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Globalisation and regional identity

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CONFORMITY AND RELIGIOSITY ACROSS EUROPE – A MULTILEVEL APPROACH

Abstract

In this paper we examined the association between conformity as a value orientation and religiosity across Europe. Given that in less religious societies the impact of religion weakens, including in terms of the effect on value orientations, we hypothesize that less religious societies are characterized by a weaker association between conformity and religiosity. We used the data from the ninth round of the European Social Survey (2018), with 39,804 respondents from 29 countries. The data indicated a non-significant moderating effect of country level religiosity on a individual religiosity–conformity association. Furthermore, the association between conformity and religiosity is significant but very weak. The results generally indicate that European societies are characterized by a weak influence of religiosity on value orientations such as conformism, both in less and more religious societies.

Keywords: conformity, European Social Survey, multilevel analysis, religiosity.

1. INTRODUCTION – CONFORMIST VALUES AND RELIGIOSITY

Conformity presents one of the essential value orientations. According to Schwartz's widely accepted typology of value orientations (Schwartz 2012), conformity is (along with power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence tradition, and security) one of the ten basic value orientations. It may be defined as the restraint of actions and impulses that may upset or hurt the group or society and that violate the social rules and social expectations (Schwartz et al. 2012). This conceptual definition suggests two potential conformity subtypes. The first is conformity in terms of rules (complying with expectations), which is most commonly measured through questions like „How much each person is or is not like you" and items such as „He believes

he should always do what people in authority say", „It is important to him to follow rules even when no-one is watching", and „Obeying all the laws is important to him". The second is interpersonal conformity (avoiding upsetting others), and it is measured using items such as „It is important to him to avoid upsetting other people", „He thinks it is important never to be annoying to anyone", and „He always tries to be tactful and avoid irritating people" (Schwartz 1992).

Conformity is, thus, most commonly indicated by self-discipline/resist temptation, obedient/meet obligations, politeness/courtesy, honor parents/show respect, do what told/follow the rules, behave properly/avoid doing anything people says wrong, polite/never disturb, respect parents/obey. The social structure and moral systems of each society are engraved by such self-restriction demands and, therefore, consciously or unconsciously absorbed by individuals (Castaño and Lino 2013).

In order to consider the association of conformity with religiosity, it is essential to describe its relationship with other similar and distinctive values. Conformity could be considered opposite to self-direction as it implicates some degree of commitment and dedication to the group, while self-direction concerns a higher trust in one's own judgment and independence of actions without external opinions (Castaño and Lino 2013). The presence of these two values at the same time would likely lead to an internal conflict of values. Self-direction emphasizes one's own independent thought and action, and favoring change is the opposite of submissive self-restriction, as well as the preservation of traditional beliefs and practices, and protection of stability (Schwartz and Huisman 1995). Conformity is distinctive to hedonism also as restraint of one's impulses and acceptance of externally imposed limits conflict indulgence of one's desires (ibid.).

Benevolence and conformity share promoting devotion to one's in-group and emphasizing its well-being; conformity can go with tradition as well, as they both share a subordination of the self in favor of the social expectations; security is also similar to conformity, as it concerns with maintaining order and harmony in relationships (Castaño and Lino 2013). Finally, conformity and security both emphasize the protection of order and harmony in relations (Schwartz and Huisman 1995).

Prior research indicates large and stable conformity differences among cultural groups (Kim and Markus 1999; Bond and Smith 1996). As some authors note (Castaño and Lino 2013), this makes conformity values the right candidates for examining culture as a shared meaning system, which is essential for their relation with religiosity. Also, according to Schwartz and Huisman (1995), some research indicates the role of mainstream religions in symbolizing, preserving, and justifying the prevailing norms and social structure. They add that, although religions sometimes oppose the ruling political regimes, over the long run it has rather supportive function. Also, religion provides

a sacred basis for prevailing social structure and normative system, which encourages religious individuals to accept the social order and status-quo (Schwartz and Huisman 1995). For this reason, religiosity should be positively related to conformity. These variables should be related positively also because both of them emphasize attaining and maintaining certainty for the individual, and reducing uncertainty in life (ibid.). They may relieve anxiety regarding unwanted things and uncertainty, and may enable individuals to accept and make peace with their situation in life, thus providing answers for life's most essential existential issues. Finally, the function of religion is the search for meaning beyond the immediate through belief and worship (Russell 1999).

Similarly, some other authors (e.g. Welch et al. 2006) argue that religious individuals are more conformist because of fear of the supernatural, whether that might be experienced during life or anticipated for the afterlife. Further, religion makes individuals internalize moral restraints, which motivate regulation of their own behavior to avoid feelings of guilt (ibid.). Community effect of religious experience is also crucial in the context of conformity: religion makes networks of believers who mutually exercise informal social control and reduce the misbehavior probability (ibid., Thiruchselvam et al. 2017).

The association between religiosity and conformity as a value orientation is indicated in many previous studies. Sarglou, Delpierre, and Dernelle (2004) carried out a meta-analysis of studies on twenty-one samples from fifteen countries. All the studies are based on Schwartz's theoretical model. The authors concluded that religiosity is associated with conformity, security, and tradition - values that promote conservation of social and individual order. Also, these patterns are constant across different religious denominations and cultures. Schwartz and Huismans's (1995) also showed that religiosity is positively related to conformity as well as security and tradition, on several different samples - Israeli Jews, Spanish Roman Catholics, Dutch Calvinist Protestants, Greek Orthodox, and West Germans, and sub-samples divided by age, gender, education, and income. Also, several different measures of religiosity and values were used. Roccas and Schwartz (1997) extended that research indicating that that opposition between church and state modifies the associations of values with religiosity. More concretely, authors showed that in countries where church and state have oppositional relations, religiosity correlates less positively with conformity and security values, compared to countries with a weak divide between church and state. The strength of the relationship between conformity and religiosity varies in prior research. Besides that, the association tends to be reciprocal – religiosity affects value orientations and is affected by them (Russell 1999).

While the association between conformity and religiosity is well-established, no study, to the best of our knowledge, examined differences in its strength in relation to religiosity on a societal level. We test these differences across European countries. European societies are still relatively heterogeneous in terms of religiosity (Van der Noll et

al. 2018; Storm 2017). In less religious societies, religion should have a weaker role in an individual's behavior, attitudes, everyday life etc. Given that in these societies, the impact of religion weakens in terms of the effect on value orientations, we hypothesize that less religious societies are characterized by a weaker association between conformity and religiosity.

2. METHOD

We used the data from the ninth round of the European Social Survey (ESS), from 2018. ESS is a nationally-representative, repeated, cross-sectional survey on the population from fifteen year olds and above in more than thirteen countries and has been carried out every two years since 2002. The typical response rates are between 50 and 70 percentages in each country and wave (Storm 2017). The ninth ESS round contains the data from 29 European countries and a total of 49,519 respondents (51.4% of females, M_{age} = 48.42, SD_{age} = 19.02), all of which are included in our analysis.

We measured religiosity using a single eleven-item subjective scale, where 0 means „Not at all religious", and 10 „Very religious". ESS contains other dimensions of religiosity also, but we decided not to include them in our analysis. The unidimensional approach makes multilevel analysis much more simplified. Besides that, as Schwartz and Huismans (1995) suggest, in the research of this kind unidimensional approach in measuring religiosity has some other advantages. First, when the primary interest is in relating religiosity to general cultural attitudes and not in unraveling relations among the various components of religion, a unidimensional approach could be more appropriate. Second, when the sample consists of relatively heterogeneous groups in terms of a country residence and religious affiliation, there is a need for a conception and operationalization of religious commitment that emphasizes the common denominator of religiosity rather than its discrete dimensions (ibid.). Third, the authors add, it is shown that nationally representative samples typically yield a single religious factor in the research.

Conformity in ESS is measured on a scale through two items. Respondents are asked to rate „How much each person is or is not like you" and items are „He believes that people should do what they're told", „He thinks people should follow rules at all times, even when no-one is watching", „It is important to him always to behave properly", and „He wants to avoid doing anything people would say is wrong". Internal consistency of the scale is not high (Cronbach's alpha = .496), but that is due to the small number of items indexing each value and the fact that each value encompasses different sub-constructs (Schwartz 2003).

We also included control variables in our model – age, gender (transformed into a dummy variable with females as the reference category), and income (from 1 – first decile, to 10 – tenth decile).

3. RESULTS

As it may be seen from Table 1, nearly 50,000 respondents (from 29 European countries) rated their importance of conformity as 4.03 out of 6 on average, which indicates a slightly above-neutral score. Also, their average self-rated religiosity score is slightly below neutral – 4.49 on a ten-point scale. Country-level religiosity score is approximately similar (4.40) and it was calculated as an average level of religiosity in all studied countries.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

	n	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Gender	49519	1.51	0.50	1	2
Age	49286	47.84	18.89	15	90
Income	39043	5.48	2.76	1	10
Conformity	48828	4.03	1.08	1	6
Religiosity	48989	4.49	3.13	0	10
Country-level religiosity	49519	4.40	0.93	2.4	6.71

As already noted, in order to test whether in more religious societies the effect of religiosity on conformity is stronger than in less religious ones, we run several multilevel regression models. We run a total of four models, first of which included only control variables, the second additionally included individual religiosity, the third included religiosity on a country-level, and in the fourth one we added an interaction effect of religiosity at a country-level and religiosity at the individual level on our dependent variable. The results are presented in Table 2.

In the null model, the Intra-Class Correlation Coefficient (ICC) is about 0.06, which means that proportion in variation in conformity that lies between countries is approximately 6%. This indicates a clustering of observations within countries to some extent; hence there was a need to employ multilevel models. Most of our independent variables have a significant although weak effect on conformity. When it comes to our control variables, gender has a statistically significant effect in the sense woman are more prone to conformity compared to men. Age is also shown to be positively related to conformity. Finally, household income is negatively associated to individual conformity.

Moving to our main independent variables our results indicate a significant and positive association between individual religiosity and conformity (Model 2). However, this effect is not particularly strong ($\beta = .045$), so it may be claimed that religiosity on a societal level is not associated with conformity (Model 3).

Additionally, in order to investigate our main research question, we run a multilevel model on conformity with an interaction effect between religiosity on an individual level, and religiosity on a country level. In other words, we tested whether religiosity on a country level moderates the relationship between religiosity on an individual level and conformity as a value orientation. The results (Model 4) indicate that religiosity on a country level does not moderate this relationship. Moreover, goodness of fit measures (both AIC and BIC) show that this model does not explain a higher amount of variance compared to previous models. More precisely, the model which explains the highest amount of variance is Model 2 that includes only religiosity on an individual level.

Table 2. Multilevel modeling results

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	3.726***	3.631***	3.586***	3.644***
	(.056)	(.055)	(.230)	(.235)
Female	.022*	.060***	.060***	.060***
	(.010)	(.010)	(.010)	(.010)
Age	.008***	.007***	.007***	.007***
	(.0003)	(.0003)	(.0002)	(.0003)
Income	-.012***	-.010***	-.010***	-.010***
	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)
Religiosity (individual level)		.045***	.045***	.032***
		(.002)	(.002)	(.009)
Religiosity (country level)			-.001	.004
			(.050)	(.051)
Religiosity (individual level)* Religiosity (country level)				-.003
				(.002)
Observations	39,804	38,888	38,888	38,888
Log Likelihood	114099.006	112866.257	112866.482	112864.255
AIC	114111.006	112880.257	112882.482	112882.255
BIC	114162.447	112940.236	112951.029	112959.371

Note: Effects and standard errors (between brackets) of a multi-level linear regression.
*p<0.5, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

4. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we tested whether in more religious societies across Europe the effect of religiosity on conformity is stronger than in less religious ones. With that aim, we assessed the interaction effect of mean religiosity at a country-level and religiosity at the individual level on conformity. The results indicated that there is a non-significant interaction effect. In other words, the level of religiosity on a country level does not moderate the association between individual religiosity and conformity. Our results also indicate a relatively weak association between religiosity and conformity on an individual level, so a non-existent moderating effect is not surprising. We also confirmed a significant, but weak effects of gender, age, and income level on individual religiosity. Although we hypothesized that less religious societies are characterized by a weaker association between conformity and religiosity, our results indicate a different picture. In sum, religiosity is indeed important on an individual level when it comes to conformity, but not on a societal level. Future studies should examine a moderating effect of country-level religiosity in non-European countries, in the first place the more religious ones.

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KONFORMIZAM I RELIGIOZNOST U EUROPI – VIŠERAZINSKI PRISTUP

Sažetak

U ovom smo radu ispitivali povezanost konformizma kao vrijednosne orijentacije i religioznosti diljem Europe. S obzirom na to da u manje religioznim društvima utjecaj religije slabi, uključujući i u smislu učinka na vrijednosne orijentacije, pretpostavljamo da manje religiozna društva karakterizira slabija povezanost između konformizma i religioznosti. Koristili smo se podacima iz devetog kruga Europskog društvenog istraživanja (2018.), s 39 804 ispitanika iz 29 zemalja. Podaci su pokazali da ne postoji moderirajući učinak religioznosti, na razini zemlje, na vezu između religioznosti i konformizma. Nadalje, povezanost konformizma i religioznosti značajna je, ali vrlo slaba. Rezultati općenito ukazuju na to da europska društva karakterizira slab utjecaj religioznosti na vrijednosne orijentacije poput konformizma, i u manje i u više religioznim društvima.

Ključne riječi: konformizam, European Social Survey, višerazinska analiza, religioznost