

ROKEACH DOGMATISM SCALE

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1. Core Definition

The **Rokeach Dogmatism Scale**, frequently referred to as the D Scale, is a significant psychometric tool developed to systematically assess the degree to which an individual's belief system is characterized by openness or closedness. Designed by American social psychologist Milton Rokeach, this instrument provides a quantitative measure of dogmatism--a construct Rokeach defined not by the specific content of an individual's beliefs (e.g., political affiliation or religious doctrine), but by the structural properties of those beliefs. A highly dogmatic individual possesses a rigidly closed system, displaying strong resistance to change, intolerance toward dissonant information, and a generalized authoritarian posture that transcends traditional left-right political divides.

Dogmatism, as measured by the D Scale, is theorized to be a defensive cognitive organization employed to cope with existential anxiety and perceived threat. This psychological defense mechanism fosters an unwarranted and highly inflexible certainty in one's convictions, alongside a blanket rejection of any external information or source that challenges the established belief structure. The scale operationalizes these structural features, such as the compartmentalization of contradictory beliefs and an overreliance on external authority figures. By focusing on the cognitive style rather than the ideological substance, the D Scale offers researchers a reliable metric for correlating the degree of mental rigidity with various behavioral outputs, social attitudes, and cognitive processing styles, establishing dogmatism as a crucial dimension of personality psychology.

2. Historical Development and Context

The Rokeach Dogmatism Scale originated in the intellectual ferment following World War II, a period marked by intensive psychological investigation into the origins of totalitarianism and prejudice. Formally published in Rokeach's seminal 1960 book, *The Open and Closed Mind: Investigations into the Nature of Belief Systems and Personality*, the D Scale was explicitly created as a necessary refinement of existing measures, particularly the California F Scale (F for Fascism). While the F Scale effectively measured elements of the authoritarian personality, critics, including Rokeach, contended that its item content was ideologically biased, primarily detecting rigidity among right-wing extremists.

Rokeach's ambitious goal was to develop a "content-free" measure of **general authoritarianism**--a scale that could accurately identify closed-mindedness in individuals across the entire ideological spectrum, including those holding communist, socialist, or highly liberal positions. This required a

paradigm shift away from measuring specific attitudes and toward measuring the underlying architecture of belief systems. The 66 items of the initial D Scale (Form E) were painstakingly crafted to assess general aspects of rigidity, intolerance, and dependence on authority, ensuring that responses were independent of specific political platforms or religious affiliations. This theoretical neutrality propelled the D Scale into widespread use, allowing cross-cultural and comparative studies of cognitive rigidity that were previously hindered by the ideological limitations of earlier instruments.

3. Purpose and Measurement Objectives

The fundamental purpose of the Rokeach Dogmatism Scale is to quantify an individual's propensity toward inflexible thinking and intolerance, providing a standardized measure of the permeability of their belief system. The scale aims to identify how individuals process information that is either supportive or threatening to their core worldview. High scorers are anticipated to exhibit marked difficulty in synthesizing conflicting data, a pronounced emotional response to perceived ideological threats, and an ingrained reliance on external authority figures--or "reference groups"--to define reality and validate truth.

Specific psychological dimensions targeted by the 66-item examination include the individual's perception of threat, their capacity for differentiation, and their time perspective. The scale explores the degree to which an individual sees the external world as hostile or dangerous, thereby necessitating a defensive, closed posture. It also measures the tendency toward **isolation of beliefs**--the cognitive mechanism that keeps contradictory ideas separate and insulated from one another, preventing internal conflict. Furthermore, the D Scale assesses attitudes toward the past, present, and future, finding that dogmatic individuals often exhibit a rigid adherence to the past or an overwhelming anxiety about an uncertain future, which they seek to control through absolute belief systems. The final, aggregated score is intended to function as a direct indicator of the overall extent of psychological closed-mindedness.

4. Structure and Components (The D-Scale)

The most widely utilized version of the scale, Form E, comprises 66 declarative statements that respondents assess using a 6-point Likert scale, typically ranging from -3 (I disagree very much) to +3 (I agree very much). The final total score is derived by summing the absolute value of responses or converting them to a positive range, ensuring that a higher numerical score directly corresponds to a greater degree of dogmatism. Rokeach initially insisted on the large number of items to ensure comprehensive coverage of the complex, multifaceted construct of dogmatism, aiming for high reliability and validity across diverse populations.

The items are designed to subtly probe various aspects of the closed mind without triggering

obvious social desirability bias related to specific political or religious doctrines. Item themes generally cluster around several core components of dogmatism: 1) **Authoritarian Submission and Power** (acceptance of authority and belief in absolute leaders); 2) **Intolerance and Prejudice** (hostility toward out-groups and those with differing views); 3) **Belief in a Single Truth** (the conviction that one's own viewpoint is unequivocally correct); and 4) **Cognitive Rigidity** (a preference for consistency and an inability to tolerate ambiguity or change). These statements often deal with abstract themes such as the purpose of life, the nature of humanity, and how one should react to societal changes or threats.

Although Rokeach hypothesized the scale measured a single, unified construct, subsequent rigorous factor analytic research has often challenged this **unidimensionality claim**. Many studies suggest that the D Scale might be better understood as measuring several related, but distinct, factors of cognitive rigidity and generalized authoritarianism. This complexity has led to the development of numerous shortened versions of the D Scale in applied research settings, although researchers caution that these abbreviated forms may sacrifice the robustness and theoretical depth inherent in Rokeach's original comprehensive 66-item structure.

5. Theoretical Basis: The Open and Closed Mind

The Rokeach Dogmatism Scale is the empirical manifestation of the theoretical framework detailed in *The Open and Closed Mind*. Rokeach's theory posits that the difference between an open mind and a closed mind is not merely quantitative but structural. An **open belief system** is characterized by a high degree of permeability and differentiation. Open-minded individuals are capable of distinguishing the merits of an argument from the credibility of the source, integrating new information flexibly, and comfortably navigating ambiguity and intellectual uncertainty. Their belief systems are dynamic, capable of evolving and integrating contradictory information without experiencing severe psychological distress.

In contrast, the **closed belief system** is structured for defense. It represents the psychological organization of ideas and attitudes around an absolute set of beliefs, serving to reduce crippling anxiety by providing a rigid framework of certainty. For the closed-minded individual, the primary motive is not seeking truth, but maintaining cognitive consistency and shielding the ego from external threat. This defensive structure leads to the evaluation of information based almost solely on source authority--ideas endorsed by the "in-group" or recognized authorities are accepted, while those from "out-groups" are automatically rejected. The theory emphasizes that this structure, rather than specific ideological content, is the hallmark of dogmatism, explaining why high dogmatism can manifest in seemingly disparate political or religious organizations.

6. Significance and Impact

The impact of the Rokeach Dogmatism Scale on psychological research has been immense, establishing a foundational construct for studying ideological conflict and cognitive styles. By successfully developing a measure intended to be content-neutral, Rokeach fundamentally changed the academic conversation regarding authoritarianism, broadening the focus from strictly political extremism to generalized cognitive rigidity. The D Scale provided the necessary tool to demonstrate empirically that closed-mindedness is a psychological disposition found across the political spectrum, allowing for comparative studies that illuminated the shared psychological mechanisms underlying intolerance in various ideological groups.

The D Scale has been extensively employed to research critical social phenomena, including prejudice, educational resistance, and the dynamics of persuasion. Studies consistently show that individuals scoring high on dogmatism are significantly more difficult to persuade through rational argument, less likely to integrate new scientific information, and more resistant to attitudinal change in therapeutic or educational settings. Furthermore, high dogmatism is often correlated with increased ethnocentrism, heightened feelings of vulnerability, and a preference for highly structured, predictable environments. The enduring significance of the D Scale lies in its capacity to measure this essential dimension of personality, which powerfully predicts how individuals interact with complexity and difference in the social world.

7. Debates and Criticisms

Despite its widespread adoption, the Rokeach Dogmatism Scale has attracted substantial methodological and theoretical criticism over the decades. A primary point of contention centers on the scale's operational success in achieving **ideological neutrality**. Critics argue that even the non-political phrasing in the items still tends to yield scores that correlate more strongly with conservative and traditional forms of authoritarianism than with left-wing radicalism, suggesting an inherent bias remains, albeit less pronounced than in the F Scale. This has led some researchers to prefer later instruments, such as Altemeyer's Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) scale, which explicitly measure politically right-oriented authoritarianism.

A second major challenge involves psychometric limitations, particularly issues related to **response set bias**. Early versions of the D Scale contained a high number of positively worded items, making the score susceptible to acquiescence bias--the tendency for respondents to agree with statements regardless of content. This methodological issue can artificially inflate dogmatism scores, leading to questions about the purity of the measurement. Furthermore, the debate over **unidimensionality** persists; while Rokeach intended the D Scale to measure a singular, unifying construct, factor analyses frequently reveal that the scale is best understood as tapping into multiple, correlated sub-factors of rigidity and prejudice, complicating the interpretation of the single, global score.

The sheer length of the original 66-item scale has also been a practical drawback, necessitating the creation of dozens of unofficial, shorter versions. While these short forms are convenient, they often lack the comprehensive theoretical coverage and robust validity of the original instrument, further contributing to inconsistencies in research findings across studies. These criticisms highlight the ongoing challenge of creating a truly neutral and purely structural measure of complex cognitive orientations.

Further Reading

[Milton Rokeach \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Rokeach, M. \(1960\). The Open and Closed Mind: Investigations into the Nature of Belief Systems and Personality.](#)

[Dogmatism in Psychology \(ScienceDirect\)](#)

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