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Research Article

Dominant Religion, Radical Right-Wing, and Social Trust: An Empirical Investigation

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ABSTRACT

This paper empirically investigates the impact of dominant religion and radical right-wing political views on social trust, using data taken from the World Values Survey on 60 countries over the period 2010–2014. To supplement the existing literature, we consider both religion and political views at the same regression equation, and relatively recent data to reflect terrorism and anti-immigration policies in recent years. It is found that people living in Asian countries where Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Shintoism are the dominant religions trust others more than people living in Christian and Muslim countries. A plausible explanation is that Asian religions are closely related to the ethics of life regarding relations with neighbors, which may have a positive impact on trust among people. However, when classified according to the frequency of participation in prayer, it is observed that these religions may not have a distinctly discriminatory impact on social trust. The impact of radical right-wing political views on trust is negative and statistically significant, meaning that people with radical right-wing political views have a relatively lower social trust than others. The empirical results suggest that religion and political views influence trust and can be a factor in producing either harmony or division among people.

Keywords: Religion, Political View, Right-Wing, Social Trust



1. Introduction

Social trust is the “social glue” that connects different parts of society, allowing people to function in economically efficient, politically peaceful, and both democratically and culturally diverse and harmonious ways. Moreover, social trust connects people in society enabling them to conduct themselves safely and providing them with the relative ease with which to carry out daily activities such as driving, using public transportation, trading goods and services, socializing at local bars, cafes, and so on. (Dingemans, & Van Ingen, 2015).

This paper empirically investigates the impact of religion and political views on social trust. Therefore, the aim of the paper is to see whether people with different religious and political views have different attitudes towards social trust. Investigating the effect of religion and political views on social trust is important since social trust itself is a crucial factor in the development process. We briefly summarize the importance of social trust in economic and social development in the following pages. At the outset, we state that we intend to shed some light on the empirical side of the relationship between social trust and religion and political views. We already know from existing literature that the issue has not been settled since there are conflicting findings on the effect of religion and political views on social trust. Therefore, we believe that it is still worthwhile to investigate the topic with more empirical findings since theory can provide logical arguments about the effects of political views and religion on social trust in both negative and positive directions. We already know that the literature on social trust is rich. However, we do not know what the separate effects of religion and political views on social trust are when both are included in the same analysis. We also controlled the effects of different major religions present in a country. This, to the best of our knowledge, has not yet been done using World Values Survey (WVS) data.

Trusting others has been studied in economics over the last three decades since social trust is recognized as important in the promotion of economic growth and social development (Bjørnskov, 2012; Kwon, 2019). In other words, it is considered that without social trust, a country’s economy cannot perform well because transaction costs – costs in undertaking economic transactions by economic entities – would be too high. That is, trust contributes to economic efficiency in markets, to private provision of public goods, to social integration, to co-operation and harmony, to personal well-being, to democratic stability, and even to good health and longevity, as noted in Delhey & Newton (2003). This implies that finding individual and societal determinants of social trust is an important research topic. Moreover, You (2012) pointed out that “generalized interpersonal social trust is different from “institutional trust” (trust in institutions) or “political trust” (trust in political institutions, such as government) and “private trust” (trust in personal relationships).

This paper aims to focus only on trust in others with whom one has no personal relationship. We analyze the determinants of social trust among unknown people in a society. Specifically, this study attempts to examine whether trust can be affected by religiousness (or dominant religion) and right-wing political views. The relationships between religion and social trust, and between political views and social trust have been examined separately in the existing literature, and hence the investigation has not been exhausted. This paper takes into account both dominant religion and radical right-wing political views in the same regression and examines their impact on trust. In this analysis we also investigate whether there is a specific religion that is closely related to social trust.

It is of note that most of the previous literature on this topic used data collected before 2010. However, we use data collected by the World Values Survey over the period 2010–2014 (Sixth wave). These years are significant in terms of number of deadly terrorist attacks in the world. The Center for Systemic Peace¹ lists 712 bomb attacks on non-combatant (civilian and political) targets by non-state actors resulting in 15 or more deaths between 2010 and 2019. More than 61

1 The Center for Systemic Peace is a non-profit company founded in 1997 to conduct on innovative research of the problems of political violence under the global system (refer to <https://www.systemicpeace.org/>).

percent of these attacks took place between 2010 and 2014. These attacks mostly occurred in Islamic countries and among religious groups. We intend to supplement the existing literature by investigating the years in which there were many bomb attacks (namely, between 2010 and 2014), years in which there was political polarization in the world.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

This section gives, first, some theoretical perspectives and empirical findings that have already informed the topic or question. Second, in this section we look at the unaddressed puzzle, controversy, or paradox that this study addresses and, third, why it needs to be addressed. Fourth, we consider what is new in this study, and finally, we look at how our study fundamentally changes, challenges, or advances our understanding about social trust.

First, social scientists theoretically and empirically have been trying to understand the various aspects of social trust for more than three decades (e.g., Alesina & La Ferrara, 2002; Delhey & Newton, 2003; Newton, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Uslaner, 1999, 2000). All these studies, mostly theoretical, investigated, as is usually the case, either individual determinants of social trust, such as age, gender, income, social status, and education level, or societal determinants of social trust, such as membership of voluntary organizations, network of friends, and religious denominations that are connected to each other.

Second, although we have some understanding about the determinants of social trust, we believe that other aspects of social trust, such as individual religious and political views, are still worth investigating. It has been pointed out that social trust has been declining over the years (Rapp, 2016). The next section of this paper will shed light on how such decline is measured. We also address the question of how social trust relates to religiousness and political views, since there are some conflicting findings about the effects of these factors. Some studies find that religiousness and political polarization increase social trust, others find the opposite.

Third, this paper investigates how the degree of people's religiousness or behavior in regard to praying and political views relate to social trust. Specifically, people with radical political views are said to trust others less because political polarization is one important dividing line in social issues (Berning & Ziller, 2017; Rapp, 2016). In addition, Beugelsdijk & Klasing (2016) found that high diversity regarding political ideological values is related to lower social trust. Similarly, Duckitt (2001) and Duckitt & Parra (2004) investigated that radical-right-wing conservatives might not expect others to behave in a manner that promotes collective interests. Berning & Ziller (2017) addressed the issue of individual social trust decreasing radical right-wing populist party preferences. Other papers by Balliet et al. (2018) and Koivula et al. (2017) demonstrated that the level of trust among the supporters of populist parties is relatively low and higher levels of ideological conservatism are associated with lower concern with others' social value outcomes. Balliet et al. (2018) also supported the notion that, with increasing conservatism, concern for equality in social value outcomes decreases. The right and left distinction is one of the most useful and popular ways to classify the political ideology in the Western world, as in Erikson & Tedin (2003) and Balliet et al. (2018). Specifically, Balliet et al. (2018) examined that ideology is concerned with behavioral options and outcomes desired in the social decision-making process. Liberals (on the left of the spectrum) have more egalitarian consequences, whereas conservatives prefer more inequitable outcomes.

Meanwhile, there have been many studies which show the possible impacts of religion on social trust (e.g., Berggren & Bjørnskov, 2011; Daniel & Ruhr, 2010; Dingemans & Von Ingen, 2015; Grechyna, 2016; Olson & Li, 2015; Putnam & Campbell, 2010; Uslaner, 2002). The existing

literature reports conflicting results about the impact of religiousness on social trust.² For example, Uslaner (2002) stated that “religion has an uneasy relationship to trust,” whereas Putnam & Campbell (2010) stated that “religious people . . . are more trusting of just about everybody than are secular people.” Daniel & Ruhr (2010) showed that black Protestants, Pentecostals, fundamentalist Protestants, and Catholics trust others less than individuals who do not claim a preference for a particular denomination. They also suggested that liberal Protestants trust others more and this effect is reinforced by attendance at religious services.

Berggren & Bjørnskov (2011) stated that the negative impacts of religion on daily life could come about in two different ways: by how religiosity affects the religious and by how religiosity affects the non-religious. Religion may create a divide in society if those who believe see others as morally inferior and if they are more prone to condemn what they consider to be immoral behavior. Berggren & Bjørnskov (2011) used new data from the Gallup World Poll on 109 countries and 43 U.S. states to estimate the impact of religion on social trust in everyday life. The empirical results suggested that a robust and negative relationship exists between religiosity and social trust, both internationally and within the U.S.

Fourth, what is new in this paper? This paper investigates the effects of both political view and religiousness in the same regression. It also provides more evidence on the empirical side of the determinants of social trust by including religiousness and political views of individuals along with other determinants (investigated previously in the literature) in the same regression.

Therefore, our final aim is basically to advance our understanding of the relationship between religiousness, political views and social trust by giving more empirical evidence.

Based on the literature review above, we empirically test the following hypotheses in this study to provide more empirical evidence. We use WVS data for this since the WVS data set is the best suited for the hypotheses below.

Hypothesis 1: People of right-wing persuasion trust others less compared with the rest of the population.

Hypothesis 2: Religious people or those who pray frequently trust others less compared with those who seldom pray. Hypothesis 3: People living in countries with mostly Asian religions (Hinduism + Shintoism + Confucianism + Buddhism) have higher social trust.

The third hypothesis is based on the general perception that people who adhere to Asian religions look for harmony with society, nature, and other people, whereas Islam and Christianity look for justice. Justice, however, is more based on value judgement.

The following section uses statistical analysis to investigate the hypotheses.

3. Data

In this study, we use the data set of the sixth wave of the World Values Survey (WVS), covering 88,565 individuals from 59 countries around the world over the period 2010–2014.³ All variables, except for age, are designed as categorical or dummy variables with minimum and maximum values of zero and one, respectively. It should be noted that not all respondents answered all questions.⁴ Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics about the variables used in the regression analysis. For dummy variables, the mean values reported in Table 1 are the percentages of indi-

2 These conflicting results are summarized in Dingemans and Von Ingen (2015).

3 These may be downloaded from <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>.

4 For this reason, the number of observations used in the regression analysis is reduced to 59,559, as shown in Table 2.

viduals in the appropriate category for answering the questions. For example, approximately 25 percent (mean: 0.248) of 86,285 people replied in the affirmative to the statement “Most people can be trusted.” The sum of people who answered the same question by replying that we “need to be very careful” is 64,909 (75%). The question of trust is the dependent variable in the regression analysis. In addition, the independent variables include political view, age, education level, income level, marital status, employment status, sex, social class, frequency of prayer, and the dominant religion in the country where the respondent lives.

Before we proceed, it would be useful to give some methodological information. Some might question the applicability of the use of international data such as WVS in our analysis here. We state that there are some difficulties and limitations of using such a data set to compare the case of one country with others, but that there is also great usefulness in this. In terms of difficulty, the data set might not really define what the political left and the political right are. It leaves this to the respondent of the survey. Different countries give different meanings to these terms. However, the “political right” in many countries means more market-oriented policies and political ideas (this is almost the universal meaning of it economically). In addition, (social) trust as a concept might not be given the same meaning in every country in the sample, which consists of 59 countries. Social trust is also not defined in the data set. Respondents answer this question according to whatever meaning they “load” to the concept. However, we still think that there is some usefulness in the data set. One of the areas of its usefulness is the fact that it covers many different countries. Therefore, it provides one with great variation, which is needed for regression analysis. Another useful aspect of the data set is that it is an important survey about “values” of societies however they define those values. It gives researchers an opportunity to investigate the social values that have not been investigated before. The most important limitation of the data set is the fact that it does not follow the same person over different waves. Therefore, a panel regression analysis is not possible. However, we still get an idea about the relationship between social trust, political view, and religious behavior.

Though the paper tries to give a detailed account of different religions (at the aggregated level) and their effect on degrees of trust among people, we would like to mention at this stage that we cannot analyze the differences among people living in different countries with the same dominant religions. For example, we cannot see how a country such as Turkey has (di)similarities with other Islamic countries such as Algeria, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq Malaysia, Palestine, Pakistan, Tunisia, Qatar, and Yemen. All these Islamic countries may be different from one another in many aspects. These countries may be different at the trust level, and the determinants of social trust among Islamic countries can reveal different aspects of societies. For this, however, a different analysis is required, which might be a topic for another paper. Therefore, we would like to state at this stage that a religious block of countries may have both similarities and distinctions.

The next section gives some descriptive statistics about regression variables.

Table 1. Summary of descriptive statistics

Variables	Categories	Number of Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Most people can be trusted (Dependent Variable)	(1) Most people can be trusted	21,376	0.248	0.431	0	1
	(0) Need to be very careful	64,909	0.752	0.247	0	1
Self-positioning in political scale	(1) Right wing	5,489	0.081	0.273	0	1
	(0) The rest of the population	61,980	0.919	0.081	0	1
Age		88,382	41.998	16.568	16	102
Highest educational level attained	(1) No formal education	5,394	0.061	0.938	0	1
	(2) Incomplete primary school	5,018	0.057	0.232	0	1
	(3) Complete primary school	9,655	0.11	0.312	0	1
	(4) Incomplete secondary school: technical/ vocational type	6,619	0.075	0.264	0	1
	(5) Complete secondary school: technical/ vocational type	16,653	0.190	0.392	0	1
	(6) Incomplete secondary school: university-preparatory type	7,046	0.080	0.271	0	1
	(7) Complete secondary school: university-preparatory type	15,441	0.176	0.380	0	1
	(8) Some university-level education, without degree	6,552	0.075	0.262	0	1
	(9) University-level education, with degree	15,388	0.175	0.380	0	1
	Scale of incomes	(1) Lower step	6,947	0.081	0.919	0
(2) second step		6,310	0.074	0.262	0	1
(3) Third step		9,977	0.117	0.321	0	1
(4) Fourth step		11,774	0.138	0.345	0	1
(5) Fifth step		18,315	0.215	0.411	0	1
(6) Sixth step		1,311	0.154	0.361	0	1
(7) Seventh step		10,265	0.120	0.325	0	1
(8) Eighth step		5,765	0.068	0.251	0	1
(9) Ninth step		1,596	0.019	0.135	0	1
(10) Tenth step		1,256	0.015	0.120	0	1
Marital status	(1) Married	49,284	0.558	0.442	0	1
	(2) Living together as married	6,073	0.069	0.253	0	1
	(3) Divorced	3,347	0.038	0.191	0	1
	(4) Separated	1,659	0.019	0.136	0	1
	(5) Widowed	5,371	0.061	0.239	0	1
	(6) Single	22,587	0.256	0.436	0	1
Employment status	(1) Full time	27,839	0.320	0.680	0	1
	(2) Part time	8,054	0.093	0.290	0	1
	(3) Self employed	10,873	0.125	0.331	0	1
	(4) Retired	10,458	0.120	0.325	0	1
	(5) Housewife	13,365	0.154	0.361	0	1
	(6) Students	6,441	0.074	0.262	0	1
	(7) Unemployed	8,315	0.096	0.294	0	1
	(8) Other	1,693	0.019	0.138	0	1
Sex	Male	42,235	0.477	0.523	0	1
	Female	46,239	0.523	0.499	0	1

Social class	(1) Upper class	1,660	0.019	0.981	0	1
	(2) Upper middle class	17,230	0.201	0.400	0	1
	(3) Lower middle class	30,855	0.359	0.480	0	1
	(4) Working class	24,776	0.288	0.453	0	1
	(5) Lower class	11,374	0.132	0.339	0	1
How often you pray	(1) Several times a day	24,540	0.296	0.704	0	1
	(2) Once a day	14,670	0.177	0.382	0	1
	(3) Several times each week	9,016	0.109	0.311	0	1
	(4) Only when attending religious services	5,538	0.067	0.250	0	1
	(5) Only on special holy days	5,358	0.065	0.246	0	1
	(6) Once a year	1,635	0.020	0.139	0	1
	(7) Less than once a year	6,581	0.079	0.270	0	1
	(8) Never, practically never	15,504	0.187	0.390	0	1
Dominant religion in the country	Muslim	25,588	0.290	0.450	0	1
	Christian	47,546	0.540	0.500	0	1
	Hinduism + Shintoism + Confucianism + Buddhism	15,431	0.170	0.380	0	1

Note: The statistics are based on the data set provided by the World Values Survey.

Since we try to understand the impact of “religiousness” on social trust, this should be used as a variable that reflects some of the possible effects of religious culture. It is assumed that the frequency of prayer can show some degree of religiousness or at least it shows the degree of acceptance of religious culture. We organize this variable into a dummy variable using the WVS question of “Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you pray?” There are eight categories from which respondents can select only one that best defines them. Those eight categories are as follows: several times a day, once a day, several times each week, only when attending religious services, only on special holy days, once a year, less than once a year, and never.

Table 1 shows that 24,540 people, approximately 30 percent (mean: 0.296) of the sample, gave “several times a day” as the answer to the above question. The sum of people who answered the same question by saying “once a day” and “several times each week” was 23,686 (14,670 and 9,016 people, respectively), which is about 28.6 percent. Similarly, the sum of people whose answer to the same question was “only when attending religious services;” “only on special holy days;” “once a year;” “less often than once a year;” and “never” was 5,538; 5,358; 1,635; 6,581; and 15,504, respectively. These respondents constitute close to 42 percent of the whole, while those for whom ‘frequent prayers’ was the answer (the first three categories) represent almost 59 percent. This categorical variable is numbered from 1 (“several times a day”) to 8 (“never”), meaning the increased value signifies a lower degree of religiosity.

Another topic examined by this paper is whether social trust differs depending on the dominant religion. In order to do this we investigate countries in which high levels of trust are found to be present and which have a dominant religion such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Confucianism, atheism. Dominant here means more than fifty percent. For instance, Korea’s population is almost 57 percent atheist and hence Korea is classified in this paper as an atheist country. Turkey is classified as a Muslim country since 99.8 percent of the population is Muslim. Data on the percentages of different religions in a country are taken from the World Factbook, which is issued by the Central Intelligence Agency. In our survey 29 percent of the sample population lives in Islamic countries, 54 percent in Christian countries, and 17 percent in countries in which Hinduism, Shintoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, or atheism dominate.

Determining the impact of political views on social trust, we define a political variable through the WVS question of “Self-positioning in the political scale,” consisting of 10 categories. Categories 1 and 10 refer to political tendencies of the most left- and the most right-wing, respectively. For two reasons, we convert this variable to redefine and recode it into a new dummy variable (right-wing) of two values, one and zero. The first reason is that only around 75 percent of individuals answered this question. People seemed to be hesitant to answer a question about political views. Second, people who placed themselves in categories 5, 6, and 7 on the scale constitute more than half (53 percent) of respondents. That is, more than half the individuals are neutral rather than right- or left-wing.

The radical left-wing (about 7 percent) and radical right-wing (about 8 percent) represent a political polarization in a sense. That is, excluding the radical left- and right-wing, the total number of individuals accounts for 85 percent. Since we examine whether people with radical right-wing political views trust others more, we recode the variable by converting the category 10 to 1 and otherwise to 0, creating a new dummy variable for radical right-wing political views. As shown in Table 1, the percentage of people who define themselves as radical right-wing is 8.1 percent.

Some other explanatory variables are also included in the regression analysis. Except for age they are also categorical variables, some of which are ordered in an increasing order, such as education level, income scale, and social class. A number is assigned to each category, and the number increases as the order of the corresponding category changes. However, some categorical variables, such as employment status and marital status are not ordered. The mean values reported in Table 1 define the corresponding percentage of people who responded to the relevant categorical state or question. For example, those who define themselves as upper class constitute 1.9 percent of the total sample size.

4. Regression Results

The regression method uses probit analysis because the dependent variable is a binary variable: 1 (most people can be trusted) and 0 (need to be very careful). As already mentioned, the independent variables are the determinants of social trust, which have frequently been used in the existing literature (e.g., Alesina & La Ferrara, 2002; Delhey & Newton, 2003). The regression results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Regression results

Estimation Method	Probit analysis	
Dependent Variable	Most people can be trusted (WVS)	
Independent variables	Coefficient	Standard Error
Constant	-1.143***	0.067
Radical right-wing (political views)	-0.117***	0.022
Age	0.008***	0.001
Highest educational level attained (Reference category: No formal education)		
Incomplete primary school	-0.057	0.042
Complete primary school	-0.004	0.036
Incomplete secondary school: technical/vocational type	0.128***	0.037
Complete secondary school: technical/vocational type	0.102***	0.035
Incomplete secondary school: university-preparatory type	0.199***	0.038
Complete secondary school: university-preparatory type	0.221***	0.035
Some university-level education, without degree	0.368***	0.038

University-level education, with degree	0.364***	0.035
Scale of incomes (Reference category: First level)		
Second level	-0.003	0.031
Third level	0.019	0.027
Fourth level	-0.0003	0.027
Fifth level	-0.024	0.026
Sixth level	-0.010	0.027
Seventh level	0.060**	0.028
Eighth level	-0.006	0.032
Ninth level	0.221***	0.045
Tenth level	0.258***	0.049
Marital status (Reference category: Married)		
Living together	-0.0008	0.023
Divorced	0.017	0.029
Separated	-0.053	0.043
Widowed	-0.094***	0.027
Single	0.033**	0.016
Employment status (Reference category: Full time)		
Part time	0.046**	0.021
Self employed	-0.106***	0.019
Retired	-0.043*	0.023
Housewife	-0.105***	0.021
Student	-0.057**	0.026
Unemployed	-0.169***	0.022
Other	0.00004	0.043
Sex	0.034***	0.012
Social class (Reference category: Upper class)		
Upper middle class	-0.015	0.041
Lower middle class	-0.118***	0.041
Working class	-0.187***	0.042
Lower class	-0.219***	0.045
How often to you pray (Reference category: Several times a day)		
Once a day	-0.012	0.018
Several times each week	0.201***	0.020
Only when attending religious services	0.169***	0.024
Only on special holy days	0.179***	0.025
Once a year	0.406***	0.039
Less often than once a year	0.290***	0.023
Never, practically never	0.482***	0.017
Dominant religion in the country (Reference category: Hinduism + Shintoism + Confucianism + Buddhism)		
Muslim	-0.167***	0.020
Christian	-0.179***	0.017
Log pseudo likelihood		-31,209.37
Pseudo R ²		0.05
Wald χ^2 (21) (Prob. > χ^2)		3,102.22 (0.000)
Number of Observations		59,559

Note: ***: $p < 0.01$, **: $p < 0.05$, *: $p < 0.10$

In Table 2, the estimated coefficients of “Muslim” and “Christian” are negative and statistically significant (-0.167 and -0.179, respectively). This implies that people living in countries where the dominant religions are Muslim and Christian have less trust in others than people living in countries dominated by Asian religions, such as Hinduism, Shintoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. One plausible explanation is that Asian religions emphasize the ideals of harmony, compassion, and non-violence, perhaps in a more powerful way than the so-called Abrahamic

religions, as noted in Clobert et al. (2014). In addition, it is also possible that Asian religions are closely related to certain life ethics such as relations with neighbors, which may have a positive effect on the formation of trust among people.⁵

The estimation coefficients for the number of people who regularly pray, are positive and statistically significant, except for those who answered, “once a day,” meaning that people who participate a lot in prayer may have relatively low trust. It is also observed that those whose reply to the question about participation in prayer was either “seldom” or “never” are associated with a relatively high social trust compared to those who participate in it “frequently.” It is generally known that religious people within the same denomination or sect can have higher social trust among themselves. However, our regression finding, without controlling for denominations, implies that those who pray frequently have relatively low social trust. Theoretically or intrinsically no religion teaches its followers not to trust others per se. Nonetheless, our empirical finding is inconsistent with the results of some literature, such as Valente & Okulicz-Kozaryn (2020) who found that frequent participation in prayer can increase social trust. Hence, this result may be a case study (a group of countries in WVS for the years 2010–2014) in which participation in prayer may not have a distinct effect on the formation of trust.

Meanwhile, the impact of radical right-wing political views on trust is negative and statistically significant. That is, people with radical right-wing political views have a relatively lower trust. This result is consistent with the findings of the existing literature. Berning & Ziller (2017) provided evidence about a negative relationship between social trust and right-wing political views in the Netherlands. The existing literature also provides extensive evidence that radical right-wing populist parties attract electorates with low social trust (e.g., Marcel et al., 2002; Mudde, 2007; Norris, 2005). Berning & Ziller (2017) emphasized that right-wing politics is related to anti-immigrant policies and people with right-wing political views support an anti-immigrant stance. Stankov (2021) highlighted that populist politics contribute to the increased visibility of the right-wing parties and that terrorism linked to right-wing ideology is on the rise. It is also known that after the Syrian civil war started in 2010–2011, there has been the pressure of a great influx of immigrants flooding into European countries and radical right-wing political parties have been on the rise in terms of electoral support.⁶

Table 2 shows that the estimated coefficients of education level, social class, and income level are observed as expected, which is similar to the previous literature. That is, it appears that social trust increases according to education level, social status, and income level.

Lastly, we argue that right wing political ideology and religiosity play an important role on the level of trust. But some might raise the question that this may also be related to the level of social and economic development of a particular country, to the degree of political polarization and to the openness of the political system. In other words, economic and social development, political polarization, and openness of the political system can affect social trust in a country. Those economic, social, and political variables are important in gaining an understanding of the nature of social trust. If an aggregated analysis at the country level had been conducted, those socio-eco-

5 These results are not irrelevant to the fact that most bomb attacks and anti-immigration policies over the period 2010–2014, which is the sample period of this study, appeared in Muslim- and Christian-dominated countries, as described in Section I.

6 It should be noted that the above results can be analyzed more elaborately. That is, it may be possible to determine how the dominant religion affects trust in a group with the same political views, or how political views affect trust in a country dominated by a particular religion. This will be an interesting topic for future study and will complete the analysis of this paper.

nomic and political variables would have been measured somehow. For example, we would have needed to measure the openness of the political system or political polarization and included those factors in order to analyze the aggregated level of social trust. To address this point we need to add some remarks regarding the individual level of our analysis (59,559 persons or respondents). It would be necessary to include the above-mentioned variables if the study were conducted at an aggregated country level. However, our paper covers different countries at the individual level, and individual level social and economic variables such as the highest education level attained and income levels are included in the analysis.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

In this paper, we estimate the impact of dominant religion and radical right-wing political views on social trust. The association between religious practice (frequency of prayer) and social trust is also examined. We use data on the sixth wave of the World Values Survey, covering 88,565 individuals from 60 countries around the world over the period 2010–2014. This study uses a regression that simultaneously considers dominant religion and political views affecting social trust, and relatively recent data reflecting terrorism and anti-immigration policies in recent years.

The findings of the study show that people living in countries dominated by Asian religions, such as Hinduism, Shintoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism have higher trust in others than those living in countries dominated by Christianity and Islam. In addition, estimated results suggest that the frequency of participation in prayer may not have a distinct impact on social trust. On the other hand, the impact of radical right-wing persuasions on trust is negative and statistically significant, meaning that radical right-wing political views result in a relatively lower trust. Hence, those with right-wing political views and those who frequently pray trust others relatively less. These empirical findings suggest that religiousness and political views can be dividing factors in the world, which is confirmed in that anti-immigration sentiment and terrorist attacks are creating a divided world based on religion and/or political views.

In terms of our hypotheses listed in the previous section, we cannot reject any of the hypotheses based on our regression results. One of the main investigation points of this paper is to empirically test whether religiousness or religious behavior in terms of frequency of praying and political view can affect social trust. We found that people who are more religious and of right-wing persuasion do not have a higher social trust than others. After controlling the regression for many other independent variables we also found that people living in Asian countries have a higher level of social trust. This last finding is a new one since not many previous studies have investigated the same question or hypothesis in the same way.

As discussed in the text, social trust is important in many different aspects of social life such as income distribution, economic and social development, etc. Therefore, social trust has been a subject of investigation in many different social sciences or disciplines including economics, sociology, and political science to name a few (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2002; Delhey & Newton, 2003; Newton, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Uslander, 1999, 2000). Social trust is studied differently in different disciplines. In economics however, it is mostly studied empirically using different data sets.

Scholars in different disciplines choose to undertake different methods and analysis, depending on their question of study or investigation. Therefore, our paper is intended to contribute to the empirical literature about determinants of social trust. Our paper is different from many others in terms of data set and time span. We use the 6th wave of the WVS data set, which covers the years between 2010 and 2014. Our results tell us that in those years for the countries in the 6th wave,

listed in the appendix, social trust was affected by political view and religious behavior. The practical contribution of this paper is to add more evidence for the possible relationship between social trust and religious behavior and political view. In addition, and importantly, social trust is higher in countries where Asian religions (Hinduism + Shintoism + Confucianism + Buddhism) are dominant. What does this imply about economic variables? It is difficult to explore all the implications of this finding. However, we observe that all these countries with Asian religions experience have higher growth rates in their market oriented economic policies. Of course, this observation does not offer any causal relationship. It just offers a detailed future study in subject matter.

This paper empirically challenges some previous findings. It also advances or produces more evidence for some other findings in the previous literature. The subject matter is not exhausted with the current paper. There needs to be more studies, both empirical and theoretical, investigating the relationship between social trust, political view, and religious behavior.

There are of course some limitations to our paper. First, we use the 6th wave of the WVS. This sample covers 60 countries for a certain period (2010-2014). The study would have been much more comprehensive if all the waves would have been followed for the same countries.

For future research, we believe there is a need for a new data set. In addition, survey data should be implemented by the election results of some countries to see whether the said data confirm the election results or not. All these studies require further research and a new paper.

Ethics Committee Approval: Since the dataset of the study was obtained from a secondary source database such as the “World Values Survey”, this research is among the studies that do not require the approval of the ethics committee.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Author Contributions: Conception/Design of Study- S.H.A., J.H., N.K.; Data Acquisition- S.H.A., J.H., N.K.; Data Analysis/Interpretation- S.H.A., J.H., N.K.; Drafting Manuscript- S.H.A., J.H., N.K.; Critical Revision of Manuscript- S.H.A., J.H., N.K.; Final Approval and Accountability- S.H.A., J.H., N.K.

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Appendix. Countries in the 6th wave: Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belarus, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Cyprus, Ecuador, Egypt, Estonia, Germany, Ghana, Hong Kong, India, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Lybia, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Qatar, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Singapore, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United States, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Yemen, Zimbabwe.