

# Chapter 11

## Conservative and Liberal Values in Relation to Religiosity



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**Abstract** The conservative versus the liberal conflict currently seems to be prevalent in Western societies. This chapter tests the association between conservative and liberal worldviews and basic human values: conservation values (CONS) versus values we term “liberal attitude values” (LA). We explore their association to each other, to religiosity, and to social policy attitudes. We first explore these associations in the full Young Adults and Religion in a Global Perspective (YARG) sample, and then focus on three samples from countries that have recently experienced a liberal-conservative political polarization: Poland, Israel (Jewish sample), and the United States. The contribution of the YARG data is in the ability to present a more nuanced view of this dimension, with an emphasis on its relation to religiosity. Our intention is to unpack the conservative and the liberal worldviews in order to explore the elements that each of them promotes and to identify variance within national contexts, shifting the liberal-conservative dichotomy to a culturally-nuanced spectrum.

**Keywords** Conservative versus liberal attitudes · Values · Religiosity · Ideology · Social policy attitudes · Young adults · Cross-cultural design

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## 11.1 Introduction

In contemporary Western countries, the liberal-conservative worldview distinction is so prominent and ubiquitous that it is often referred to as a “culture war” (Flanagan & Lee, 2003; Frimer et al., 2014, p. 1205). Some political scientists argue that much of the political tensions of the world boil down to a struggle between liberal and conservative worldviews, also termed “left” and “right” (Noël & Thérien, 2008).<sup>1</sup> In recent years, this polarization has intensified in the United States and in Europe (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2005; Jost, 2006). This distinction is further reflected in voting patterns, economic policies and foreign policies as well as in attitudes to arms control, environmentalism, gay marriage, abortion and euthanasia (Kriesi et al., 2012).

In trying to uncover the roots of the conservative-liberal divide, two important concepts surface: values and religiosity. Values underlie all ideologies and worldviews (Schwartz, 2012; Schwartz et al., 2010), while religions direct worldviews (Hood et al., 2009). What, then, is the relation between conservative and liberal attitudes, value constructs and religiosity among university students worldwide today?

We begin by describing some of the main theoretical perspectives about the conservative-liberal divide. We then shift to the theory of Basic Human Values (Schwartz, 2007, 2012, 2017) and compare conservatism, liberalism and religiosity to value constructs within that theory. Next, we report the results of an analysis of liberal and conservative attitudes, religiosity and value constructs in the full Young Adults and Religion in a Global Perspective (YARG) sample ( $N = 4964$ ), followed by an analysis of qualitative data for three groups which represent those national contexts where the conservative-liberal divide is salient: Americans ( $n = 299$ ), Polish ( $n = 295$ ), and Jewish Israelis ( $n = 328$ ) (for more on YARG, see Chap. 1 of this volume).

## 11.2 Juxtaposing the Conservative and Liberal Worldviews

The crucial rift between conservative and liberal worldviews has been analyzed through various disciplinary lenses. In a philosophical nutshell, liberalism is a response to modernity involving first and foremost a commitment to liberty, which is seen as normatively basic, and implies that any restrictions on it must be justified. This view is based on a positive view of humanity, implying that if people are given

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<sup>1</sup> In some countries, such as the United States and the UK, there is a preference for using “conservative/ liberal” in survey questions while most European countries prefer the left/right distinction. Often the two sets of terms are used interchangeably, with “right” mapping onto “conservative” and “left” mapping onto “liberal” (Caprara et al., 2017). We follow Schwartz (2018) in preferring the terms “conservative/liberal” because of their broader range and because the meaning of left-right in former communist countries differs from its meaning in the West and is at times reversed or ambiguous.

maximal freedom to develop themselves, they will thrive, and so will society. The good life, in this view, is that which is chosen freely by the individual.

Liberalism ranges from a comprehensive philosophical/ideological way of viewing the world to a political stance. In this chapter, we will refer to the former as a “liberal ideology” and to the latter as a “liberal political attitude”, although the two are closely interconnected. While the importance of liberty is liberalism’s core belief, it also includes a range of political visions (Gaus et al., 2018), sometimes at odds with each other. For example, those who adhere to “classical liberalism” focus on the right to autonomy, while “liberal egalitarians” endorse civil and personal liberties and social justice. However, all liberals tend to share an emphasis on freedom, equality, autonomy, choice and tolerance.

Conservatism is another response to modernity, which appeals to experience and authority rather than to human reason alone, putting its faith in family, private property and traditions. It opposes ideologically-driven change, and in that sense, its polar opposite is revolutionism rather than liberalism (Hamilton, 2016). Conservatism can be reactionary or moderate and is not so much a philosophy as a drive to preserve stability and ‘the way things are’ (Oakeshott, 1991). The conservative worldview holds a darker view of human nature, considering people to be selfish and weak, and maintaining that society needs to rely on experience, institutional authority, traditions and rules in order to maintain social order (Kekes, 1997). Reliance on reason, ideology, abstract values and utopian visions are considered to have dangerous consequences. Concrete, specific and time-honored political arrangements are preferred; duties are emphasized over rights (Hamilton, 2016). There are various flavors to political conservatism, ranging from endorsing a hierarchical social order, to supporting a skeptical and responsible democracy, and involving a pragmatic rejection of ideology per-se in the European context, or a coherent ideology as in the case of American libertarianism or neo-conservatism (ibid.) Despite these differences, all conservatives tend to support continuity, tradition and social stability.<sup>2</sup>

Some researchers claim that conservatism-liberalism is a unidimensional continuum (Jost, 2006), at the heart of which lies the importance of freedom. These researchers point to the fact that this single construct predicts voting patterns in multiple locations (ibid). Others argue that these are two separate dimensions, negatively but not fully correlated, as attested by the fact that some philosophers (e.g. Hegel) have attempted to synthesize them (Hamilton, 2016) and by the finding that bi-dimensional political spaces exist in many countries, often setting apart economic and cultural attitudes (Bornschier, 2010; Feldman & Johnston, 2014). This means that it is possible, although unusual, to be both conservative and liberal (Barnea & Schwartz, 1998). For this paper, we will treat the two constructs as related but separate, rather than assume them to be diametric opposites.

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<sup>2</sup>It is worth noting that when considering conservatism and liberalism as ideologies, some researchers argue that the role of ideology in people’s lives and behaviors is minimal and inconsistent (Converse, 2000). For these researchers the leading question becomes: what directs political choices in specific contexts, issues and times? (Carney et al., 2008).

### 11.3 Liberalism, Conservatism, Religiosity and Values

The difference between conservative and liberal ideologies could be considered in terms of value priorities. As noted, conservatism connotes stability, tradition, respect for authority and continuity. Liberalism highlights freedom, equality, autonomy, tolerance and choice. Using the theory of Basic Human Values (Schwartz, 2007, 2012, 2017), we find that all types of values may be politically relevant depending on context (Barnea & Schwartz, 1998), but typically, conservative ideologies and right-wing political attitudes (Aspelund et al., 2013) are positively correlated with values of tradition, conformity and security. Studies have also found positive correlations between liberal ideologies, self-direction and universalism values in all countries, except in Eastern Europe (Caprara et al., 2017, 2018).

Studies consistently find that religious people tend to be more conservative politically and support existing social arrangements rather than new ones. In one large-scale study of the extent to which religiosity accounted for ideological orientations (Caprara et al., 2018), religiosity was consistently related to right and conservative ideologies in 15 of 16 countries, across religions. Religion has been found to play a bigger political role in politically or ethnically fractionalized societies, with religiously unaffiliated individuals being more tolerant in politics and social attitudes than religious ones (Van der Brug et al., 2009).

Moving on to religion and values, several studies have found a positive correlation between religiosity and values of tradition and conformity (e.g. Saroglou et al., 2004). However, a large recent study (Caprara et al., 2018) also found that after controlling for basic personal values, the contribution of religiosity on ideology was significant and substantial only in countries where religion has played a prominent role in the public sphere, (e.g. Poland, Israel, United States). To date, Caprara's study is the only one which directly examined the three-way relation between values, religiosity and ideology. Although it is large and robust ( $N = 8825$ , 16 countries), there are several reasons for testing the value/religiosity/ideology relation with another dataset: (1) Caprara's study used only direct self-reports for religiosity and for conservatism-liberalism. Our study uses both direct and indirect scales for these constructs and measures religious belonging and religious practice as well as self-defined levels of religiosity. (2) Caprara's (2018) study used the older 10-value circle. Our study used the recently updated and globally validated 19-value model (Schwartz, 2012) which is said to have "greater universal heuristic and predictive power." (ibid, p. 664); 3) Caprara's study surveyed the general population. Our study, which targeted young adult university students and included a qualitative component, allows us to consider the role of the university campus climate on the relationships which we are testing.

## 11.4 Method and Research Questions

Participants were the full YARG study sample ( $N = 4964$ ). All participants were active students at the time of the study.

As an indicator of liberal/conservative social ideology, we constructed a “Social policy attitudes” 7-item measure, eliciting attitudes towards same-sex marriage, adoption, abortion under different circumstances, euthanasia and assisted suicide. The reliability of the scale was good (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .85$ ).

We used the PVQ-5X to measure participants’ values but aggregated the value scores in a novel manner. The 19 values of the Schwartz Theory of Basic Values are typically construed as two sets of higher-order values: conservation values versus openness to change values and self-enhancement versus self-transcendence values (Schwartz, 2012; see Fig. 11.1). For this study, we devised a new way of grouping some of Schwartz’s values. The values which we propose as reflecting liberal attitudes include *two* of the *Openness to change* values, namely, self-direction-thought and self-direction-action, and two self-transcendence values – Universalism-concern and Universalism-tolerance. We make this suggestion based on the core values of liberalism – freedom, equality and autonomy – and previous findings of consistent positive correlations between these values and liberal attitudes.



Fig. 11.1 The 19 values in the refined values theory. (Note. Reproduced from Schwartz, 2012, p. 669 with new higher-order LA highlighted)

For each participant, we averaged the z-scores of the tradition, conformity and security values to obtain a “Conservation” score (henceforth: CONS). We averaged the z-scores of self-direction values and of universalism-tolerance and universalism-concern values to obtain a “Liberal attitude” score (henceforth: LA).

We used four measures of religiosity: *Religious belonging* was measured dichotomously by the question: Do you consider yourself as belonging to one or more religious groups, communities, or traditions? (Yes/No). *Personal religiosity* was measured on a 0–10 scale by the question: regardless of whether you consider yourself as belonging or close to a particular religious group, community, or tradition, how religious would you say you are? *Religious practice* was measured by averaging two questions:

- Apart from special occasions such as weddings and funerals, about how often do you take part in religious ceremonies or services these days?
- Apart from when you are at religious ceremonies or services, how often do you engage in private religious or spiritual practices, such as worship, praying, or meditation?

Finally, *religious change* was measured by recording the normalized difference between each participant’s rating of personal religiosity, and their reported level of religiosity of the home in which they grew up.

Our study addressed the following two questions:

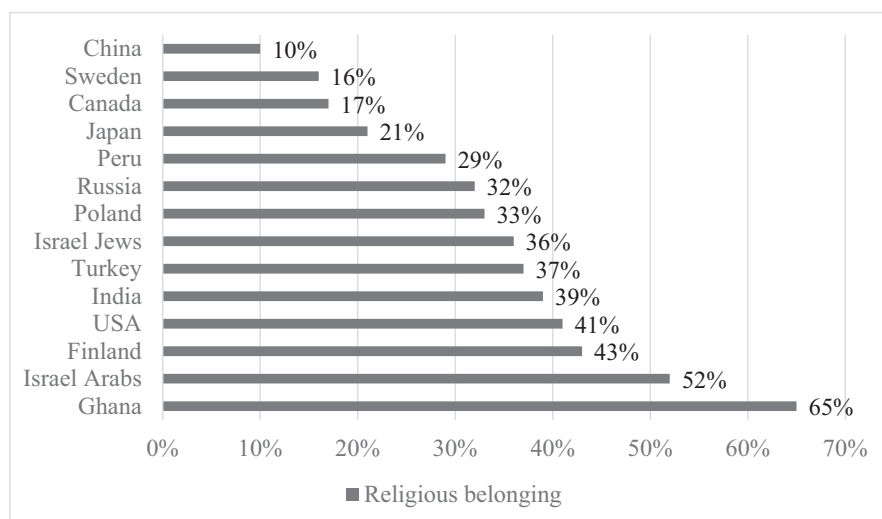
- How do social policy attitudes relate to religiosity and to value preference and what is the added explanatory power of each variable in predicting conservative or liberal ideological orientations?
- How do these variables and the relations between them vary as a function of national and cultural context?

For question 2, we also used a subsample of the YARG respondents who completed in-depth interviews about their own religious subjectivities. Analyzing the interview transcripts from Poland, United States and Israel, we asked how conservative and/or liberal worldviews interact with their religious beliefs, practices and belonging.

## 11.5 Findings

### 11.5.1 Religiosity in the YARG Sample by 4 Indices

35% ( $n = 1714$ ) of all YARG participants considered themselves as belonging to a religious group, community or tradition, and 66% ( $n = 3250$ ) did not consider themselves as belonging to any of these. In terms of personal religiosity, on a scale of 0 (not at all religious) to 10 (very religious), participants averaged 3.93 ( $SD = 2.93$ ). In terms of religious practice (both public and private), on a scale ranging from 1



**Fig. 11.2** Religious belonging by country/ethnicity

(never practice) to 7 (daily religious practice), participants averaged 3.03 ( $SD = 1.76$ ). When considering the difference between family of origin religiosity and personal current religiosity, the trans-national average was  $-1.06$  ( $SD = 2.60$ ), meaning that on average, these students estimated themselves as being somewhat less religious than their family of origin.

All of these indices vary a great deal depending on country and cultural group. Figure 11.2 lists the percentage of those belonging to religious groups/traditions by country or ethnicity (in the case of Israel), showing a great variation from the most religious in our sample – Ghana (65%) and Israeli Arabs (52%) – to the least religious – Sweden (16%) and China (10%).

Figure 11.3 lists the other 3 religious indices by country or ethnicity. Again, Ghana and Israeli Arabs express the most religiosity while Sweden expresses the least.

### ***11.5.2 Social Policy Attitudes and their Distribution by Country***

Overall, on a scale of 1 (low liberal attitudes) to 5 (high liberal attitudes) participants averaged 3.69 ( $SD = 1.04$ ). Figure 11.4 ranks countries/ethnicities by social policy attitudes showing that here too, students from Ghana and Israeli Arabs scored the lowest on liberal ideology in contrast with students from Sweden.

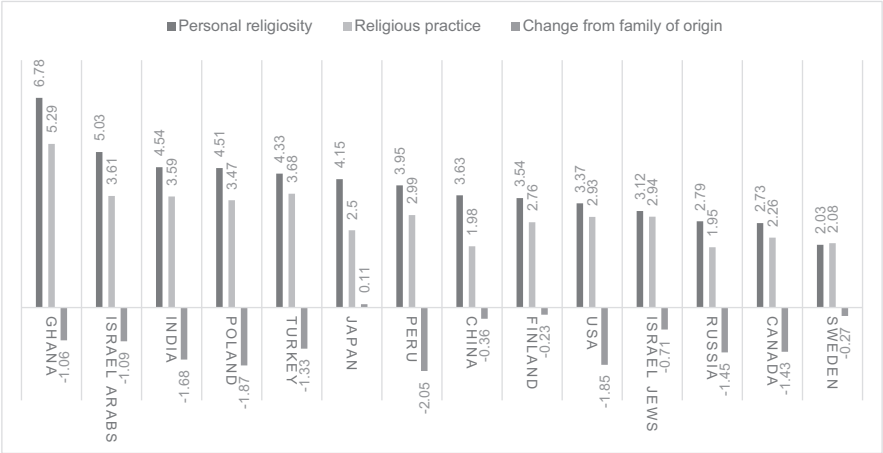


Fig. 11.3 Indices of religiosity and religious change by country/ethnicity

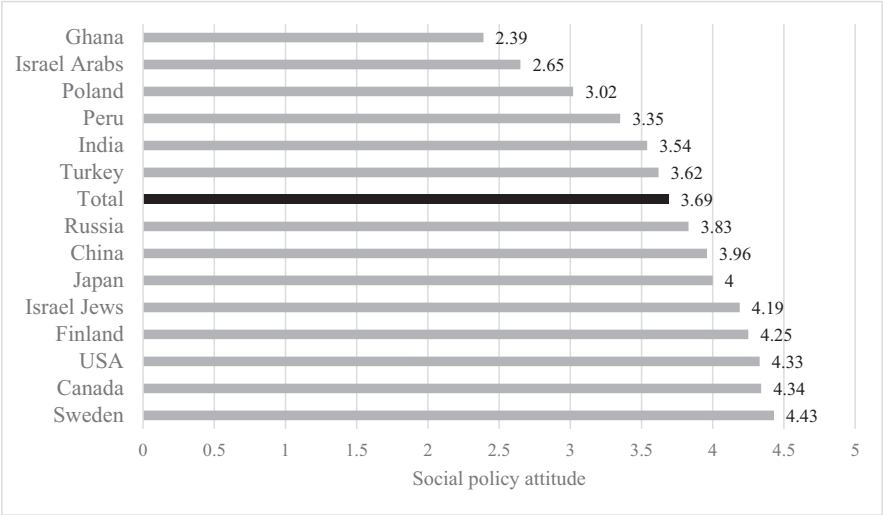


Fig. 11.4 Social policy attitudes by country/ethnicity

### 11.5.3 Value Patterns Relating to Conservatism and Liberalism and Distribution by Country

While country samples differed by mean level of CONS values, overall, the entire sample did not rank them highly; 11 of the 14 groups ranked them below the mean value ranking. Figure 11.5 presents the average conservation value z-scores by country from highest to lowest.

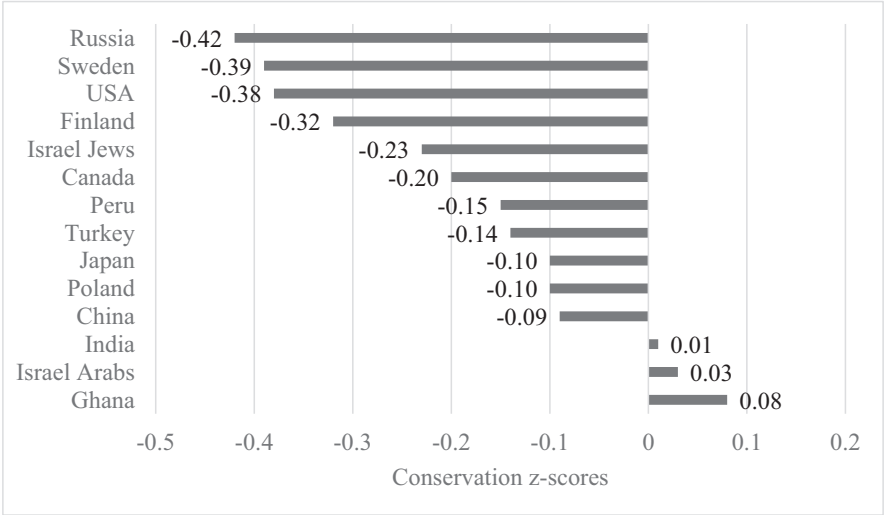


Fig. 11.5 Conservation z-scores – mean by country

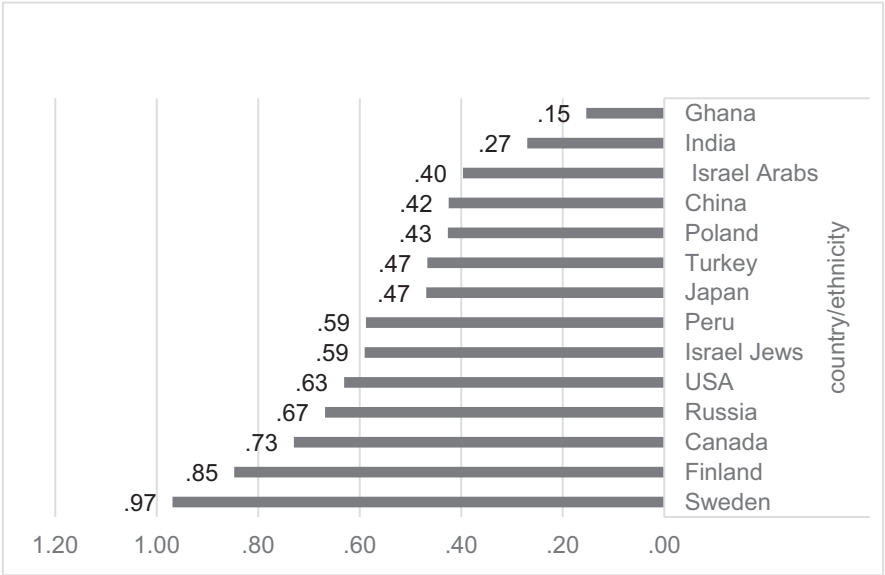


Fig. 11.6 Liberal attitude (LA) z-scores – mean by country

Country samples also differed in the mean ranking of LA values (the average z-scores of Universalism-tolerance, Universalism-concern, Self-direction-thought and Self-direction-action). Figure 11.6 presents the average LA value scores by country from highest to lowest.

### ***11.5.4 The Relation Between CONS Values, LA Values and Social Ideology***

Overall, CONS values ( $M = -.17$ ,  $SD = .42$ ) were significantly ( $p < .001$ ) lower than LA values ( $M = .55$ ,  $SD = .52$ ), indicating a general preference among participants for liberalism and openness over conservation values. This might be related to participants' age, as this study examined young adults. Multiple value studies have found a negative correlation between age and openness to change values, and a positive one between age and conservation values (see summary in Milfont et al., 2016). Age, cohort and period effects are easily confounded, however, and it is possible that the preference for liberal values should be attributed to a cohort or period effect, since this study specifically targets the Y-generation (for more on age and cohort effects, see Chap. 2 in this volume), which has been found to place high value on choice and change (Pinzaru et al., 2016). A third possibility is that this effect is a function of education, specifically of the liberal campus climate, reflecting the fact that participants were on-campus when they participated in the study. Some studies have found that education level is a stronger predictor of liberal attitudes than age (Dassonneville, 2016), while others find larger correlations for age and values than for education and values (Schwartz, 2007), so it is difficult to determine the best explanation for this pattern in our data.

LA values negatively correlated with CONS values ( $r = -.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that the values underlying liberalism and conservatism differ significantly. However, the data support our argument that the opposite of conservatism is not liberalism but change (in political terms, revolution; Hamilton, 2016). The highest negative correlation with conservation values at  $r = -.72$  ( $p < .001$ ) was with Openness to Change values (OTCH, made up of Self-direction, stimulation and hedonism values). This is as expected by Schwartz's model, indicating that while Liberalism and Conservatism are negatively correlated, they are not two polarities of the same construct.

As Table 11.1 indicates, the social policy attitude measure showed a stronger correlation to LA values ( $r = .38$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than to OTCH values ( $r = .33$ ,  $p < .001$ ), although both were significant. There was a significant negative correlation between social ideology and conservation values ( $r = -.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### ***11.5.5 Values and Religiosity Along the Liberal-Conservative Divide***

Religiosity was found to relate significantly ( $p < .001$ ) to LA and CONS value patterns. Those belonging to a religious group or tradition endorsed CONS values more ( $-.08$  vs.  $-.22$ ), endorsed LA values less ( $.47$  versus  $.60$ ), and had a lower score on the social policy attitude index ( $3.2$  versus  $3.9$ ), all significant at the  $p < .001$  level.

**Table 11.1** Correlations between groups of values and the social policy measure

| Correlations                   |        |        |        |        |        |        |         |   |
|--------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---|
|                                | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5      | 6      | 7       | 8 |
| 1. LA Liberal Attitudes values | —      |        |        |        |        |        |         |   |
| 2. SOC social ideology         | .38**  | —      |        |        |        |        |         |   |
| 3. OTCH Openness to Change     | .53**  | .33**  | —      |        |        |        |         |   |
| 4. CONS Conservation           | -.54** | -.40** | -.72** | —      |        |        |         |   |
| 5. STRA Self-Transcendence     | .58**  | .21**  | -.03*  | -.22** | —      |        |         |   |
| 6. SENH Self-Enhancement       | -.50** | -.02   | .06**  | -.19** | -.74** | —      |         |   |
| 7. SOCIAL Social Focus         | .13**  | -.13** | -.52** | .48**  | .68**  | -.83** | —       |   |
| 8. PERSONAL Personal Focus     | -.13** | .13**  | .52**  | -.48** | -.68** | .83**  | -1.00** | — |

*Note.* \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), \*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

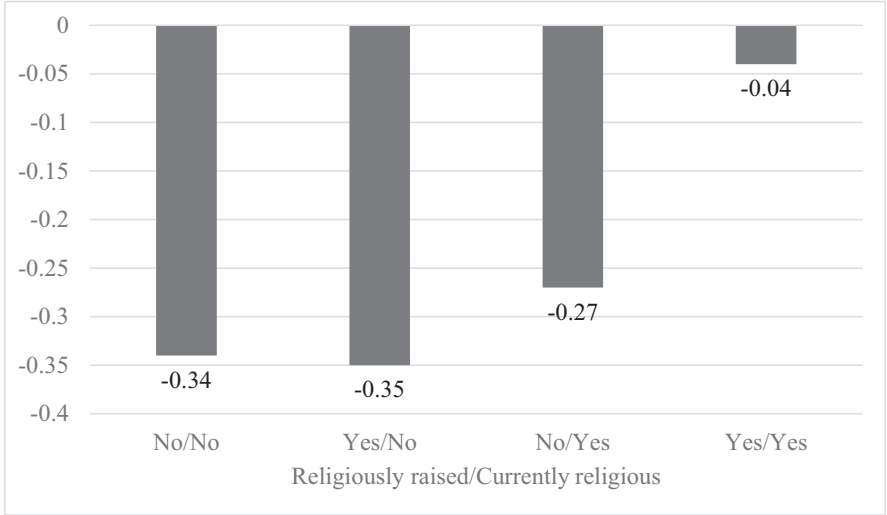
Personal religiosity correlated positively with CONS values ( $r = .36, p < .001$ ), negatively with LA values ( $r = -.26, p < .001$ ), and negatively with liberal social policy attitudes ( $r = -.52, p < .001$ ). The religiosity of family of origin showed the same patterns and magnitudes of correlation.

Religious practice correlated positively with conservation values ( $r = .30, p < .001$ ), strongly negatively with Liberal Attitude values ( $r = -.54, p < .001$ ), and negatively with the social policy attitude index ( $r = -.23, p < .001$ ).

An interesting picture emerged when we examined religious change. Religious conservation means preserving the family religious tradition and continuing to believe in and practice the religious rituals of one's childhood (Beit-Hallahmi, 2015). Most YARG students hold on to their upbringing, whether religious or non-religious. When dividing the sample into "religious" (anyone who rated their religiosity as higher than 3 on a 0–10 scale) and "non-religious" (those who rated their religiosity as 0–2 on a 0–10 scale), more than half (57%) were raised as religious and continued to be religious, while 19% were raised as non-religious and continued to be non-religious. About one-quarter of the students altered their level of religiosity; most of these 'religious changers' became less religious as young adults (19% of the YARG sample), while 5% became more religious.

Religious changing, one would argue, reflects openness to change more than concern for conservation. However, the direction of religious change matters. In societies that are becoming more secular, switching from non-religious to religious means going against the grain. This is especially the case for university students who become religious, since most universities in the countries surveyed are liberal-secular. The opposite direction, namely switching from religious to non-religious, may express a clash between one's religious upbringing and a conformity to broader societal secular norms. All of this raises the question of CONS and LA values among the group of students who made changes in the direction of higher religiosity.

We found that currently non-religious students are lowest in CONS and highest in LA values. Their upbringing, whether religious or non-religious, does not seem to matter: The non-religious changers (who used to be religious) are almost identical to those who were always non-religious: high in LA, low in CONS. Those who



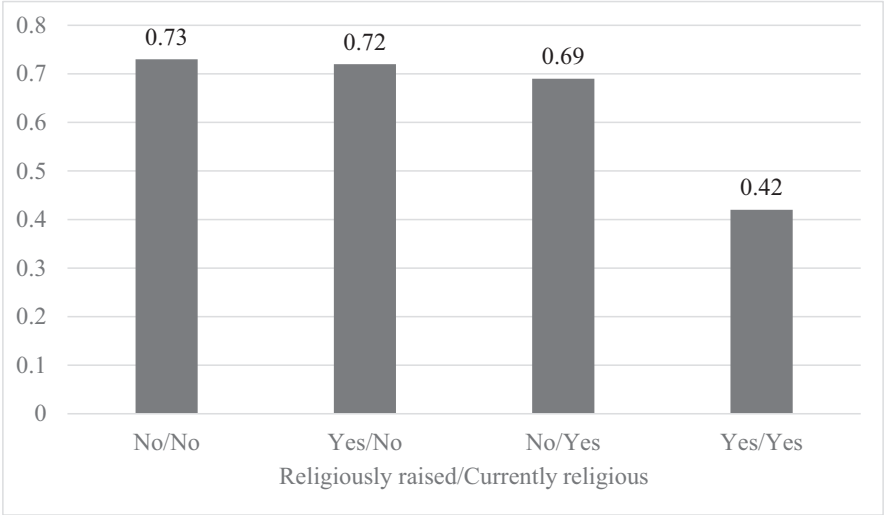
**Fig. 11.7** Conservation z-scores (CONS), as a function of respondents being religiously raised (yes/no) and currently religious (yes/no)\*  
\* No/No born non-religious, currently non-religious, Yes/No born religious, currently non-religious, No/Yes born non-religious, currently religious, Yes/Yes born religious, currently religious

were raised religious and continue to be religious are highest in CONS and lowest in LA values, as would be expected. The most intriguing group, however, is that of students who were not raised religious, but are currently religious. One might expect them to conform to the religious norm of high CONS and low in LA, yet the very fact that they switched – and swam against the tide – could mean that they are low in conservation. Which is it?

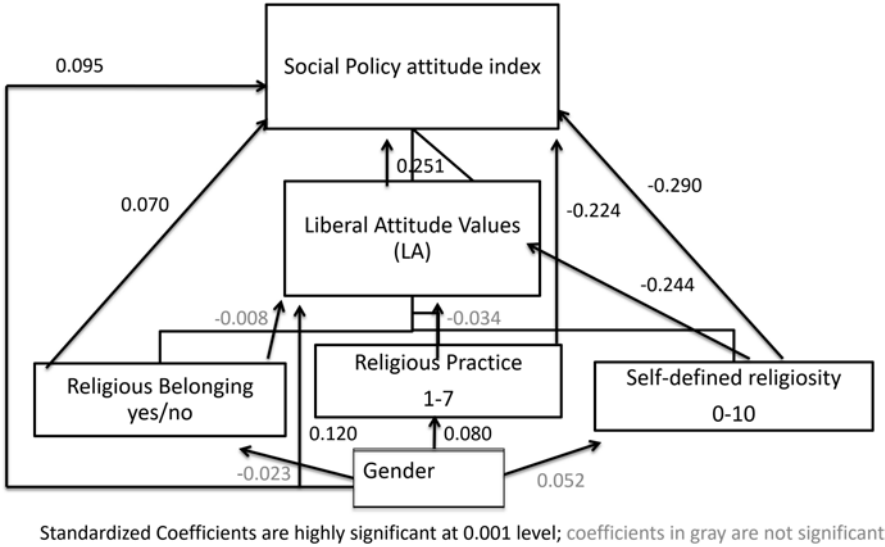
We found that those who were not raised religious but are currently religious score fairly low in CONS and fairly high in LA. In other words, they are closer in their value priorities to the non-religious than to the religious (see Figs. 11.7 and 11.8).

**11.5.6 Regression Analyses**

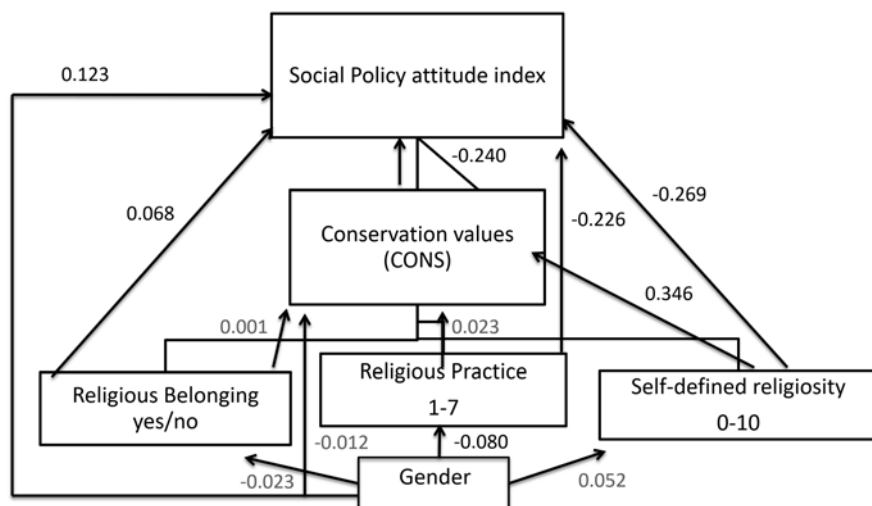
We conducted a series of linear regression models to evaluate the effects of gender, values and religiosity on the social policy attitude index. In the first step, religiosity (three different measures) is the dependent variable while gender is the independent one. In the second step, liberal values (LA), and Conservation values (CONS), each separately, are the dependent variable with religiosity and gender being the independent ones. In the third step, the Social Policy Attitudes Index is the dependent variable, while all the others are tested as independent variables. Figure 11.9 presents the regression model for LA values and Fig. 11.10 presents the model for the CONS values.



**Fig. 11.8** Liberal attitude (LA) z-scores as a function of respondents being religiously raised (yes/no) and currently religious (yes/no)\*  
\* No/No born non-religious, currently non-religious, Yes/No born religious, currently non-religious, No/Yes born non-religious, currently religious, Yes/Yes born religious, currently religious



**Fig. 11.9** Regression analysis model for overall YARG students – Liberal attitude values



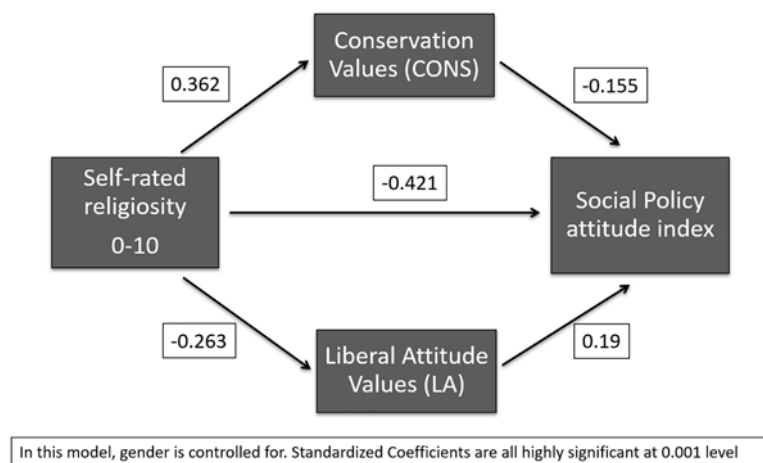
**Fig. 11.10** Regression analysis model for overall YARG students – Conservation values

As both models indicate, there is no discernible effect of gender on the paths delineated beyond a low direct effect on social policy attitudes. However, there are both direct and indirect significant effects of religiosity on social policy attitudes. The most powerful effects of religiosity are expressed when it is measured as a personal self-report construct, followed closely by religious practice, and least of all, in terms of religious belonging. This might reflect the fact that religious belonging was defined here extremely broadly. It includes not only those who belong to specific religious communities or houses of worship, but also those who consider themselves as belonging nominally to a religious tradition.

When considering religious self-rating and religious practice, we see the same patterns emerge for both CONS and LA attitudes: Religiosity affects social policy attitudes directly, explaining about 38% of the variance. It also affects social policy attitudes indirectly, via each of the value sets CONS and LA. Self-reported religiosity has a stronger indirect effect than does religious practice. This is true for both CONS and LA models.

In the combined regression model (Fig. 11.11), we focus on religious self-identification. We first controlled for gender, then added religiosity to the model (0–10, centered), followed by both value constructs - CONS and LA (centered). Next, we added the interactions between religiosity and CONS, and between religiosity and LA. Our outcome variable was the social policy attitude scale (centered).

Altogether, this model explained 36% of the variance in the data ( $df = 4891$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Adding each of the 3 steps was highly significant, but effect sizes varied: religiosity explained 28% of the variance, values explained a further 8% and the interaction added another 0.6%. There were direct and indirect effects: religiosity has a strong direct effect on social policy ( $\beta = -0.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and it also had



**Fig. 11.11** Combined and simplified regression model

powerful direct effects on CONS values ( $\beta = 0.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and on LA values ( $\beta = -0.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, there was also an indirect effect of religiosity on social policy attitudes via the two value sets ( $\beta = -0.64$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This means that 15% of the effect of religion on social policy is explained via the mediating effect of CONS and LA values. Both value sets also had a significant direct effect on social policy attitudes (for LA values  $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $p < .001$ ; for CONS values  $\beta = -0.16$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Finally, there was a small but significant interaction effect for religiosity by CONS values ( $\beta = 0.07$ ,  $t = -5.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ) which means that when people are more religious, conservation values negatively impact their social attitude policy more than they do when people are less religious. The interaction effect of LA values and religiosity on social policy attitudes was not significant.

### 11.5.7 Case Studies and Qualitative Data

While the overall pattern in the YARG study was the one described above, individual countries exhibited important variations on the theme. In the following section we will analyze patterns in three cultural contexts: Israel (Jewish Israelis), Poland and the United States. These countries have been experiencing some of most active tensions today between liberals and conservatives. The three micro-analyses of case studies are based on interviews and focus on how liberal/conservative attitudes are expressed in the lives and narratives of college students.

#### (a) Case Study 1: The United States

In the United States, most university students leave home for the first time at age 17 or 18. This physical distancing from their home is indicative of a social distancing

as well. While living away from their families, students are able to form their own views and interact with many different perspectives. Forging peer groups along new lines of thought – political, religious, or otherwise – is an essential part of the American university experience, and one that often puts them into conflict with their home communities in some way.

Most participants who described this transition as dramatic, shifted from a religious family background to an agnostic personal practice. A participant who grew up in the African-American Baptist tradition explained:

It's been a big shift altogether, like, especially coming from the South. Everyone in my high school went to church, even the people who weren't religious went to church. [...] So it's been a very big change from having everyone know at least something about God or in some sense believe in God, going from that to people being, 'God is not real, God is dead.' (YUSTP054).

This participant expressed both relief and discomfort at the chance to forge her own religious practice away from her home congregation. Another participant said:

This campus is very atheist, so I guess that kind of rubbed off on me, no one else was religious, at least anyone that I encountered at the time. So I just was with everyone else. (YUSTP040)

For some religious students, the liberal campus climate is challenging. For others, it expanded their horizons and enabled them to discard traditional values. American students scored high on endorsing choice and change. One student declared: "I'm pro-everything. Pro-whatever you want to be, people of America" (YUSTP042).

College was also a chance for some non-religious participants to explore religiosity:

I was just raised totally non-religious, and that was just never a part of my life, it wasn't something I thought about in relation to myself. [...] But I also have recently felt some sort of, like, stronger connection, and had some experiences that definitely have changed how I'm thinking about religion. And like, I don't call myself religious, but I just – yeah, I guess I just really don't know where I stand right now. And that's definitely changing. (YUSTP015).

In many ways, the American pattern reflects a heightened version of the overall YARG student pattern in relation to religious change: those who became less religious, those who remained non-religious, and those who became more religious all expressed a low-CONS, high-LA value profile. At the same time, the largest subgroup, those who were born religious and remained religious, exhibited high conservation and low liberal attitudes. The latter represents students who maintained their own religious outlook despite liberal campus climate. To judge from our sample, the liberal-conservative gap is smaller than we might have imagined, as indeed some researchers are claiming (Harari, 2018). Across the board, participants in our survey placed great emphasis on individual choice and showed that the zeitgeist is growing increasingly tolerant of certain social issues, whether conservative or liberal. Freedom of choice is a hallmark of American millennials (Keysar & Piltzecker, 2016). American participants often chose to reject old labels, and expressed a need for new, more freewheeling options:

I would say I'm spiritual. But I wouldn't put that in any kind of – because I'm not Buddhist, I don't think I observe enough about that to consider myself Buddhist. But I definitely absorb some of their practices – I really feel like, a connection with the religion, and I really like it, but I wouldn't say, like, "I'm a practicing Buddhist" – But I feel like I can take pieces – I tend to believe in a multitude of things. So to devote myself to one thing is not conducive. (YUSTP027)

#### (b) Case study 2: Poland

While the current political polarization in Poland has its historical roots in the first years of transformation from communism to democracy and capitalism, which started in 1989, it was strengthened, politicized and clearly articulated during the parliamentary elections of 2005. The winner party, Law and Justice, called for "solidarity Poland" and opposed it to "liberal Poland". The latter label was assigned to opposition parties including the liberal Civic Platform. The political program of Law and Justice party emphasizes the need for an increased role of the state. The party encourages nationalism, Christian values, anti-liberalism, critical attitudes towards the European Union and anti-immigration movements. Attempts to dismantle democratic institutions were met with fierce reaction of the liberal opposition. The political cleavage reflects a real division in society (Bojarowicz, 2017, p. 11), but the instrumentalization of this division in political debate resulted in a deeper and more profound social cleavage. The polarization of political debate became even more pronounced after the Smolensk plane crash in 2010, in which many of the most prominent politicians and officials were killed.

Religion plays an important role in social and political polarization. The Catholic Church is the largest and most influential religious institution, with nearly 90 % of Poles declaring themselves to be Catholics. The partnership between the Church, or at least some organizations within the Church, and the conservative government is welcomed by ruling party supporters and criticized by some opposition parties and social movements. The role of religion in political debates is visible in public debates that revolve around such issues as abortion, in vitro, same-sex marriages and the pace of religion in the public sphere. However, it cannot be said that the church exclusively defines itself as an institution belonging to the conservative camp because the church itself is divided. To a certain degree, the political and social divide translates into the liberal Catholicism/conservative Catholicism divide. The rhetoric of two Catholic churches co-existing in the Polish religious landscape reflects political polarization in general (Ramet, 2014, p. 43).

The CONS/LA polarization, strengthened and shaped by the main cleavage on the political scene, is also visible among young adult university students. It manifests itself in attitudes toward the Catholic Church, immigration crisis, national tradition, self-realization, and free choice. Students who hold CONS values were or still are actively engaged in religious activities such as being altar servers (YPLSS329), members of church-affiliated religious movements or communities (YPLSS077P; YPLSS009P) or attending a summer camp organized by the church (YPLSS033P). Religiosity itself is a predictor of CONS values, but the effect seems to be much stronger for those participants who are active church-goers.

CONS values are cultivated in a community. Some interviewees point to a tension between a religious community which plays a role in their life and general society or the peer environment which cultivated alternative, usually more liberal, values. Religious communities provide support for those types of values which are not dominant among students. One of the interviewees describes this experience as “having our own world”:

We laughed that we had our own world because people who did not go to the community thought that only – such holy persons, as it were, go there. And why go there at all? Well, because we stayed together - we did not attack other persons and those persons did not [attack] us but – it felt like – it was one world, such security, that – that – someone understands me. (YPLSS009P)

However, this is not a closed world. Even those who hold CONS values are open to alternative values and ready to change their worldviews. Another student, who expresses aversion to new-age spirituality and declares attachment to Christian values, is nevertheless open to change:

I have already come to terms with the fact that probably by the end of my days I will be able to call myself an eclectic combining terribly different traditions. I do not have in mind religious traditions but political ones, or beliefs in general. I think I can reasonably combine conservatism with very – I would say, progressive [beliefs] or rather – beliefs transforming society, that is, with something that has nothing to do with conservatism. (YPLSS329)

A different sort of need for change is emphasized by a non-religious student thus:

My worldview is that – today, everything should just change, evolve so that we could live a better life in this world. It is a well-known fact that this is not the safest and nicest place, so being oriented to change and redefinition of one’s own worldviews may contribute to that we will live a better life in this world. (YPLSS162P)

Freedom of choice is also very important, but it is also problematic. It requires self-consciousness, self-knowledge and the ability to act in a world of many possibilities.

On the one hand, it is great that we can choose – from a range of possibilities. But on the other hand, there is a stress because of too many possibilities – Without any help and self-consciousness, we may choose nothing or, what is worse, make a bad choice. (YPLSS162P)

### (c) Case study 3: Israeli Jews

Israel is a country fractured by multiple conflicts, external (the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; the ongoing conflict with most of the Arab nations) and internal (the religious-secular conflicts, ethnic and political conflicts). The protracted nature of the conflicts has led to an increase in right-wing political attitudes, while terrorism threats have led to an increase in valuing security, safety and other conservative values. Religion plays an important role in social and political polarization, with a strong and consistent correlation to socially conservative attitudes and right-wing politics. In contrast, university campuses in Israel are strongholds of liberal values and secularity. What happens to Israeli students in terms of religiosity and liberal/conservative attitudes?

In our interviews, many participants expressed a fatigue of politics, perhaps as a result of the tense fast-paced conflict and perhaps as a result of the legally-debated corruption in the Israeli political system. Although there were some exceptions to this rule, many participants avoided all but basic civic duties:

P: I read anything I can. Anything that isn't politics. I don't like reading about politics.

I: You don't get involved in politics?

P: Sometimes, it depends. When it's election time I get into it, because you need to vote. I try not to, because it is so dirty, I just don't like it. (YISAM004)

In several of the interviewees' narratives, especially males who served in the Israeli Defense Forces in combat positions, there was a sense of disillusionment and despair that change could ever happen. Although the narratives sound quite conservative ("nothing changes"), underlying them is a lost dream of liberalism:

I see Israel becoming more and more tribal, and the tribes can't deal with each other – religious, Arabs, national religious, secular – and it seems like it will be much more difficult to hold a political structure here, national, whatever. And the forces that I don't believe in, they are changing my environment to an environment that I don't want to see. (YISAM092)

Participant YISAM085 expresses a feeling that liberalism cannot be sustained in Israel:

I come from a family which is very liberal and very feminist, um, very people-loving, um and often I feel that the values of my family which I grew up with, and the values of my friends or the values this country is founded on, just clash. (YISAM085)

The connection between religion and state in Israel was noted and strongly rejected by most secular participants:

Once you mix religion with politics, it's toxic, it's not good. [...] I even believe that there is a clash between liberal democratic values, and religion. Because the Bible is about commands, guidelines that we get from God. He doesn't talk to us about our rights. And – we didn't get human and civil rights from God or the Bible. [...] The role of religion is – if there are people who derive a meaning for their life from it, then good for them. They can have it, enjoy, I'm fine with that. But once religion enters politics, it limits the freedoms of other people. And – that is wrong. (YISAM108)

Third World War, um, will take place, um, against the evil forces, which is, from my perspective, religion. It'll be with religious countries. (YIAM085)

Some religious participants saw things differently, supporting the merging of state and religion in Israel and rejecting liberalism:

The Torah will still always be true. It doesn't matter if there are trends, like feminism, doesn't matter, liberalism, whatever. The Torah will always be relevant. (YISAM93)

However, some intellectual liberal-religious participants did make an effort to blend religiosity and open-mindedness:

I'm a religious guy. [...] So there are all kinds of conflicts that I run into a lot, and each time I make a decision, I come from more of a thinking place and less following things blindly. – I think it was in high school when we began actually learning things more- you can't avoid it, academic studies do that to you, like, make you think and criticize. Like, to know, to try

and investigate, ask questions. Why this and why that. So yes, it's from that place.  
(YISAM103)

## 11.6 Discussion

Previous studies have shown that religious people tend to be politically conservative, and to support existing social arrangements. The evidence linking religiosity and conservative social attitudes extends across social policy attitudes (issues such as same-sex marriage or abortion) and political attitudes (voting patterns). Typically, the power of religions draws on traditions, authority figures and in-groups, which makes its connection to conservative attitudes clear.

Today, public disagreements have arisen around attitudes towards sources of authority and “outsiders” in general. Do we support their rights to equality? Such questions frame the political debate in many societies and raise the question of whether religion has an important role to play in promoting conservative values and attitudes and in eschewing liberal ones.

The YARG sample concentrates on emerging adults (Arnett, 2007). This developmental phase is marked by exploration in such areas as work, love and ideology. The sample also shares the fact of being college or university students. While these two attributes mean that the study is not representative of the population as a whole, it offers us an in-depth look at the young people who are destined to become the leaders of tomorrow. This sample also allows us to consider the effects of being in an academic, typically highly liberal atmosphere, on students’ attitudes as they reflect on this in the interviews.

Our quantitative findings are generally consistent with the research literature. We found via path analyses that religion affects ideology both directly and indirectly. There is a direct relationship between religiosity and positions on issues such as homosexuality and same-sex marriage. In addition, there is also an indirect relationship in which religiosity is related to values, which in turn are related to ideology. Gender was found to have minor effects, and remains mostly insignificant in these social attitudes.

An added insight of our analyses regards the measurement of religiosity. Self-assessment of religiosity was the best indicator of one’s actual level of religiosity, performing better than self-reported religious practice and self-reported religious belonging. Apparently, this scale is less ambiguous for young adults across different cultures and is less susceptible to social desirability, such as reporting on participation in religious services.

We also offered a new way of grouping a set of values from Schwartz’s Theory of Basic Human Values (Schwartz, 2007, 2012, 2017). We juxtaposed “Conservation” to a new construct which we termed “Liberal attitudes” (LA) which is a combination of self-direction and universalism values, rather than to the commonly used “Openness to Change” construct. We believe that the fact that CONS and LA values are not fully opposite each other on the value-circle explains how it is possible,

although rare, to be liberal in some aspects and conservative in others. CONS and LA are negatively correlated, because some of their underlying values directly contradict each other: self-direction-thought conflicts with tradition-values, since insisting on traditional ideas and beliefs would limit freedom of thought, while self-direction-action conflicts with conformity-rules, since always following rules constrains the freedom to decide what to do. However, the values are not fully opposed, because CONS is strongly related to social considerations of belonging and loyalty, while LA is strongly related to ethical considerations of tolerance and concern for the weak. It is not impossible to feel positively towards both ingroup and outgroups (Brewer & Miller, 2010).

This brings us full circle to the relation between religiosity and conservative/liberal attitudes: Religion achieves its often-positive effects through social cohesion and social support. It creates a real community, not just an imagined one, through rituals, identity definitions, shared experiences and limitations on outgroup interactions. Much effort is put into those behaviors which mark identity boundaries. Acts of exclusion determine the identities of large and small groups, and social categorization is highly effective in creating barriers and outgroup rejection. Religious congregations are cohesive, and provide strong social support to their members, but at the cost of exclusivism and the risk of prejudice against those of other faiths and ethnicities. However, while this is true in the aggregate, it does not account for liberal religions, liberation theology or those religious denominations that support change and humanism, such as Reform and Conservative Judaism (a liberal religious stream despite its historically-derived name), Unitarian Universalism, and Progressive British Islam. This brings us to the nuanced distinctions of the qualitative analysis.

The themes uncovered in the respective case studies took us in different directions. In the US case study, we highlighted the transitions that university students undergo when they leave home and encounter new values in their new settings. The Polish case study discussed how the values encountered in religious communities are understood from the perspective of those engaged in them. The Israeli case study explores values in relation to surrounding political and religious tensions. These different emphases reflect the cultural milieus of these case studies: in the United States, diversity and democratic stability are strong, despite recent upheavals. Personal security is high, and university students enjoy the freedom to choose, deliberate, and experience diversity on campus. All these cultural attributes are apparent in the American participants' narratives, which focus on choice, autonomy and self-expression in relation to religion and to politics. In Poland, the cultural climate is homogeneous: nearly 90% of the population shares a Catholic religious background and the democratic culture is far less stable. In this climate, it is easier to see micro-level differences between conservatism among the actively religious and those who are not. While the link between religious participation and CONS values was less apparent in the quantitative analyses, it still surfaced in the context of a consistently religious country such as Poland.

In Israel, tensions run high; threats to personal security abound and society is deeply fractured, but Israel also has a sound democratic history, with universities in

Israel acting as liberal strongholds. This potent mixture of tensions and values leads to politics-fatigue, disillusionment with liberalism and religious-secular polarization among the students we interviewed. Even so, the religious-conservative versus secular-liberal dichotomy was found to sometimes break down.

Thus, while quantitative macro-level findings presented clear trends of the relation between religiosity and conservatism, the micro-level, culturally contextual findings distinguished some important sub-types among each national group and identified nuances in how these values come into play. Future research on the role of culture in mitigating the interplay between religion, values and ideology will further enhance our understanding of these complex interactions.

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