

Political Orientation, Religiosity and Life Satisfaction: An Exploratory Investigation Amongst Indians

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Abstract

Recent advancements in positive psychology have led to an increased focus on life satisfaction and subjective well-being. Research has been conducted to examine the relationship between political orientation, religiosity and life satisfaction in the Western societies, but not much is known about this relationship in non-Western nations, such as India. Thus, the current study aimed to understand the relationship between political orientation, religiosity and life satisfaction in the Indian context. The study included 101 participants in the 40-65 age group. Participants completed the following measures: social and economic conservatism scale (Everett, 2013), dimensions of religiosity scale (Joseph et al, 2007) and satisfaction with life scale (Diener, 1985). It was hypothesized that (a) There will be a significant positive relationship between political conservatism and life satisfaction and (b) There will be a significant positive relationship between religiosity and life satisfaction. The results have been discussed in the light of the relevant literature.

Key Words:

Positive psychology, conservatism, liberalism, life satisfaction, political orientation, religiosity

The recent advancements in the field of 'positive psychology' have legitimized the study of happiness and subjective well-being in the scientific lexicon. Much attention has been paid on understanding the essential ingredients for life satisfaction and on establishing ways to achieve the same. Subjective well-being is a multidimensional concept that comprises cognitive and emotional appraisal of one's own life (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Higher levels of subjective well-being indicate the presence of positive emotions and cognitive wellbeing (e.g., life satisfaction; Diener et al., 1985) and the absence of negative states, such as depression and anxiety (Emmons, 1998). Thus, life satisfaction is a salient cognitive aspect of subjective well-being.

Ancient texts, such as Plato's *The Republic* (376 BC, formally published in 1970) and *The*

Atharvaveda (circa 1200 BC) have described the salience of politics and religion, respectively, in people's lives (see also Briggs, 2014; Davie, 1999). The impact of these factors on wellbeing has been the subject of much research.

Political Orientation and Life Satisfaction

Research in the past (e.g., Napier & Jost, 2008) has tried to understand how political orientation influences life satisfaction. With respect to political orientation, an individual can be identified as a liberal or a conservative. On the one hand, liberalism as a political philosophy endorses civil rights, democracy, gender and racial equality, internationalization, and freedom of religion (Donohue, 2003; Hashemi, 2009; Heywood, 2012). Liberalism is rooted in "beliefs in progress, the essential goodness of the human race (and the related idea that social inequalities reflect failings of

SATISFACTION

society rather than the individual), and the protection of political and civil liberties” (Schlenker, Chambers & Le, 2011, p. 128). On the other hand, conservatism as a political philosophy stresses upon tradition, hierarchy, authority and preservation of institution (Heywood, 2012).

Prior research has shown that well-being is higher for conservatives in comparison with the liberals (Napier & Jost, 2008). Variations in thinking patterns and motivations could possibly explain the differences in well-being of these two groups (see Napier & Jost, 2008). For instance, liberals contemplate more, seek cognitive closure less, and tolerate ambiguity better than the conservatives (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski & Sulloway 2003; Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti & de Grada 2006). Using systems justification approach (Jost & Banaji, 1994), Napier and Jost (2008) argue that the conservatives prefer reinforcing the status quo. In addition, personality dimensions also explain the association between political ideology and well-being: conservatives espoused agency, positive orientation, and transcendental moral conviction more than the liberals (Schlenker et al., 2011). Interestingly, conservative Republicans were much more satisfied with their lives than liberal Republicans; whereas, liberal Democrats were much more satisfied with their lives than conservative Democrats (Özmen, Danieau & Brelsford, 2017). In addition, studies indicate that the magnitude of political orientation than political orientation per se, influences life satisfaction (see Choma, Busseri & Sadava, 2009).

Religiosity and Life Satisfaction

Religiosity is a subjective construct. A religious person absorbs himself/ herself into a belief and uses it as a guiding force (Joseph & Diduca, 2007). Higher levels of religiosity, for instance, have been linked to better parent-child relationships (Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008) and enhanced body perceptions (Boyatzis & McConnell, 2006). In general, religiosity has a positive influence on well-being, especially life satisfaction (Blazer & Palmore, 1976; Cohen et al., 2005; Ellison, 1991; Hadaway & Roof, 1978; Hunsberger, 1985; Mcfadden, 2010; Özmen et al., 2017). However, the association is much

stronger in societies that place a premium on religiosity (Stavrova, Fetchenhauer & Schlösser, 2013).

Koenig and Cohen (2002), in their review, highlight three factors that account for the positive impact of religious and spiritual engagement on health and well-being. First, many religions negatively appraise smoking and alcohol consumption. Second, religious groups provide social support to the individual, and social support can attenuate the negative impact of stressful situations (see also Pargament, 1997). Social identity theory indicates that belongingness to and absorption into a group determines an individual’s self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Applying this theory, one can ascertain that identifying with a religious denomination and political ideology is likely to influence an individual’s self-esteem. Finally, religious beliefs can augment self-evaluation, mastery and efficacious orientation, and purpose in life – all of which contribute to a higher sense of well-being (see also Ryff, 1989).

Thus, the current study seeks to understand the relationship between political orientation, religiosity and life satisfaction. While a lot of studies have been conducted in the Western context, the topic remains underexplored in non-Western societies, such as India. India, a society with an amalgamation of individualistic and collectivistic attributes, scores high on power distance (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). In high power-distance societies, hierarchies are accepted as an inevitable part of one’s lives (Hofstede et al., 2010). Furthermore, many Indians demonstrate an interdependent self-concept, rooted in interpersonal relationships (Bhawuk, 2011; Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and show preference for tradition (Konsky, Eguchi, Blue & Kapoor, 1999). The largest democracy, India allows its citizens to choose their political allegiance and religion and its intensity.

Based on the existing literature and considering the cultural milieu, two hypotheses were established. (a) Political conservatism, regardless of any political party identification, will be positively and significantly related to and predict life satisfaction.

(b) Religiosity will be positively and significantly related to and predict life satisfaction.

Method

Participants and Sampling Procedure. Sample consisted of 101 participants from urban India in the age group of 40-65 years. A majority of adults in this age group are financially stable. This allows for controlling the impact of financial stability on well-being. The respondents belonged to the socio-economic category A1 and A2 according to Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) India's (2015) new consumer classification system. A snowball sampling technique was used to collect data.

Measures

Demographic Details: The participants were asked to provide their age details. They were also asked to indicate the education level of the chief wage earner of their household and were asked to select the consumer durables owned by the family. The predefined list included 11 items: Electricity connection, Ceiling fan, Gas Stove (LPG Connection), Refrigerator, Two-Wheeler, Washing Machine, Colour TV, Computer, Four-Wheeler, Air Conditioner and Agricultural Land (BARC India, 2015). Based on the information provided, the respondents were classified into socio-economic categories according to BARC India's. This was done to control for the effects of an individual's socio-economic background.

Political Orientation: Everett's (2013) 12-item social and economic conservatism scale was used in the current study. This scale comprises two subscales: social conservatism and economic conservatism. Participants are asked to report how favorable they consider each of the items on this scale from 10 (Highly Negative) to 50 (Highly Positive). In this scale, scores are aligned with the intervals of 10, 20, 30, 40, 50. The mean score for each participant is calculated, and higher mean scores are indicative of higher political conservatism. Everett (2013) found Cronbach alpha values to be .88 for the overall scale, .70 for the economic conservatism subscale, and .87 for the social conservatism subscale, thus indicating

adequate internal consistency. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was .581 for the overall scale, 0.74 for the economic conservatism subscale, and .626 for the social conservatism subscale.

Religiosity: Joseph and Diduca's (2007) 20-item Dimensions of Religiosity scale was used in the current study. This scale includes 4 subscales, namely, emotional involvement, preoccupation, guidance and conviction. Participants respond to each item on a 5-point Likert scale, with values ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with the scoring reversed for negatively worded items. Higher scores suggest higher levels of religiosity. Joseph and Diduca (2007) found Cronbach alpha values to range from .87 to .94 for these subscales. In the current study, Cronbach alpha values were 0.90 for Emotional Involvement, 0.93 for Conviction, 0.92 for Preoccupation, and 0.80 for Guidance, and 0.97 for the overall subscale.

Life Satisfaction: Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al. 1985) was used in the current study. Participants respond to each item on a 7-point Likert scale, with values ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Diener and colleagues (1985) found evidence for good test-retest reliability (.82) and internal consistency (.87) of this scale. Higher scores are indicative of higher levels of life satisfaction. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha value was found to be .774.

Data Collection

Google Forms was used to gather data from the participants. After consenting to participate in the research project, respondents filled up the demographic sheet and psychological scales. After the primary data were gathered, SPSS (SPSS version 22.0, IBM Corp. Released 2013) software was used for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation were calculated. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationship between political orientation, religiosity and life satisfaction. Regression analysis was carried out to

identify predictors of life satisfaction in the study sample.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics: Means and Standard Deviations for Age, Political Conservatism, Religiosity and Life Satisfaction

| Variable | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|-------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| Age | 48.79 | 4.91 |
| Political Conservatism | 35.60 | 4.97 |
| Social Conservatism | 38.51 | 6.51 |
| Economic Conservatism | 31.52 | 5.47 |
| Religiosity | 67.15 | 20.36 |
| Preoccupation | 15.35 | 5.71 |
| Guidance | 15.84 | 4.78 |
| Emotional Involvement | 17.86 | 5.59 |
| Conviction | 18.93 | 5.85 |
| Life Satisfaction | 26.41 | 4.60 |

Table 2: Examining Relationship Between Political Orientation, Religiosity and Life Satisfaction

| PC | PC | POS | POE | REL | PRE | GUI | EI | CO | LS |
|-----|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| PC | - | 0.899** | 0.685** | 0.385** | 2.98** | 0.402** | 0.390** | 0.347** | 0.152 |
| POS | | - | 0.297** | 0.488** | 0.394** | 0.480** | 0.465** | 0.475** | 0.137 |
| POE | 0.685** | | - | 0.28 | -0.005 | 0.77 | 0.77 | -0.33 | 0.105 |
| REL | 0.385** | 0.488** | | - | 0.938** | 0.891** | 0.950** | 0.927** | 0.269** |
| PRE | 0.298** | 3.94** | -0.005 | | - | 0.804** | 0.873** | 0.796** | 0.248* |
| GUI | 0.402** | 0.480** | 0.77 | 0.891** | | - | 0.773** | 0.757** | 0.246* |
| EI | 0.390** | 4.65** | 0.77 | 0.950** | 0.873** | | - | 0.865** | 0.279** |
| CO | 0.347** | 4.75** | -0.33 | 0.927** | 0.796** | 0.757** | | - | 0.224* |

| | | | | | | | | |
|----|-------|------|-------|---------|--------|--------|---------|---|
| LS | 0.152 | 1.37 | 0.105 | 0.269** | 0.248* | 0.246* | 0.279** | - |
|----|-------|------|-------|---------|--------|--------|---------|---|

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ PC= Political Conservatism, POS= Social Conservatism, POE= Economic Conservatism, REL= Religiosity, PRE= Preoccupation, GUI = Guidance, EI = Emotional Involvement, CO = Conviction, LS= Life Satisfaction

Table 2 represents correlation between psychological variables under investigation in the current study. Findings indicate that overall political conservatism is significantly positively associated with religiosity but not life satisfaction. Social conservatism too was significantly positively correlated to religiosity and all of its individual aspects. But no significant relationship was detected between the variable and life satisfaction. Economic Conservatism did not share a significant relationship with any of the variables. Religiosity displayed a significant positive correlation with life satisfaction. Individual aspects of religiosity like preoccupation, guidance and conviction shared a significant positive relationship with life satisfaction. All the subscales of religiosity were significantly correlated to each other.

Regression Analysis

Linear regression analysis was carried out to identify predictors of life satisfaction in the study sample (see Table 3 for the results). Age was entered as the predictor in Model 1. The overall model was statistically insignificant and age was not found to be a significant predictor of life satisfaction. Political conservatism was entered as an additional predictor in Model 2. The overall model was statistically insignificant; political conservatism did not significantly predict life satisfaction. In Model 3, religiosity was entered as an additional predictor. The overall model was not statistically significant after religiosity was added and religiosity did not significantly predict life satisfaction.

Table 3: Predicting Life Satisfaction

| | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | | Model 3 | | |
|--------------------------------|---------|-------|---------|---------|-------|---------|---------|-------|---------|
| | B | SE | β | B | SE | β | B | SE | β |
| Constant | 23.53 | 4.503 | | 18.931 | 5.512 | | 19.646* | 5.407 | |
| Age | 0.059 | 0.059 | 0.063 | 0.053 | 0.093 | 0.056 | 0.024 | 0.092 | 0.025 |
| PC | | | | 0.138 | 0.092 | 1.49 | 0.053 | 0.098 | 0.057 |
| REL | | | | | | | 0.055 | 0.024 | 0.243 |
| R² | | 0.004 | | | 0.026 | | | 0.075 | |
| F | | 0.396 | | | 1.321 | | | 2.640 | |
| ΔR^2 | | | | | 0.022 | | | 0.049 | |

Note: ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Discussion

The current study sought to examine if political conservatism and religiosity predicted life satisfaction. The results revealed that in the Indian context there is no significant relationship between

political conservatism and life satisfaction and neither is the former a significant predictor of the latter. These results were not in alignment with the past studied conduct in the field which indicated that conservatives enjoyed higher life satisfaction (Napier & Jost, 2008; Taylor et al., 2006). A

possible explanation for the inconclusive results can be that it attempted to establish a correlation between political conservatism and life satisfaction instead of taking into account the degree of polarisation on either side (conservatism or liberalism). The degree of polarisation could have acted as a better predictor of life satisfaction (Choma et al., 2009). The current study does indicate the magnitude of political ideology as was reflected in the study by Choma et al in 2009. Overall political conservatism and social conservatism were significantly positively correlated to religiosity and all of its subscales (preoccupation, guidance, conviction and emotional involvement). Past research has indicated that religious individuals are more likely to be politically conservative (e.g., Fowler et al., 2004; Hirsh et al., 2013; Wilcox & Larson, 2006). Political conservatism is associated with inclination towards order and tradition, which is also central to religious orthodoxy (Napier et al., 2009).

This study also indicated that religiosity is significantly positively correlated to life satisfaction. This result is in alignment with the past researched conducted which revealed a significant positive correlation between the two variables (e.g., Blazer & Palmore, 2010; Ellison, 1991; Hadaway & Roof, 1978; Hunsberger, 1985; Mcfadden, 2010; Özmen et al., 2017). Religion offers social support and encourages healthy lifestyle, which in turn could lead to better wellbeing (Koenig & Cohen, 2002). However, religion was not a significant predictor of life satisfaction. Including a relatively bigger sample is likely to increase the predictive ability of religion vis-a-vis life satisfaction.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings suggest that political conservatism is not associated with life satisfaction but is significantly positively correlated to religiosity. Religiosity shares a significant positive relationship with life satisfaction but is not a significant predictor of life satisfaction. The first limitation of the study lies in the investigation of the complex structure that political orientation and religiosity are. The data could have possibly been affected by social desirability (Fisher, 1993) in the

self-report data. The current study was limited by the number of respondents and a restricted age group of 40-65 years. A larger and more diverse sample might prove to be representative of the current population. Nevertheless, this research can be treated as a foundation for future studies. Future studies can also include variables, such as personality traits, gender, socioeconomic status. Given the centrality of the religion and politics in an individual's life, governments can use this knowledge to formulate effective public policies.

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