

Religious and Political Attitudes Towards Race, Reproductive Rights, and Parenting Equality

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Abstract

People often hold strong, deep-seated beliefs about religion and politics, two domains that influence numerous aspects of a person's life. Previous studies have indicated that religiosity and political orientation are individually related to attitudes about racism, parenting equality, and reproductive rights; thus, this study will examine the effects of both religiosity and political orientation on all three attitudes. It is hypothesized that these variables will have a significant impact on beliefs surrounding racism, non-heteronormative parenting, and abortion. The sample consisted of 509 participants who completed an online survey designed by students in an experimental psychology course at Tulane University. The results of the study indicated religiosity and political orientation both significantly impacted beliefs about racism, parenting equality, and reproductive rights.

Religious and Political Attitudes Towards Race, Reproductive Rights, and Parenting Equality

Religiosity and political orientation are both personal identities that exert a strong influence on personality, belief systems, and moral values. General religiosity, regardless of specific religion, certainly impacts personal social and ethical principles. Previous research has shown that having a strong religious identity is associated with derogation of racial outgroups (Hall et al., 2010). In addition, high levels of religiosity significantly predicted negative attitudes towards gay and lesbian adoption (Averett et al., 2011). Religious affiliation and personal religiosity were also significant predictors of pro-life attitudes surrounding abortion (Cochran et al., 1996). Thus, it is clear that religiosity has a high impact on attitudes surrounding social issues.

Politics are involved in every facet of our lives including our health, money, and education; thus, it is rare to come across people who don't strongly believe in or identify with specific policies or political parties. Political affiliation is a source of pride and identity for many Americans and often drives their attitudes towards issues in society as a whole. Past research has demonstrated the link between political affiliation and racism – White conservatives are more likely to be biased against minorities, as well as justify their discrimination based on stereotypes (Harton & Nail, 2008). In addition, those with conservative political affiliations are more likely to believe that children are adversely affected when raised by gay and lesbian parents (Averett et al., 2011). A study by Jelen and Wilcox (2003) also demonstrated the link between having a conservative political ideology and holding an anti-abortion stance.

Research in this area has become exceedingly important in recent years with the continuing struggles for racial equality, advent of legalization of same-sex marriage, and debates surrounding reproductive rights. This research has important consequences for people of colour, the LGBTQIA population, and young women; it has the potential to provide insight into the

psychology of discrimination and influence legislation in the field.

Despite the abundance of research in this area, previous research has not examined how both religiosity and political orientation affect beliefs about racism, parenting equality, and reproductive rights. In this study, we expect to find a significant interaction between all of these variables, with high religiosity and a conservative political orientation predicting racist beliefs, opposition to parenting equality, and anti-abortion views.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

H₀. Religiosity will have no effect on beliefs about racism.

H₁. Religiosity will have an effect on beliefs about racism.

Hypothesis 2

H₀. Religiosity will have no effect on beliefs about parenting equality.

H₁. Religiosity will have an effect on beliefs about parenting equality.

Hypothesis 3

H₀. Religiosity will have no effect on opposition to reproductive rights.

H₁. Religiosity will have no effect on opposition to reproductive rights.

Hypothesis 4

H₀. Political orientation will have no effect on beliefs about racism.

H₁. Political orientation will have an effect on beliefs about racism.

Hypothesis 5

H₀. Political orientation will have no effect on beliefs about parenting equality.

H₁. Political orientation will have an effect on beliefs about parenting equality.

Hypothesis 6

H₀. Political orientation will have no effect on opposition to reproductive rights.

H₁. Political orientation will have no effect on opposition to reproductive rights.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Participants in this study were friends and family members ($n = 509$) of students in an experimental psychology course at Tulane University. Participants were mainly female (81.5%), employed (56%), and educated (90.1% completed or plan to complete at least a Bachelor's Degree). Finally, participants were geographically dispersed (26.9% originally from the Southern U.S., 38.5% from the Northeast, 15.5% from the Midwest, 14.1% from the West, and 4.9% from outside the U.S.).

Students in the course created a survey of 128 items, measuring various constructs, and participants responded to the survey items online through Qualtrics.com. For this set of analyses, only the following variables were analyzed: religiosity, political orientation, beliefs about racism, beliefs about parenting equality, and opposition to reproduction rights.

Measures

Religiosity. This variable is designed to measure how religious the participants are. The item asks, "Are you a religious person?" The potential responses range from -5 (disagree) to +5 (agree). High scores on this variable mean the participant is a religious person.

Political Orientation. This variable measures participants' political orientation on social issues, including same-sex marriage, immigration, abortion rights, and healthcare. The item asks, "What is your political orientation on social issues?" The potential responses are measured continuously from -100 to +100, with -100 being the most liberal and +100 being the most conservative. Thus, high scores on the variable mean the participant is politically conservative with regards to social issues.

Beliefs about Racism. This variable is designed to measure whether participants believe

racism is still a problem in the United States. In essence, it measures the extent to which participants feel that we live in a post-racial society, sometimes described as covert racism. The item asks, “Do you believe racism is no longer a major problem in American society?” The responses are measured from -5 (disagree) to +5 (agree). High scores on the variable mean participants hold high covert racist beliefs and think that racism is no longer a problem in America today.

Beliefs about Parenting Equality. This variable measures the extent to which participants believe that children raised by non-heteronormative families are just as well-adjusted and healthy as those raised by heteronormative families. The item asks, “Do you believe children with gay or lesbian parents are as likely to be raised in a healthy, nurturing environment as children with heterosexual parents?” The responses ranged from -5 (disagree) to +5 (agree). High responses indicate participants’ support for parenting equality.

Opposition to Reproductive Rights. This variable measures participants’ attitudes towards abortion, specifically government spending on abortion. The item asks, “Do you believe that tax dollars should be banned from covering the cost of an abortion?” The responses ranged from -5 (disagree) to +5 (agree). High responses to this measure indicate participants’ opposition to abortion and government acceptance of it.

Results

Our results indicated that the majority of our sample was non-religious ($M = -0.71$, $SD = 3.57$) and mostly liberal, with 83.5% of participants self-identifying as such. Most participants did not believe in a post-racial society ($M = -2.95$, $SD = 2.34$). The majority of participants were in support of parenting equality, with 70.9% of participants rating their agreement a +5 on a scale ranging from -5 to +5.

We began by testing the relationship between the independent variables (religiosity and

political orientation) and the dependent variables (beliefs about racism, beliefs about parenting equality, and opposition to reproductive rights) in our study using bivariate correlations.

Religiosity ($r = 0.147, p < 0.01$) and political orientation ($r = 0.268, p < 0.01$) both significantly predicted beliefs about racism. Religiosity ($r = -0.211, p < 0.01$) and political orientation ($r = -0.336, p < 0.01$) also both significantly predicted beliefs about parenting equality. Finally, religiosity ($r = 0.411, p < 0.01$) and political orientation ($r = 0.535, p < 0.01$) both significantly predicted opposition to reproductive rights. Thus, religiosity was slightly related to beliefs about racism and beliefs about parenting equality, but modestly correlated with opposition to reproductive rights. Political orientation was slightly related to beliefs about racism, modestly related to beliefs about parenting equality, and highly correlated with opposition to reproductive rights. In order to examine the overall contribution of religiosity and political orientation in accounting for beliefs about racism, beliefs about parenting equality, and opposition to reproductive rights, multiple regression was used. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that religiosity and political orientation account for 7.4% of the variability in overall beliefs about racism ($R^2 = 0.074, p < 0.01$), 11.9% of the difference in total beliefs about parenting equality ($R^2 = 0.119, p < 0.01$), and 31.8% of the difference in overall opposition to reproductive rights ($R^2 = 0.318, p < 0.01$). Thus, religiosity and political orientation account for a small proportion of the variability in beliefs about racism and parenting equality and a modest proportion of the variability in opposition to reproductive rights.

Discussion

Religiosity and political affiliation are clear indicators of beliefs regarding racism, parenting equality, and reproductive rights. These belief systems have irrefutable connotations for public policy and legislation. Research in this field could illuminate future paths for advocacy regarding these social issues.

Past research has indicated the link between high religiosity, racist beliefs, opposition to gay and lesbian parenting, and anti-abortion views (Hall et al., 2010; Averett et al., 2011; Cochran et al., 1996). Additional studies have shown the correlation between conservative political ideology and these variables as well (Harton & Nail, 2008; Averett et al., 2011; Jelen & Wilcox, 2003). In this study, we expected to find that high religiosity and conservative viewpoints would predict belief in a post-racial society, negative views towards same-sex parents, and opposition to abortion rights.

Multiple regression showed that both variables had a slight impact on the variability in beliefs about racism and parenting equality but a moderate impact on the variability in opposition to reproductive rights. Thus, the results supported all of the hypotheses, indicating that high religiosity and conservative ideology are affiliated with racist beliefs, opposition to parenting equality, and opposition to abortion. These findings are relatively in line with what was expected. Religiosity and political ideology were most highly correlated with opposition to reproductive rights, which is to be expected considering the strong anti-abortion standpoint that both religious individuals and conservative political parties take. Religion and political orientation were not as highly correlated with beliefs about parenting equality, which is surprising considering the stance taken by religious and conservative groups on gay rights. However, racist beliefs are not explicitly endorsed by religious or conservative parties, so the smaller correlation was not as surprising.

The strengths of this study include the large number of participants, the broad number of constructs measured, and the scales used to quantify responses. The study included 128 variables and 509 participants varying in age, geographic location, and education level. The scales we used were mostly numeric scales with an anchor at each number, allowing for better accuracy and greater reliability. This study certainly has broader implications outside of academia. This

information could be used to guide future research investigating these topics of concern, as well as to increase awareness of these issues in communities that have previously been untouched, in order to increase tolerance of different races and sexual orientations.

We noted a few limitations to this study. In particular, there were a high number of females in the sample (81.5%), which has potential to skew our results. In addition, important variables such as race, specific age, and sexual orientation were excluded, which could be detrimental to the validity of our results. Furthermore, snowball sampling was used to recruit participants, potentially creating a homogeneous sample. In all likelihood, these results would only be able to extrapolate to highly-educated American individuals, as this is what the sample mostly consisted of.

This research could take a variety of future directions. It would be interesting to see whether those leaning towards homosexual orientations, as well as people of colour, would hold negative views towards their own in-group, which could be an expression of internalized racial or sexual oppression. Another interesting direction could be measuring microaggressions and racism among various religious populations and political groups.

This field of research holds a lot of promise for the future, as these social issues come to the forefront of human consciousness.

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