

Religiosity and Conservatism Revisited:

Relating a new religiosity measure to the two main conservative political ideologies

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Summary. - The relation between the two religiosity dimensions which Wulff (1997) described (Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence and Literal vs. Symbolic) and two conservative political ideologies (Cultural and Economic Conservatism) was investigated in a sample of 714 students, a heterogeneous sample of 262 adults and a sample of 301 religiously affiliated adults gathered in Flanders (Belgium). Both Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence and Literal vs. Symbolic were expected to relate only to Cultural Conservatism. Results supported these hypotheses, providing further evidence for the close association between religiosity and Cultural Conservatism and the validity of the Post-Critical Belief scale (Duriez, Fontaine & Hutsebaut, 2000) as a measure of Wulff's religiosity dimensions.

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In the past, researchers often assumed that political parties and political attitudes could be arrayed on a single dimension of left-right or progressivism-conservatism (e.g. Lipset, 1960; McClosky, 1958). However, more recently it has been argued that the meaning of this dimension varies across nations and over time and is thus often insufficient to represent the relevant political dimensions in a given society (e.g., Inglehart, 1990; Rokeach, 1973). Middendorp (1978, 1991), for instance, rigorously analyzed the ideological components of this left-right dimension (and of political conflicts in general) in a theoretical, historical and empirical way, and distinguished two unrelated dimensions rather than one. The first dimension, opposing traditionalism to libertarianism, concerns individual rights and readiness for social change. This dimension was later labeled Cultural Conservatism (De Witte & Scheepers, 1999), Cultural conservatives are concerned with maintaining discipline in people's lives, especially within the family (e.g., by making divorce difficult and by tightening controls over abortion and euthanasia), and are in favor of a strict upbringing and traditional sex-roles. The second dimension, opposing right-wing political attitudes to left-wing political attitudes, concerns the desirable level of economic equality among people as well as the desirability of trade unions and governmental intervention in economics. This dimension was later labeled Economic Conservatism (De Witte & Scheepers, 1999). Economic conservatives oppose economic equality, trade unions and governmental intervention in the economic sphere. The distinction between Cultural and Economic Conservatism is similar to the distinction between social and economic conservatism (Lipset, 1981) and between social traditionalism and economic conservatism (Johnson & Tamney, 2001).

In a somewhat similar vein, Wulff (1997) provided an interesting new perspective on religiosity. According to Wulff, all possible attitudes to religion can be summarized along two dimensions. The Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence dimension specifies whether the objects of religious interest

are granted participation in a transcendent reality. The Literal vs. Symbolic dimension indicates whether religious expressions are interpreted literally or symbolically. Recently, Fontaine, Duriez, Luyten and Hutsebaut (in press) have shown that the Post-Critical Belief scale (Duriez, Fontaine & Hutsebaut, 2000) captures the interindividual differences in these basic religiosity dimensions. In this way, the Post-Critical Belief scale allows one to disentangle the effects of believing in a transcendent reality or not (Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence) from the way in which religious contents are approached (either in a literal or in a symbolical way).

The aim of the present study is to relate the religiosity dimensions that are captured by the Post-Critical Belief scale to the main conservative political ideologies which Middendorp (1978) identified (Cultural and Economic Conservatism) in order to evaluate the external validity of the Post-Critical Belief scale. There are two reasons to examine the construct validity of this scale in relation to measures of conservatism. First, religiosity has been found to be linked to some of these measures, but not to others (see below). Second, just like the Literal vs. Symbolic dimension (Desimpelaere, Sulas, Duriez & Hutsebaut, 1999; Duriez, 2002), some of these measures have been found to relate to cognitive variables such as dogmatism (see below). Hence, specific predictions can be made regarding the relation between the two religiosity dimensions and these conservatism measures.

The Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence dimension is expected to relate positively to Cultural Conservatism. Factor analyses of social attitude items have consistently led to a cultural conservatism - religiosity factor (Brown, 1981; Comrey & Newmeyer, 1965; Eysenck, 1944, 1954, 1971; Ferguson, 1939, 1940, 1973; Gorsuch & McFarland, 1972; Sania, 1952; Saucier, 2000; Thurstone, 1934; Wilson, 1970), and independently developed measures of cultural conservatism and religiosity have often been reported to be strongly related (Gorsuch, 1984; Walkey, Katz & Green, 1990). In contrast, since Economic Conservatism was shown to be independent of religiosity (Johnson & Tamney, 2001; Middendorp, 1978), Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence is expected to be unrelated to Economic Conservatism.

The Literal vs. Symbolic dimension, which is basically a cognitive dimension (see Desimpelaere et al., 1999), is expected to relate negatively to Cultural Conservatism. Recent research has shown that persons high on cognitive rigidity measures are likely to support culturally conservative ideologies since these rely on tradition, are aimed at (societal) stability, and imply the avoidance of ambiguity caused by change (e.g., Greenberg et al., 1990; Johnson & Tamney, 2001; Jost, Glaser & Kruglanski, in press; Kemmelmeier, 1997; Kossowska & Van Hiel, 2002; Shah, Kruglanski & Thompson, 1998; Tetlock, 1983, 1993; Van Hiel, Pandelare & Duriez, 2002). Moreover, recent research has shown that literal thinkers tend to be high on measures of cognitive rigidity such as dogmatism, closed-mindedness and intolerance of ambiguity (Duriez, 2002, Duriez & Soenens, 2002). In contrast, the Literal vs. Symbolic dimension is expected to be unrelated to Economic Conservatism. On the one hand, there is evidence that Economic Conservatism relates negatively to dogmatism (Johnson & Tamney, 2001). Economic Conservatism tends to embrace technological evolutions, especially within the business world (Sayer, 1991) and hence it is likely to go hand in hand with a pragmatist outlook in which there is little room for the traditional morality that might be incompatible with technical evolutions. Economical Conservatism would therefore relate to trying to understand the (religious) views of the opposition, rather than to emotionally reject them. However, at the same time, pragmatism is likely to inhibit thinking about the symbolic meaning of religious language.

In sum, the Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence dimension is expected to relate positively to Cultural Conservatism and to be unrelated to Economic Conservatism, and the Literal vs. Symbolic dimension is expected to relate negatively to Cultural Conservatism and to be unrelated to Economic Conservatism.

Method

Samples

Three samples were gathered in Flanders (Belgium) (total $N=1277$). Sample 1 ($N=714$; 20% male) consisted of university students taking an introductory psychology course. Participation was

obligatory and they received course credit. The mean age was 18 years ($SD=01$). Sample 2 ($N=262$; 55% male) consisted of adults only. Subjects were gathered by undergraduate students who asked their neighbors to participate in order to obtain heterogeneous samples. The mean age was 39 years ($SD=15$). Sample 3 was gathered among highly religious subjects, affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church ($N=301$; 35% male), by asking the participants of a meeting of Catechist to cooperate with our research. The mean age was 45 years ($SD=12$). Participants having over two missing values on the Post-Critical Belief scale or over one missing value on one of the other scales were excluded from further analyses. This way, 19 participants (less than 2% of the participants) were removed across the three samples. For subjects who were not removed, missing values were replaced by the sample-specific mean of the item. In total, only 82 missing values (less than 0.1% of the individual scores included in this study) were replaced.

Measures

Participants completed a Cultural and Economic Conservatism scale (De Witte, 1990; Duriez et al., 2002; both 12 items). The items were scored on a 5-point scale anchored by Certainly disagree and Certainly agree. Examples of items for cultural and economic conservatism are, respectively, "Women should do the household and men should go out making money" and "Differences between high and low incomes should remain the same". Estimates of internal consistency were .70, .79 and .75 for Cultural Conservatism, .76, .83 and .86 for Economic Conservatism in sample 1, 2 and 3 respectively. Participants obtained mean scores of 2.22 ($SD=0.44$), 2.58 ($SD=0.67$) and 2.87 ($SD=0.63$) for Cultural Conservatism and 2.52 ($SD=0.43$), 2.48 ($SD=0.67$) and 2.45 ($SD=0.73$) for Economic Conservatism in sample 1, 2 and 3 respectively. As expected, Cultural and Economic Conservatism were largely unrelated ($r_s=.11$, $p<.01$, .05, ns, and .09, ns). Participants also completed the Post-Critical Belief scale (Duriez, Fontaine & Hutsebaut, 2000; 33 items). The items were scored on a 7-point scale anchored by Certainly disagree and Certainly agree. As in Fontaine et al. (in press), an estimation of level of acquiescence was subtracted from the raw scores. For each sample, a Principal Component Analysis

(PCA) was carried out on these corrected scores. A scree test indicated a two-componential solution for all samples. These structures were subjected to orthogonal Procrustes rotations towards the average structure reported by Fontaine et al. (in press). In all samples, Tucker's Φ indices suggested good fit. Hence, in all samples, the two components could be interpreted as Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence and Literal vs. Symbolic respectively. Due to the correction for level of acquiescence, the mean scores on these dimensions were 0.00 ($SD=1.00$) for all samples. Examples of items are "I think that Bible stories should be taken literally, as they are written" (Inclusion of Transcendence, Literal), "Faith is an expression of a weak personality" (Exclusion of Transcendence, Literal), "The Bible holds a deeper truth which can only be revealed by personal reflection" (Inclusion of Transcendence, Symbolic) and "There is no absolute meaning in life, only giving directions, which is different for every one of us" (Exclusion of Transcendence, Symbolic).

Results

For each sample, the relationships between the religiosity dimensions and the conservative ideologies were investigated by means of bivariate correlations. In addition, average correlations across the three samples that were used in this study were also computed. For this purpose, the correlations obtained in the different samples were subjected to Fisher- Z transformations. Whereas Cultural Conservatism, on average, relates positively to Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence ($r=.44$) and negatively to Literal vs. Symbolic ($r=-.23$), Economic Conservatism is virtually unrelated to both religiosity dimensions ($r=.00$ and $-.03$ respectively). Although there was some fluctuation across the three samples that were used in this study, similar patterns occurred. Whereas Cultural Conservatism related consistently positively to Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence ($r=.35$, $.48$ and $.40$, $p<.0001$ for sample 1, 2 and 3) and consistently negatively to Literal vs. Symbolic ($r=-.13$ and $-.20$, $p<.01$ for sample 1 and 2, and $r=-.33$, $p<.0001$ for sample 3), Economic Conservatism was consistently unrelated to both Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence ($r=.06$, $.03$ and $-.10$, ns, for sample 1, 2 and 3) and Literal vs. Symbolic ($r=-.08$, $.03$ and $-.04$, ns, for sample 1, 2 and 3). A 10 item Marlowe-Crowne Social

Desirability scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960) was administered in samples 1 and 3 to check whether controlling for social desirability would influence the observed relations. However, controlling for social desirability had no significant effect on the correlations. In a similar vein, controlling for gender, age and level of education in study 2 and 3 had no significant effect on the correlations.

Discussion

The present results provide further evidence for the close association between religiosity and Cultural Conservatism and support the construct validity of the Post-Critical Belief scale. As expected, whereas Cultural Conservatism relates positively to the Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence dimension and negatively to the Literal vs. Symbolic dimension, Economic Conservatism is unrelated to both of these religiosity dimensions. Relationships were relatively stable across the different samples. An interesting avenue for future research would be to examine whether these relations also remain stable across religious denominations and countries. From the theory of Max Weber (1930), one might hypothesize that Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence might relate to Economic Conservatism in Protestant denominations. Similarly, the association between Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence and Cultural Conservatism might drop off in countries where the tradition is hostile to religion, as might be the case in communist and formerly communist countries.

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