

Structural Equation Model of Political Instability, Religiosity, and Progressive Values

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Introduction

- Religiosity has seen a precipitous decline throughout the developed world over the last half century.
- With the many theories put forward to explain the decline, socio-political stability and societal development seem to be at the root.
- The postulation is that religion serves as a means of comfort and control when social and environmental factors seem out of control.
- Religiosity has been consistently associated with more conservative values, moreover, greater religiosity has been linked to greater opposition towards homosexuality, gender equality, and abortion.
- It can be supposed that political instability may engender a greater reliance on religion, and with that, comes a return to more traditional or conservative values.
- To our knowledge, no research to date has addressed the causal relationship between political instability, religiosity, and progressiveness.
- We proposed a model of complete mediation in which political instability is related to progressive values strictly through religiosity viz. increases in political instability are associated with decreases in progressive values through increases in religiosity.

Method

- Data were retrieved from the 2005 World Values Survey (WVS) however only a subset was used in the study. Random stratified sampling was used to preserve the structure of the sample ($N=3,881$).
- Figure 2 displays the countries included in our sample.

Political Instability

- Five items were selected from the WVS that assessed level of confidence in the country's different political entities. Entities include: armed forces, the police, the justice system, the government and the political parties. Higher scores on the 4-point scale represented less confidence.

Religiosity

- Five items were selected that assessed religiosity: importance of religion, importance of faith in children, confidence in churches, church attendance, and importance of God in one's life. All items were measured on different scales that were coded so that lower scores represented greater religiosity.

Progressiveness

- Seven items were selected that assessed three issues of social concern: abortion, homosexuality, and gender equality. Items were coded so that higher scores represented greater approval of progressive values.

Hypothesized Model

- The model reflected our theory of latent mediation: the relationship between views of political instability and progressiveness could be fully explained by religiosity. Furthermore, religiosity would have an inverse relationship with progressiveness.
- We conducted three EFA's to check the measurement portions of the model. One-factor solutions best fit the data.
- SEM assumptions were checked and verified in SPSS. The model was run in EQS.

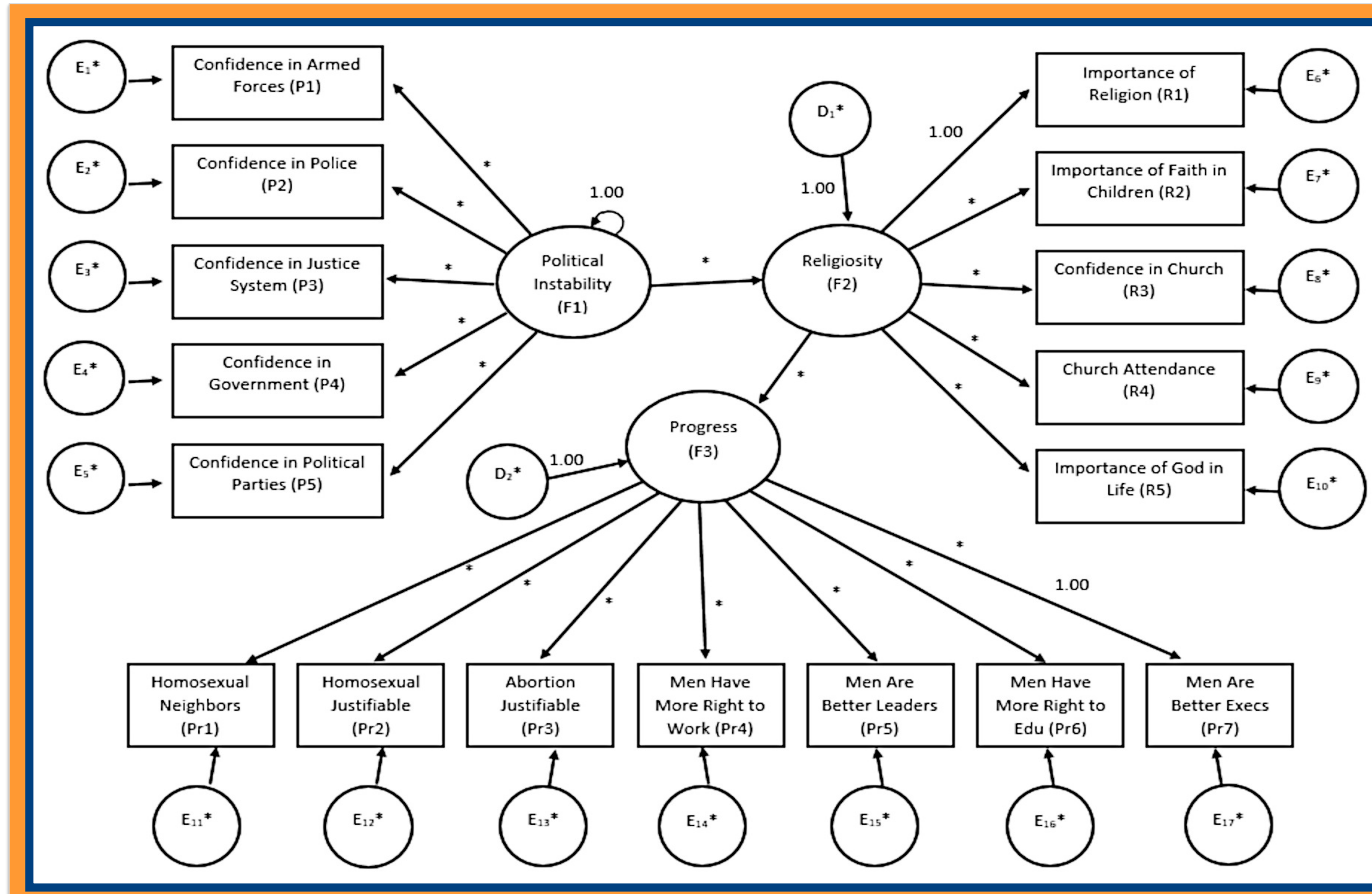


Figure 1. Proposed SEM Model...

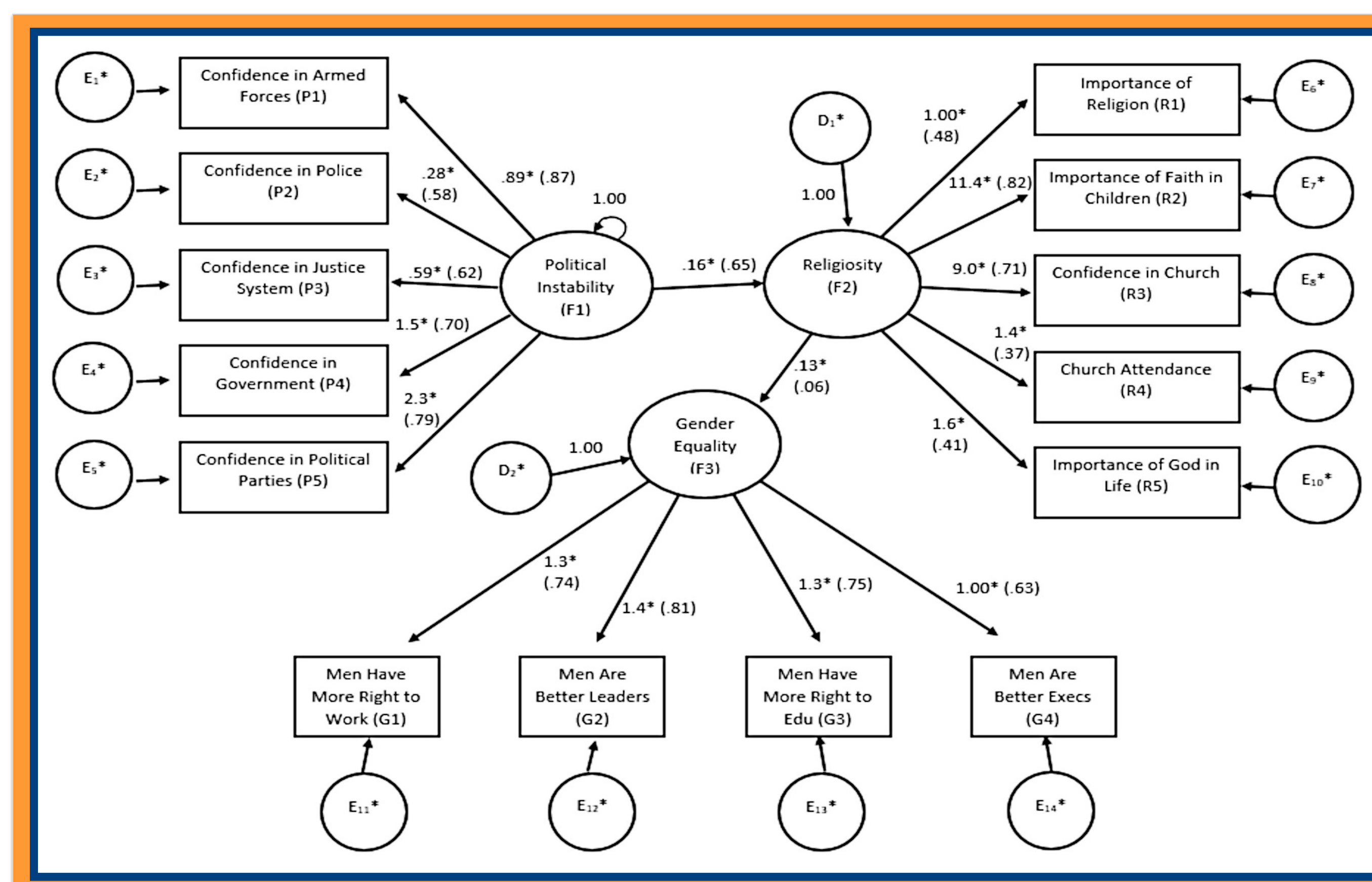
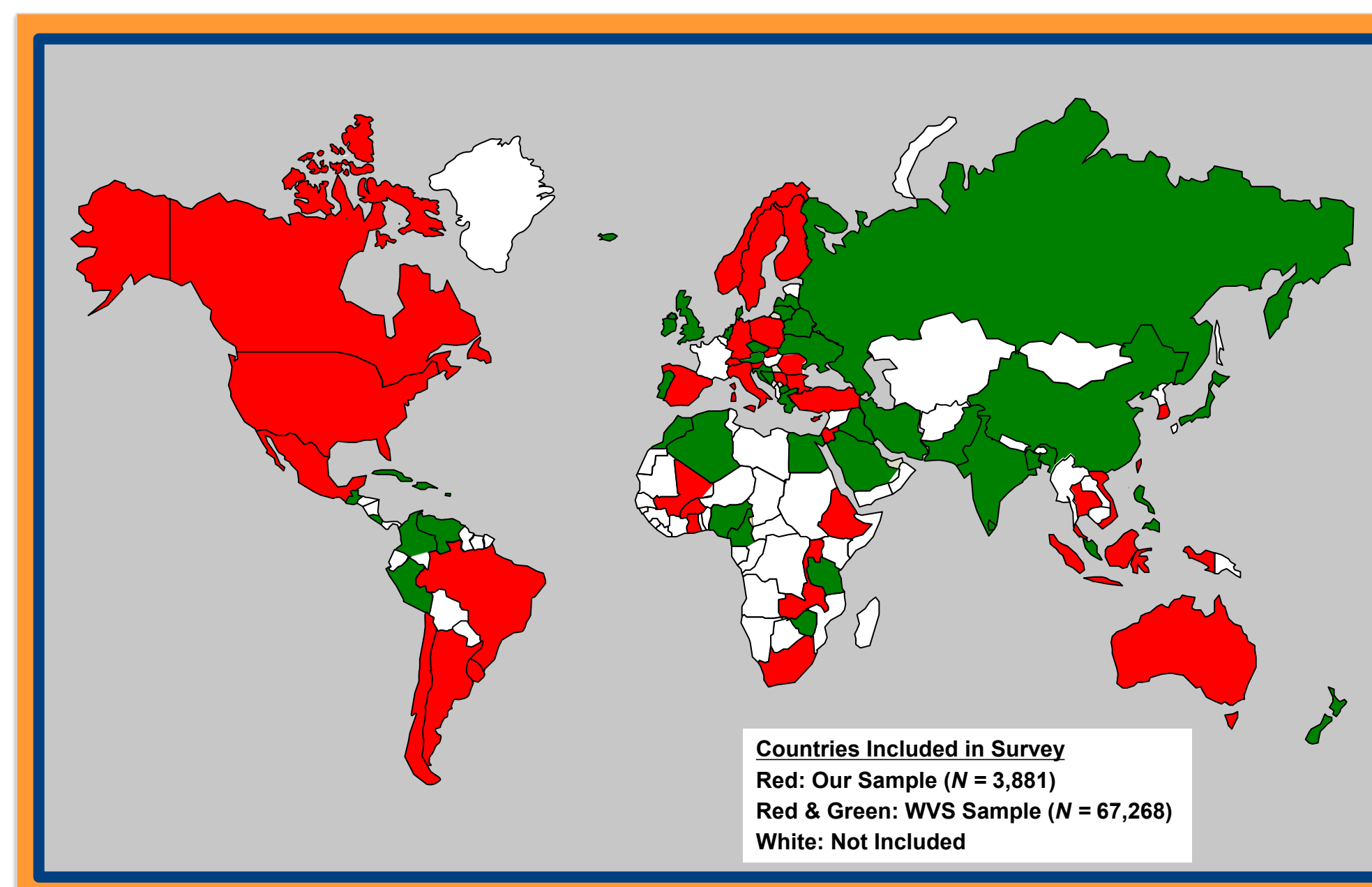


Figure 3. Final Model....

Results

- Overall fit for the model was poor, $\chi^2(117) = 6403, p < .05, AIC = 6170, NNFI = 0.71, SRMR = 0.13, RMSEA = 0.12$.

Model Modification

- The multivariate LM test proposed several parameters to be estimated—all of which would have produced cross-loadings between indicators related to homosexuality and the religiosity construct. An EFA of all 17 indicators confirmed the complexity of these indicators.
- The problem indicators were dropped resulting in the progressiveness construct being distilled down to a construct of gender equality.

Final Model

- The revised model fit the data well, $\chi^2(75) = 1658, p < .05, AIC = 1508, NNFI = 0.90, SRMR = 0.06, RMSEA = 0.07$.
- Direct effects: increased religiosity was predicted by greater political instability (unst. coefficient = .115, $p < .05$); decreased gender equality was predicted by greater religiosity (unst. coefficient = .133, $p < .05$).
- Indirect effects: increased political stability predicted decreased religiosity, which predicted increased gender equality (unst. coefficient = .021, $p < .05$).

Discussion

- The complexity of the dropped indicators makes sense theoretically as the three items cover social values (homosexuality and abortion specifically) that are explicitly addressed in many religious doctrines. The remaining progressiveness indicators were to do with women's rights and while some religious doctrines do address such rights, most practitioners are not dogmatic in suppressing women's rights (with the exception of extremists).
- Contrary to our hypothesis, greater political instability predicted lower religiosity. Also, the direct effect of religiosity and the indirect effect of political instability on gender were weak. A negligible amount of variance in gender equality was accounted for by religiosity.
- The contrary findings may have several explanations. The self-report nature of the WVS is a possible factor. Also, people who are more religious have been found to be more trusting of governing bodies. Lack of personal control due to external factors is associated with a stronger tendency to support religious and sociopolitical systems.

Limitations & Future Directions

- The fact that the factor Political Instability was a measure of confidence in governing intuitions may have confounded the relationship between our measure of political instability and religiosity.
- Additionally, we may have overlooked important differences in religiosity by collapsing across all religious denominations.
- Future research should utilize more objective measures of political instability, e.g., GDP, average life expectancy, crime statistics, etc., and look at individual religious denominations.