



The interpersonal roots of politics: Social value orientation, socio-political attitudes and prejudice



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ABSTRACT

The relationships between social value orientation, socio-political attitudes and prejudice was investigated in three studies (total N = 1069). Participants filled in questionnaires containing measures of social value orientation, left–right political orientation, social worldviews (i.e. dangerous world and competitive jungle), right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), social dominance orientation (SDO) and prejudice towards immigrants. Study 1 showed that a prosocial orientation was associated to right-wing political orientation through the mediation of RWA and SDO. Study 2 revealed that social worldviews mediated the relationships of a prosocial orientation with RWA and SDO. Finally, Study 3 indicated that a prosocial orientation was related to prejudice through the intervention of social worldviews, RWA and SDO. Overall, these findings provided robust evidence about the relevant role of interpersonal orientation underpinning socio-political attitudes and prejudice.

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1. Introduction

There has recently been a revived interest in the notion that dispositional processes contribute to ideological outcomes. Robust evidence suggests that variables such as conscientiousness, fear of threat, death anxiety, epistemic motivations (such as intolerance of ambiguity, closed mindedness, personal needs for structure) are positively related to a more right-wing ideological orientation (e.g., Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009). Conversely, openness to experience, agreeableness, cognitive complexity, tolerance of uncertainty, and self-esteem appear positively associated with a left-wing orientation (e.g. Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003, Sibley, Osborne, & Duckitt, 2012). These associations have been interpreted as stemming from a match between individuals' dispositional repertoire and the leftist or rightist ideologies (e.g., Jost et al., 2003). Such optimal matching between dispositions and ideology would be driven by an “elective affinity”, that is the strength of mutual attraction connecting the contents of belief systems and the motives of their adherents (Jost, 2009). The individual's needs and dispositions would match with the belief systems and ideology that resonate best with his/her dispositional build-up. In this process, environmental and situational factors can directly affect political attitudes and related individual traits (e.g. Jost et al., 2003, 2009), but also genetic factors can play some role in forming political attitudes and ideologies by shaping such

predispositions that constitute the basis of individuals' political orientation (e.g. Alford, Funk, & Hibbing, 2005; Funk et al., 2013).

In this paper, focusing in particular on the concept of social value orientation (Van Lange, Otten, De Bruin, & Joireman, 1997), it will be argued that interpersonal orientation taps one fundamental aspect of politics and ideology, i.e., how resources should be allocated in terms of equality/inequality, and therefore represents an important personal-root of ideological attitudes as well (Van Lange, Bekker, Chirumbolo, & Leone, 2012).

2. Social value orientation

The concept of social value orientation (SVO) refers to stable preferences for certain patterns of outcomes for oneself and others, usually defined in terms of the weights people assign to their own and others' outcomes in situations of interdependence (McClintock, 1978; Messick & McClintock, 1968). So far, SVO research has focused on three major types of interpersonal orientations (Balliet, Parks, & Joireman, 2009; Bogaert, Boone, & Declerck, 2008): (1) cooperative or prosocial orientation, which seeks to enhance own and other's outcomes as well as equality in outcomes; (2) individualistic orientation, which seeks to enhance outcomes for self, and being largely indifferent to outcomes for another person; and (3) competitive orientation, which seeks to enhance the difference between outcomes for self and other in favor of the self. Relative to individualists and competitors, prosocials tend to be more other-regarding in that they are more

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strongly oriented towards helping others and pursuing equality in outcomes (Van Lange et al., 1997).

The construct and measurement of SVO are rooted in experimental games on cooperation and competition (Balliet et al., 2009; Messick & McClintock, 1968). This peculiarity sets SVO apart from other relational and interpersonal constructs (e.g., altruism, agreeableness, and honesty/humility) that are commonly measured by means of self-descriptions framed in personality or value terms. Social value orientation is generally measured as a decomposed game where participants are asked to choose between options that offer points to the self and another person (Bogaert et al., 2008; Kuhlman & Marshello, 1975). Participants have to answer with the understanding that they will not meet or interact with the other person. No feedback is received by participants about the choices of the other person. These conditions are crucial in order to eliminate participants' strategic considerations from the choice. In this way, choices in the decomposed games are usually taken as an indication of a person's social values or motives, and habitual reactions to social interactions. According to recent reviews (Au & Kwong, 2004) most people are classified as cooperators (46%) or individualists (38%), and much fewer as competitors (12%). Usually, cooperators are referred to as prosocials, while individualists and competitors are typically combined into a single group called proselfs.

Social value orientation has been interpreted by game theory and by experimental game's tradition as the cognitive and motivational underpinnings of cooperation and competition in interpersonal interactions. The findings available clearly suggest that individuals differ in their preferences for particular distributions of outcomes for self and another person (e.g., Van Lange & Joireman, 2008). Such preferences result from habitual processes developed from early childhood to young adulthood and exhibit a strong individual consistency across situations and over time (Van Lange et al., 1997). SVO can be theoretically conceived as "a fundamental and stable personality trait" (Bogaert et al., 2008, p. 455) that shapes behavioral choices concerning cooperation, competition and the preferred pattern of resource allocation. Because SVO taps into preferences for equality/inequality of resource allocation, we propose that SVO may function as a dispositional underpinning of socio-political attitudes and prejudice.

3. Personality, social value orientation and political attitudes

Within the approach of ideology as motivated social cognition, dispositions associated with liberal/conservative ideologies can be organized in three clusters of motives: epistemic, existential and relational motives (Jost et al., 2003; Jost et al., 2009). Epistemic motives relate to the drive to reduce uncertainty, complexity, or ambiguity. Existential motives regard managing threatening circumstances and longing for personal security (e.g., death anxiety, threat avoidance). Finally, relational motives refer to shared reality but also to the desire to affiliate and to establish interpersonal relationships that imply a need for solidarity with others (e.g., agreeableness, altruism), and a need for personal or social identification.

Recent evidence focusing on dispositions belonging to the relational motive sphere (such as agreeableness, altruism, and honesty/humility) corroborates the importance of such motives for the personality-ideology fit (e.g. Chirumbolo & Leone, 2010; Lee, Ashton, Ogunfowora, Bourdage, & Shin, 2010; Zettler & Hilbig, 2010); yet, much less research exists on how relational motives relate to ideology and socio-political attitudes as compared with the evidence gathered on epistemic and existential motives (Jost et al., 2009). In a broad sense, SVO as a basic disposition can be considered as pertaining to the relational motive sphere. The goals behind relational motives — i.e., affiliation and solidarity (vs. individualism and egotism) — can be conceptualized to cover the individuals' preferences and motives to establish or avoid equality vs. inequality of outcomes and of resource allocation. These goals are instrumental to attaining a certain level of solidarity vs. individualism

and a distinct pattern of interpersonal relationship (based on availability of resources vs. equality) that would transpire and match with the desired level of interpersonal affiliation and solidarity. In turn, such desired levels of affiliation and solidarity represent a core divide between left-wing and right-wing ideologies and beliefs.

In this perspective, there are many plausible links between SVO and the political field. Left-wing ideologies have been associated with cooperativeness and collectivism, whereas, by contrast, right-wing ideologies are historically more inclined to adhere to individualistic values instrumental to self-enhancement (Jost et al., 2003). Left-wing orientations appear to give more importance to the achievement of economic and social equality through policies that promote solidarity, the welfare state, social security, equal opportunities, and affirmative action (e.g., Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008). Conversely, right-wing orientations are usually more disposed to give importance to traditions and the preservation of the status quo, to justify the hierarchical system and social inequality, and to favor political issues such as economic system-justification, general system-justification, free-market ideology, and opposition to redistribution of wealth and equality of outcomes, (see Jost et al., 2008). Thus, from a theoretical point of view, SVO may be linked to ideology through its dimensions of equality/inequality, which is, perhaps, the most clearly defined ideological divide between left-wing and right-wing orientations (Jost et al., 2003). In this perspective, SVO may provide the dispositional and motivational underpinning to adopt the left-wing or the right-wing outlook to interpersonal and intergroup equality/inequality of outcomes. Prosocials pursue joint outcomes (Van Lange et al., 1997), interpret the situations in terms of justice, fairness, equality, morality, social responsibility (Bogaert et al., 2008), and are more inclined to give resources such as donations (Van Lange, De Cremer, Van Dijk, & Van Vugt, 2007). In contrast, proselfs tend to interpret situations in terms of personal outcomes and goals, dominance, competence, and strength (Bogaert et al., 2008; Van Lange et al., 2007). Hence, at least in Western Societies, one should expect that prosocials would be more likely to endorse left-wing values than proselfs (i.e., individualists and competitors). Conversely, proselfs should be more attracted by right-wing ideologies.

To date, not many studies have investigated the associations between SVO and political preferences. A few studies reported that prosocial values were associated to proenvironmental intentions and concerns (Gärling, Fujii, Gärling, & Jakobsson, 2003; Joireman, Lasane, Bennett, Richards, & Solaimani, 2001). Sheldon and Nichols (2009; study 4) reported an association between being prosocial (more than proself) and identifying as Democrat, and between being proself and identifying as Republican. More robust evidence connecting SVO, political orientation (measured as left-right self-placement) and voting was found in three studies conducted in Italy and The Netherlands. Individuals with a proself orientation tended to identify more as a conservative or right winger, endorse conservative ideologies, and vote for conservative/right-wing parties as compared with prosocials (Van Lange et al., 2012).

Taken together, these findings provide support for the idea that individual differences in SVO might be predictive of political preferences or ideology. However, the few studies providing evidence on this connection have only addressed bivariate associations between interpersonal orientations and political variables. To our knowledge, more complex models of associations (i.e., mediation models), involving SVO along with attitudinal, ideological and political variables, have not yet been assessed.

In social-psychological literature two distinct dimensions of socio-political attitudes have lately emerged as preeminent: Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA; Altemeyer, 1998) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO, Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Individuals high in RWA tend to strictly adhere to rules, social norms, traditions and conventions. They tend to maintain uncritical support of authority and are inclined to disregard and derogate norm-violators and disadvantaged out-groups. Conversely, SDO refers to individual orientations

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