

The Association Between Moral Values and Political Identity



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Introduction

- There is an obvious link between a person's emotional responses and politics; emotions such as fear, anger, and disgust playing a significant role in shaping political attitudes and beliefs (Kugler, Jost, & Noorbaloochi, 2014; Lippold, Laske, Hogeterp, Duke, Grünhage, Reuter, 2020)
- There is evidence that a General Factor of Personality determines political beliefs and may even be genetic (Bell, Woodley, Schermer, Vernon, 2012)
- Numerous other external factors like Education, Wealth, And Intelligence have been shown to affect Political beliefs (Emler & Frazer, 1999)
- Findings suggest that parenting values that emphasize group loyalty and conformity may be associated with more conservative political beliefs, while parenting values that prioritize tolerance, fairness, and harm avoidance may be associated with more liberal political beliefs (Kugler, Jost, & Noorbaloochi, 2014)

Methods

Sample

- The sample used is from the 2021 General Social Survey, participants include Adults 18 or older in the United States who live in noninstitutional housing at the time of interviewing. Individuals were invited to take part in the survey by mail, and the survey itself was conducted over the web. 27,591 were invited to participate, and the end sample size was 4,032. The present study uses a subset of that, with a total sample size of 2,573.

Measures

- Moral Values were determined by those values which participants deemed most important to instill in children ("If you had to choose, which thing on this list would you pick as the most important for a child to learn to prepare him or her for life? Which comes next in importance? Which comes third? Which comes fourth?")
- Political Affiliation was determined by their own self identified political identity as well as their choice of candidate in the 2016 election.

Research Questions

- Are a person's moral values associated with their political alignment, and if so which values align with which political beliefs?
- Does this association have a stronger or weaker effect than demographic variables like class or sex?

Results

Univariate

- 33.30% identified as broadly left wing, 34.74% were center leaning, 31.96% were broadly right wing. 54.59% voted for Hillary Clinton in 2016, and 37.52% voted for Donald Trump. The remaining 7.88% either voted for a third candidate or didn't vote
- 20.72% thought that helping others was the most important value, 0.82% thought that being popular was most important, 4.94% thought that obeying authority was, 49.28% chose thinking for yourself, and 24.25% chose working hard.

Bivariate

- Regression analysis showed that **every value with the exception of popularity has a statistically significant association with political alignment.** more specifically, **Obeying Authority and Working Hard were most associated with right wing politics** and the values of **Helping Others and Thinking for Yourself were associated with left wing.** for all of these, $p < 0.02$
- As expected, there appears to be a relationship of some kind between moral values and political beliefs

Multivariate

- Comparing the association between political affiliation and belief in the value of Obeying authority and accounting for other factors like education, class, and sex, the strongest association by far was that between political affiliation and the moral value of obeying. The odds ratio was by far the highest, and every other association was not statistically significant. (Figure 1)
- For the other three associated values, similar results were found, with the exception of working hard, which is still significantly associated, but appears more tied to education

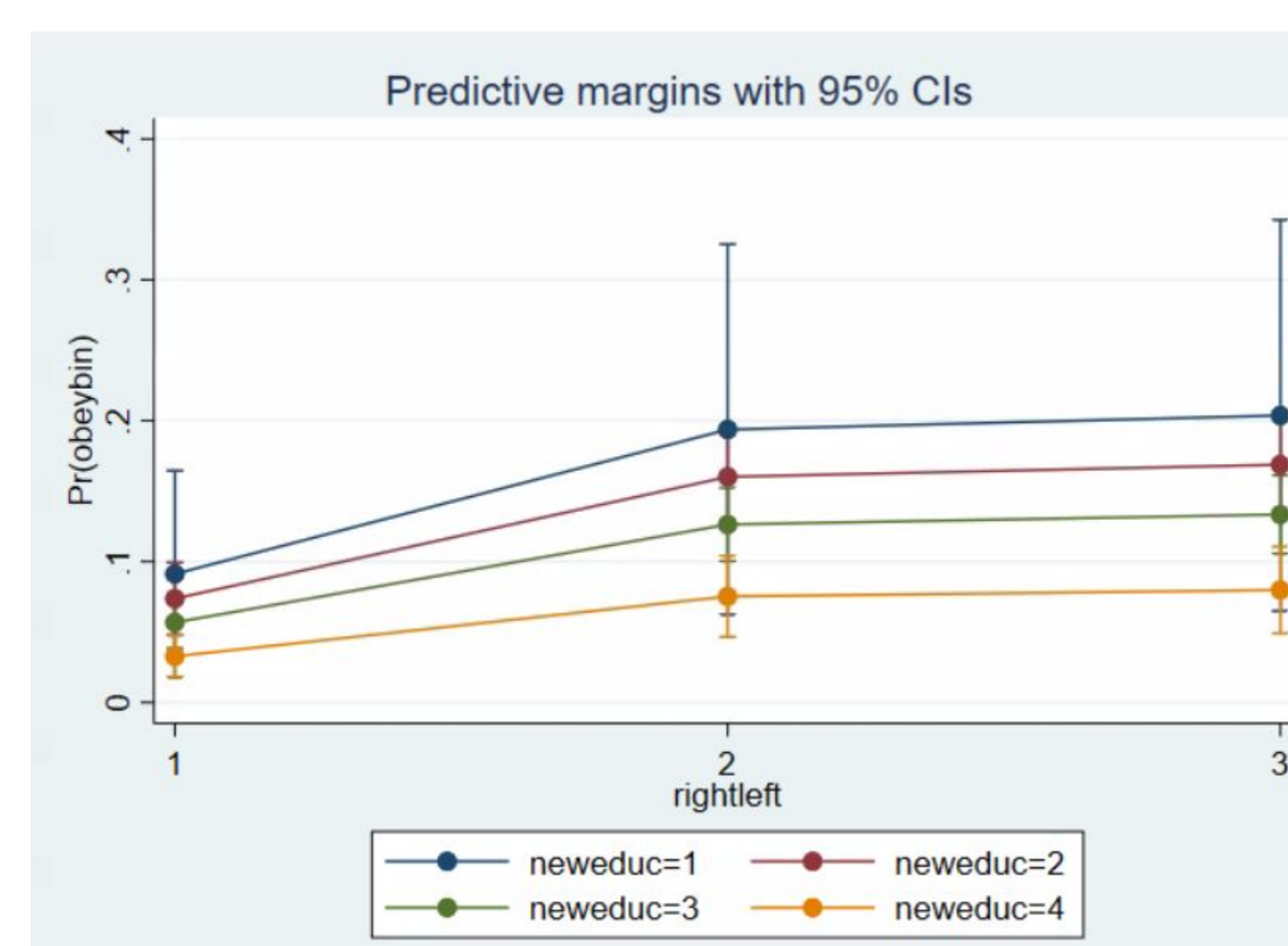


Figure 1. Logistic plot of political association vs value of obeying, controlling for education level.

Multivariate (cont.)

- when controlled for race, It's still significant, but race has a higher odds ratio.
- the association is visible when plotted as in a bar graph (Figure 2).

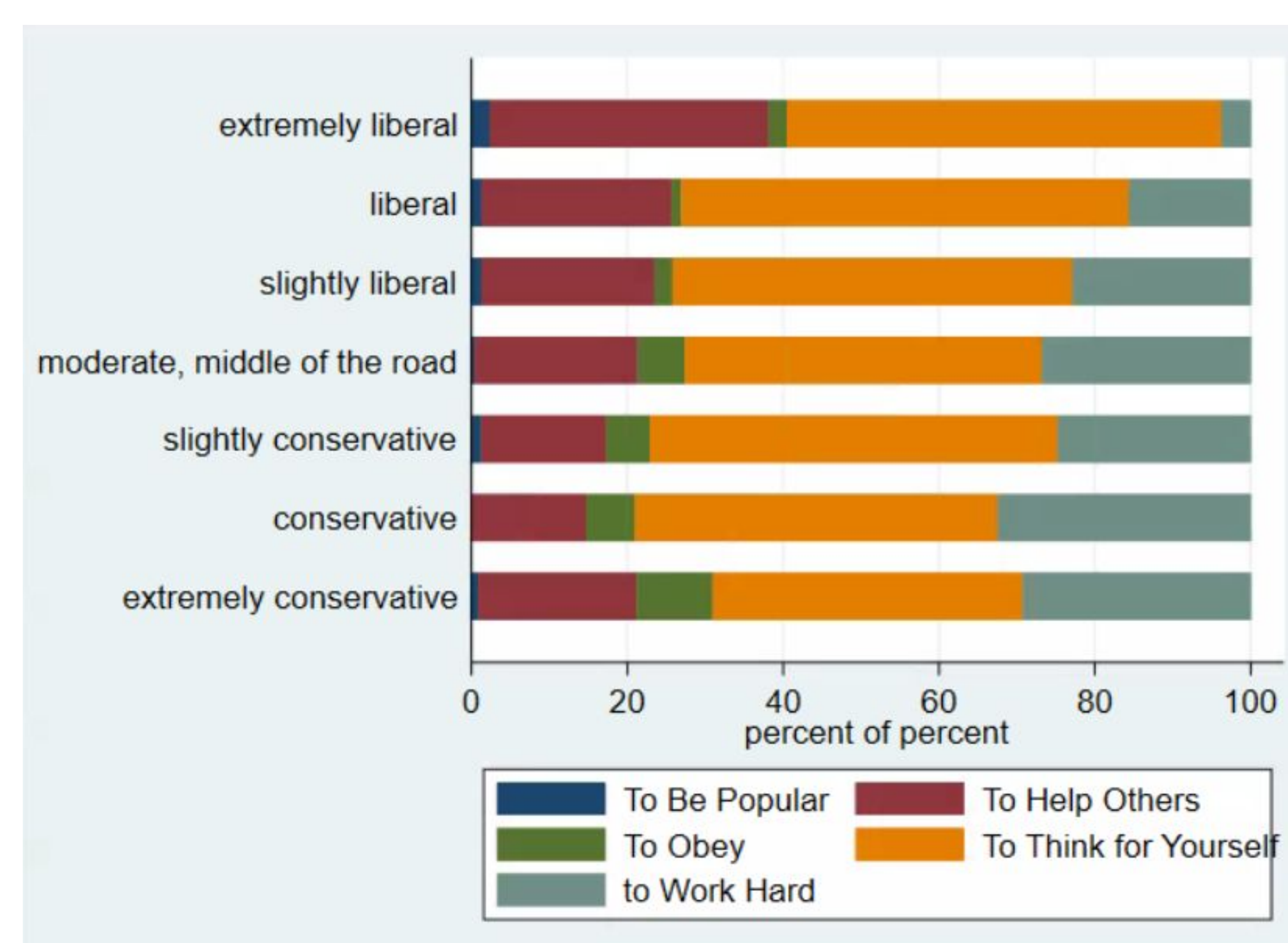


Figure 2 stacked bar of value prevalence vs political affiliation

Discussion

- Individuals who believe in the importance of obeying authority and working hard are more likely to be on the political right
- Individuals who believe in the importance of helping others and thinking for yourself are more likely to be on the political left.
- The exact level of importance of these values to the subjects is difficult to determine, we only know how they relate them to the other values, and not how important each one is, or if there are other values which are more central to their moral beliefs.
- Further research is needed to other values which could have an effect, and to gain better data on the precise extent to which someone places importance on these values.

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. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-014-0223-5>

Emler, N., & Frazer, E. (1999). *Politics: The education effect*. Oxford Review of Education, 25, 251-273. <https://doi.org/10.1080/030549899104242>

Bell, E., Woodley, M. A., Schermer, J. A., & Vernon, P. A. (2012). Politics and the general factor of personality. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 53(5), 546-551. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2012.04.027>

Lippold, J. V., Laske, J. I., Hogeterp, S. A., Duke, É., Grünhage, T., & Reuter, M. (2020). The role of personality, political attitudes and socio-demographic characteristics in explaining individual differences in fear of coronavirus: A comparison over time and across countries. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 552305. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.552305>