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Correlational Study Between Conservatism and Altruism

Aleksander Mansdoerfer⁷

This study was designed and executed with the intention to discover if there was a relationship between the amount of altruistic acts they have performed, and the attitudes towards political topics. Participants were registered voter's in the United States and were not asked any demographic questions. This study purely focused on the responses to an Altruism Personality Assessment and a Political Attitudes Questionnaire. This study concluded with the discovery of no correlation between the amount of Altruistic acts they have performed in their life and their political opinions. It was discovered this study used an Altruism Assessment Scale that incorrectly assessed altruism. In addition, the lack of demographic questions allowed no other conclusions to be drawn.

The enlightenment thinker Jean Jacques Rousseau proposed the notion that humans are inherently good, however it is society that makes them cruel (Rousseau, 1974). Many would argue that his thinking had a good notion of truth to it. However, in our modern society there are more complex social problems that affect our everyday lives and the lives of those around us. The question of this study is to answer, are certain groups in our society more likely to be altruistic than others? Specifically, are those with liberal or conservative values more altruistic than their counterparts?

The first question to answer is, what is altruism? Altruism has been studied a great deal since the 1950s. Originally, it was thought that there was no such thing as 'pure altruism' but rather every social interaction actually had an underlying selfish desire behind it (Pillivian & Charng, 1990). However as time went on, altruism studies moved from learning about the underlying drives behind people being good to one another, and instead by 1986 beginning to recognize that altruism can be defined by how does the action, benefit another

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person, the act being done voluntarily and intentionally, and done without expecting any external reward (Bar-Tal as cited in Pillivian & Charng, 1990). Acts of altruism described like that are pure altruism, the trouble sometimes is learning if the act in question actually meets that standard. An example of this can be seen in how some people vote in a democracy. Rationally, no one would vote to raise taxes on themselves. In contrast, people do vote to raise taxes on themselves for a variety of reasons, such as to better pay teachers at a local school, or take care of the elderly. This is often seen as establishing welfare or interfering with capitalism.

The second question is how does altruism develop? Some would suppose that people's altruistic tendencies might develop the same as other personality traits. However, altruism is not a personality trait. Instead it is an adjective as it describes an action or activity. Researchers instead believe such as modeling, child rearing practices, role-identities, and attribution lead to the development of altruism (Pillivian & Chang, 1990). In addition, there is the concept of 'awe' which is "an emotional response to perceptually vast stimuli that transcend current frames of reference" (Piff, Dietze, Feinberg, Stancato, & Keltner, 2015, p.1). This sense of awe translates into something called "small self" which is how someone may feel when he or she experience awe. In research, it was found that those who experience awe demonstrate more pro-social behavior because they have seen or experienced sensations that override parts of their innate selfish behaviors (Piff et al., 2015).

The third question is what causes people to develop their political opinions? Similar to altruism, some would guess that there is a connection between political attitudes and their personality. However, longitudinal research suggests weak or a statistically non-significant relation between political dimensions and personality dimensions (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism), (Hatemi & Verhulst 2015).

The last question is how has political opinions affected people's social behavior in the past? In recent studies, it was found that conservatives and liberals rely on different moral foundations. Those with more liberal tendencies have been shown to be more preoccupied issues of harm and fairness while conservatives were more focused on in-groups, purity, authority, moral relevance and moral judgment (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek 2009).

My study will be correlating the results of the Altruism Assessment Score and the Score of the Political Attitudes Questionnaire. It is possible that the questions about political opinions and altruism may cause participants to reflect upon their personal choices and prior actions resulting in feeling unsatisfactory. This potential for unsatisfactory self-reflection has the possibility of resulting in false response. The potential for lying on an anonymous survey was examined in 2010. In that study 1000 adults were anonymously surveyed regarding number of lies they told in a 24 hour period, all lies admitted to being told only came from 5% of the sample (Serota, Levine, & Boster 2010). With their study, we can propose that around 5% of responses given to this survey may contain falsehoods.

Although Jean Jacques Rousseau proposed that people are inherently good, does that make them inherently altruistic? Since altruism is a learned behavior, and political beliefs are not linked to some sort of intrinsic part of a person what does that mean for their relationship. I hypothesize that the relationship, if any exist between altruism and political values, will show that those with conservative values will be less altruistic overall.

Method

Participants

Consenting adults over the age of 18 were recruited through the Lindenwood Participant Pool and Aleksander Mansdoerfer's Facebook Account (76 volunteers attempted, 59 completed). Participants in participating Lindenwood courses were awarded 1 point of extra credit for taking

the survey. All participants who completed the survey were registered voters in the United States.

Materials and Procedure

To assess participant's level of altruism, the Altruism self-report scale (Rushton, Chrisjohn, & Fekken, 1981) was adapted to a digital format (Appendix 1). There were 20-questions each with the same five response options available. The participants were tasked with answering whether or not they have done each altruistic act by responding: Never, Once, More than Once, Often, or Very Often. Each of these options was given a point value, the more times the altruistic action was taken, the greater the score. The Most altruistic score that can be answered is 100 and the least altruistic is 20.

The second part of this research was the participants, political opinions. To assess this the Political Attitudes Questionnaire (Koleva, Graham, Iyer, Ditto, & Haidt, 2012) was adapted to a digital format (Appendix 1). The participants were asked 11 questions, each with answers that corresponded numeric scores. The more conservative option had higher the point values. The most conservative score of this questionnaire is thirty while the most liberal score was eleven because each score had a non-negative and non-zero number associated with the choice.

Results

For my survey, I wanted to examine the correlation between the responses of the Altruism Survey, and the Political Attitudes Questionnaire. I hypothesized that Conservatism has a negative correlation with altruistic activity. Of the 79 people who participated in the study, only 59 people reached the survey's conclusion. To analyze the political responses, the pairs of scores were sorted by placing them in descending order (Appendix 2). The most liberal score (11) was the lowest, and the most conservative score (30) were on opposite sides of

the spectrum. To study the results I had to operationally define what constituted conservatives, liberals, and moderates. To categorize the three, I divided the range of the highest possible conservative and liberal scores into three categories. I was able to determine that: the liberal scores ranged from 11 to 16 (N1=33), The moderate scores ranged from 17-23 (N2=25), and conservative scores ranged from 24-30 (N3=1). Upon running a Pearson's r correlation for the pairs of summed political attitudes and the average altruistic actions score (Appendix 3) no statistically significant correlation was found. To follow up with that analysis, a second Pearson's r correlation was run with the summed political attitudes and the summed altruism altruistic actions score (Appendix 4) also revealed no statistically significant correlation either.

Discussion

Upon calculating the results of my survey, and reading the feedback given to me by my participants I discovered several flaws in my study that may have caused my lack of statistically significant results. From the analysis of my responses I discovered that with the way I operationally defined conservatives, which was a political attitude sum greater than 24, I had only one conservative response. However, my study also had the responses from 33 liberal responses, and 25 moderate responses. As a result of this skew, I discovered I had a major confounding variable, a lack of conservative participants. The lack of conservative responses could have been due to the type of people I am connected with through Facebook. The confounding variable, could also have been the way the political attitudes questionnaire is designed to measure political attitudes on a simple left to right scale. This system measures social opinions and economic opinions on the same spectrum, instead of accounting for combinations of socially liberal, socially conservative, economically liberal, and economically conservative. By failing to account for these differences, those who could have been on any of

four extremes came out appearing as moderates. An additional overlooked confounding variable within my study was the altruism self-report scale asked questions that did not take account into individual abilities to complete the altruistic activities asked about. An example of this issue, can be found in the first question of the altruism self-report scale. The first question asked the participants if they “had helped a stranger who was pulled over on the side of the road” (Appendix 1). The action of helping a stranger who was pulled over on the side of the road is altruistic, however it may be something a participant may not do because of the risk to their personal safety they may incur. The value of their own personal safety may be the reason they have never done this altruistic action but that doesn’t mean they are not an altruistic person.

Although my research was ultimately inconclusive, I learned a great deal that could dramatically improve further investigation into my research question. I intend to do this research again, however I need to do two things before I can release an updated survey. The first thing that needs to be updated is my political attitudes questionnaire. I believe, that by maintaining the current scoring method but separating the scores of each question by whether or not the question is asking about their economic or social political opinions I can differentiate the results on a more complicated spectrum. In addition, I could write my own altruism self-report scale. A complication with writing my own altruism self-report scale, is it may need a research project on its own to establish validity and reliability. However, I could start by removing questions that may be influenced by the individuals safety risk. Alternatively, I could pose hypotheticals to participants about what they would do, instead of what they have done.

In conclusion my research question asked if there was a correlation between the altruistic actions someone has done, and their political opinions. I hypothesized that those who are more conservative who be less altruistic than those who were liberal. My research resulted in statistically insignificant findings.

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Appendix 1.

Q0 Consent Form

Introduction

The researcher conducting this project is an undergraduate student at Lindenwood University who is enrolled in the PSY40400: Advanced Research Methods course. The purpose of this survey is to gather data regarding individual feelings about social issues and how they have interacted with other people in the past. The results of this survey will be published in a course wide research journal.

Procedures

This survey asks you to respond to a few demographic items as well as questions asking about your level of altruism and about your perspective on social issues. Altruism is a trait that shows how involved in the well being of others you are. This survey can be used in order to see whether there is a relation between altruism and a person's social views. This questionnaire will be conducted with an online Qualtrics-created survey, and should not take any more than 10-15 minutes of your time

Risks/Discomforts

There are no known risks associated with this study. If you do not feel comfortable completing any part of this survey, you are free to skip any questions or withdraw without penalty

Compensation and Benefits

By taking part in this study, you will earn 1 bonus point toward your LPP participating course. You will also gain experience taking part in a psychological survey project and potentially learn more about the field. If you are interested in learning more about this project or would like to learn about the results of this project once completed, please contact Aleksander Mansdoerfer at AEM987@Lindenwood.edu

Confidentiality

No personally identifying information will be collected, including your IP Address. All data obtained from participants will be kept confidential and will only be reported in an aggregate format (by reporting only combined results and never reporting individual ones). All questionnaires will be concealed, and no one other than the researchers listed below and their course professor, Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair. The data collected will be stored in the HIPPA-compliant, Qualtrics-secure database until it has been deleted by the primary investigator

Questions about the Research

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Aleksander Mansdoerfer at AEM987@Lindenwood.edu or direct your inquiries to the course professor, Dr. Nohara-LeClair at mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu or (636)949-4371

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below

Clicking on the "Agree" button below indicates that you have met all of the criteria below

- You have read the above information

- You voluntarily agree to participate.
 - Agree (1)
 - Disagree (2)

End of Block: Consent Form

Start of Block: `

- Q5 You can legally vote In the United States of America and its territories.
- Yes (1)
 - No (2)

- Q6 Are you over the age of 18?
- Yes (1)
 - No (2)

End of Block: `

Start of Block: Block 1

Q1 Please select the option for each topic that most applies to you.

	Never (1)	Once (2)	A few (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
I have helped a stranger that had pulled over on a highway (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have given directions to a stranger. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have made change for a stranger. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have given money to a charity. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have given money to a stranger who needed it (or asked for it). (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have donated goods or clothes to a charity. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have done volunteer work for a charity. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have donated blood. (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I have helped carry a stranger's belongings (Books, boxes, furniture). (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have delayed an elevator and held the door open for a stranger. (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have allowed someone to go ahead of me in a line (Supermarket, restaurant, amusement park). (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have given a stranger a lift in my car. (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have corrected a clerk or teller at a super market for UNDERCHARGING me for an item. (13)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have let a neighbor I did not know borrow an item that had some value to me. (14)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have bought 'charity' holiday cards deliberately because I knew it was for a good cause. (15)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have helped a colleague who I did not know well, with an task that I had a greater amount of skill in. (16)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I have, before being asked, voluntarily looked after a neighbor's pet or children without being paid for it. (17)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have offered to help a disabled or elderly stranger across the street (18)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have offered my seat on a bus or train to a stranger who was standing (19)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have helped an acquaintance to move households. (20)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Block 1

Start of Block: Block 5

Q19 Please respond to each question with the statement that comes closest to your view.

End of Block: Block 5

Start of Block: Block 4

Q7 Which statement about abortion comes closest to your view?

- Abortion should not be permitted at all (4)
- Abortion should be against the law except in cases of rape, incest, and to save the woman's life (3)
- Abortion should be available but under stricter limits than it is now. (2)
- Abortion should be generally available to those who want it (1)

Q8 Which statement about defense spending comes closest to your view?

- The federal government should decrease defense spending (1)
- The federal government should maintain current defense spending (2)
- The federal government should increase defense spending (3)

Q9 Which statement regarding teaching 'intelligent design'/'creationism comes closest to your view?

- Public schools should only teach Intelligent design/ creationism (instead of evolution) (3)
- Public schools should teach Intelligent design/ creationism along with evolution (2)
- Public school should only teach the theory of evolution (1)

Q10 Which statement regarding illegal immigration comes closest to your view?

- Illegal immigrants do more to weaken the US economy overall because they do not all pay taxes but can use public services. (2)
- Illegal immigrants do more to strengthen the US economy overall because they provide low-cost labor, pay taxes, and spend their money. (1)

Q11 Which statement regarding terrorism comes closest to your view?

- In the long run, the US will be safer if it CONFRONTS the countries and groups that promote terrorism in the middle east (2)
- In the long run, the US will be safer if it STAYS OUT of other countries affairs in the middle east. (1)

Q12 Which statement regarding torture comes closest to your view?

- It is OFTEN justified to use forceful interrogation techniques/torture to get information from suspected terrorist (4)
- It is SOMETIMES justified to use forceful interrogation techniques/torture to get information from a suspected terrorist (3)
- It is ALMOST NEVER justified to use forceful interrogation techniques/torture to get information from a suspected terrorist (2)
- It is NEVER Justified to use forceful interrogation techniques/torture to get information from a suspected terrorist. (1)

Q13 Which statement regarding STEM cell research comes closest to your view?

- The federal government SHOULD NOT fund research that would use newly created STEM cells obtained from human embryos (2)
- The federal government SHOULD fund research that would use newly created STEM cells obtained from human embryos (1)

Q14 Which statement regarding flag-burning comes closest to your view?

- I favor a constitutional amendment that would make it illegal to burn the American flag (2)
- I oppose a constitutional amendment that would make it illegal to burn the American flag (1)

Q15 Which statement regarding gun control comes closest to your view?

- It is more important to protect the right of Americans to own guns. (2)
- It is more important to control gun ownership (1)

Q16 Which statement regarding global warming/climate change comes closest to your view?

- The government should decrease current restrictions because global warming is a theory that has not yet been proven. (3)
- The restrictions currently in place are sufficient to reduce the effects of global warming. (2)
- The government should increase the restrictions on emissions from cars and industrial facilities such as power plants and factories in an attempt to reduce the effects of global warming. (1)

Q17 Which statement regarding same-sex marriage comes closest to your view?

- Same-sex couples should NOT be allowed to marry nor have civil unions. (3)
- Same-sex couples should be allowed to have a civil union, but not to marry. (2)
- Same-sex couples should be allowed to legally marry. (1)

End of Block: Block 4

Start of Block: Block 2

Q4

Feedback Letter

Thank you for participating in my study. The results will be used in order to determine if there is a correlation between how someone may handle ambiguous situations, and how they feel about social issues.

Please note that I am not interested in your individual results; rather, I am only interested in the results of a large group of responses, of which you are now a part of. No identifying information about you will be associated with any of the findings

If you have any questions or concerns regarding any portion of this study, please do not hesitate to bring them up now or in the future. My contact information is found at the bottom of this letter. If you are interested in obtaining a summary of the findings of this study at a later date, please contact me and I will make it available to you at the completion of this project

Thank you again for your valuable contribution to this study.

Sincerely,

Principal Investigator

Aleksander Mansdoerfer 314-477-8484 (AEM987@lindenwood.edu)

Supervisor:

Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair 636-949-4371 (mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu)

End of Block: Block 2

Appendix 2.

Political Attitude Sum	Altruism Sum	Political Attitude	Altruism Average
11	46	L	2.3
11	53	L	3.631578947
11	48	L	2.35
11	41	L	2.65
11	52	L	4.15
11	49	L	3
11	50	L	4.2
11	76	L	2.1
12	69	L	3.05
12	61	L	2.75
12	81	L	2.894736842
12	65	L	4.05
12	58	L	3.6
12	46	L	2.4
13	42	L	3.95
13	55	L	3.25
13	72	L	2.4
13	52	L	2.5
13	52	L	2.4
13	74	L	2.85
14	55	L	2.75
14	36	L	2.95
14	88	L	2.8
15	55	L	2.8
15	48	L	3.9
15	78	L	2.6

15	62	L	2.45
16	60	L	2.05
16	84	L	2.1
16	59	L	2.15
16	86	L	2.9
16	49	L	4.3
17	47	M	2.25
17	79	M	2.45
17	50	M	2.75
17	48	M	2.6
17	56	M	2.65
17	53	M	2.85
17	53	M	1.8
18	57	M	2.1
18	56	M	2.6
18	45	M	3.1
19	41	M	3.7
19	70	M	1.8
19	45	M	2.45
20	49	M	2.8
20	42	M	3
20	36	M	2.05
20	74	M	2.25
20	60	M	3.7
20	45	M	2.3
21	43	M	2.65
21	56	M	2.5
22	83	M	3.5
22	55	M	3.8

22	42	M	4.4
24	57	C	2.25

Appendix 3.

Correlations

		Political_Attitudes	Altruism_Avg
Political_Attitudes	Pearson Correlation	1	-.103
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.445
	N	57	57
Altruism_Avg	Pearson Correlation	-.103	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.445	
	N	57	57

Appendix 4.

Correlations

		Political_Attitudes	Altruism_Sum
Political_Attitudes	Pearson Correlation	1	-.090
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.506
	N	57	57
Altruism_Sum	Pearson Correlation	-.090	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.506	
	N	57	57