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# Political Identity Movement in Times of Crisis: The Impact of Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Economic System Justification on Political Views during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Argentine immigrants in Israel

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## ABSTRACT:

This study aims to analyze how Social Dominance Orientation, Right Wing Authoritarianism and Economic System Justification can influence the public's opinion of the government and possibly shift political ideological views during the coronavirus pandemic. The sample was composed of 205 Argentinian immigrants living in Israel, ages ranging from 20 to 78 years old ( $M = 51.95$ ;  $SD = 14.10$ ), of both sexes (Men = 47.3%; Women = 52.7%). Our results show that there is a strong correlation between Social Dominance Orientation, Right Wing Authoritarianism, Economic System Justification and supporting a liberal-capitalist state as opposed to a social-democratic state. These positions intensified with the coronavirus pandemic. Future research should be conducted after the coronavirus pandemic ends.

**KEYWORDS:** Right-wing Authoritarianism, Social Dominance Orientation, Economic System Justification.

## INTRODUCTION

Political views are one of the ways we can describe individuals, as they vary in their political ideology. While some people believe that governments should be more involved, should develop the economy through state measures, introduce social welfare programs, and carry out social planning, others believe in less government intervention, less regulation, and a liberal capitalist state that leaves social development to the mercy of economic laws (Lavelle, 2005).

Political views can change throughout an individual's life. In times of crisis, a modification of historical narrative that introduces convergence, singularity and deviation (Figueroa, 2003) these variations can be much greater. In times of crisis, citizens often become more insecure which may lead to a change in political views (Hillebrand, 2020). Recent studies began to highlight the erosion of trust in government capacity and transparency, as well as the overabundance of information and fake news that put mental health at risk during the health crisis (Dong & Bouey, 2020). A study carried out in the Netherlands during Influenza A

highlights that trust towards the government before the pandemic was high and then decreased significantly during the course of the pandemic ( van der Weerd et al., 2011).

The world is currently in a time of crisis as it grapples with the coronavirus pandemic and there is not yet enough research on how this crisis is affecting the change in political views in immigrants. This particular group is part of the cultural minority and could experience higher stressors in times of pandemic, without a community support system and with more adverse psychological consequences ( Taylor, 2019). The coronavirus pandemic as a high-stress life experience may be shifting the political views of immigrant populations. In particular, Argentinian immigrants in Israel have been pointed out as a minority group who are presented with strong stressors ( Klor, 2016; Babis, 2016; Simkin, 2020). There are other views that could impact an individual's political views, which are explained by three main social psychology theories: Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA), and Economic System Justification (ESJ).

## **Social Dominance Orientation and Shift in Political Views due to the Coronavirus Pandemic**

Pratto et al., ( 1994) argue that societies minimize group conflict by agreeing on ideologies that promote one group's superiority through social dominance orientation theory (SDO). SDO gives us an indication of whether people believe in a more equal or unequal society. Pratto et al., ( 1994) found that people who are more social-dominance oriented will favor hierarchy-enhancing ideologies and those who are less social-dominance oriented, favor hierarchy-attenuating ideologies. By testing the acceptance of hierarchy-attenuating and hierarchy-enhancing myths we aim to evaluate beliefs of social equality in Israel. SDO is related to how people believe society should be structured and is therefore related to political ideology. Pandemics are often marked by uncertainty, confusion and a sense of urgency ( WHO, 2005). As the current crisis' nature impacts people's beliefs and behaviors, SDO assists in understanding people's shift in beliefs of political-economic conservatism, meritocracy, and social policy attitudes. As people's beliefs may have changed due to the coronavirus pandemic, SDO is used as an important indicator of whether people are supportive of a libertarian politics or more of a social welfare state ( Pratto et al., 1994).

## **Right Wing Authoritarianism and Shift in Political Views due to the Coronavirus Pandemic**

Right Wing Authoritarianism contains within it conventionalism, authoritarian aggression, and authoritarian submission. Its purpose is to measure the willingness of the citizens of the state to "surrender" to the authorities and maintain what is perceived as a legitimate social norm while being hostile to people who do not adhere to them ( Altemeyer, 1981; Zakrisson, 2005). Karwowski et al. ( 2020) claims that the coronavirus pandemic can lead to anxiety about the dangers and the unknown, such as the economic and health situation. More so, people will become more socially conservative and closed off. People look for stability in their lives in an expected world, however, due to the uncertainty that this virus brings, stability is not possible. Therefore, even those who advocate freedom become less open, to the point of radical change in their political views and can "turn right" into social conservatism as they urge for a strong leader to lead them in uncertain times ( Karwowski et al., 2020). Karwowski et al. ( 2020), in the same way as Han ( 2016), argue that in times of growing inequality people become more radical and turn to radical right parties who offer to defend existing social boundaries. As people's views are affected in times of crisis, we used right-wing authoritarianism to try and understand shifts in political views as they are impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

## Economic System Justification and Shift in Political Views due to the Coronavirus Pandemic

According to Kay and Joost (2003), Economic System Justification (ESJ) allows us to understand the variance in people's motivation to accept and support the societal status quo by measuring system justifying beliefs. By understanding the intergroup relations and prejudice towards outgroups we have a better knowledge of how people believe society should be structured. Pandemics can greatly affect the economy and societal infrastructure (Taylor, 2019). As people differ in their tendency to support social, economic and political systems, ESJ helps us understand if people believe that society is fair and just (Kay & Joost, 2000). The Israeli government has used several tactics and programs in their national response to the coronavirus pandemic. People may have shifted their perception of economic system justification and their political views due to different government actions during the coronavirus pandemic.

### The current study

The current study aims to exemplify how SDO, RWA and ESJ can influence the public's opinion of the government and possibly shift political ideological views during the coronavirus pandemic. Our study focuses on the specific population of Argentinian immigrants to Israel and their shift in political views during the coronavirus pandemic. A study like this has not yet been conducted and will serve as a case study for how government responses to crises such as a pandemic have the ability to shift political views.

## METHOD

### Participants

Our sample was composed of 205 Argentinian immigrants living in Israel. The age range was from 20 to 78 years old,  $M = 51.95$ ;  $SD = 14.10$ , of both sexes (Men = 47.3%; Women = 52.7%).

### Measures

#### *Social Dominance Scale*

The Social Dominance Orientation Scale (SDO; Joost & Thompson, 2000) used in this research is a modified 10-item scale which measures if people believe in a more equal or unequal society. The original scale was made by Pratto et al., (1994) however we decided to use the Argentina version (Etchezahar et al., 2014) in order to better research our analysis unit, Argentinian immigrants to Israel. The scale tests the acceptance of hierarchy-attenuating and hierarchy-enhancing myths to evaluate people's beliefs in social equality. People who are more social dominance oriented will favor hierarchy-enhancing ideologies and those who score lower on SDO, favor hierarchy-attenuating ideologies. Responses were given using a 5 point Likert scale, measuring from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Those who score higher on the SDO scale will favor what maintains or increases social inequality. Those who score lower on the SDO scale will choose what reduces inequality. In this study reliability for SDO was adequate ( $\alpha = .860$ ).

### *Right Wing Authoritarian*

Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA; Zakrisson, 2005) measures a social attitude dimension of conventionalism, authoritarian aggression, and authoritarian submission. We used the short version of the Right-Wing Authoritarian scale, composed of 15 items; this was reduced from the original 30 item RWA scale. We used the Argentinian version which is an adaptation from Etchezahar et al., (2011). Responses for the new 15 item scale are measured from 1 (very negative) to 7 (very positive). This is a one-dimension scale, meaning one can be more or less RWA oriented. In this study reliability for RWA was adequate ( $\alpha = .819$ ).

### *Economic System Justification Scale*

The System Justification Scale (ESJ; Kay & Joost, 2003) measures the variance in people's motivation to accept and support the societal status quo by measuring system justifying beliefs. The scale consists of 8 items which aim to assess motivations to perceive the status quo as reasonable, fair, stable and legitimate. We decided to use the Argentinian adaptation (Etchezahar et al., 2014). Responses were given by using a 7-point Likert scale where answers are measured from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). In this study, reliability for ESJ was adequate ( $\alpha = .857$ ).

### *Shift in Political Views*

We created six questions to ask the subjects in order to analyze if the coronavirus pandemic had an influence in shifting their political views. In our first question, we aimed to measure the views of the individual on the health care system and whether or not the state should support it (1. I believe that the health system should be universal, free and of quality, and that the state should finance it). Our second question attempted to understand the perspective of the individual on police involvement (2. The intervention of the police forces to comply with the measures against the COVID-19 pandemic was necessary). In our third question, we asked whether or not the support of the subject for the government grew after the coronavirus pandemic began (3. After the COVID-19 pandemic, my support for the government grew). In our fourth question, we asked the subjects whether or not they support government intervention more so after the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic (4. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, I support more than before the government intervention in the economy). In our last two questions we asked whether subjects support a more liberal-capitalist state or more of a social-democratic state due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. (5. From the impact of COVID-19 I support a more liberal capitalist state than before; 6. From the impact of COVID-19, I support a more social-democratic state than before). In general, these questions aimed to evaluate whether or not subjects shifted their political views from more social-democratic to capitalist-liberal or vice versa due to the implications of the coronavirus pandemic. Answers were given in a 5-point Likert-type format, ranging from (1) completely disagree to (5) completely agree.

### **Procedure**

Selection of the cases was carried out by non-probability sampling. All the participants have agreed and completed the questionnaire voluntarily. Participants were explained that the results of the study and the data gathered would be used exclusively for scientific purposes in order of the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) code of ethics (Res, D No. 2857/06) and under Argentina's National Law 25.326.

## Data analysis

The statistical analysis was conducted by using EQS 6.4 (Bentler, 2006; Byrne, 1994) and IBM SPSS Statics 25 (Armonk, NY, USA) for Windows

## RESULTS

A correlation analysis was conducted in order to find the impact of the three scales on our questions of political views.

TABLE 1  
Correlations between variables of interest

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. UHCS	1										
2. PFI	-.009	1									
3. GS	-.124	.368**	1								
4. EI	.087	.186**	.444**	1							
5. LC	-.294**	.215**	.360**	.039	1						
6. DS	.222**	-.130	-.022	.328**	-.324**	1					
7. RWA	-.133	.256**	.333**	.055	.383**	.012	1				
8. ESJ	-.298**	.297**	.302**	.018	.565**	-.154*	.430**	1			
9. DG	-.194**	.094	.244**	.073	.492**	-.219**	.355**	.415**	1		
10. OI	-.447**	.094	.123	-.130	.497**	-.346**	.145*	.390**	.447**	1	
11. SDO	-.390**	.110	.208**	-.045	.580**	-.338**	.282**	.470**	.819**	.880**	1

Notes: UHCS= Support for Universal Health Care; PFI= Police Force Intervention Support; GS= Government Support; EI= Support for Economy Intervention; LC= Support for Liberal Capitalist State; DS= Support for Social Democrat State; RWA= Right Wing Authoritarianism; ESJ= Economic System Justification; DG= Group Dominance; OI= Orientation to equality; SDO= Social Dominance Orientation

Regarding RWA, there is a weak positive correlation ( $r = .256$ ,  $p < .01$ ) between Right Wing Authoritarianism and the intervention of police forces to comply with the measures against the coronavirus pandemic. There is a moderate positive correlation ( $r = .333$ ,  $p < .01$ ) between Right Wing Authoritarianism and the growth of government support after the coronavirus pandemic began. There is a moderate positive correlation ( $r = .383$ ,  $p < .01$ ) between Right Wing Authoritarianism and growth of support of a liberal-capitalist state after the coronavirus pandemic began

Regarding EJS, there is a weak to moderate negative correlation ( $r = -.298$ ,  $p < .01$ ) between Economic System Justification and the support of a universal and free health care system. There is a weak to moderate positive correlation ( $r = .297$ ,  $p < .05$ ) between Economic System Justification and the belief that the intervention of police forces was necessary to comply with the measures against the coronavirus pandemic. There is a moderate positive correlation ( $r = .302$ ,  $p < .05$ ) between Economic System Justification and the

growth of support for the government after the coronavirus pandemic began. There is a strong positive correlation ( $r = .565, p < .05$ ) between Economic System Justification and the growth of support of a liberal-capitalist state after the coronavirus pandemic began. The higher people are on the ESJ scale, the more they support a liberal-capitalist state. There is a weak negative correlation ( $r = -.154, p < .05$ ) between Economic System Justification and the growth of support of a more social-democratic state than before the coronavirus pandemic began.

Regarding SDO, there is a moderate negative correlation ( $r = -.390, p < .01$ ) between Social Dominance Orientation and the support of a universal and free health care system. There is a weak positive correlation ( $r = .208, p < .01$ ) between Social Dominance Orientation and growth of government support after the coronavirus pandemic began. There is a strong positive correlation ( $r = .580, p < .01$ ) between Social Dominance Orientation and growth of support of a liberal-capitalist state after the coronavirus pandemic began. The higher SDO, the more people support a liberal capitalist state. There is a moderate negative correlation ( $r = -.338, p < .01$ ) between Social Dominance Orientation and the growth of support of a more social-democratic state than before the coronavirus pandemic began. Subscales of SDO also found similar correlations, as seen in the table above ( $r = -.194$ ).

A regression analysis was then conducted in order to find the impact of the three scales on our questions of political views (Table 2)



TABLE 2  
Regression Analysis between variables of interest

		B	SE	Beta	T	Sig.
UH	(Constante)	5,680	,241		23,605	,000
	ESJ	-,027	,013	-,148	-2,024	,044
	SDO	-,051	,012	-,320	-4,390	,000
PFI	(Constante)	2,814	0,262		10,73	0
	RWA	0,028	0,014	0,153	2,076	0,039
	ESJ	0,043	0,014	0,231	3,136	0,002
GS	(Constante)	0,833	0,276		3,017	0,003
	RWA	0,048	0,014	0,245	3,382	0,001
	ESJ	0,04	0,015	0,197	2,716	0,007
LC	(Constante)	-,834	,264		-3,162	,002
	RWA	,029	,013	,131	2,259	,025
	ESJ	,074	,014	,325	5,163	,000
	SDO	,077	,012	,390	6,584	,000
DS	(Constante)	4,319	,318		13,585	,000
	RWA	,026	,015	,115	1,675	,095
	SDO	-,074	,014	-,372	-5,419	,000

Notes: UHCS=Support for Universal Health Care; PFI=Police Force Intervention Support; GS=Government; EI=Support for Economy Intervention; LC=Support for Liberal Capitalist State; DS=Support for Social Democrat State; RWA=Right Wing Authoritarianism; ESJ=Economic System Justification; DG=Group Dominance; OI=Orientation to equality; SDO=Social Dominance Orientation.

Regarding universal health, ESJ and SDO were found relevant. There is a negative relationship between people who are SDO / ESJ and support for the health system, which means that people believe that the system should not be egalitarian, free and universal.

Regarding intervention of police forces RWA and ESJ were found relevant. There is a positive relationship between people who are ESJ \ RWA and the belief that police force intervention is necessary to manage the coronavirus pandemic.

Regarding government support, there is a positive relationship between people who are high in ESJ \ RWA and the extent of their support for the government after the coronavirus pandemic began.

Regarding capitalist liberal support, a positive relationship has been found between RWA / ESJ / SDO scales and support for a more liberal-capitalist state than before the coronavirus pandemic.

Regarding social democratic state support a negative relationship was found between the SDO scale and support for a more social-democratic state than before the coronavirus pandemic.



## DISCUSSION

The body of literature that we have used enabled us to think that in times of crisis, individuals could undergo a variation in their political perspectives, either intensifying ( van Bavel, 2020) or supporting measures contrary to their visions in phases of greater uncertainty and fear ( van der Weerd et al., 2011). We have also seen that, in some situations, support for the government has decreased ( Dong & Bouey, 2020) and in others, depending on the phase of the pandemic, support for the government and the state increased or decreased ( Hillebrand, 2020)

### Political views and support

Our study has produced some significant correlations that enable us to affirm that the profiles of immigrants whose political perspective is more oriented to the right wing, in a pandemic situation, tend to increase their support for the government and affirm the need for police forces to take charge to enforce health measures. At the same time, this profile, contrary to what we predicted, affirms that its support for a liberal-capitalist state grew and its support for a social democratic state decreased. Due to the series of regressions carried out, we have highlighted those that we consider outstanding. These regressions could be explaining the post-pandemic variations and political intensifications. Those described within the RWA, ESJ and SDO scales find positive variations in relation to support for the government, the liberal capitalist state, and negative ones in relation to the free health system, and to the social democratic state.

### Access to information

We have also tried to put in tension the problem of information and access to it. In crises, the relationship with information is important to define the attitudes to follow. Consequently, if a political belief disbelieves from a type of information on the health crisis, its actions will be consistent with that belief ( Barrios & Hochberg, 2020). We have also seen that, in times of pandemic, political polarization, lack of physical contact and the increase in fake news, limit access to information that is contrary to the individual perspective ( van Bavel et al., 2020). In addition, there are works that affirm that, in situations of extreme uncertainty and fear, a situation of affective semiosis is generated, in other words, a single homogeneous vision of seeing the world, but as the crisis transits, this convergence enables the possibility of other interpretations, access to other visions or the possibility of thinking other perspectives ( Venuleo et al., 2020). Our study has not yielded relevant results in relation to this problem. The possibility is open for future debates on how information is interpreted, how governments manage the use of institutions to provide it, and how these intensify or modify political perspectives.

### Limitations

The greatest limitation of this study is regarding its small scope. This study was conducted on only 205 Argentinian immigrants to Israel and future studies would benefit from researching a greater number of subjects. In a future study, it would be interesting to see how political views of different sectors of the population change in relation to one another. It should be noted that this sample is not representative of the greater population in Israel and is solely representative of the Argentinian immigrant population in Israel.

We suggest comparing different immigrant populations' shifts in political views due to the implications of the coronavirus pandemic, such as African, Russian, North American, European and other immigrant

populations. As immigrants have more stressors affecting their views, it would also be interesting to compare the immigrant populations' shift in political views to the native Israeli population. Another interesting further study could compare the shift in political views between different countries with varying responses to the pandemic and disparities in public policy. For example, to compare the changes in political views between all the OECD countries.

Another limitation which arose in the research was limited access to data. As we are researching a rare occurrence, whether the current pandemic affects change in political views, our access to similar data was limited. It would have been interesting for this line of research to measure the change in political views before and after the coronavirus pandemic; a limitation of time constraint arose here. This was not possible in our study as the coronavirus pandemic is still prevalent in people's everyday lives and government decisions and policies are ever-changing. We recommend continuing further research where people are re-surveyed after the pandemic to understand political view shifts at a greater scale and with better accuracy.

## Conclusion

In our study we found that SDO, RWA and ESJ do indeed influence the public's opinion of government during the coronavirus pandemic. We discovered that there was a shift in the views of Argentinian immigrants' in Israel with regards to their political views and perception of the government from before to during the coronavirus pandemic. We initially predicted that the individuals who were more SDO, RWA and ESJ would move from supporting a more liberal-capitalist state to a more social-democratic state due to the implications of the coronavirus pandemic. It was interesting that we actually found the opposite in our results, that those who were more SDO, RWA and ESJ actually intensified their views and became more right-winged and more supportive of a liberal-capitalist state.

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