

## Chapter 9

# The Relation Between Moral Attitudes and Political Identity

**Tuuli-Marja Kleiner**

*Thünen Institute of Rural Studies, Germany*

**Reinhold Melcher**

*Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, Germany*

### **ABSTRACT**

*This study investigates how moral values structure the left/right identification of citizens. Specifically, this chapter reconnoitres how moral attitudes relate to the political fringes on both sides compared to economic attitudes. Using pooled data drawn from the World Value Survey (WVS) and the European Value Survey (EVS), this chapter calculates point-biserial correlation coefficients for 12 European countries at different points in time (1982-2014). The findings indicate that (1) both cultural and economic aspects determine mass political identification, (2) the significance of cultural aspects seems higher in traditional countries, (3) all influences remain largely stable over time. In addition, (4) this chapter identifies an unexpected pattern: while the economic dimension structures the political realm quite evenly, moral orientations seem to be divided into the ‘moral universalists’ on the left pole and the ‘moral conservatives’, who consider themselves as either moderate or rightist.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3677-3.ch009

## INTRODUCTION

Since the French Revolution, the political realm has been divided into opposing camps (Bobbio, 1996, p. 2), and for more than two centuries, the two antithetical terms ‘left’ and ‘right’ have been used to summarise and describe two sides of political axes of tension based on conflicts in the basic structures of social systems (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Such societal lines of conflict (cleavages) can be translated into party differences, whereas the left-right metaphor usually serves as an overarching spatial orientation scheme that can incorporate different types of conflicts and meanings (Knutsen, 1995, p. 87).

Historically, in Western societies the conflicts underlying the (industrial) polarisation ‘left vs. right’ were either related to economic inequalities and the question of the desirability of a market economy (Knutsen, 1995, p. 65) on the one hand, or to the struggles between religious and secular forces over the role of the state and the Catholic Church on the other.

In the 1980s, various social scientists argued that Western societies were being transformed, with a ‘new’ axis emerging against the old axes of tension and conflict. This new axis is fundamentally cultural in nature (Bornschieer, 2010; de Vries, Hakhverdian, & Lancee, 2013; Hunter, 1994; Inglehart, 1990; Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008; Kitschelt & Hellemans, 1990; Kriesi et al., 2008). Others argue that no new conflict of values has emerged and that instead a redefinition of the existing cultural dimension has taken place (Bornschieer, 2010, pp. 420, 434; Knutsen, 1995).

However, like social-structural contradictions, cultural antagonisms remain latent with regard to the political struggle as long as they are not interpreted politically (Fuchs & Klingemann, 1990, p. 223). For social divisions to become relevant for the political realm, a socio-political articulation is necessary (Freire, 2006, p. 361). Likewise, they can only become “defining forces of public life” (Hunter, 1994, p. 2) if competing views of what is good and true, as well as fundamental disagreement between opposing visions, are (1) translated into ‘the language of politics’ and (2) made tangible by specifying them in terms of beliefs about socially acceptable behaviour (social norms; Minkov, Blagoev, & Hofstede, 2013, p. 1095) <sup>1</sup>.

A clear indicator for the significance of values and beliefs in the political realm is the way in which cultural stances influence the left/right self-positioning of citizens – a central dimension of their political identification (de Vries et al., 2013, p. 224; Jost et al., 2008; Piurko, Schwartz, & Davidov, 2011). It has been shown that morally charged issues can drive citizens apart (Fiorina, 2011; Jacoby, 2014). We therefore assume that political issues related to moral questions are particularly suitable for structuring mass political self-placement. Thus, this chapter explores how moral values are associated with the left/right identification of citizens (a) in different countries and (b) over time. Specifically, the chapter investigates how

25 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: [www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-relation-between-moral-attitudes-and-political-identity/257979](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-relation-between-moral-attitudes-and-political-identity/257979)

## Related Content

---

### Football: A Metaphor for Society

Alessio Drivet (2025). *Global Perspectives on Soccer and the Media and Entertainment Industry* (pp. 213-236).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/football/363349](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/football/363349)

### Identifying Forward and Backward Linkages From China's Infrastructure Investment in Africa

Ehizuelen Michael Mitchell Omoruyi (2021). *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* (pp. 1-31).

[www.irma-international.org/article/identifying-forward-and-backward-linkages-from-chinas-infrastructure-investment-in-africa/272582](http://www.irma-international.org/article/identifying-forward-and-backward-linkages-from-chinas-infrastructure-investment-in-africa/272582)

### Identifying Forward and Backward Linkages From China's Infrastructure Investment in Africa

Ehizuelen Michael Mitchell Omoruyi (2021). *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* (pp. 1-31).

[www.irma-international.org/article/identifying-forward-and-backward-linkages-from-chinas-infrastructure-investment-in-africa/272582](http://www.irma-international.org/article/identifying-forward-and-backward-linkages-from-chinas-infrastructure-investment-in-africa/272582)

### China's Infrastructure Financing and the Role of Infrastructure in Awakening African Economies

Michael Mitchell Omoruyi Ehizuelen (2021). *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* (pp. 1-25).

[www.irma-international.org/article/chinas-infrastructure-financing-and-the-role-of-infrastructure-in-awakening-african-economies/279131](http://www.irma-international.org/article/chinas-infrastructure-financing-and-the-role-of-infrastructure-in-awakening-african-economies/279131)

## A Comparative Examination of Developments in the Modern Civil Service in South Korea and the Philippines and Their Divergence After the Post-War Era

Ador R. Torneo, Enzo Miguel M. De Borja, Junmo Kim and Seung-Bum Yang (2025). *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* (pp. 1-21).

[www.irma-international.org/article/a-comparative-examination-of-developments-in-the-modern-civil-service-in-south-korea-and-the-philippines-and-their-divergence-after-the-post-war-era/382477](http://www.irma-international.org/article/a-comparative-examination-of-developments-in-the-modern-civil-service-in-south-korea-and-the-philippines-and-their-divergence-after-the-post-war-era/382477)