ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-4-October-December-2019

Political orientation and moral foundations

Mr Jirushlan Dorasamy

Masters student: Monash University

Melbourne, Australia\ Honorary Research Associate Durban University of Technology (**TO BE CONFIRMED**

Corresponding author: J Dorasamy

Email: nirmala@dut.ac.za

Abstract

Studies, especially in the North America, have shown a relationship between political orientation and moral foundation. This study investigated whether moral judgements differ from the political orientation of participants in South Africa moral judgment and the extent to which moral foundations are influenced by political orientation. Further, the study investigated the possibility of similar patterns with the North American Conservative-Liberal spectrum and the moral foundation. There were 300 participants, 78 males and 222 females, who completed an online questionnaire relating to moral foundation and political orientation. The results partially supported the hypothesis relating to Liberal and Conservative orientation in South Africa. Further, this study partially predicted the Liberal-Conservative orientation with patterns in the moral foundation, whilst showing similar findings to the North American studies. A growing rate of a neutral/moderate society is evidenced in South Africa and abroad, thereby showing the emergence of a more open approach to both a political and general stance.

Key words: Moral judgements, liberals, conservatives, moral foundations

Introduction

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-4-October-December-2019

Scholars have sought to establish a nexus between political orientation and the elements of moral foundation theory. The argument, generally, is that the moral concerns of the individuals determined their political orientations, whether conservative or liberal (Napier and Luguri 2013; Garvey and Ford 2014; Day, Fiskel, Downing and Trail 2014; Kivikangas, Lönnqvist and Ravaja 2017).

Scholars have shown evidence, in their studies, of positive correlation between conservatives political orientation and the individualizing and binding foundations; and between liberals and the individualizing foundations. Day el (2014:1) found that "People's social and political attitudes are often based on their moral concerns". On the other hand, however, Malka, Osborne, Soto, Greaves, Sibley, and Lelkes (2016: 1251) found that "the association between political orientation and general conservatism was weakened to the extent that the person held binding moral foundations or was high in disgust sensitivity".

This study examined nexus between conservatives and liberal ideological dispositions and individualising moral foundations. It argued that liberalism and conservatism acquire meaning and influence from motives, psychological needs and constraints that vary in different contexts.

The contention of moral foundations theory (MFT) is that there are two categories of inherent moral foundations that guide the motives of the individuals in the society (Napier and Luguri 2013). These are the individualizing and the binding foundations. The individualizing foundations comprises of harm/care and fairness, while the binding foundations are in-group loyalty, deference to authority, and purity. The moral values associated with harm and fairness include the sense of avoidance of pain, showing gentleness, kindness, compassion, justice and autonomy of rights. The values associated with the bidding foundations include self-sacrifice, cooperation, patriotism, respect for authority, fellowship, leadership, respect

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-4-October-December-2019

for tradition, obedience, duty, admiration for legitimate authority, purity/sanctity avoidance of contamination, disgust and carnal pleasures (Napier and Luguri 2013; Malka et al 2016).To the adherents of this MET, moral persuasion of the individual is not limited to their concerns about justice and welfare but that these innate moral values are the compass that guide their political orientation in the society.

. Moral virtues are founded and socially developed on psychological foundations. These are: Harm/care and fairness are loyalty, authority and purity are binding foundations because they focused on the membership of a group in a moral system. The MET is disposed to the idea that each culture creates its unique moral standard based on universal and innate psychological foundations. Graham, Haidt and Nosek (2009) posit that these five foundations, as part of the evolutionary nature of the state, were the inheritance of every human but varies over the course of time.

Conservative and Liberal Orientations

Graham et al (2009) have contended that the postulations of the MFT goes beyond the values of welfare, rights and justice associated with the liberal political orientation. On the other hand, the ascribed values associated with the conservative orientation as well as other non-western concerns formed a substantial part of the MFT. The liberals, according to Graham et al. (2009), were of the position that established institutions and authorities should not inhibit the freedom of the individual to to choose and pursue their own path of personal development.

On the other hand, the belief of the conservatives was that institutions and authorities were established to promote and regulate the freedom of the individuals. Thus, in order to promote social order, the conduct of the people should be regulated by the rules established by the

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-4-October-December-2019

relevant authorities and institutions (Malka et al 2016). Their argument was that unconstrained freedom of the individuals, with the liberty to pursue personal development could jeopardise to the necessary perfections needed in the polity. In this wise, the conservatives were more open to stability and predictability, while the liberals were more amenable to change (Graham, Nosek and Haidt, 2012).

In their study, Graham et al found that:

> liberals showed evidence of a morality based primarily on the individualizing foundations (Harm/care and Fairness/ reciprocity), whereas conservatives showed a more even distribution of values, virtues, and concerns, including the two individualizing foundations (Harm/care and Fairness/reciprocity) and the three binding foundations (Ingroup/ loyalty, Authority/respect, and Purity/sanctity (Graham et al 2009:1031).

This finding was not unique to the American society as similar pattern were found in Canada, United Kingdom and Argentina. Haidt and Graham (2007) have identified moral principles to include loyalty to group, respect for the superiors and worldly pleasures, which were not recognised by the liberals. The major contention between the liberals and the conservatives was the need and the appropriate mode to preserve the society as well as the individuals. At the centre of this contention is the role of morality in the pursuit of the interest of the individuals and the collective. In either way, there are consequences.

There were contentions that the dispositions of the liberals and the conservatives to the primacy of morality underpinned the American culture war (MoralFoundations.org 2016). While the liberals attempted the creation of morality influenced by the values of care, harm, fairness and reciprocity, the conservatives were disposed to the binding foundations of loyalty to the established authorities and institutions. Supporting these claims, Haidt and Graham (2007) assert that the liberals built their morality on on the platform of the harm and fairness foundation. This persuasion characterised the environment of the American politics, especially the ideological dispositions of the two major political parties: The Republican and

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-4-October-December-2019

the Democrat. While the Democrat represents the liberal orientation, the conservatives are associated with the Republican.

Studies in psychology have confirmed an increasing support for a conservative political orientation and the individual morality, especially during crisis periods, as exemplified by the impact of the 9/11 (Jost et al., 2008). This is aligned to harm and care, associated with the moral foundations theory. Jost et al. (2008) in their study, highlighted the ideological differences in relation to the liberals positions on social change and equality, as well as .the tradition and inequality that characterised the conservatives ideological persuasion. They have noted that these were meaningful phenomenon, they indicated an established nexus between political orientation and moral foundation.

The study by Federico, Weber, Ergun, and Hunt (cited by Kuglar, Jost and Noorbaloochi, 2014), indicated a weak correlation between conservative and the values of fairness and avoidance of harm, while the liberals authoritarianism had a correlation with the support for the in-group, authority, and purity concerns.

Evidence from psychological studies have ascribed conservatives with the individuals who have preference for the promotion and preservation of the traditional order, values, hierarchy, conformity and stability. On the other hand, the liberals are the protagonists of equality, change, flexibility, chaos, rebelliousness and feminism (Jost, Nosek and Gosling, 2008). This study tested two hypotheses. These are: (1) individualizing foundations are congruent with the liberal ideological orientation and (2) the conservative ideological orientation hinge more on the binding moral foundations.

Methodology

Participants

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-4-October-December-2019

In this study, 350 people, drawn from a college in South Africa, participated in the surveys. Out of this figure, the responses of 50 participants contained incomplete data, and thus excluded. . The data used were gathered form the 300 participants, which comprised of of 78 males, with the mean age of 32.24 years (*SD* = 6.77). There were 222 female participants with a mean age of 29.08 years (*SD* = 4.57). There were differences between the mean age of the male and female participants. The mean age of the male participants was slightly higher than the female participants. The difference was significant, t (298) = 2.44, p = .035. The age range of the participants was between 18 and 60 years.

Survey instrument

The survey instruments include a Moral Foundation Questionnaire (MFQ), administered thought the web. The measures for political orientation and moral foundations were presented separately. The moral relevance items, each rated on a scale of 0 (not relevant) to 5 (extremely relevant), in the moral foundations measures include harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, in-group/loyalty, authority/respect and purity/sanctity. Only one item was used to measure political orientation. The responses of the participants were rated on a 7-point scales: 1 (strongly liberal) to 7 (strongly conservative). Point 4 indicated neutral.

Procedure

In answering the questions with regards to political orientation, the participants were provided with seven rating options 1 (strongly liberal) to 7 (Strongly conservative). The question sought to know the thought of the ideological position of the participants on political issues, whether liberal or conservative. They were asked to rate the extent of their ideological persuasion

On the moral relevance items, participants were asked to indicate their preference using a 6-point rating scale from 0 (net relevant) to 5 (extremely relevant) to answer the question. The

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-4-October-December-2019

question sought to know the relevance of their considerations in determining whether an issue was right or wrong.

Results

The study analysed the five elements of moral foundations. These comprises of the two values of individualising and the three values of the binding foundations. In Table 1, the mean and standard deviation of the moral relevance ratings of each moral foundation are shown as functions of political orientation. The mean score of the responses of the participants for all the political orientations are listed in the last column to the right. In the individualising foundation, there was a significant difference on the element of harm/care, between the liberal ideological orientation and the conservative ideological orientation. The total mean shows 4.23 and 3.91, respectively, for the liberals and the Conservative ($p = 0.040$). Similarly, there was a significant difference in the overall mean of fairness/reciprocity, at 4.06 and 3.69 ($p = 0.22$), to the liberal and the conservatives, respectively.

In the overall mean of the in-group/loyalty of the binding foundations, there was no significant difference between the two ideological orientations. of the liberal had 2.52 while the conservative had 2.42. There was a swing in the mean score of the authority/respect element 2.54 and 2.82 liberal and conservative, respectively. In the purity/sanctity element, conservative had a mean score of 1.98 while the liberals had 2.08.

The strongly liberal and the moderate liberal garnered a relatively large range of standard deviation in comparison to other values. This implication of this is that there was a larger standard deviation of 1.31 for a mean score of 2.69. It should be noted, however that the smaller sample size ($n = 19$ for strongly liberal), was responsible for this. However, out pf the 300 participants, 164 were in support of the liberal orientation while the conservative had 68

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-4-October-December-2019

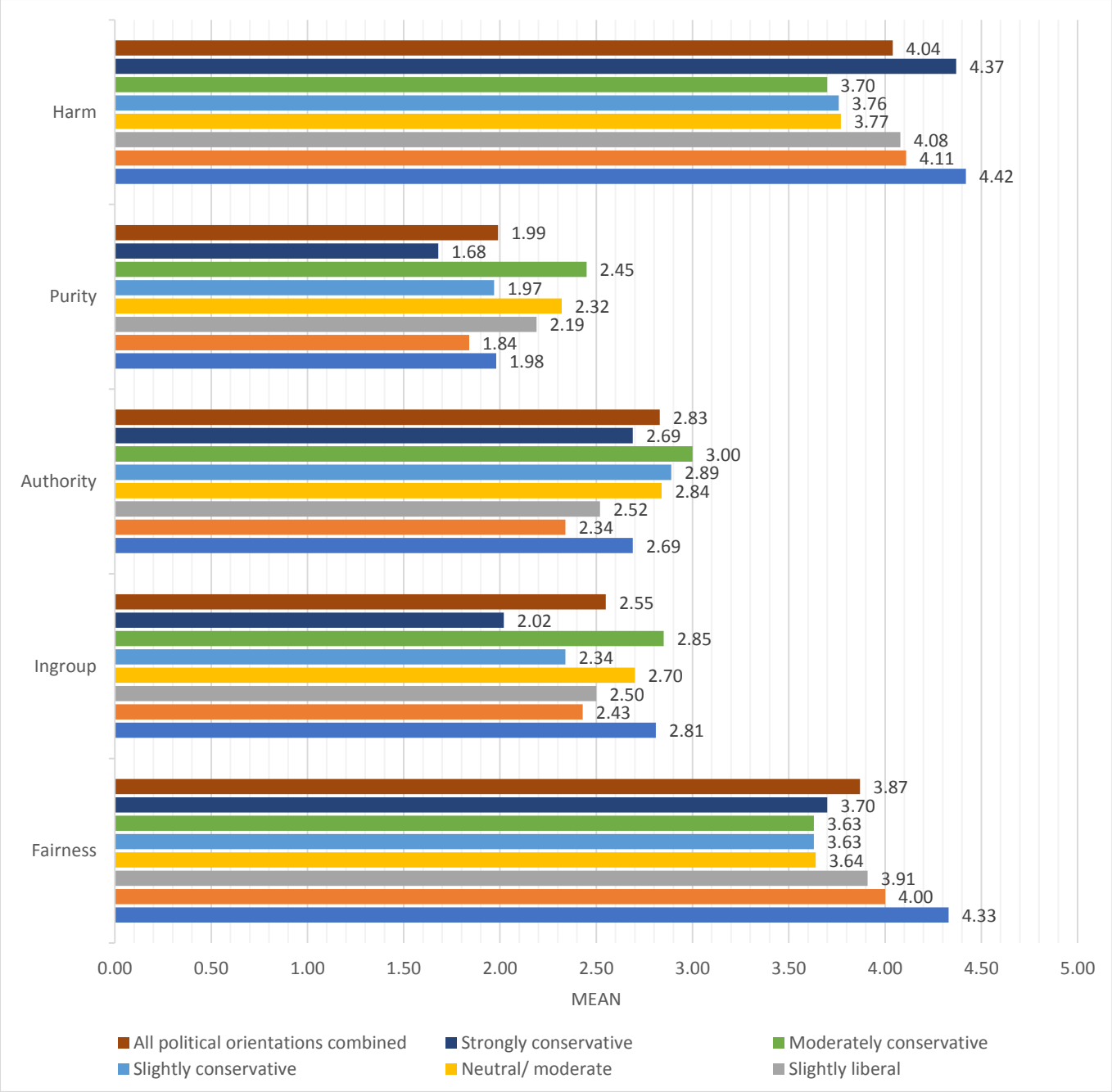
participants. In other words, the liberal had a larger majority for fairness, in-group and harm while the conservative had the majority in authority and purity.

Table 1: Mean Moral Relevance

Foundation	Strongly liberal		Moderately liberal		Slightly liberal		Neutral / moderate		Slightly conservative		Moderately conservative		Strongly conservative		All political orientations combined	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Fairness	4.33	0.63	4.00	0.59	3.91	0.59	3.64	0.70	3.63	0.79	3.63	0.95	3.70	0.63	3.87	0.81
Ingroup	2.81	1.10	2.43	0.90	2.50	0.64	2.70	0.80	2.34	0.78	2.85	1.03	2.02	0.72	2.55	0.97
Authority	2.69	1.31	2.34	0.98	2.52	0.72	2.84	0.81	2.89	0.60	3.00	1.16	2.69	0.73	2.83	1.04
Purity	1.98	1.21	1.84	0.84	2.19	0.84	2.32	0.80	1.97	0.82	2.45	0.93	1.68	0.72	1.99	0.69
Harm	4.42	0.55	4.11	0.59	4.08	0.53	3.77	0.64	3.76	0.88	3.70	0.75	4.37	0.58	4.04	0.75
n	19		116		29		68		33		14		21		300	

Figure 1: Mean Moral Relevance Ratings Bar Chart

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-4-October-December-2019



Discussion

A cursory look at the mean scores on the nexus between the moral foundations and political orientation in South Africa showed a partial approval of the hypothesis. The study hypothesised that the elements of the individualizing foundations are more relevant to the liberals orientation while the conservative placed more premium on the elements of the binding moral foundations. From the result, 164 participants choose harm, care and intergroup elements as the most relevant for the liberals and the majority of the participants

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-4-October-December-2019

picked authority and purity elements for the conservatives. The in-group element of the moral foundation tilted towards the the liberal political orientation. This was contrary to the findings in the literature on liberal and conservative orientation. The study Graham et al (2009:1035) revealed that the conservatives were more concerned about concerned about a Ingroup issues than the liberals.

Unlike previous studies that showed in-group foundation as the political orientation of the conservative political orientation (Graham, Haidt & Nosek, 2009; Graham, Nosek & Haidt, 2012; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Jost, Nosek & Gosling, 2008; Kugler, Jost & Noorbaloochi, 2014), this study showed a slight difference in the mean total score. The liberals had 0.53 of the mean total score for ingroup issues. However, the findings of this study in relation to conservative political orientation and purity and authority issues, and the liberal political orientation associated with fairness and harm, aligned with the findings of of Graham et al (2009).

This study noted that there was no significant difference in the number of respondents between strongly liberal (n = 19) and strongly conservative in each of the 5 moral foundations (n = 21). The implication is that there is the ideological strength of is not necessarily a function of the moral foundation. In other word, the strength of each of the ideological orientation depends largely on the context of their observation and expression

It could be argued, therefore, that the two ideological orientation could be understood as being motivated by social cognition (Haidt et al., 2007). Motives are reflections of moral beliefs and cognition. Graham et al., (2009. p. 1033), affirmed this, noting that, the "moral thinking of liberals and conservatives may not be a matter of more versus less, but of different opinions about what considerations are relevant to moral judgment".

In this study, 164 respondents indicated their Liberal traits, while 68 (23%) were neutrally/moderately oriented. This indication found relevance in the findings of Jost et al.

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-4-October-December-2019

(2008), that societies, in recent times, have shifted, disproportionately away from the conservative stances, to the neutral/moderate persuasion.. Thus, arguably, the individuals in the society are tending towards the neglected issues and embracing new ideas and knowledge in their contexts.

Conclusion

Research has shown that there were no strict differences between the conservatives' values, attached to authority, in-group loyalty and the enforcement of purity concerns. They are well intentioned, valid, and morally defensible as the values of harm and fairness associated with the liberal (Kugler et al., 2014). Therefore, both the individualizing and binding moral foundations associated with liberal and conservative political orientations could not be dismissed as invalid claims. Both liberals and conservatives play influential roles in the political agenda.

This study partially supported the research provided by other researchers. North American studies which found a strong relationship between moral foundation and political orientation, has found some similarity with the study in South Africa. However, as the study findings revealed, there was partial support for certain moral foundations within the individualizing and binding categories. This implies that moral judgements can differ from an individual's liberal and moral political orientation.

The survey of this study only targeted academics employed in a college in South Africa. Widening the sample would generate greater representation. Since the survey only focused on items relating to moral relevance, the limitation that arose was that items relating to moral judgements were excluded. Further, the survey instrument did not consider more politically contextualized elements influencing political orientation and the impact on South African

ISSN:0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-4-October-December-2019

moral judgement. Further studies on this issue should be expanded with more representative samples across different sector of the society.

References

Day, M. V., Fiskel, S. T., Downing, E. L. and Trail, T. E. 2014. Shifting Liberal and Conservative Attitudes Using Moral Foundations Theory Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, pp.1-15. DOI: 10.1177/0146167214551152

Garvey, L. and Ford, T. G. 2014. Rationality, Political Orientation, and the Individualizing and Binding Moral Foundations. Letters on Evolution Behavioral Science, 5(1), 9-12.

Graham, J., Haidt, J. & Nosek, B.A. (2009). Liberals and Conservatives Rely on Different Sets of Moral Foundations. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 96(5), 1029–1046. doi: 10.1037/a0015141.

Graham, J., Nosek B.A, Haidt, J. (2012). The Moral Stereotypes of Liberals and Conservatives: Exaggeration of Differences across the Political Spectrum. PLoS ONE, 7(12), 1- 13.doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0050092.

Haidt, J. & Graham, J. (2007). When Morality Opposes Justice: Conservatives Have Moral Intuitions that Liberals may not Recognize. Social Justice Research, 20 (1),98-116. doi: 10.1007/s11211-007-0034-z.

Jost, J. T., Nosek, B. A., & Gosling, S. D. (2008). Ideology: Its resurgence in social, personality, and political psychology. Perspectives on Psychological Science, 3, 126–136.

Kivikangas, J. M., Lönnqvist, J. and Ravaja, N. 2017. Relationship of Moral Foundations to Political Liberalism-Conservatism and Left-Right Orientation in a Finnish Representative Sample. *Social Psychology* DOI: 10.1027/1864-9335/a000297

Kugler, M., Jost, J.T. & Noorbaloochi, S. (2014). Another look at Moral Foundations Theory: Do Authoritarianism and Social Dominance Orientation Explain Liberal-Conservative Differences in "Moral" Intuitions? Social Justice Research, 27, 413-431. Doi:10.1007/s11211-014-0223-5.

Malka, A., Osborne, D., Soto, C. J., Greaves, L. M., Sibley, C. G. and Lelkes, Y. 2016. Binding Moral Foundations and the Narrowing of Ideological Conflict to the Traditional Morality Domain. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 42(9) 1243–1257.

MoralFoundations.org. (2016). Retrieved December, 9, 2016, from http://www.moralfoundations.org/."

Napier, J. L and Luguri, J. B. 2013. Moral Mind-Sets: Abstract Thinking Increases a Preference for "Individualizing" Over "Binding" Moral Foundations. Social Psychological & Personality Science 4(6), 754-759.