**Effect of Political Orientation on Altruistic Attitudes**

<https://github.com/anind99/304Final>

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**Abstract**

Altruism is the moral practice of helping others when they are in need. This may even include taking on a personal cost to do so. Having altruistic attitudes allowed humans to prosper over other organisms, and as a result societal norms have evolved to promote such stances. In modern democratic societies the political orientation of people determines the altruistic stance of society as a single entity. In this paper I explored whether political orientation could predict altruistic stance. In addition, I determined whether political philosophy could predict political orientation i.e., whether the party people vote for truly represents their social stances. My results confirmed the findings of previous papers, that political orientation and altruism are correlated. In addition, I determined that the current political system is not capable of representing the social philosophy of individuals. In order to implement the true attitudes of individuals a less binary system needs to be implemented.

**Key Words**: Altruism, Political Orientation, Social Philosophy, Society, Evolution, Culture, Government

**Introduction**

Altruism is the philosophy of helping others even when it may result in incurring a personal cost. It is behaviour that has evolved in social organisms as it provided a survival advantage over non-social species. These non-altruistic species had more competition and less companions. It is arguable that us humans were able to beat the competition and become the dominant species in this world because of our social nature. Consequently, Altruism is a major part of the success of human species and society.

In his paper, Vlerick (2020) explained that along with our genes, culture has also evolved to take altruistic stances. Competition between groups selected for norms which were more beneficial for the survival of the group as a whole. For example, individuals who can be identified as “cheaters” are punished in various ways; including social criticism and even physical punishment. Vlerick didn’t stop at this, in his paper he explored a novel aspect of altruism; conscious decision making. Rather than hard-wired motions, intuition-based processes play a major part. This may even override the automatic, instinctual responses talked about previously.

Being such an important aspect of society, one may ask; how can these altruistic characteristics that we have developed further be emphasized? While humans individually may morally take the stance of helping others, society as a single entity (a system) does not always share this sentiment. Government policies dictate the opportunities people receive and ultimately decide the quality-of-life of less fortunate individuals.

In order to explore this societal implementation of altruism, in this paper I will explore the effect of political orientation on altruistic attitudes. Given the assumption of a democratic government, the goal of my work will be to identify how the altruistic opinions of individuals can be accurately represented on a broader scale. This will be an expansion of the study previously conducted by Zettler and Hillbig (2009); who also explored whether altruism is an important construct in political orientation even when controlling for personality factors. This is because while researchers had found the importance of personality on political orientation, the concept of altruism still remained to be explored.

Zettler and Hillbig (2009) confirmed their hypotheses; i) Individuals high in altruism will endorse a left-wing ideology. ii) Altruism explains unique variance in political orientation beyond personality (big six).

To follow the mentioned study, I will be exploring whether political orientation influences altruistic attitudes. More specifically, I will be analyzing the prototypical properties of both extreme political stances (left vs Right), to determine whether they can predict altruistic stances. In addition, I will confirm whether these prototypical properties are truly representative of people or are individuals forced to take an extreme stance due to the nature of the political system.

In order to implement and validate this study will analyze data collected by the American Social Survey (NORC 2016) and select for two types of variables. The first being variables that capture altruistic attitudes, the second being variables associated with political orientation. To follow I will be analyzing the effect of dependent variables of political orientation on the independent variables of altruistic responses. Lastly, I will determine whether the variables of political ideology can independently determine orientation. Or whether our current political system is incapable of capturing the social stances of its subjects. I will use linear regression, ordinal logistic regression along with chi-squared tests to determine the significance of the relationships between these variables.

**Data**

<https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/web/pages/instructors/ddlgs/guides/altuism/index.html>

**Results**

**Discussion**

Altruism is a key part of human behavior that has allowed us to become the dominant species on the planet. [@Article1] described in their paper that culture played a huge part in the development of altruistic attitudes within humans. Social norms and rules have been formed to promote altruistic behaviour in pursuit of the greater good rather than benefiting certain individuals. Recursively, even our genetics were molded due to these factors. This may be because people who were more assimilated to the social constructs also had an advantage when it came to reproduction.

While being such an important factor in human success, modern society is much different from prehistoric times. The rules that govern us determine the altruistic stance of society as a single entity. Depending on what the values of this entity are, individuals are able to rely on the cumulative support of the group. In other words, government policies are ultimately the deciding factor in societal altruism.

[@Article2] explored the effect of political orientation on altruism. They conducted this study while controlling for personality factors (defined by the Big 6 personality test), in order to isolate the effect of altruistic attitudes. The results showed that individuals high in altruism will endorse a left-wing ideology.  This is logical because left-wing attitudes are more agreeable to matters such as social welfare while right-wing attitudes are more individualistic.

Drawing from the two mentioned studies, I had two goals in this paper. The first was to confirm the findings of [@Article2]. and determining the extent of the relationships between altruistic attitudes and political orientation. The second was to investigate the concept of representing opinions regarding socio-political matters (i.e government policies) through a voting system. The latter task included the conclusion of whether the two-party system currently in place in the United States is sufficient.

My first hypothesis was that my findings will be similar to those mentioned in [@Article2], i.e left-wing ideologies will endorse altruism at a higher level. To add, I believed that the two-party voting system is not sufficient in representing the political attitudes of an individual.

I began the initial data exploration by analysing the distribution of altruistic and political variables grouped by political orientation (“Polviews”).  The findings were aligned with my hypotheses and showed that mean scores on altruistic variables were generally higher for right-wing groups. This means that right-wing groups are, on average, less willing to help others (higher score means disagreement as defined by the values of the variables). Similarly, political variables representing the willingness towards social welfare had higher means in right wing groups.

In order to probe deeper into these relationships such that conclusions can be drawn, I analysed their correlation through two statistical models; Chi-squared Test and Logistic Regression. The former was done to identify the significance between each of the categorical variables of altruism/socio-political opinion and political orientation. The latter was required to identify the extent of these relationships.

I conducted these analyses in 2 parts. Starting with the relationship between altruistic attitudes and political orientation.  Aligning with my hypotheses, I found that most altruistic attitudes correlated with political orientation (excluding donating blood, loaning items and “cutahead”). This lack of correlation can be explained through the nature of the variables. For example, the act of donating blood has many other hidden factors rather than simply “altruism”. It is related to the health of the individual along with convenience. Similarly, loaning items and “cutahead” are more related to personality rather than ideology.

The logistic regression model showed that for extreme values of “Careself”, “Selffrst”, “Othshlp” and “Givhmlss”, there is a noticeable pattern related to political orientation. As hypothesized, the more conseervating an individual is, the less likely they are willing to take extremely positive altruistic stances (their probability increases for high values of “Othshlp” and “Givhmlss”). In addition, right-wing individuals are also shown to be more self orientated i.e. their probability increases for lower values of  “Careself” and “Selffrst”. To articulate, it is more probable that an individual who values self-importance over helping others is conservative in their political orientation.

The latter goal of this study was to identify the effectiveness of the current political system in representing socio-political stances of individuals. Sequentially determining whether altruism is effectively implemented by society, accurate to what each individual desires. The Chi-squared test and logistic regression showed that the 7-point scale of “polviews” is highly correlated with the political variables. Aligning with the initial data exploration, conservative individuals are indeed more hesitant to social welfare than liberals.

Although a 7-point political spectrum may be sufficient in representing the sociopolitical attitudes of individuals, the current system in place in the United states consists of 2 major parties. Therefore, I analysed the relationships between political stance variables and voted party within one logistic regression model. The results aligned with my hypothesis and showed that there was no significant relationship between any of the political factors and voted candidates. When all of the political variables are coupled together, none of the factors correlate with political orientation. However, this result should be taken with the stipulation that the study was conducted with limited data.

To summarize my findings, the analysis was aligned with previous studies. The more conservative an individual, the less they are likely to take on altruistic stances. This makes sense because conservative ideology is defined by its individualistic nature. It puts value on the success of each person rather than the group as a whole. Furthermore, I found that while a 7-point political orientation scale could represent various stances on politics of an individual, the current 2-party system is not sufficient. Thus, aligning with my hypotheses.

However my study consisted of various weaknesses. The major issue for my analysis was related to the modelling of the 2-party system with political stance variables. No conclusion can confidently be made from this model because there was not sufficient data for reliable results. Future studies should collect data regarding various socio-political opinions, along with voted party, and investigate this further.

Additionally, the survey questions asked by the GSS were not specifically designed to represent altruism. A more specific set of questions which aims to capture various altruistic attitudes will be helpful.

Finally, in order to properly replicate the study conducted by [@Article2] and mitigate the effects of hidden variables, personality factors should be included with the analysis. A potential extension of this study should include these personality factors along with other plausible effectors and calculate the variation caused by altruism solely.

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