (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)	- 0.05*** (0.00)	- 0.03*** (0.00)
Religiosity	0.28*** (0.01)	0.23*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)
Age	- 0.00*** (0.00)	- 0.00*** (0.00)	- 0.00*** (0.00)	- 0.00*** (0.00)
Female	0.01* (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)	- 0.05*** (0.01)	- 0.03*** (0.00)
Constant	0.18*** (0.01)	- 0.02* (0.01)	0.12*** (0.01)	- 0.17*** (0.01)
<i>N</i>	20,109	20,094	20,231	20,215
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.05	0.17	0.08	0.35

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ 

and especially for the Front National ( $r = 0.22$ ), while they are less likely to support the Parti Socialiste ( $r = -0.17$ ) or Parti de Gauche ( $r = -0.16$ ). This reflects a relatively clear left–right contrast in the relation between authoritarianism and partisan preferences. A stronger authoritarian disposition increases the chances of supporting a right-wing party, and this effect is even more pronounced for the far right Front National. At the same time, it lowers the perceived attractiveness of the main two left-wing parties. These relations remain when controlling for social class and additional socio-demographic characteristics. This can be seen in the first model for each party. The corresponding coefficients are presented in Table 3 for left-wing parties, and in Table 4 for the right.

However, this effect of authoritarianism largely disappears when controlling for attitudinal preferences (Model 2). It becomes indistinguishable from zero for the Socialist Party and the Front National, while some marginal effect remains for the Parti de Gauche and for Les Républicains. But even in that case, the effect is strongly weakened. This shows that differences in partisan preferences between citizens with stronger or weaker authoritarian dispositions are almost entirely mediated by differences in political attitudes. Authoritarianism does not exert a direct impact on partisan preferences—or at least not a very strong one. In line with the previous findings that showed a strong association of authoritarianism and ethnic intolerance, the reduction of the authoritarianism effect is stronger for the party the support of which is more closely related to attitudes toward ethnic groups, that is, the Front National.

## Conclusion

Much of extant research investigates prejudice and the rise of the far right on the basis of social group memberships. However, the decline of the explanatory merit of these traditional theoretical tools calls for alternative explanations of individual differences on the propensity to vote for populist leaders or endorse anti-immigrant attitudes. This is why we investigated in this article the socio-demographic origins of authoritarianism in France as well as its potential to explain political attitudes and voting preferences, using an improved measure that is free from the methodological flaws of the past. Our findings largely corroborate two time-honored findings of past research that employs the RWA or the *F*-scale: First we find that authoritarianism in France, as is the case in other national contexts, is higher among people with low education, the working class, and church goers. When treated as an independent variable, our results indicate that authoritarianism is a strong and significant predictor of ethnic intolerance.

At the same time authoritarianism is only weakly related to economic conservatism. Further, our results stand against the hypothesis of a positive relation between working-class authoritarianism and the endorsement of left-wing economic policies. Yet it is noteworthy that despite the very feeble effect of authoritarianism on economic conservatism on the whole sample, our findings show that authoritarianism among the managerial classes is a strong predictor of conservative attitudes in the economic domain. Taken together, these findings suggest an overall



positive association between authoritarianism and economic conservatism in the case of France. These findings are in line with past studies that have found a positive relationship between RWA and facets of economic conservatism (Altemeyer 1998).

Finally, the results offer little support for the assumption of a convergence of the extremes, as they indicate that authoritarianism divides the electorate along the left–right ideological axis: There is a strong and significant association between authoritarianism and the propensity to vote for the two right-wing parties, the far right Front National and Les Républicains. On the contrary, authoritarianism has a strong negative relationship with voting both for the left, and especially with the Parti de Gauche. Interestingly, it is often the cases that the impact of authoritarianism exceeds the respective impact of key demographic characteristics such as social class or religiosity. It should be noted that the combined explanatory power of models that include only demographics and authoritarianism on the vote is low compared to models that include political attitudes, indicating that even though authoritarianism has an important influence on the vote, still its interpretive merit is inferior compared to political attitudes.

Future research could build on and extend these findings in multiple ways. First, expanding the investigation of the relationship between authoritarianism and preferences for economic policy by including additional items other than attitudes toward economic redistribution would add to our understanding of the endorsement of conservative economic preferences that appear to be on the rise in France. These may include attitudes toward economic inequality, poverty, or cuts in the welfare state. Moreover, at a broader level this article investigated for the first time in France the potential of dispositional traits in understanding individual-level differences in political behavior. Adding additional concepts from political psychology, such as Social Dominance Orientation, the Big Five, or Need for Cognition, would shed additional light on how structural psychological differences may shape both vote intentions and policy preferences, allowing us to capture a full range of the psychological motivations that these political choices serve (see Jost et al. 2003 for a discussion). Finally, an interesting question concerns the way in which authoritarianism interplays with various threatening stimuli such as economic insecurity, physical threats, terrorism, or the presence of ethnic minorities. The key question here is whether this wave of authoritarianism that we witness throughout Europe and the US is due to the activation of authoritarians by various types of threat and/or a change of the social correlates of authoritarianism. During the last decade, authoritarianism has reemerged as a key concept for explaining patterns of prejudice and radical vote choices. Yet, it has rarely been used in analyses of political choices in Europe. Adding it to political science models could lead to a better understanding of what drives ideological endorsements, political attitudes, and voting choices.

## Appendix

See Tables 5 and 6.



**Table 5** Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.	N
Authoritarianism	0.64	0.31	0	1	24,325
Ethnic intolerance	0.54	0.25	0	1	24,304
Economic conservatism	0.44	0.28	0	1	24,365
Voting propensities					
Parti de Gauche	0.24	0.29	0	1	20,672
Parti Socialiste	0.37	0.35	0	1	20,622
Les Républicains	0.37	0.35	0	1	20,138
Front National	0.25	0.37	0	1	20,263
Social class					
Farmers	0.01	0.08	0	1	24,369
Self-employed	0.03	0.17	0	1	24,369
Managers	0.13	0.34	0	1	24,369
Middle-level professionals	0.18	0.38	0	1	24,369
Clerical and service staff	0.21	0.41	0	1	24,369
Manual workers	0.07	0.26	0	1	24,369
Pensioners	0.23	0.42	0	1	24,369
Non-labor force participants	0.14	0.35	0	1	24,369
Education level	0.40	0.83	-1	1	24,369
Religiosity	0.26	0.21	0	1	24,369
Age	0.00	15.63	-30	51	24,369
Female	0.57	0.50	0	1	24,369

**Table 6** An interactive model of authoritarianism, socio-economic characteristics, and economic conservatism

	Coef.	Std. err.
Authoritarianism	0.10***	0.01
Social class (ref: middle-level professionals)		
Farmers	0.01	0.05
Self-employed	0.10***	0.02
Managers	0.05***	0.01
Clerical and service staff	0.03*	0.01
Manual workers	0.05**	0.02
Pensioners	0.07***	0.01
Non-labor force participants	0.04**	0.01
Interactions		
Auth. × Farmers	0.05	0.07
Auth. × Self-employed	- 0.04	0.03
Auth. × Managers	0.02	0.02
Auth. × Clerical and service staff	- 0.07***	0.02
Auth. × Manual workers	- 0.11***	0.03
Auth. × Pensioners	- 0.06**	0.02



**Table 6** continued

	Coef.	Std. err.
Auth. × Non-labor force participants	− 0.08***	0.02
Education level	0.03***	0.00
Religiosity	0.10***	0.01
Age	0.00	0.00
Female	0.01*	0.00
Constant	0.32***	0.01
<i>N</i>	24,321	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.03	

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ;\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ 

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