

The Wilson-Patterson Conservatism Scale

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In his courteous reply to my paper (Stacey, 1977b), Wilson makes a number of points. Possibly the most important point is implicit in the reply. It is that the C-Scale is a reliable instrument which yields results that are stable, consistent and interpretable. My critical review of the research based on the C-Scale would in general support this point, as would the empirical work in Australia and New Zealand on sex and generational differences in conservatism (Boshier, 1973; Feather, 1977). Wilson agrees with my conclusion that the evidence does not indicate the C-Scale is unidimensional, though earlier he had claimed it to be unidimensional (Wilson, 1970, p. 106).

Wilson states the scale measures a general factor in the sense that a majority of the items are inter-correlated, and the failure of this general factor to account for much of the total variance is of no consequence. This position is not out of accord with Wilson's theoretical stance, but appears to me to be out of accord with the evidence available. For instance, on the basis of their factor analytic results Robertson and Cochrane (1973) write:

One must therefore conclude that the C scale does not measure a general dimension of conservatism. This impression is strengthened by examination of the item-whole correlations. While, with a sample of 329, a rho of about 0.12 attains an acceptable level of significance, one would not expect 10 out of 50 items to correlate less than 0.2 with the overall C score if a general factor of conservatism is indeed measured by the scale (pp. 429-30).

The available empirical evidence strongly suggests the C-Scale has three major components — blimpish religiosity, racialism and a rather prurient sexuality. While freely accepting that conservatism has been defined in many different ways and dissected into many different parts, these three components undoubtedly add up to a greatly constricted view of conservatism. And, as I pointed out in Stacey (1977a), they reflect Wilson's view of the characteristics of the ideal conservative rather than his description of the overlapping conceptualizations of the nature of conservatism.

Wilson may not believe Kerlinger's assertion that conservatism and liberalism are independent, but Kerlinger arrived at this position by ad-

ministering a large social attitude referents (single words and short phrases) scale to different samples and factor analysing the results (Kerlinger et al., 1976). The first-order factors of the referents scale in Kerlinger's recent studies contained what were regarded as four conservatism factors — religiosity, economic conservatism (money, business, profits), traditional conservatism (authority, discipline, duty) and morality; the second-order factor analysis yielded two main orthogonal factors — one labelled as conservatism, the other as liberalism (inappropriately for me) — and a third factor complementary to one of the two main factors. As the morality and religiosity issues, which are so prominent in Eysenck's T-Scale (Stacey, 1977a), showed as conservatism factors, Kerlinger has not renamed tender-mindedness as liberalism.

I have not been the only person to criticize the choice of items in the Wilson-Patterson scale and certain features of the scoring procedure. For example, Kerlinger et al. (1976) comment:

The Wilson and Patterson conservatism scale uses a number of items that seem unlikely to measure fundamental social attitudes (e.g. computer music, white lies, chaperones, straightjackets). Even more questionable, liberal items are treated as though they were conservative items but scored oppositely, and this scoring, which arises from the bipolarity assumption, precludes adequate determination of attitude factors (p. 266).

In a New Zealand study just completed, C-Scale items (initially developed on New Zealand samples) were found to have far less discriminatory power in the political realm than items chosen from Sidanius's Swedish scale of conservatism (Jamieson, 1978). This study provides empirical support for Sidanius's (1976) belief that inattention to the discriminative power of the C-Scale and its items against suitable criteria was a major shortcoming in its development.

Wilson and Patterson's view that party preference and attitudes concerning the distribution of wealth are determined mainly by habit, social class, and expediency may well hold in the upper class, and largely hold in the middle class but it certainly does not hold in the manual and

white-collar strata of the working class. My treatment of working class conservatism indicates some of the psychological, economic and political complexities of the phenomenon (Stacey, 1977b). Wilson's statements that conservatism "involves acceptance of authority and the status quo" and "a preference for what is familiar and safe," cover two of the conceptualizations which he described as delineating the nature of conservatism. They are far from synonymous with the alleged characteristics of the ideal conservative, which the C-Scale reflects. Further, they lead very easily to other categories of conservatism — status quo conservatism or wanting to preserve things as they are, reactionary conservatism or wanting to reconstruct an attractive past social order, reform conservatism or combining a "tendency to preserve with an inclination to improve" as Burke described it. This brings us back to the exceedingly difficult problem of definition.

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