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## **POLITICALLY CORRECT STEREOTYPING: THE CASE OF TEXANS**

**Andreas Schneider**  
*Texas Tech University*

### **ABSTRACT**

Texans are often presented as self-righteousness, simple-minded, and big-mouthed individualists. Despite this individualist stance, by believing in law and order they are supposed to have their own way of authoritativeness. Operationalizing the love for authority, it is demonstrated empirically that these prevalent stereotypes about Texans are unfounded. There are two reasons for the prevalence of stereotypes about Texans. As part of the US Zeitgeist, stereotypes about Texans are politically correct and, therefore, largely unchallenged. Building identity and pride, these stereotypes are often accepted by the stereotyped. This acceptance creates a persuasive two-edged stereotyping process.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Social information makes our perception of people different from the perception of inanimate objects (Heider 1958). The attribution of identities, traits, values, and motives increases the effectiveness of our perception. This effectiveness, however, is contaminated by potential biases (Jones and Davis 1965, Kelly 1971). While certain biases, like gender or racial biases, are today politically incorrect, and hereby widely accepted as stereotypes, preconceived opinions about Texans have to be first identified to be invalid to be accepted as stereotypes. This article identifies stereotypes of authoritativeness about Texans, shows their invalidity empirically, and demonstrates the two-edged process in which the stereotyped cocreates biases that, being politically correct, are often not identified as stereotypes.

There seems to be a moral division in ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ stereotypes. In recent years, ‘wrong’ stereotypes against women and selected minority groups became a major objection in the academic community. Giving any indication of following one of these stereotypes is seen as an offence that leads to social and professional decline, and sometimes even legal repercussions. In contrast, stereotyping people of certain local

heritages, like Texans, is widely accepted. In the case of Texans, stereotypes can also be used by the stereotyped to create pride and self-identity. In this way, stereotyping is a two-sided process unlikely to meet objection. This missing objection is one reason why people might not realize that they follow a stereotyped assessment of others. The 'right' stereotyping of Texans is politically correct, the 'wrong' stereotyping of women or minorities, politically incorrect.

### *The Texan Stereotype*

Addressing stereotypes about Texans, the author focuses on the specific form of authoritativeness attributed to Texas and the South. This authoritativeness is unique in its contradiction with the myth of individualism. It can be generalized as a love for authority that does not necessarily imply being subject of this authority.

There is debate about the exact physical boundaries of the Southern region. I favor the interpretation of Gastil (1975) that Texas has been influenced by Southern and Southwest/Western cultures that can be seen as distinct but they are nevertheless closely related. Presenting conceptions about the South to describe aspects of authoritarianism and individualism in Texas, the fact that the Southern culture and the Texan culture are closely related is central: stereotypes about Texans are embedded in a well-established myth of the South.

According to McWhiney (1988), the southern nature is rooted in the tough stance settlers had to adopt to protect their families and livestock in the absence of protection under the law. Despite tremendous structural change in the American South, the cultural pattern partly survived, and being a Southerner is still seen as a very distinctive regional heritage by most contemporary North Americans. Being southern implies rigid codes of honor with a serious undercurrent of violence. Southerners are also well known for their friendliness and politeness. Although 'the Southerner is proverbially gentle in manner, it has been said that until he is angered enough to kill you, he will treat you politely' (Charter 1963:59). Cohen et al, (1999) confirmed that the defense from potential hostility is a main cause for southern politeness.

The literature about the South, including Texas, presents mixed opinions about southern uniqueness. Recent historical interpretations indicate two movements that blur the cultural borderline between the American North and South. The rapid industrial development of the South (Sosna 1984) after WWII created structural similarities with the North. A southernization of the United States in terms of a reactionary political mindset, popular culture, and public life (Cobb 1999) followed. Howard Zinn (1964:218) argued that 'far from being utterly different,' the South represented 'the essence of the nation.' Differences between the South and the nation at large 'have been matters of degree, based on time and circumstance.' Before substantiating the argument that if the neo-conservatism of the North meets traditional conservatism found in Texas,

stereotypes about Texans are unfounded, let me proceed identifying Texan-specific stereotypes.

As instruments of domination, guns add to the power dimension found in authority, but they also imply individual empowerment. In this way the love for guns fits the stereotypical Texan form of authoritativeness. It is astonishing how deep the stereotype of the gun-loving, trigger-happy Texan is rooted even in academic circles. The author, for example, was ridiculed with references to six-guns when he announced his professional move to Texas. However, the celebration of gun culture is by no means special for Texans. Quite different from the common stereotype, Texas is actually a state with relatively rigid gun control laws in comparison to other states. Handgun laws in Texas are, for example, far more restrictive than in Indiana or Arizona. Today, for private citizens it is virtually impossible to openly carry a handgun legally in Texas. Concealed carry is in principle possible, but highly restricted. The right to carry a handgun can be easily revoked, and, to keep handguns out of the hands of the economically disadvantaged, a costly licensing procedure is employed.

Another common stereotype pictures Texans as having a good degree of stubbornness and self-righteousness. These individualistic attributes seem to contradict the authoritarianism implied in another component of the stereotype about Texans, their love for law and order. Stubbornness and individualism might be the charming myth that adds a special flavor to the perceived Texan love for authority and makes the underlying authoritativeness more acceptable.

Learning about the degree of authoritativeness, traditionalism, or conservatism in the United States, people who perceive themselves as liberals will not agree that this concerns themselves, their friends, or their colleagues. Others have to be found to be responsible for this negative picture of the United States. For non-Texan North Americans, stereotypes about Texas become persuasively convenient in the interpretation of information that implies traditionalism, nationalism, conservatism, and authoritativeness in the United States. Stereotypes about Texans become part of the US Zeitgeist. They make it possible for people offended by authoritative orientation to maintain a congruent set of identities (Heider 1958; Stryker 1980) by attributing negative, uncomfortable, or unwanted information about themselves to a willing scapegoat.

### *Challenging the Texan Stereotype*

Challenging the core of the stereotype about Texans, the author does not argue that Texans are not authoritative, but given the neo-conservative tendencies in the United States, Texas is not special anymore. Schneider's (1999a) model of neo-conservatism defines conservatism as the love of family, religion, and authority. This love is based on authoritativeness and an intrinsic interest in material values. The term neo-conservatism was coined to describe the contemporary United States that, after moving towards postmaterialism and postauthoritativeness in the 1970s, regressed to a materialistic and authoritative orientation. The postauthoritativeness-

authoritativeness dimension is strongly associated with Inglehart's (1997) traditional versus secular-rational authority dimension.

Traditionalism is reflected in the love for God, fatherland, and family, negative attitudes towards abortion, and stressing the importance of work in the definition of self-identity. Although Inglehart's use of the term traditionalism seems largely identical with the author's definition of neo-conservatism, the term neo-conservatism for the United States implies the dynamic character of recent changes in US authoritativeness and materialism. The idea of a neo-conservative development in the U.S. also is in line with the aforementioned southernization found by Cobb (1999).

Legitimation is a central concept in the definition of an authority (Weber 1922a). Stereotypes about Texans are challenged empirically by focusing on one aspect: the love for authority. An authority can be operationalized as someone potent, highly evaluated, and not expressive (Schneider 2004). Being coerced is unpleasant, and generally leads to a negative attitude toward the coercer. However, if the other's coercion is culturally legitimated, then she is an authority and for that reason may be evaluated positively (Weber, 1922a). The power of authorities is attributed by their social environment. This makes it unnecessary for authorities to engage in expressive actions to communicate their power. The more legitimation is given to authorities in the subject's culture, the more this person will like an authority. Just as questioning authority is a sign of liberalism, the love of authority is an important aspect of conservatism. Potency and evaluation are affective core dimensions in the definition of an authority. The more potency is attributed to a person, the more legitimation has to be given to the person in order to avoid the impression of coercion. It is the legitimation of authority that makes the attribution of positive evaluation possible. In the challenge of the stereotypes about Texans, authorities are operationalized as potent, good, and not expressive.

## **PROCEDURES**

### ***Measurement of Meaning***

Affect and cognition describe the meaning of two parts of the same coin, a sentiment (Osgood 1974). Although two cultures might agree on a lexical categorization, the language translation or denotation of identities, the connotation or affective meaning of these identities and behaviors might still differ. Since language use in Texas is largely identical to other states it is easy to control for the connotative meaning by using the same identity words as stimuli in the rating of affective meaning. In cross-cultural comparison, the cultural universality of the instrument and the cultural particularity of the measurements are core prerequisites. Using evaluation, potency and activity ratings of affective meanings, both prerequisites are addressed. Osgood, May and Miron (1975) found evidence for the cross-cultural universality of the evaluation, potency, and activity dimensions of affective response, the

dimensions that operationalize authority. Since affect is the central mode of information, ratings of affective meanings are very sensitive to differences of meaning (Heise 1987) and create higher-order denotative categories of meaning (Schneider and Roberts 2004) such as authority.

Semantic differential ratings of affective meanings are collected with scales that are defined by clusters of adjectives. The evaluation dimension is described as *good* or *nice* versus *bad* or *awful*, the potency dimension as *big* or *powerful* versus *little* or *powerless*, and the activity dimension as *quiet* or *slow* versus *lively* or *fast*. Interval scales were used to compute means on all three differential scales of affective meaning. Intervals between the points are labeled as 'neutral,' 'slightly,' 'quite,' and 'extremely'. They were coded as differences of 1.0, corresponding to visual distance on the scale. Differences between the scale endpoints 'extremely' and 'infinitely' were coded 1.33, again corresponding to visual scale distances. While the bipolar, interval scales range from -4.33 to +4.33 for the individual rating of each identity, the average ratings for all 413 identities typically ranged from -3 to +3.<sup>1</sup>

The three measurement dimensions pointedly operationalize the authority concept as someone potent, highly evaluated, and not expressive (Schneider 2002, 2004). As in these previous investigations of the authority concept, the focus here is on the evaluation and potency dimensions. Strong legitimation or love for authority figures is indicated in people who assign high evaluation to others despite the potential of being coerced. There is no theoretical argument how incremental differentiation on the activity dimensions would influence the authority concept.<sup>2</sup>

In the suggested operationalization of authoritativeness, the core component of stereotype about Texans, the null hypothesis states that that current potency and evaluation ratings of authorities are not higher in Texas than elsewhere. If it is found that non-Texan US subjects follow the same pattern of authoritativeness as Texan subjects, the idea of Texan uniqueness can be refuted.

### ***Samples***

According to Osgood (1974), there is always a dilemma for comparative studies that maximizing the representativeness within samples generally leads to minimizing equivalence between samples. The concern for the sample from Missouri is not to be representative, but to be comparable to the data collected from undergraduates in Texas. Using a homogeneous student population, equivalence is maximized while representativeness is limited. Since both universities are largely recruiting from their own state, students can be seen as representing their region. The Texan university sampled has 88% and the university in Missouri 92% in-state enrollment.

Data are collected that are directly comparable to the Texan data. For testing the hypothesis that Texans are not different in respect to their authoritativeness, it is sufficient finding one state in the US in which comparable subjects are not different, or even more extreme in the positive evaluation of authorities. It is herby not necessary to draw a representative

sample from all states, however it is preferable to choose a state that does not share a similar reputation as Texas. Since stereotypes about the South resemble aspects of stereotypes about Texas, the author avoided using a Southern state for the empirical comparison. While Missouri, like all states of the United States, share certain aspects of cultural history with Texas, it is fairly representative for the United States in terms of its voting pattern (Scruggs-Leftwich 1999) and historical Amonker & Burson, 2001) as well as current demographic developments (Drugge & Moomey 2002). This is especially true for the sample used in this study which is neither obtained from the southernmost portion of Missouri where we might expect Southern influence, nor is it collected in the northern part where we might expect influence of the Midwest/Plains.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Data Collection***

There are three samples involved in this study. The first sample rating 413 identities was collected in West Texas. Another sample was used to rank the authoritativeness of identities. Finally, the 65 identities empirically identified as authorities were rated by a third sample collected in Missouri.

In December 1998, data were collected by interactive computer questionnaires (Heise and Lewis 1988) at a university in West Texas. Interval scales were used to compute means on all three EPA differential scales. Intervals between the points are labeled as 'neutral,' 'slightly,' 'quite,' and 'extremely'. They were coded as differences of 1.0, corresponding to visual distance on the scale. Differences between the scale endpoints 'extremely' and 'infinitely' were coded 1.33, again corresponding to visual scale distances. Undergraduate subjects were obtained by in-class announcements in classes of the social sciences and by postings at a West Texan University. Data was collected in a computer lab central to the classrooms. Students received a small monetary incentive.<sup>4</sup> In this study a list of 413 identities was rated by 420 students.<sup>5</sup>

To ensure a valid classification of identities as authorities (Schneider 2002, 2005) about 140 undergraduate subjects in West Texas classified identities into structural categories, one of them an authority category. This study is used to indicate a subset of authority identities in the Texan study to serve as stimuli in the data collection in Missouri. Subjects classified a list of 413 identities as definitely an authority (coded as 0), maybe an authority (coded as 1), definitely not an authority (coded as 2).<sup>6</sup> Selecting identities that received on the average a rating higher than 1.5, 65 authority identities are selected as stimuli for the study in Missouri (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**65 Identities Classified as Authorities**

advisor	detective	minister
airline pilot	disciplinarian	mother

attorney	employer	parent
auctioneer	executive	policeman
authority	expert	postmaster
babysitter	farm laborer	principal
banker	fireman	probation officer
barkeeper	genius	professor
bill collector	God	prosecuting attorney
bodyguard	grandfather	psychiatrist
boss	grandmother	psychoanalyst
bouncer	grandparent	psychologist
bulldozer operator	grownup	referee
busdriver	headwaiter	schoolteacher
champion	hero	scoutmaster
chemist	heroine	sheriff
church deacon	instructor	slave driver
confidant	judge	specialist
conformist	juror	superior
construction	landlady	supervisor
foreman	lawyer	surgeon
dentist	manager	teacher

The subset of the 65 identified authorities was then rated by 60 subjects of Missouri. Subjects were recruited from the same population: undergraduate students, predominantly in the social sciences. The same instrument and method of data collection was used as in the Texan sample.<sup>7</sup>

## RESULTS

### *Comparing Texas with Missouri*

The null hypothesis that potency and evaluation ratings of authorities today are not higher in Texas than in Missouri is unchallenged by the data. Students from Missouri and Texas loved their authorities about equally (Table 2). Texan males show insignificantly lower evaluations than male subjects do from Missouri. Texan females even rate authorities significantly ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) lower on the evaluation dimension than female subjects from Missouri. Stronger differences are found on the potency dimension of authorities, which is rated higher by male and female students in Missouri. For the potency dimension, t-values indicate differences of statistical significance ( $\alpha=0.01$ ) for males and for females. Ascribing similar (males) or slightly higher (females) evaluation despite the higher potential of coercion indicates a higher degree of appreciation of authorities for subjects from Missouri. Results not only fail to disconfirm my hypothesis, they even indicate that Texans might be less authoritative than subjects in Missouri, an

unanticipated result that might be subject of further investigation.

**Table 2**  
**Average Evaluation and Potency Ratings of 65 Authorities by**  
**Males and Females in Texas and Missouri**  
**Paired sample t-test ( $p < .05$ ,  $**p < .01$ )**

	Texas male	Missouri male	T
Evaluation	1.00	1.03	0.508
Potency	1.50	1.74	4.301**
	Texas female	Missouri female	T
Evaluation	1.10	1.21	2.125*
Potency	1.51	1.89	7.365**

In Missouri and Texas, females legitimate authority more than males. This gender difference in the appreciation of authority and the attribution of power to authority follows a general gender tendency that the author observed in other data on affective meaning of identities collected in North Carolina (Heise 1978), Canada (MacKinnon 1988), and Germany (Schneider 1999a).

### **The Context of Previous Studies: Conservative Dynamics within the United States and their Relation to the World**

The United States overall became more conservative, traditional, and authoritative, making Texas not an exception any more. The Inglehart and Baker's study (2000) that uses the tremendous resources of the World Value Survey supports my previous findings (Schneider 1999a) that love of authority is a US phenomenon. Inglehart and Baker indicate two factors describing a traditional/secular-rational and a survival/self-expression factor. The survival/self-expression measures sexual tolerance, trust, subjective well-being, political activism, and self-expression. Here, the United States lie in the ranks of other postindustrial societies like Switzerland, West Germany, and Norway.

Concerning traditionalism, which is described by 'authority of God, Fatherland and Family' (Inglehart and Baker 2000, p.25), the United States are very different from other postindustrial states. Comparing the United States on the traditional versus secular-rational dimension with 64 other societies, the United States clearly falls on the traditional side, where it ranks with India, Bangladesh, Turkey, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Brazil, Pakistan, Peru, and Ireland. Tough, it is generally true that developed high-income countries are secular, the United States, and to a lesser extent Ireland,



are the only exceptions to this rule. Despite their economic development, North Americans are still traditional. 'The United States are a deviant case, having a much more traditional value system than any other advanced traditional society' (Inglehart and Baker 2000, p. 31). Traditionalism, conservatism, and the love for authority are reflected in the dynamic of US neo-conservatism in the last two decades (Schneider 1999a). Becoming one of the freest nations in the world, the United States moved towards postauthoritative values in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1980s, however, this development came to a standstill and regressed towards neo-conservative authoritative values. Because of this regression, I use the term neo-conservative to describe the contemporary United States.

This over-time change is supported by Inglehart and Baker when they compare their 1995-1998 data to the 1990-1991 World Values Surveys (Inglehart 1997). Here they find a slight increase of traditionalism in the United States between 1981 and 1995. However, in a world of general progression towards secularism/rationalism, even standing still can be considered a regression. While most postindustrial societies between 1981 and 1995 developed in the secular-rational direction over time, the United States not only kept their position as a traditional society, but also became more traditional. Acting upon traditional values that reflect the love for authorities creates problematic misunderstandings in the interaction with people of other postindustrial countries (Schneider 2002). The general trend of neo-conservatism in all the United States might be the reason why Texas is no longer a special case.

## DISCUSSION

Before the Texan love for authority could be recognized as a stereotype, this love had to be identified as a property that is not unique to Texans. Surveys from Missouri were used to test if Texans are as extreme in their love of authority to warrant stereotypes about Texans as true descriptors. Comparing Texas with a non-southern state is a very conservative testing of the hypothesis that there are no differences between Texas and the United States. This caution legitimized using subjects of Missouri instead of a representative sample of the remainder of the United States.

Subjects from Missouri love their authorities just as much — and even a little more — as subjects of Texas. If we do assume that Texans traditionally were more authoritarian, the findings of this study indicate two alternative interpretations. First, Texans became less authoritative while Americans from other states either did not change their position over time, or they became more authoritative. Second, Texans did not change their position over time while Americans of other states became more authoritative.

The first interpretation is supported by the possibility that the relative isolation of Texas in the United States combined with increasing global communication (Toeffler 1995), consumption, corporationism (Ritzer

1999; 2000), or finance (Volcker 2000) have prompted Texas to follow international trends, decreasing the Texan-specific form of authoritativeness. More likely, however, is the second argument that a southernization of the United States in terms of a reactionary political mind-set, popular culture, and public life made Texas lose its outsider status. The interpretation of an increased authoritativeness of US North Americans as a whole is widely supported in the literature. Schneider's (1999a) finds trends of neo-conservative that parallel the over time comparison of Inglehart and Baker's (2000) world value surveys. Support for the relative change within the United States is provided by Cobb's thesis on the southernization of the United States. Together these studies support the second interpretation that Texans did not change in their position on authoritativeness while the remaining United States turned more authoritative.

If Texans cannot be identified empirically as more authoritative than the rest of the nation, why is there such a persuasive image of the self-righteous, simple-minded and big-mouthed Texan? It is suggested that the state pride that is produced in the stereotyped creates a two-edged stereotyping process that is extremely persuasive. The missing objection by the stereotyped leaves the person acting on stereotypes unchecked, suggesting the stereotyping person to be correct in his or her assessment. This two-edged stereotyping process creates a climate of political correctness that protects the biased impression to be identified as a stereotype.

There is no reason to assume that politically correct stereotyping is not a process reserved to lay people. In the social sciences it has an unfortunate academic tradition in Adorno's (1950) research on national traits. Politically correct stereotyping has a potential to disturb the objectivity of social research. If we accept Weber's (1922b) position of value-free science (*Objektivität*), that even though the direction of research might be influenced by values of the scientist, the process of scientific investigation has to stay value free, stereotypes can endanger the quest for objective research.<sup>8</sup> There is a trap set for many US academics. To spare themselves the embarrassment of practical outcomes of US neo-conservatism (e.g., the highest incarceration rate in the Western world, the high rate of executions, pushing to use ultimate authoritative means – war, or the lack of ecological perspective in politics and business), US researchers might be inclined to attribute indicators of conservatism to Texans. Recent political changes, like the challenge to the democratic election process and the (re-) implementation of a conservative Texan dynasty in Washington, pour fuel into the stereotyping process. In a two-edged stereotyping process, self-perceived liberals who use Texans as scapegoats for neo-conservative trends in the United States, meet the interest of many Texans who use this stereotype creating state pride and self-identity. Being unchallenged, the political correctness of stereotypes adds a protective layer to their persistence.

With the indication that the US academic community is not immune against politically correct cultural stereotyping the author wants to provide a constructive reflection process avoiding mistakes of the past. We should not engage in the same mistake of the US academic community in the 1940s and

1950s that, led by Adorno (1950), and financed by large government/military grants, followed and supported the common US stereotype to attribute authoritarianism to the stigmatized group of Germans. Politically correct, and justified by military domination, US academics followed the government-sponsored national type idea. This support was caused either by professional opportunism, Zeitgeist, or simply by a lemming effect. It took the famous Milgram (1974) experiments carried out between 1960-1963 at Yale University to shake up the US academic community, and revealed that authoritative and authoritarianism is not a German-specific trait, but just as common in the US population. Revisiting the authority concept and identifying the two-edged process involved in the stereotyping, this study demonstrates the danger of falling into the trap of politically correct stereotyping, and hereby redoing the historical mistake of ignoring authoritative tendencies in the US culture.

## NOTES

1. All identities (with the exception of the mehtaauthority 'God') of the original list of identities in the Texan data are used to estimate the range of ratings for identities. On the evaluation dimension average ratings for identities ranged from -3.4 to 3.1 for males and -3.1 to 3.3 for females. On the potency dimension it was -2.5 to 2.65 for males and 2.7 to 3.1 for females. On the activity dimensions, average ratings of males ranged from -2.4 to 2.6 and for females from -2.7 to 2.6.
2. Focusing on the evaluation and potency only, this research widens the base of research tradition by including other social scientists who restrict the measurement of sentiments to only two dimensions (e.g. Collins 1990, Kemper 1990, Kemper and Collins 1990).
3. I like to thank the anonymous reviewer for his/her constructive critique and the notion of using I70 as a marker for the cultural divide of Missouri that separates the Southern influence that we might find in the far south of Missouri from the Midwest/Plains influence we find in the northern part of the state.
4. The Project titled "Data Collection of Texas Tech Undergraduates' Sentiments of Identities, Behaviors, and Emotions for Cross-cultural Comparison" was funded by a Research Enhancement Fund of Texas Tech University.
5. Subjects do not serve as representatives of specific opinions, but as cultural informants. The study of Romney et al. (1986) makes an empirically and methodologically well-backed argument for the representativeness and validity of the information gained from a small number of informants. Testing the model with a sample of 41 informants, she compares the results to a sub sample of four informants. She concludes that under certain conditions, four informants can produce sufficiently valid and reliable information about a culture. It is possible, for example, to correctly classify 99%

- of the 41 true or false questions with a 95% confidence level when four highly competent informers are used. Using informers with very low cultural competence we would need 29 informers.
6. The authority rating correlated highly with prior studies with the same set of identities that used expert ratings and cluster analysis (Schneider 1999b) of measurements of affective meanings (Osgood 1974; Osgood, May, and Miron 1975).
  7. The author is deeply indebted to the help of Herm Smith at the University of Missouri. He incorporated additional concepts in his study on sentiments in Missouri that allow a subset of this data to be compared to the data collected in 1998 at a West Texan University.
  8. The author acknowledges that there are alternative philosophies that doubt the principle of value free science and instead welcome values into the research process. Examples are strains of feminism (e.g., Cook and Fonow 1986) that stress the importance of empowering the female subject, and postmodernism that sees the empowerment of the subject (Rousenau 1992) as an important method to reduce the culture centeredness in scientific research.

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