

How Do Political Views Effect Reddit AITA (Am I The A**hole) Questions?

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Abstract

The objective of this project is to learn more about human morality through a simple survey of Reddit AITA questions. To accomplish this objective, the demographic identification questions, specifically the respondents political views, are used to group similar viewpoints together and help determine why those groups may have viewpoints that they do.

I. Introduction

Reddit AITA questions have made quite the cultural impact, branching out from the dedicated forum to other social media platforms, allowing users to engage and discuss the morality of both the poster of the question and their fellow users. Through a survey done amongst three different CMSC 320 (Introduction to Data Science) classes at The University of Maryland, we are able to simulate the morality of the respondents based on their response to 14 different questions from the subreddit.

With the upcoming 2024 Presidential election it seems fitting that we look further into respondents' political views, how they impact their answers to certain questions, and why that might be the case based on what general viewpoints of the major U.S. political parties.

The following is an example question that was asked on the survey:

Question 1: My boyfriend is a doctor. Lately he's been complaining about pain in his right knee and constantly taking TONS of ibuprofen to treat (like 15-20 pills a day). However, it's only gotten worse. I've told him he needs to see someone about it but he told me it was fine. So I told him that if this is how he treats herself, I'd be concerned about being his patient. He was shocked and told me that was uncalled for. Am I a jerk?

- ☐ Not a jerk
- ☐ Mildly a jerk
- ☐ Strongly a jerk

II. Background

The data set was a total of 380 responses to the survey, spread across three different spreadsheets. Each spreadsheet was gathered from a different class, one each from Max's 2023 class, Fardina's 2023 class, and an unnamed (assumed to be Max's) 2024 class. Each response contained the responses to the 14 questions, as well as the following:

- Time the survey was submitted
- Year classification of the respondent
- Age of the respondent
- Political Views of the respondent's parents/guardians
 - (Strongly/Mildly liberal/conservative, Neutral, I don't know)
- Political views of the respondent
- Religious views of the respondent
 - (Very, Somewhat, Not at all religious)
- Gender of the respondent
 - (Male, Female, Non-binary, Prefer not to say)
- A priming question (For Fardina's class only)
 - (Do you consider yourself compassionate? Yes/No)

Importantly, the questions had the genders swapped between the 2023 and 2024 surveys. The received data had some missing values, even some entire rows, although it was determined to be

randomly missing due to respondents forgetting to answer a question or error with Google Forms.

To clean the data, the missing rows were entirely removed and the empty values were replaced by the median of the column for the respondents age and 'missing' for the rest of the values. This approach was decided on to not introduce false information, but also have the ability to compute calculations on age. There was an outlier who's age was 50+ and did not respond to any other questions, which was removed from the data set. The gender of the respondents from the 2023 forms contained both 'Female' and 'Famale' responses, which were corrected. The answers to the religious views question from the 2023 and 2024 forms had different wording, which was standardized.

The three were then combined into one data frame to allow for easier interpretation and calculations, while still maintaining the three original data frames post data cleaning.

III. Testing

To find any statistically significant effects of political views, we first test the respondents' political views' effect on the response to each question. A data frame was created, binning the political views in three categories, Right, Left, and Independent. Through a series of Chi-Square tests, one on each question, with $\alpha = 0.5$, both questions 3 and 12 had statistically significant P-Values, about 0.02145 and 2.8613e-13 respectively. The questions given in the form were as follows:

Question 3: *I'm a trust fund kid; I get a healthy 'allowance' from my parents, but I mostly sock it away since I don't really feel like I deserve it. I live with my (boyfriend/girlfriend), who comes from a poor family, and we split things 50-50. Recently, (he/she) found out how much money my parents send me each month and freaked out, saying it wasn't fair that I was making (him/her) split things 50/50. I told (him/her) it was my money, and it only seems fair if we cover half the expenses. Am I a jerk?*

Question 12: *Some of my relatives refuse to come to my wedding, since they don't approve of our 'lifestyle'. I would like to donate the money I will save to an LBGTQ organization in their name. I'm hoping that I or the organization will be able to send them a receipt/thank you for the donation. Would I be a jerk?*

Political Leaning	Independent	Left	Right
Question 3			
Not a jerk	61	86	25
Mildly a jerk	34	83	11
Strongly a jerk	15	37	14

Figure 1: Responses to question 3

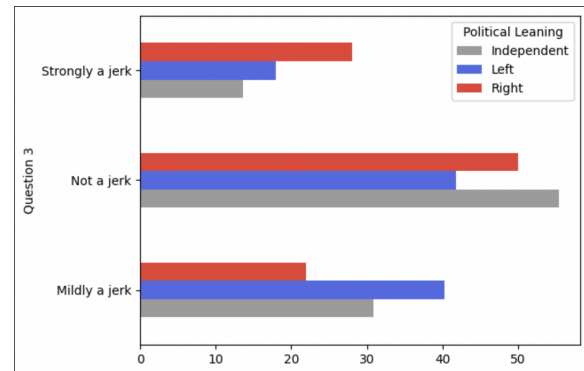


Figure 2: Responses to question 3 Bar Chart

Political Leaning	Independent	Left	Right
Question 12			
Not a jerk	63	150	14
Mildly a jerk	30	44	14
Strongly a jerk	15	9	22

Figure 3: Responses to question 12

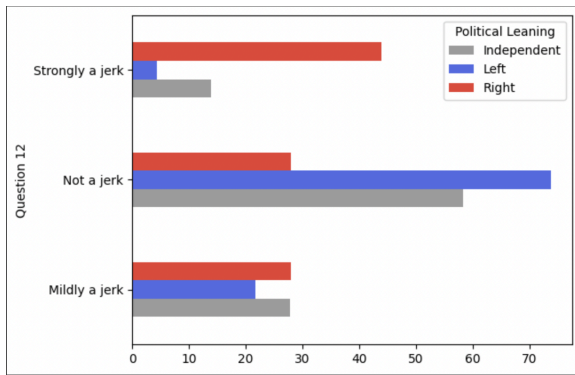


Figure 4: Responses to question 12 Bar Chart

Through testing and visualizing the data it was determined that Right-leaning respondents were 1.7 times more likely to respond ‘Strongly a jerk’ to question 3, and 5.7 times more likely for question 12. Although this can not be scientifically tested based on the given data set, based on what is known from the previous tests as well as conservative ideology in general, it is likely that right-leaning respondents have more traditional beliefs, such as traditional gender roles in relationships such as men providing and women taking care of children. This directly relates to question 3, which is largely about gender roles in a relationship. Regarding question 12, conservatives are traditionally less in favor of LGBTQ+ rights and/or values, which is why there is such a difference in response for question 12 specifically.

As mentioned previously, many questions had different genders in the different surveys. This is not the case for question 12, which was left ambiguous, but it is for question 3. Does the change in gender significantly affect the responses?

To test this a new data frame was created which has a new column, denoting which gender’s point of view the question is from. For the purpose of the testing it was assumed a male asking the question would have a female partner and vice versa, although this does not affect the testing itself. The political view was again grouped into the same three categories to simplify the testing and limit the number of categories.

Through Chi-square testing it was determined that overall, gender did significantly

affect the response to the question, with a P-value of about 0.0801; however, none of the three political groups showed a statistically significant P-value.

Right Leaning: P-Value: 0.15967

Left Leaning: P-Value: 0.23745

Independent: P-Value: 0.53823

It should be noted that, although none were statistically significant, independent respondents were the least affected by the gender swap, with left and right leaning being much closer, but still in the order we would expect. In fact, examining the following visualizations, it can be seen that right and left leaning respondents were about the same likelihood of responding ‘Strongly a jerk’ when the question is from a male point of view, but left-leaning respondents were less likely to respond the same way, when the question was from a female perspective, than their right-leaning counterparts. This is likely due to liberal ideology pushing for more female independence and breaking out of gender roles.

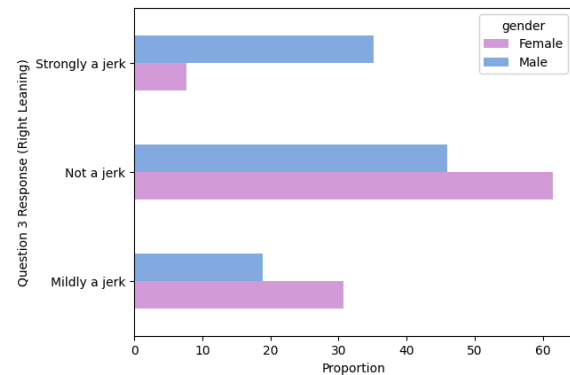


Figure 5: Right-Leaning Responses to question 3 Bar Chart

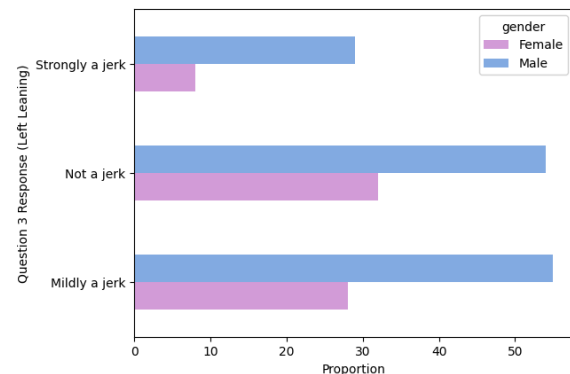


Figure 6: Left-Leaning Responses to question 3 Bar Chart

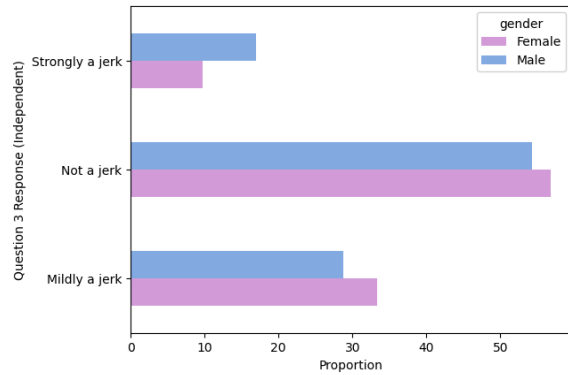


Figure 7: *Independent Responses to question 3 Bar Chart*

During our testing, another question was raised. We grouped the respondents using simple left, right, independent categories but, is there a statistically significant impact when testing between Strong and Mild conservatives and liberals?

To test this question, we created two dataframes, one containing all respondents who responded 'Strongly liberal' and 'Mildly liberal,' and the other containing the same for conservative views, and their responses to all 14 questions. Since independent views were tested previously they were left out.

Through a Chi-square test on each of the two dataframes it was found that both had statistically significant differences, although the right-leaning views had the most significant differences.

Right: P-Value: 0.00914

Left: P-Value: 0.03823

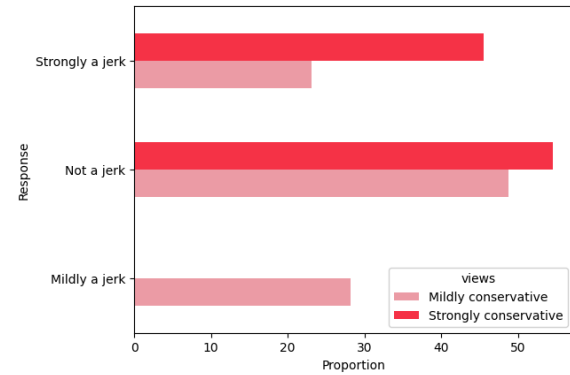


Figure 8: *Right-Leaning Responses Bar Chart*

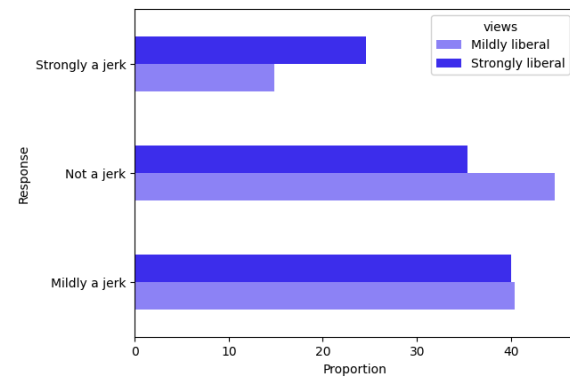


Figure 9: *Left-Leaning Responses Bar Chart*

An important note is that there were far fewer 'Strongly conservative' respondents, which is to be expected when surveying college students, who tend to be more liberal than the general population. That being said, the more extreme ends of the political spectrum were both more likely to respond 'Strongly a jerk' than their more mild counterparts. Strong conservatives were 1.97 times as likely and strong liberals were 1.65 times as likely to respond in such a manner

IV. Conclusion

Overall, political views, more often than not, have a statistically significant impact on the responses to the 14 survey questions. Most of the differences due to political views fit with what is commonly known about Liberal and Conservative ideologies, with Liberals being more progressive and Conservative being more traditional. This held true for questions 3 and 12 specifically, which happened to be the best examples of these two contrasting beliefs. Each question showed statistically significant differences between political viewpoints. It was also found through testing that changing the gender of the person in the question had a statistically significant effect on the overall responses to question 3, although no single political viewpoint had a significant difference. Finally, it was found that both extreme ends of the political spectrum had a significant

difference in responses with their mild counterparts. Specifically when it came to responding ‘Strongly a jerk,’ which seems fitting, given that they have strong political views.