EMPIRICAL ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Social Equality Is Rather Threatening Than Normative to Authoritarians

Márton Hadarics 🔟 | Anna Kende 🔟

Institute of Psychology, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary

Correspondence: Márton Hadarics (marton.hadarics@ppk.elte.hu)

ABSTRACT

Authoritarianism is a key predisposition that serves as a motivational base for prejudice against non-conventional social groups, but less is known about the contextual bases of authoritarian prejudice. Using multinational data, we revealed how contextual social equality and inclusion affect authoritarian prejudice. Authoritarians' sensitivity to social and normative threats and conformity to norms would indicate the opposite influence of contextual equality on the relationship between authoritarianism and negative attitudes towards non-conventional outgroups. Based on data from the World Values Survey (2017–2022) and other country-ranking indices, and the analysis of authoritarian prejudice against three different groups (immigrants, gay people, and traditional gender roles), we found that social equality and inclusion strengthen the effect of authoritarianism on prejudice. These results indicate that social equality functions as a contextual threat, catalyzing the "authoritarian dynamic" rather than serving as an acceptable norm to authoritarians.

1 | Introduction

Since the pioneering work of the Frankfurt School scholars, authoritarianism has been considered one of the most prominent psychological foundations of negative intergroup attitudes and prejudice, especially towards non-conventional outgroups that contradict social traditions and conventions. Despite the conceptual differences between earlier and more recent theories of authoritarianism, all major approaches emphasize the need for a stable and predictable social environment as an important motivational aspect of the concept (Adorno et al. 1950; Altemeyer 1996; Duckitt 2001; Feldman 2003; Stenner 2005). As social conventions and well-established norms can guarantee such an environment, several decades of research show that authoritarians adhere to traditional customs and conventions. In line with this, they tend to express negative attitudes toward non-conventional

outgroups that contradict conventions, because such groups are perceived as threatening the stability of the status quo and social cohesion (for reviews, see Duckitt 2022; Feldman and Weber 2023; Osborne et al. 2023).

Nonetheless, as intergroup tolerance and social inclusion become more expected and normative in many countries, it is not entirely clear how contextual social equality affects the interplay between authoritarianism and intergroup attitudes. Two lines of research imply different conclusions about the contextual effect of social equality. The "authoritarian dynamic" approach argues that normative threats activate and strengthen the impact of authoritarianism on intolerant and antidemocratic views (Feldman and Stenner 1997; Stenner 2005). If greater equality and inclusion of nonconventional groups serve as a normative threat to authoritarians, this approach suggests that equality would strengthen

the effect of authoritarianism on prejudice. On the other hand, a growing body of evidence indicates that dominant social norms can also influence how authoritarianism affects intergroup attitudes. As authoritarians have a stronger tendency to conform to norms and customs, according to this approach, which we call "authoritarian conformity," authoritarians may paradoxically adopt more inclusive and tolerant views if these represent the group's dominant social norms (Bilewicz et al. 2017; Górska et al. 2022; Roets et al. 2015). If the inclusion and greater equality of non-conventional groups reflect norms about the expected treatment of such groups, we could also assume that authoritarianism would boost the acceptance of more egalitarian norms in more egalitarian contexts. In this paper, we investigate whether contextual social equality functions as a potential threat or a normative guideline for authoritarians when expressing their attitudes towards non-conventional outgroups.

1.1 | Authoritarianism and Intergroup Attitudes

The tendency to gravitate towards strong leaders propagating antidemocratic, hostile, and intolerant views was first explained by Frankfurt School authors with a personality trait defined as authoritarianism (Adorno et al. 1950; Fromm 1941; Reich 1946). Although authoritarianism was later reconceptualized as either a learned ideological attitude cluster (Altemeyer 1996; Duckitt 2001) or a predisposition to prefer certain values (social order and uniformity) at the expense of others (autonomy and creativity; Feldman 2003; Stenner 2005), its most basic characteristics, motivational aspects, and attitudinal consequences have not essentially changed. A central characteristic of authoritarians is a strong need for certainty and predictability, which can be extended to a preference for tradition-based social cohesion and cultural uniformity (Feldman and Weber 2023; Osborne et al. 2023).

As a motivational base, two lines of theorizing highlight two slightly different foundations for such authoritarian preferences. The 'authoritarian dynamic' approach of (Feldman and Stenner 1997; Stenner 2005) emphasizes a profound need for social uniformity and normative conformity (vs. social diversity) and argues that authoritarians are particularly sensitive to 'normative threats' that undermine social sameness and uniformity. Others stress a more general strive for collective security and consider conformity and uniformity as important guarantees of secure and predictable social arrangements (Duckitt 2001; Osborne et al. 2023). According to this latter interpretation, authoritarians may be responsive to a wider array of threats to social order and collective security beyond normative threats (Duckitt 2022).

Based on both lines of theorizing, non-conventional outgroups are expected to evoke negative attitudes in authoritarians. Such groups contest predominant social conventions and traditions, consequently, they pose a direct normative threat to social uniformity, and by this, they are also threatening social order and stability that could otherwise provide a sense of security and certainty. Correspondingly, authoritarianism has been shown to predict prejudice in the case of immigrants (Cohrs and

Stelzl 2010; Cowling et al. 2019), different ethnic and cultural minorities (Birdir et al. 2022; Dunwoody and McFarland 2018; Gouveia et al. 2021), LGBTQ + people (Godø et al. 2024), homeless people (Faragó et al. 2022), or the more general clusters of "dangerous" and "dissident" groups (Duckitt and Sibley 2007; Hadarics and Kende 2018). Furthermore, authoritarianism typically correlates with policy preferences that hinder the advancement of groups contradicting the status quo (e.g., Bawden et al. 2023; Jiménez-Moya et al. 2022; Thomsen et al. 2008).

1.2 | Authoritarian Prejudice and Contextual Threat

According to empirical evidence, authoritarian intolerance is activated by social threats, meaning that in the absence of such perceived threats, authoritarianism does not necessarily result in hostility towards outgroups (Feldman and Stenner 1997; Stenner 2005). Nonetheless, if certain outgroups are perceived to endanger social order, authoritarians express negative and hostile views in their pursuit of neutralizing the threat.

Empirical evidence underlines that the effect of authoritarianism on prejudice strengthens as potentially threatening contextual factors emerge in the social environment. e.g., experimental studies show that exposure to outgroups (e.g., immigrants and ethnic minorities) framed as socially threatening strengthens the relationship between authoritarianism and prejudice towards these groups (Claassen and McLaren 2021; Cohrs and Asbrock 2009; Cohrs and Ibler 2009). Nonetheless, the exact nature of the threat also affects the relationship between authoritarianism and social attitudes. Stevens and Banducci (2022), (2023) demonstrate that normative threats endangering uniformity affect authoritarians' social attitudes, while individual-focused security threats evoke stronger responses in the case of non-authoritarians.

Objective contextual factors that are potentially interpreted as threats to social cohesion and uniformity by authoritarians also moderate the relationship between authoritarianism and negative intergroup attitudes. For instance, it was found both in the Netherlands (Van Assche et al. 2014) and the United States (Velez and Lavine 2017) that a higher level of local ethnic diversity strengthened authoritarians' outgroup prejudice but did not affect non-authoritarians' intergroup attitudes. Similarly, the results of Araújo et al. (2020) showed that authoritarians' anti-immigrant sentiments were more intense in countries with larger immigrant populations. Furthermore, both Claassen and McLaren (2021) and Araújo et al. (2020) offer evidence that authoritarian prejudice is stronger in countries where Muslims are framed as threatening. Dunn (2014) also presents supporting evidence, as he found that the negative relationship between authoritarianism and social tolerance is stronger in more democratic countries, which is explained by the threatening nature of democratic pluralism to authoritarians (see also Stenner 2005). In sum, empirical evidence indicates that authoritarian prejudice intensifies if an outgroup has a real or hypothetical intent for major social changes.

1.3 | Norms as Guidelines for Authoritarians

Social norms are widely shared and accepted standards of proper thinking and behavior within a group. As norms are effective tools to maintain social order and stability, authoritarians are especially prone to follow social norms and expect others to do so too (Altemeyer 1996). In the dual-process model of authoritarianism, Duckitt (2001), (2022) labels the personality base of authoritarianism as 'social conformity,' reflecting authoritarians' strong inclination to conform to normative social conventions and procedures while condemning those who contradict them.

Nonetheless, recent evidence highlights that social norms have the potential to weaken or even reverse the typically positive relationship between authoritarianism and intergroup intolerance. If social norms promote inclusion and tolerance as general guidelines of intergroup behavior, authoritarians seem to conform to these principles, diminishing their willingness for intergroup hostilities towards non-conventional groups. For example, Roets et al. (2015) found that authoritarianism showed positive relationships with both multiculturalism and outgroup attitudes in Singapore, where the government had propagated diversity and tolerance as social norms for several decades. Similarly, the results of Górska et al. (2022) from Poland and Great Britain showed that the typical negative relationship between authoritarianism and intergroup attitudes weakened or even turned positive if respondents perceived that positive attitudes are normative and negative ones are non-normative within their ingroup. The moderating role of ingroup norms also appears in the study of Dusso (2017), which showed that authoritarian African-American voters were more willing to vote for a liberal candidate than non-authoritarians, although authoritarianism predominantly predicts conservative preferences among the general population (Duckitt 2022; Osborne et al. 2023). Authoritarian reluctance to behave in a non-normative manner was demonstrated by Bilewicz et al. (2017), who found that authoritarianism predicted negative attitudes towards non-conventional outgroups as expected, but also showed a positive relationship with disapproval of hate speech towards the same outgroups. The author explained this result with the non-normativity of expressing blatantly hostile and offensive views about these groups, even if they are disliked by authoritarians. However, Oyamot Jr et al. (2012) present somewhat contradicting results, as their experimental manipulation of normative attitudes towards immigrants, both in positive and negative directions, eliminated the effect of authoritarianism on prejudice for non-egalitarian respondents but created it for egalitarian ones. In sum, it seems that occasionally, authoritarian conformity can overwrite authoritarian prejudice if social norms emphasize compassion and inclusion.

1.4 | Social Equality as a Potential Contextual Moderator

There are considerable national differences in the status of social groups that contradict traditional social views and conventions, such as racial, sexual, or religious minorities, as well as in terms of gender equality (Menendian et al. 2020). Such differences can be at least partly attributed to the countries' varying commitment to guaranteeing equal status and opportunities for these groups and promoting inclusion and tolerance. In other words, more inclusive (vs. non-inclusive) countries establish and strengthen egalitarian norms related to non-conventional social groups. The prevalence of such inclusive practices can be regarded as the institutionalization of social norms, which, unlike subjective (perceived) norms, manifest the expected standards of behavior and beliefs through established social practices and procedures, laws, regulations, and customs (Legros and Cislaghi 2020).

However, it is not entirely clear how contextual equality would affect the interplay between authoritarianism and prejudice towards non-conventional social groups. In this regard, the "authoritarian dynamic" (Stenner 2005) and the "authoritarian conformity" approaches (Górska et al. 2022; Roets et al. 2015) suggest contradicting outcomes in certain intergroup contexts. Based on the first, the equality and inclusion of non-conventional groups can function as a contextual normative threat undermining the status quo and social uniformity. As such, it ignites the dynamic of authoritarian intolerance and makes authoritarians express their negative views against such groups. On the other hand, in unequal and exclusionary contexts, non-conventional groups have much less power to advance their status and change the conventional status quo. Under such circumstances, authoritarians face no threat, and the "authoritarian dynamic" is not likely to create stronger prejudice in authoritarians (vs. non-authoritarians). In short, based on the "authoritarian dynamic," contextual equality would strengthen the relationship between authoritarianism and outgroup prejudice.

Conversely, if contextual social equality and inclusive practices embody the institutionalized forms of egalitarian norms, based on the "authoritarian conformity" approach, authoritarians' motivation to adhere to normative views can overwrite their "natural" tendency to degrade non-conventional outgroups. On the other side of the same coin, intolerance and exclusion may count as normative in more unequal contexts (Kende et al. 2024; Pettigrew 1959). This could lead to an additive effect between authoritarians' conformity and their tendency for intolerance, resulting in a doubly fueled, boosted relationship between authoritarianism and prejudice in such unequal and oppressive contexts. If that is the case, based on the "authoritarian conformity" approach, contextual equality and inclusion would weaken the effect of authoritarianism on outgroup prejudice or even reverse it.

2 | The Study

Our aim with this multinational study was to test whether social equality and inclusion of specific outgroups function as a contextual threat that boosts, or as an institutionalized norm that weakens or reverses, the relationship between authoritarianism and prejudice towards these groups. These two alternatives suggest opposite directions for the moderating effect of authoritarianism on prejudice: the "authoritarian dynamic" approach indicates a positive interaction, while the

"authoritarian conformity" approach suggests a negative one. Understanding how contextual social equality moderates authoritarian prejudice has important theoretical and practical relevance. First, the direction of moderation can reveal limitations in at least one of the two competing theoretical approaches. Either an egalitarian normative environment can overwrite the threat-induced authoritarian dynamic, or the latter can suppress egalitarian conformity. Both possibilities would signal that contextual social equality narrows the external validity of one of these theories. From a practical perspective, the answer might refine our predictions about authoritarians' long-term reactions to social inclusion and tolerance-promoting policies. Authoritarianism is considered a serious obstacle to equality (Feldman et al. 2021), but whether establishing egalitarian norms will ease or deepen the problem depends on the answer to this question.

We tested these alternatives across three different intergroup contexts, using data from the 7th wave of the World Values Survey, supplemented with other country-ranking indices quantifying social inclusion and equality of various non-conventional social groups.

2.1 | Datasets and Measures

The World Values Survey (WVS) is one of the largest and most significant international survey programs which aims to explore and compare people's social attitudes, beliefs, and values from an exceptionally wide range of countries. The most recent seventh wave of the WVS (2017–2022) includes data from probabilistic representative samples from 92 countries and territories (EVS/WVS 2022). The relevant variables from this dataset were extended with three country-ranking indices that show the status and inclusion of three groups contradicting traditional social conventions. These were the Gender Inequality Index (GII; United Nations 2024), the LGBT Equality Index (LEI; Equaldex 2024), and the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX; Solano and Huddleston 2020) since the WVS contains items measuring attitudes toward immigrants, gay people, and traditional gender roles.

2.2 | Variables

2.2.1 | Authoritarianism

We applied items from the "child-rearing values" section of the WVS, which asks respondents about the most important values a child should learn from a checklist (0 = not mentioned; 1 = mentioned). This way of measurement contrasts the authoritarian needs for social order and cohesion to the non-authoritarian needs for autonomy and creativity, which is based on a relatively non-politicized conceptualization of authoritarianism (Engelhardt et al. 2023). Following the scoring procedure of others, we reversed the coding of non-authoritarian values to −1 and summed the authoritarian and non-authoritarian items for each respondent (e.g. Stenner 2005; Tillman 2013; Weiner and Federico 2017). Authoritarian values were "obedience", "good manners", and "religious faith", while

the non-authoritarian counterparts were "independence", "imagination", and "tolerance and respect for other people" (Tillman 2013).

2.2.2 | Intergroup Attitudes

Intergroup attitudes were measured in three areas. Four WVS items tapped into beliefs about traditional gender roles ("Men make better political leaders than women do."; "University is more important for a boy than for a girl."; "Pre-school child suffers with working mother."; "Men make better business executives than women do."; 1 = strongly agree; 4 = strongly disagree), while attitudes towards immigrants and gay people were measured with one item ("Evaluate the impact of immigrants on the development of [your country]."; 1 = very bad; 5 = very good; "Please tell me for each of the following statements whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between."—Homosexuality; 1 = always; 10 = never). When necessary, the items' scoring was reversed to indicate higher levels of prejudice.

2.2.3 | Contextual Social Equality and Inclusion

We aimed to find country-level indices that show to what extent the inclusion, support, and promotion of the status of the three groups mentioned above appear in the social practices of different countries as institutionalized objective norms. Gender equality practices were quantified by the GII, which ranks countries along a 0-1 scale in terms of gender inequality, primarily indicated by gender differences in reproductive health, empowerment, and the labor market (United Nations 2024). Here, higher values show higher levels of inequality. The equality and inclusion of gay people was operationalized by the LEI, which applies several indicators of the legal status of LGBT + people as well as other indicators of public acceptance, and ranks countries on a 0–100 scale (Equaldex 2024). In the case of immigrants, we applied the MIPEX index, which uses 58 policy indicators to show on a 0–100 scale how committed different countries are to granting equal access and opportunities to immigrants (Solano and Huddleston 2020). When possible, we used the data of these indices from the year of the WSV data collection in the case of each country or the closest one in time.[1]

2.2.4 | Control Variables

From the WVS variables, we used respondents' gender (1 = male; 2 = female), age, education level (1 = lower; 2 = middle; 3 = upper), religiousness (1 = convinced atheist; 2 = not religious; 3 = religious), and ideological orientation (1 = left; 10 = right) as control variables during our statistical modeling procedure. As a country-level variable, when investigating anti-immigrant prejudice, we also controlled for the ratio of the immigrant population in each country (United Nations 2021). The ratio of the immigrant population for each country is reported in the Online Supplementary Material (Table S2) along with the contextual social equality indicators.

2.3 | Analysis and Results

As our focus was on how country-level social equality moderates the relationship between authoritarianism and prejudice, we applied multilevel regression analysis with cross-level interactions and full-information Bayesian estimation. There is empirical evidence showing that Bayesian analysis—compared to frequentist estimation—results in more accurate parameter estimates of multilevel models when the number of between-level clusters is limited, which typically happens in the case of international databases with a limited number of participating countries (Hox 2010; Hox et al. 2012; Stegmueller 2013). Most importantly, Bayesian analysis provides more accurate estimates for cross-level interactions, which were our main focus of interest (Stegmueller 2013). Each analysis was conducted with the MPlus 8.5 software. We set up a random intercept multilevel model for each intergroup context. The variances of the intergroup attitude items were decomposed into a 'between' and a 'within' part, the former indicating between-country differences while the latter indicating between-person differences (irrespective of their country origins). Since there were four indicator items of gender role attitudes, multilevel structural equation modeling (MSEM) was applied in that case. This means that the covariances of these four items were captured by two latent variables, one on the between-, and another on the within-level of the model.[2] Compared to scale mean scores, latent variables are more effective for accounting for measurement errors by modeling the relationship between observed variables and the underlying construct (Finch and Bolin 2017).

On the within-level of each multilevel model, the within-variance of the prejudice indicator items (and the within-level 'gender roles' latent variable in the case of the gender roles MSEM model) was regressed on authoritarianism and the control variables, which latter ones were group-mean centered around their country-means. The effect of authoritarianism was always defined as a random slope that could vary among the countries. On the between-level of the models, the variance of these random slopes was regressed on the country-level equality indicators to define the cross-level interactions in each model (Finch and Bolin 2017). Besides, on the between-level, the between-variance of the prejudice indicator items (and the between-level 'gender roles' latent variable in the case of the gender roles MSEM model) was also regressed on the social equality indicators. In the case of the anti-immigrant model, country-level migrant stock was also applied as a potential moderator. Furthermore, as higher values of the GII show higher levels of gender inequality, the GII scores were transformed—by centering and taking the centered values' additive inverses - to indicate higher levels of equality like the LEI and the MIPEX indices.

We only included a country in the analysis if both the contextual moderator and the relevant WVS items were available for them, which unfortunately was not always the case. Based on this criterion, we had 86 countries for the models about anti-gay prejudice ($N = 149{,}463$) and gender roles ($N = 149{,}759$) and 47 countries for the anti-immigrant model ($N = 95{,}087$).[3] Two Monte Carlo Markov chains (MCMC) were run with 30,000 iterations in each analysis and N $(0; \infty)$ priors were applied for the slope estimates.

The results of the three models are presented in Table 1. These show that authoritarianism predicted negative intergroup attitudes in each case (gay people: $b = 0.332$; $p < 0.001$; gender roles: $b = 0.039$; $p < 0.001$; immigrants: $b = 0.055$; $p < 0.001$) but more importantly, these effects were moderated by the indicators of contextual equality (LEI: $b = 0.007$; $p < 0.001$; GII: $b = 0.160$; $p < 0.001$; MIPEX: $b = 0.001$; $p = 0.048$) in a way that higher levels of equality resulted in stronger effects of authoritarianism on prejudice. In the case of the anti-immigrant model, country-level migrant stock did not show an interaction with authoritarianism ($b = 0.000$; $p = 0.734$).[4] As can be seen in Figure 1 and Table 2, subsequent simple slope analyses revealed that the effect of authoritarianism on prejudice was always stronger at high levels of equality ($+1$ SD and $+2$ SD), which decreased at the mean levels of the moderators, weakened further at low levels of it (-1 SD), and turned into non-significant at very low levels of equality (-2 SD).[5]

3 | Discussion

Our multinational study, based on data from several dozen countries, revealed a consistent pattern across three different intergroup contexts. Specifically, authoritarianism had a stronger impact on prejudice towards non-conventional outgroups in countries with higher levels of equality and inclusion. In more inclusive countries, authoritarians become more intolerant compared to the general population, suggesting that social equality acts more as a threat than a norm. Since authoritarians prioritize social uniformity and order, outgroups that challenge traditional conventions appear particularly threatening (Duckitt 2022). In line with the "authoritarian dynamic" approach (Stenner 2005), our findings indicate that authoritarianism has a greater potential to increase prejudice in more egalitarian contexts. Here, the institutionalized inclusion and acceptance of such groups can threaten social uniformity and traditional worldviews. This threat activates the authoritarian dynamic, prompting authoritarians to express more negative intergroup attitudes than others in the same context. Conversely, in less inclusive contexts, authoritarians may feel less threatened because the system does not support the advancement of non-conventional groups, resulting in attitudes that do not differ significantly from non-authoritarians.

Our results suggest that social equality does not align with the "authoritarian conformity" approach (Górska et al. 2022; Roets et al. 2015). While contextual social equality and inclusion reflect institutionalized social norms at the national level, authoritarians do not necessarily adhere to these expectations. On the contrary, if inclusion involves groups that contradict cultural traditions and conventions, an inclusive context intensifies their disapproval rather than fostering tolerance as an institutional norm.

Based on the study by Górska et al. (2022), it seems that not norms per se, but their perception has the potential to mitigate authoritarian prejudice. However, whether authoritarians' perception of norms is objective enough remains unclear. The authors report significant negative correlations between authoritarianism and the perception of norms of tolerance in two studies, and a positive

TABLE 1 | Multilevel models predicting intergroup attitudes.

Variables	Anti-gay model					Gender roles model					Anti-immigrant model				
	b	SD	95% CI LB	95% CI UB	p	b	SD	95% CI LB	95% CI UB	p	b	SD	95% CI LB	95% CI UB	p
Within-level															
Intercept	6.879	0.140	6.602	7.155	< 0.001	0.000	—	—	—	—	2.997	0.053	2.891	3.103	< 0.001
Authoritarianism	0.332	0.026	0.282	0.383	< 0.001	0.039	0.004	0.031	0.047	< 0.001	0.055	0.009	0.038	0.073	< 0.001
Gender	−0.428	0.013	−0.454	−0.401	< 0.001	−0.250	0.003	−0.257	−0.243	< 0.001	0.026	0.006	0.014	0.038	< 0.001
Age	0.021	0.000	0.021	0.022	< 0.001	0.002	0.000	0.002	0.002	< 0.001	0.002	0.000	0.002	0.002	< 0.001
Education	−0.335	0.01	−0.354	−0.316	< 0.001	−0.110	0.002	−0.115	−0.105	< 0.001	−0.102	0.004	−0.111	−0.093	< 0.001
Religiousness	0.506	0.012	0.482	0.530	< 0.001	0.047	0.003	0.041	0.053	< 0.001	−0.039	0.005	−0.049	−0.029	< 0.001
Ideology	0.055	0.003	0.049	0.062	< 0.001	0.021	0.001	0.020	0.023	< 0.001	0.041	0.002	0.038	0.044	< 0.001
Between-level															
Social equality indicator	−0.082	0.006	−0.094	−0.070	< 0.001	−1.733	0.252	−1.241	−2.228	< 0.001	−0.014	0.004	−0.021	−0.006	< 0.001
Immigrant population rate	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.006	0.007	−0.007	0.020	0.368
Authoritarianism X Social equality indicator	0.007	0.001	0.005	0.009	< 0.001	0.160	0.025	0.208	0.111	< 0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.002	0.048
Authoritarianism X Immigrant population rate	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.000	0.001	−0.002	0.003	0.734
Residual variance - Random intercept	1.671	0.273	1.245	2.317	< 0.001	0.141	0.024	0.105	0.197	< 0.001	0.131	0.031	0.087	0.209	< 0.001
Residual variance - Authoritarianism-prejudice random slope	0.051	0.009	0.038	0.073	< 0.001	0.001	0.000	0.001	0.002	< 0.001	0.003	0.001	0.002	0.005	< 0.001
r^2 (Within)	0.105	0.002	0.102	0.108	< 0.001	0.095	0.002	0.092	0.099	< 0.001	0.033	0.001	0.030	0.035	< 0.001
r^2 (Between)	0.691	0.057	0.564	0.789	< 0.001	0.376	0.084	0.212	0.538	< 0.001	0.260	0.109	0.069	0.486	< 0.001
r^2 (Authoritarianism-prejudice random slope)	0.367	0.086	0.197	0.533	< 0.001	0.383	0.091	0.203	0.554	< 0.001	0.143	0.096	0.014	0.377	< 0.001

Note: Estimates are unstandardized and are the median points of the Bayesian posterior distributions.
Abbreviations: 95% CI LB = Lower bound of the 95% Bayesian credibility interval; 95% CI UB = Upper bound of the 95% Bayesian credibility interval; SD = Posterior standard deviation.
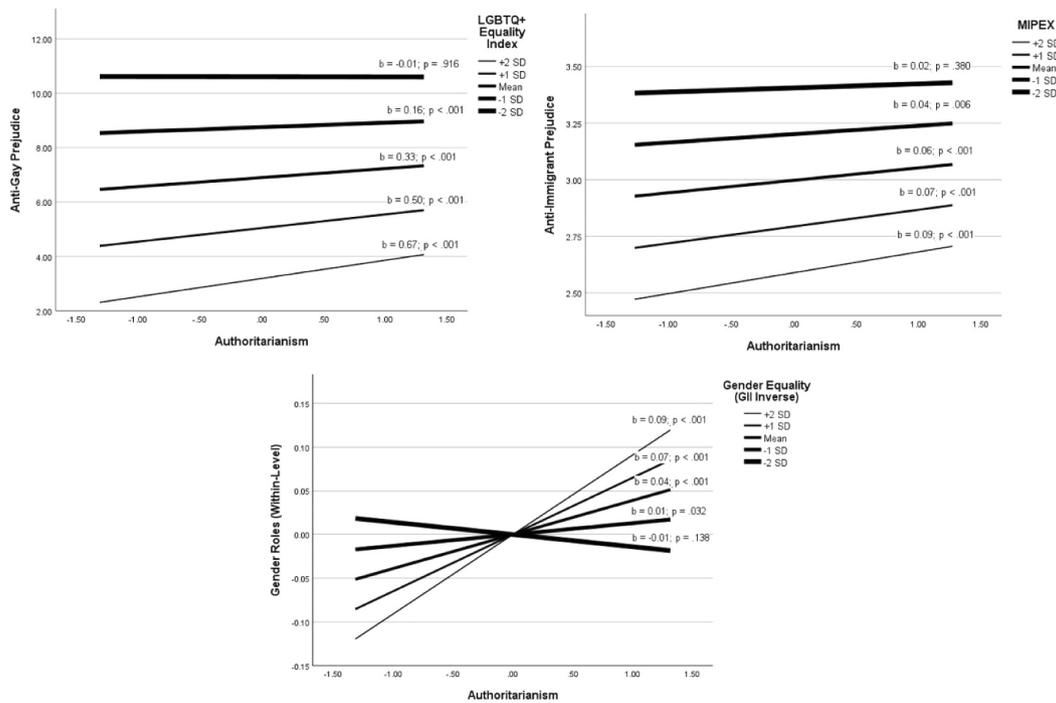
FIGURE 1 | Simple slopes for the relationship between authoritarianism and intergroup attitudes at different levels of contextual social equality.

TABLE 2 | Simple slopes for the authoritarianism - prejudice relationship.

Moderator level	Anti-gay model					Gender roles model					Anti-immigrant model				
	b	SD	95% CI LB	95% CI UB	p	b	SD	95% CI LB	95% CI UB	p	b	SD	95% CI LB	95% CI UB	p
+2 SD	0.670	0.057	0.558	0.781	< 0.001	0.091	0.009	0.074	0.109	< 0.001	0.092	0.021	0.051	0.133	< 0.001
+1 SD	0.501	0.036	0.430	0.572	< 0.001	0.065	0.006	0.054	0.076	< 0.001	0.074	0.013	0.048	0.099	< 0.001
Mean	0.332	0.026	0.282	0.383	< 0.001	0.039	0.004	0.031	0.047	< 0.001	0.055	0.009	0.038	0.073	< 0.001
−1 SD	0.163	0.036	0.092	0.234	< 0.001	0.013	0.006	0.001	0.024	0.032	0.037	0.013	0.011	0.062	0.006
−2 SD	−0.006	0.057	−0.118	0.106	0.916	−0.014	0.009	−0.032	0.004	0.138	0.018	0.021	−0.023	0.059	0.380

Note: Estimates are unstandardized and are the median points of the Bayesian posterior distributions.
Abbreviations: 95% CI LB = Lower bound of the 95% Bayesian credibility interval; 95% CI UB = Upper bound of the 95% Bayesian credibility interval; SD = Posterior standard deviation.

correlation in the third. This suggests that subjective norm perception is at least partly a motivated process for authoritarians. This is further supported by the fact that the experimental manipulation of intergroup norms alone did not affect authoritarian prejudice in the study by Oyamot Jr et al. (2012). The preference for cultural uniformity may hinder authoritarians from acknowledging and internalizing egalitarian norms. This can result in a latency phase during which they deny or ignore the shift of social norms towards tolerance and inclusion. Such a possibility requires further research.

It is important to emphasize that our study does not claim that social norms do not push authoritarians in the normative direction at all. However, it shows that norms push them less compared to others within the same context if the direction is towards equality and inclusion. For example, the results of Dunn (2014) show that authoritarians in more democratic countries are more tolerant than those in less democratic countries. However, within

the same country, authoritarians were less tolerant than non-authoritarians, and this difference was larger in more efficient democracies. Similarly, our results support that authoritarianism intensifies prejudice in more equal countries compared to the national average, resulting in greater polarization between authoritarians and non-authoritarians. In more unequal contexts, we found that everyone has more negative attitudes towards non-conventional outgroups, and authoritarianism did not have an additional effect. This suggests that anti-egalitarianism is so normative under such circumstances that authoritarian conformity is not required to follow it. Future research should test this assumption, but if everyone follows anti-egalitarian norms, it partly explains why authoritarians do not feel threatened by the mere presence of non-conventional groups.

It is also worth mentioning that in the case of anti-immigrant prejudice, the national proportion of the immigrant population did not moderate the effect of authoritarianism, which

contradicts previous studies (Van Assche et al. 2014; Velez and Lavine 2017). Our results indicate that it is not the mere presence of immigrants that ignites the authoritarian dynamic, but the accepting social climate that helps them improve their situation and become more potent in changing the conventional status quo (see also Dunn 2014).

It is necessary to highlight that our study is cross-sectional, which has two important consequences. First, contextual social equality was operationalized in the form of country differences without reflecting longitudinal changes. Nonetheless, future research should consider within-country longitudinal shifts in equality, as it is possible that after a latency period, authoritarians might indeed gravitate towards egalitarian norms. For example, in the study by Roets et al. (2015), we cannot rule out that Singaporean university students with an authoritarian predisposition had already passed such a latency period and internalized egalitarian norms within such an exceptionally tolerant environment. The second consequence is that we cannot make conclusions about the causal relationship between authoritarianism and prejudice, although the direction of the causal relationship from authoritarianism to more specific beliefs and attitudes is well-established both theoretically (Adorno et al. 1950; Altemeyer 1988; Duckitt 2001, 2022) and supported by empirical evidence (Asbrock et al. 2010; Satherley et al. 2021; Stanley et al. 2017).

4 | Conclusion

Based on the analysis of an extensive international database including responses of the representative samples of several dozens of countries, our results showed the same pattern in three separate intergroup contexts. This pattern indicates that contextual social equality and inclusion of non-conventional groups function more as a source of threat than as an appealing norm to authoritarians. Such threats to collective security and cultural university initiate the "authoritarian dynamic" which seems to hinder the internalization of evolving egalitarian views. The neutralization of authoritarian fears of diversity and equality could be crucial in strengthening social tolerance as a norm, which is why we have to understand accurately how authoritarian predispositions affect social beliefs and intergroup attitudes, and how this interplay evolves in different social contexts.

Ethics Statement

The authors have nothing to report.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The author(s) confirm(s) that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the reference list of the article.

Endnotes

[1] It was not possible in the case of the LEI, as its online database is regularly updated. In this case, we applied the data from the time of our statistical modeling (downloaded on June 24th, 2024).

[2] To test the psychometric properties of these latent variables, we set up a multilevel model with maximum likelihood estimation. The good fit of this model (χ^2 = 233.844; df = 4; CFI = 0.950; RMSEA = 0.020; $SRMR_{within}$ = 0.017; $SRMR_{between}$ = 0.002) and the appropriate range of the factor scores of the indicators (within-level: 0.81–0.32; between-level: 0.99–0.61) support the satisfying psychometric quality of the gender roles latent variables on both levels. Nonetheless, a cross-level metric invariance test indicated factor score differences across the two levels ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 121.55; Δdf = 3; $p < 0.001$), which means that the latent variable can not be interpreted entirely in the same way on the two separate levels of analysis. The somewhat lower factor scores on the within-level indicate that individuals differentiate more between the indicator items than whole societies on an aggregated level.

[3] The countries included in the models are reported in the OSM along with the descriptive statistics of the analyzed variables (Tables S1–S5).

[4] Standardized model parameters are reported in Table S6 in the OSM.

[5] In Figure 1, the main effect of contextual gender equality is not displayed. The reason for this is that we constructed a latent variable for Gender Roles both on the within- and the between-levels of the multilevel model (see Footnote 2). The main effect of contextual gender equality takes place on the between-level, targeting the between-level latent variable. In contrast, the moderated effect of authoritarianism appears on the within-level, as it affects the within-level latent variable.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.