

SHORT NOTE

Relationships between core ideological motives, social and economic conservatism, and religiosity: Evidence from a Turkish sampleSelahattin Adil Saribay,¹  and Onurcan Yilmaz²¹Department of Psychology, Boğaziçi University, and ²Department of Psychology, Dogus University, Istanbul, Turkey

The “conservatism as motivated social cognition” approach posits two core ideological motives underlying political conservatism across cultures. However, there is a scarcity of tests from non-Western cultures, and much research has failed to distinguish between social and economic conservatism. Using a relatively large undergraduate sample from a non-Western, predominantly Muslim country (Turkey), we tested the associations among resistance to change and opposition to equality motives, social and economic conservatism, right-wing political orientation, and religiosity. In line with the “conservatism as motivated social cognition” account, we found that (a) social conservatism is more strongly related to resistance to change (rather than opposition to equality), (b) economic conservatism is more strongly related to opposition to equality (rather than resistance to change), (c) social conservatism is the strongest predictor of right-wing political orientation among other conservatism measures, and (d) political orientation and religiosity had divergent effects: While right-wing political orientation was related to economic conservatism, religiosity was *inversely* related to the latter, providing support for previous work indicating a resemblance between leftists and Islamists in Turkey. The results generally support the motivated social cognition approach to conservatism while also highlighting the importance of distinguishing between social and economic conservatism.

Keywords: economic conservatism, opposition to equality, political orientation, religiosity, resistance to change, social conservatism

Research on the psychological factors underlying people’s political attitudes has seen a remarkable boost following the introduction of Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, and Sulloway’s (2003) “conservatism as motivated social cognition” approach. These authors identified two core ideological motives underlying conservative political ideology. “Resistance to change” or “traditionalism” is manifested in attitudes supporting the preservation of cultural traditions and social order. “Opposition to equality” or “acceptance of inequality/support for hierarchy” is manifested in attitudes supporting the organization of society in terms of a hierarchy whereby certain groups are dominant over others, typically within a capitalist free-market system. Since, in general, both change and lack of hierarchy are associated with a greater sense of uncertainty and threat, these two motives also serve to cope with the latter psychological states by directing

people to adopt a politically conservative orientation (Jost et al., 2007).

Jost et al.’s (2003) meta-analysis provided support for the organization of psychological factors underlying political ideology in terms of these two core ideological motives. Subsequent research outside of the United States has supported the model fully in Western Europe and partially in Eastern Europe (Aspelund, Lindeman, & Verkasalo, 2013; Thorisdottir, Jost, Liviatan, & Shrout, 2007). However, research from non-WEIRD (see Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) cultures, particularly from cultures in which Christianity is not the dominant religion, is still scarce.

While Jost et al. (2003) did not distinguish between aspects of conservatism in their meta-analysis (see the critique by Malka & Soto, 2015), research in the following years has made it very clear that any attempt to uncover the psychological bases of political ideology would do well to distinguish between social (cultural) and economic conservatism. Notwithstanding the simplicity and utility of a unidimensional conceptualization and measurement of political orientation (Jost, 2006) and the fact that these two types of conservatism are

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Received 14 June 2017; revision 29 September 2017; accepted 14 February 2018.

sometimes correlated (Altemeyer, 1998; Duriez, Van Hiel, & Kossowska, 2005), they represent distinct sets of issues that correspond to the two core ideological motives. In most cultures, social conservatism concerns preserving societal order and traditions and focuses on issues such as traditional gender roles and marriage, abortion, legalization of recreational drugs, and stricter prison sentences. Economic conservatism, on the other hand, concerns competition for resources and focuses on issues such as privatization of state ventures, social security, healthcare access, and government spending and intervention in economy. Each has distinct psychological correlates. For instance, only social conservatism tends to correlate consistently with Openness to Experience whereas economic conservatism tends to correlate, if at all, with Conscientiousness and (negatively) with Agreeableness and Neuroticism (Bakker, 2017; Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008; Van Hiel & Mervielde, 2004). Epistemic needs (e.g., Personal Need for Structure) tend to significantly predict only social conservatism (Crowson, 2009). More strikingly, the same psychological and demographic variables can even have opposite relationships with these two aspects of conservatism (e.g., Carl & Cofnas, 2016; Feldman & Johnston, 2014; Malka, Soto, Inzlicht, & Lelkes, 2014).

More broadly, these two types of political attitudes are aligned with values and ideological beliefs.¹ Specifically, in terms of Schwartz's (1992) value model, social conservatism tends to be supported by conservation (vs. openness to change) while economic conservatism tends to be supported by self-enhancement (vs. self-transcendence) (Choma et al., 2010; Duriez et al., 2005). In terms of ideological beliefs, both theory and research have implicated direct links between social conservatism and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA; Altemeyer, 1981) on one hand and economic conservatism and social dominance orientation (SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) on the other (Ashton et al., 2005; Choma et al., 2010; Duckitt, 2001; Duriez et al., 2005). Therefore, it is reasonable to think of ideological beliefs as mediating the effect of values on political attitudes. Indeed, Duriez et al. (2005) showed that the effect of conservation on social conservatism is mediated by RWA (but not SDO) and that the effect of self-enhancement on economic conservatism is mediated by SDO (but not RWA).

Within these layers of constructs, the two core ideological motives theorized by Jost et al. (2003) lie in closest proximity to the ideological beliefs of RWA and SDO. While there is no set of measures specifically developed or commonly used to directly measure the two core ideological motives proposed by Jost et al. (2003; for different operationalizations, see Jost et al., 2007; Thorisdottir et al., 2007), RWA and SDO are

treated as corresponding closely to resistance to change and opposition to equality, respectively (Federico, Ergun, & Hunt, 2014). In advancing their framework, Jost et al. (2003, p. 344) argued directly that scales such as RWA measure resistance to change whereas those such as SDO measure opposition to equality.

The Current Study

In the present research, we examined whether the relationships between political orientation (left-right) on one hand and social (e.g., support for traditional gender roles) and economic (e.g., support for privatization) conservatism on the other were related to resistance to change and opposition to equality motives, respectively, as the motivated social cognition account would suggest. In accordance with the literature, we hypothesized that (a) social conservatism is more strongly related to resistance to change (rather than opposition to equality) and that (b) economic conservatism is more strongly related to opposition to equality (rather than resistance to change). We also investigated the relation between religiosity and core ideological motives. Previous research has shown that Turkish Islamists and leftists are similar in some ways (Özbudun, 2006a), for instance, in their tendency to endorse individualizing moral foundations (Yılmaz, Sarıbay, Bahçekapılı, & Harma, 2016). Other research has shown that religiosity is correlated positively with social conservatism, but negatively with economic conservatism (Davis & Robinson, 2006; Yılmaz & Sarıbay, 2016). We expected to replicate these findings.

The current study contributes to the relevant literature in several ways. First, we provide a large sample from a non-Western, predominantly Muslim country because Turkey not only has a strong religious history but also has been experiencing a growing influence of religion in politics (see Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2009). For instance, Turkey has been ruled by an Islamic conservative party (AKP) since 2002, which may have led its people to become more conservative during this period. According to International Social Survey Program (ISSP) data, the level of religiosity in Turkey is higher than in other ISSP countries (Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2009). Yeşilada and Noordijk (2010) also suggested, based on the World Values Survey, that religiosity has been on the rise in Turkey at least since the mid-1990s, well into the time of AKP rule. Some theoretical (e.g., Özbudun, 2006b) and empirical (Yılmaz et al., 2016) investigations also have pointed to the unique moral and political attitudes of Muslim people especially on economic conservatism (i.e., neoliberal policies), as compared to religious people living in Western countries. We also provide locally established scales to measure relevant conservatism components, in contrast to most of the

political psychology literature (Bakker, 2017; Federico et al., 2014; Malka et al., 2014).

Method

Participants

A total of 1,196 Boğaziçi University undergraduates ($M_{age} = 20.80$, $SD = 2.06$; min: 18, max: 40; 447 males, 723 females, 26 unreported) enrolled in introductory psychology courses participated in the study.² They were given course credit in return for their participation. The majority of participants identified as Muslim ($n = 737$, 61.6%). The remaining participants reported belief in God without subscribing to any organized religion ($n = 197$, 16.5%) or identified as atheist ($n = 117$, 9.8%), agnostic ($n = 59$, 4.9%), or “other” ($n = 51$, 4.3%). Very few participants identified as Christian ($n = 5$, 0.4%), Jewish ($n = 2$, 0.2%), and Buddhist ($n = 2$, 0.2%), and some did not report their religious identity ($n = 26$, 2.2%).

Materials and Procedure

Data were collected in the Spring semesters of 2015 and 2016. An e-mail sent to students invited them to take part in an online survey. Those who accepted the invitation were informed that they would be requested to complete a battery of measures, that they should do so in one sitting with minimal distraction, that it would be self-paced and take around 40 to 50 min, and that they should complete it at their chosen time in the following 2 weeks. Order of the measures was randomized.

Core ideological motives. As mentioned, according to Jost et al.’s (2003) “conservatism as motivated social cognition” approach, two core ideological motives—resistance to change and opposition to equality—underlie political conservatism. Since there are no established measures of these motives, we relied on items compiled from the following scales: the Social Dominance Orientation scale (Pratto et al., 1994), the Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992), the *F*-scale (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950), the Social and Cultural Attitudes scale (Küçüker, 2007), the Egalitarianism-Inegalitarianism scale (Kluegel & Smith, 1983), and items measuring resistance to change used by Jost et al. (2007). In previous work (Saribay, Olcaysoy Ökten, & Yılmaz, 2017), we factored-analyzed responses of several undergraduate samples to items from these scales. The results supported a two-factor solution corresponding to the two core motives, and demonstrated the reliability and validity of these two core-motive scales. In the current

study, we relied on these two scales in which resistance to change is measured by eight items (e.g., “The love of Westernization will result in the assimilation of our [Turkish] culture and identity”) and opposition to equality by 17 items (e.g., “If people were treated more equally we would have fewer problems in this country;” reverse-coded). The response format was a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores indicate stronger resistance to change ($\alpha = .77$) or opposition to equality ($\alpha = .88$).

Social conservatism. The Social Conservatism Scale was developed and revised by Henningham (1996) for Australia and adapted to current U.S. politics by Piazza and Landy (2013). The original scale presents a set of policy issues (e.g., “pre-marital virginity,” “multiculturalism”) and uses a two-choice response format (“opposed” or “not opposed” to the policy in question). We changed the response format to an 11-point scale ranging from -5 (*strongly disagree*) to $+5$ (*strongly agree*). We also removed some items and added new ones to make the scale more suitable for Turkish politics, which resulted in a total of 15 items (see Yılmaz & Saribay, 2016, Appendix B, Table A2). Two items with low (below .20) item-total correlations were excluded. We averaged responses to these 13 items ($\alpha = .89$). Higher scores indicate stronger social conservatism.

Economic conservatism. We used a 16-item scale that we had previously composed to measure the level of economic conservatism of Turkish participants (see Yılmaz & Saribay, 2016, Appendix B, Table A3). Five items were taken from Küçüker (2007), and the remaining 11 items were developed by the authors. Responses were given on a scale of 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*). We averaged responses to these 16 items ($\alpha = .74$). Higher scores indicate stronger economic conservatism.

Political orientation. We asked participants to report their overall political orientation using the single-item self-placement rating frequently used in the literature. Participants indicated their orientation on a scale of 1 (*left*) to 7 (*right*).

Religiosity. We asked participants to indicate the extent to which they consider themselves a religious person using a scale of 1 (*not at all religious*) to 7 (*highly religious*).

Demographics. At the end of the survey, a basic demographic information form asked for gender (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*), age (in years), socioeconomic

status (SES) (1 = *very high*, 5 = *very low*), and hometown size during childhood (1 = *metropol*, 5 = *village*).

Results and Discussion

Table 1 indicates zero-order correlations among the variables. Political orientation (right-wing) was significantly correlated with social conservatism, $r = .631$, $p < .001$, economic conservatism, $r = .109$, $p < .001$, opposition to equality, $r = .365$, $p < .001$, and resistance to change, $r = .510$, $p < .001$. Participants with right-wing political orientation also tended to score higher on religiosity, $r = .555$, $p < .001$. Religiosity's correlations with resistance to change, $r = .510$, $p < .001$, and social conservatism, $r = .689$, $p < .001$, were positive and moderately strong. However, religiosity was not correlated with economic conservatism, $r = -.05$, $p = .091$, and correlated weakly and positively with opposition to equality, $r = .112$, $p < .001$. When we only included self-identified Muslim participants, religiosity was significantly (and negatively) correlated with economic conservatism, $r = -.093$, $p = .013$, and not significantly correlated with opposition to equality, $r = .053$, $p = .156$.

Social conservatism was correlated positively and significantly with opposition to equality, $r = .198$, $p < .001$, and resistance to change, $r = .610$, $p < .001$, along with (right-wing) political orientation and religiosity (discussed earlier). On the other hand, economic conservatism was correlated positively and significantly only with opposition to equality, $r = .445$, $p < .001$, along with (right-wing) political orientation (discussed earlier). These results remained constant when we only included self-identified Muslim participants. Although small in magnitude, there was a negative correlation between social and economic conservatism, $r = -.081$, $p < .001$. This is interesting since right-wing political orientation is related to both social and economic conservatism. This negative correlation also converges with other recent findings showing that these two aspects of conservatism are inversely correlated especially in traditional nations (Malka, Lelkes, & Soto, 2017).

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to understand the unique variances that both religiosity and

right-wing political orientation accounted for in economic conservatism for self-identified Muslim participants. All demographics (gender, age, SES, hometown size during childhood) were entered first, followed by religiosity and right-wing political orientation in the second step. The results revealed that after accounting for the effect of demographic variables, only religiosity independently (and negatively) predicted economic conservatism, $\beta = -.120$, $p = .003$; right-wing political orientation did not significantly predict it, $\beta = .001$, $p = .971$. Thus, the results suggest that economically conservative attitudes including support for a neoliberal state were mostly driven by a decreased level of religiosity for Muslim participants. We conducted the same analysis with social conservatism as the outcome variable (also for self-identified Muslim participants only). After accounting for the demographic variables in the first step, both religiosity, $\beta = .401$, $p < .001$, and right-wing political orientation, $\beta = .421$, $p < .001$, independently (and positively) predicted social conservatism.

In addition, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the variance accounted for in right-wing political orientation. In Step 1, we entered basic demographic variables as follows: gender, age, SES, hometown size during childhood, and religiosity. In Step 2, we entered social and economic conservatism. In Step 3, we entered resistance to change and opposition to equality. Results from the regression model are presented in Table 2.³

After accounting for the effect of demographic variables and religiosity, both of the conservatism measures and both of the core motive measures independently predicted right-wing political orientation. However, the strongest predictor was social conservatism.

Overall, the results support our hypotheses based on the "conservatism as motivated social cognition" account in a predominantly Muslim country. The results also suggest that religiosity was inversely related to economic conservatism for self-identified Muslim participants. The apparently surprising negative correlation between religiosity and economic conservatism is in fact consistent with the past literature. For instance, Davis and Robinson (2006) observed the same relation in both

Table 1 Correlations Among Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Political orientation	1	.555	.634	.102	.513	.368
2 Religiosity	–	1	.689	–.056	.511	.113
3 Social conservatism	–	–	1	–.081	.610	.200
4 Economic conservatism	–	–	–	1	.023	.441
5 Resistance to change	–	–	–	–	1	.386
6 Opposition to equality	–	–	–	–	–	1

Note. Coefficients in bold are significant at $p < .01$.

Table 2 Hierarchical Multiple Regression: Standardized Regression Coefficients Predicting Right-Wing Political Orientation

	Right-wing political orientation			Adjusted R^2
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	
Demographics				
Gender	-.139***	-.079***	-.040	.332***
Age	-.010	.018	.041	–
Socioeconomic status	.017	.020	.021	–
Hometown	-.019	-.030	-.030	–
Religiosity	.569***	.242***	.226***	–
Political ideology				
Social conservatism	–	.483***	.399***	.465***
Economic conservatism	–	.150***	.054*	–
Ideological motives				
Resistance to change	–	–	.084**	.506***
Opposition to equality	–	–	.205***	–

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Muslim-majority nations and some European countries (Davis & Robinson, 1999). As evident in the earlier analyses, religiosity strongly predicts social conservatism. The relationship between religiosity and resistance to change also was stronger than that between religiosity and opposition to equality (see Table 1). We conducted a multiple regression which revealed that resistance to change, $\beta = .546$, $p < .001$, is indeed a stronger predictor of religiosity than is opposition to equality. The latter had a weak and negative effect, $\beta = -.093$, $p = .001$. The negative relationship between religiosity and economic conservatism suggests that it is not Islamist conservatives who support neoliberal (anti-egalitarian) policies in Turkey. To the contrary, it seems more possible that the real supporters of such policies are mainly those who are, similar to American libertarians, highly opposed to equality, and low in resistance to change and religiosity. This interpretation of the data also is consistent with previous work indicating a resemblance between Turkish leftists and Islamists (Özbudun, 2006a).

Limitations, Future Directions, and Conclusion

Caution is necessary in drawing conclusions about Turkish society in general from the present findings since we employed an undergraduate sample. The sample came from perhaps the most politically liberal university campus in the country; yet, there still appeared to be sufficient variability in the measures. Furthermore, like political orientation, religiosity is known to be multifaceted. In addition to the intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity distinction (Allport & Ross, 1967), Saroglou (2011)

suggested that religion has several meanings (believing, bonding, behaving, belonging). Thus, future research should seek to uncover whether measuring different aspects of religiosity qualifies what we have concluded here about the effects of this variable (Bahçekapılı & Yılmaz, 2017).

Despite these limitations, we provide a large data set from an underrepresented and a non-Western political structure with carefully selected conservatism measures. In summary, our data generally support the motivated social cognition model of conservatism (Jost et al., 2003) because they demonstrate the utility of conceptualizing conservatism in terms of two core ideological motives.

In addition, the data reveal a surprising insight into the question of who supports neoliberal policies: Among Turkish Muslims, religiosity was negatively, albeit weakly, correlated with economic conservatism. Future research should test whether these results are unique to Turkey. In any case, these findings point out the importance of distinguishing aspects of conservatism as argued by bidimensional models (e.g., Duckitt, 2001) and consistent with emerging research (e.g., Feldman & Johnston, 2014). They also highlight the importance of taking religiosity into account in research examining political attitudes. Apparently, religiosity and (conservative) political orientation sometimes have opposing effects on political attitudes. Future research should continue to examine the relationships between religiosity (and political orientation), core motives, and political attitudes.

Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Footnotes

- ¹ Values (e.g., self-transcendence, conservatism) lie at the most abstract level, followed by ideological beliefs (e.g., right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation), and at the most concrete level, political attitudes (e.g., social and economic conservatism) (see Choma, Ashton, & Hafer, 2010).
- ² Data from a subset of this sample, consisting of 750 participants, was analyzed in another publication (Yilmaz & Saribay, 2016, Study 2) focusing on the relationship between cognitive style and conservatism. However, none of the findings reported here have not been reported in any other publication.
- ³ The results presented in Table 2 remain largely unchanged when only self-identified Muslims are included in the analysis, except that the effect of economic conservatism in Step 2, $\beta = .047$, $p = .128$, and Step 3, $\beta = -0.34$, $p = .291$, is not significant.

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