

Political Positioning, Religiosity, and Perceived Costs of Having Children

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Abstract

The current study examines the relationship between the higher perceived cost of having children and social conservatism (in terms of right-wing political positioning and religiosity). The current online study included 227 participants in a convenience non-probability sample (age range: 19–57 years; *Mean* = 37.28; *SD* = 11.66; 216 female participants). Data was collected through an online survey that was conducted on the Google Forms platform. To determine if the effects of the higher perceived cost of having children on political positioning are the same across different levels of religiosity, we examined the nature of the moderating impact using AMOS-21 for SPSS. This study's results provide evidence that higher levels of religiosity strengthen the positive relationship between higher perceived costs of having a child and political conservatism. This link is evident in traditional societies since having children is strongly influenced by the instrumental values of children associated with upholding religious and traditional standards.

Keywords: Higher perceived costs of children, Religiosity, Political attitudes, Right-wing political positioning Conservatism.

1. Introduction

Issues relating to sex and reproduction are among the most contentious in contemporary politics; therefore, several recent studies have attempted to determine the relationship between sexual and reproductive beliefs and political ideology (Petersen, 2018). Individual perspectives on these issues may reflect individual differences in political ideology to a significant extent, according to research in political science and psychology (Haidt & Hersh, 2001). Abortion is typically opposed, and conservatives support abstinence. Contrarily, liberal people tend to support the abortion option and disagree with the idea that pre-marital abstinence is the only morally acceptable choice (Petersen, 2018). Numerous explanations have been used to explain this connection between people's political ideologies and their views on conception intentions. For example, liberals and conservatives have different cultures towards sexual relations and understanding of the family, and these disparities in cultures are what lead to variances in reproductive intentions (Haidt &

Hersh, 2001; Lakoff, 1996); that as conservatives tend to be more religious than liberals, the link is caused by religiosity (Olson et al., 2006).

There are significant individual variances in people's desire to care for children, their appeal, and their level of tenderness or protectiveness toward them (Buckels et al., 2015). However, this caring motivation can be differently triggered depending on motivation and context (Beall & Schaller, 2019). The persistence of what has been called a strong pronatalist culture may be evidenced by favorable attitudes toward having a baby (Park, 2005). This pronatalist culture is characterized by the conviction that having children benefits people's well-being, their families' well-being, and society's (Park, 2005). Even though a considerable body of research has now been done connecting differences in parenting motivation to different social attitudes and actions (Schaller, 2018), the influence attitudes toward babies have on social attitudes is undervalued (Kerry et al., 2022).

According to Kerlinger et al. (1976), social attitudes, such as conservatism, authoritarianism, and religiousness are complicated behavioral dispositions that involve cognitive assessments of social phenomena, accompanying emotional responses, and behaviors related to social events (Međedović, 2021; Petersen, 2018). Conservative ideology includes thoughts about the importance of family and parenthood, and this applies to political conservatism and religiosity, which are therefore important for the empirical investigation of the influence of attitudes toward babies to conservative ideology (Kerry & Murray, 2019). Perspectives on political attitudes contend that parenting motivation should be correlated with these beliefs as more socially conservative attitudes prioritize self-protection norms (Kerry & Murray, 2019).

This study examines the significance of the perceived costs of having children in forming ideology. In particular, it assumes perceived costs as a significant and scarcely researched factor concerning forming people's broader ideological stance (in terms of right-wing political positioning). Based on the notion that attitudes about sexual politics reflect, to a large extent, self-interested concerns about sex and are related to differences in the sexual strategies people pursue (Weeden & Kurzban, 2014), the current study examines whether the perceived costs of having children are related to specific social ideological attitudes such as religiosity and conservative ideology.

1.1. *Religiosity and Fertility Intentions*

According to Argyle and Beit Hallahmi (1975), religion is often described as a belief in a divine being that frequently accompanies acts of worship. Scholars have frequently observed that many religious communities encourage childrearing through their teachings on family values (Hayford & Morgan, 2008; McQuillan, 2004). According to Johnson et al. (2011) and Sewell (2005), these doctrinal messages can be thought of as schemas that people employ to decide how and why to act as well as to assess how other people behave. Research in religion and family typically emphasizes childrearing, especially on outcomes like fertility rates (Hayford & Morgan, 2008; Zhang, 2008) or fertility timing (Pearce & Davis, 2016). A pronatalist culture is maintained because having children is predicted by having a religious affiliation, being active in a religious society, and valuing one's faith (Uecker, 2021). Religion not only makes people less inclined to be childless, but it also makes it more likely that someone who wants to have a child would be upset if they did not (Uecker, 2021). Religiosity is linked to women's perceptions of the value of motherhood (McQuillan et al., 2015; Tichenor et al.,

2017).

Religiosity still influences people's decisions about having children, according to a large number of studies (Bein et al., 2021; Dilmaghani, 2019), and some findings even suggest that its significance has increased over time (Adserà, 2006). According to Bein et al. (2021), very religious people have less of an impact on fertility regarding perceived costs and advantages. Thus, how religiosity connects to and might affect perceived costs of having children arises because individual religiosity remains relevant for childbearing decisions. In addition, as there is a consistent positive correlation between religiousness and conservatism (Ludeke et al., 2013), this study examines whether religiosity moderates the relationship between the perceived costs of children and political positioning. The issue of how religiosity relates to and may affect the perceived costs of having children is significant because of the influence religiosity has on fertility intentions.

1.2. *Right-Wing Political Positioning and Fertility Intentions*

Conservatism is defined as "a political and social philosophy that supports traditional social institutions in the context of culture and civilization." Tradition, social hierarchy, authority, and property rights are the main elements of conservatism (Heywood, 2017). Research data suggest that social conservatives pay more attention to information warning of potential threats (Weber, 2015) and are more wary of physical threats than liberals (Crawford, 2017; Jost et al., 2003).

Differences in political positioning may be significant for attitudes toward babies because persons typically involved in or desire to be involved in childcare may be more motivated to promote stable, family-centered environments, making them more receptive to political policies that advance these objectives. For example, people more favorable toward babies may also have less to gain from more sexually permissive rules (Kerry et al., 2022). More recently, studies have connected the parental care system to particular political ideologies. For example, parenting motivation predicts social conservatism more strongly than parenthood itself, and parents are more socially conservative than nonparents (Kerry & Murray, 2019).

There are significant factors that could link political conservatism and fertility intentions. Parenting a small child entails caring for a physically weak person, and conservative values provide a threat-management purpose supporting institutional safety (Crawford, 2017). In line with the above-mentioned theoretical line, we hypothesized right-wing political positioning to be more prevalent among those who report higher perceived costs of having children since perceived costs may increase the need to maintain traditional family values and structures.

1.3. *This Study*

The current study is conducted in Greece within a sociocultural setting that values conventional family and sexual values (Grigoropoulos, 2023a, c, 2022b, 2021b). In addition, the Orthodox Church has a big say in matters pertaining to marriage and sexuality (Grigoropoulos, 2023b, 2022d). Regarding sexual behavior and attitudes, Greece has a very conservative institutional structure and culture (Grigoropoulos, 2022a, c, 2021a, 2019).

The current study tests the hypothesis that higher perceived costs of children relate to social conservatism (in terms of

right-wing political positioning) and that religiosity moderates this relationship. Because research data indicate that having children and parental motivation are positively correlated with conservatism and that conservatism and religiosity are both associated with higher levels of reproduction, these two social attitudes were chosen (Kerry & Murray, 2019).

Thus, grounded on the theoretical line that conservative ideas become more prominent when people experience risks (Cohrs, 2013; Onraet & Van Hiel, 2013), we expected higher perceived costs of children to correlate positively with political conservatism. Due to the positive relationship between religiousness and conservatism (Ludeke et al., 2013), we also expected religiosity to strengthen the relationship above. To sum up, this study examines whether tradeoffs (to see having children as requiring significant sacrifices in comparison to their other objectives) relate to right-wing political positioning and whether religiosity moderates this relationship.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

The current online study included 227 participants in a convenience non-probability sample (age range: 19–57 years; Mage = 37.28; SD = 11.66; 216 female participants). The minimum recommended size was 184 participants using an online calculator (see Soper, 2020), with an expected effect size of 0.30 (recommended for instrumental SEM research), a desired probability of 0.05, and a statistical power level of 0.95.

Data was collected through an online survey that was conducted on the Google Forms platform. Informed consent was included on the first page of the survey, which was a voluntary participation in the study. The sample was taken using a snowball method, in which the initial group of respondents spread the poll over the internet and largely used social media to find new respondents. Between September and November 2022, data were collected. The participants were all of Greek nationality, and the data were collected in Greece. The majority of participants were heterosexual (212; 93.4%), lesbian/gay (10; 4.4%), and bisexual (5; 2.2%). Most of the participants had a university degree 52% (118), 18.5% (42) were university students, 18.1% (41) had completed their secondary education, and 11.5% (26) had a postgraduate degree.

2.2. Measures

The following surveys and a demographics form (including gender, age, sexual orientation, and educational attainment) were filled out by respondents.

Religiosity: Respondents indicated how frequently they attend religious services and pray (1=Never to 7=Very Frequently). The "Duke Religion Index" (DUREL; Koenig et al., 1997) was used as the source for these two questions. Strong correlations between the two questions measuring religiosity were found ($r(192) = .54$, $p < .001$). As a result, they were added to create a single measure of religiosity ($\alpha = .71$).

Political Positioning. The respondents were asked to rate themselves on a scale of 1 (left) to 5 (right; i.e., left, center-left, center, center-right, and right) to determine their ideology. Prior research has indicated sufficient stability and validity for one-item self-placement assessments of political orientation (Jost, 2006).

Attitudes toward Babies Scale (ABS; Brase & Brase, 2012). The ABS instrument consists of three subscales, namely positive elicitors, negative elicitors, and tradeoff considerations. The current study used the tradeoffs factor, which emphasizes the more deliberate costs of having a child, such as the time, financial, and social costs. Each item comprises statements rated from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*) on a Likert scale. Sample example, "Having a baby would destroy my social life." Higher scores on the tradeoff factor indicate less favorable attitudes toward babies. The total score has been calculated by averaging the response items.

2.3. Statistical Analysis

A between-subject correlational design was employed in the investigation. The 17th version of IBM SPSS statistics was used to analyze the data. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to check whether the data distribution was normal. Data were not dispersed normally. The associations between the research variables were subsequently evaluated using Kendall's Tau correlation analysis (Table 1). Religiosity was negatively associated with tradeoff factors.

Next, we examined whether religiosity influences the strength of the relationship between tradeoff factors and political positioning. In order to determine if the effects of tradeoff factors on political positioning are the same across different levels of religiosity, we examined the nature of the moderating effect using AMOS-21 for SPSS. The simple slopes approach was used to assess our anticipated moderating effect at one standard deviation above and below the mean to demonstrate higher and lower levels of religiosity (Frazier et al., 2004).

3. Results

The results prove that religion significantly moderates the relationship between tradeoff factor and political positioning ($b = 0.154$, $t = 3.030$ $p = .002$; Figure 1).

As shown in Figure 2, the effect of Religiosity strengthens the positive relationship between tradeoff factors and right-wing political positioning. Thus, for participants who reported higher-than-average levels of religiosity, the relationship between tradeoff factors and right-wing political positioning was stronger ($b = .29$, $SE = .11$, $95\%CI [.07, .52]$, $p < .05$) when compared to average or lower levels of religiosity ($b = .10$, $SE = .07$, $95\%CI [-.03, .24]$, $p > .05$; $b = -.08$, $SE = .07$, $95\%CI [-.22, .05]$, $p > .05$, respectively).

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	α
<i>Variables</i>									
1. Age	37.28	10.66	—						
2. Educational attainment			.163**	—					
3. Sexual Orientation			-.072	.014	—				
4. Tradeoff factors	2.74	0.79	-.110*	-.084	-.040	—			.71
5. Religiosity	2.77	1.23	.119*	.111*	-.020	-.348**	—		
6. Political Positioning	2.85	0.71	-.003	-.055	-.008	-.030	.169**	—	

Table 1. Study Variables' Correlations (n = 227)

Note. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

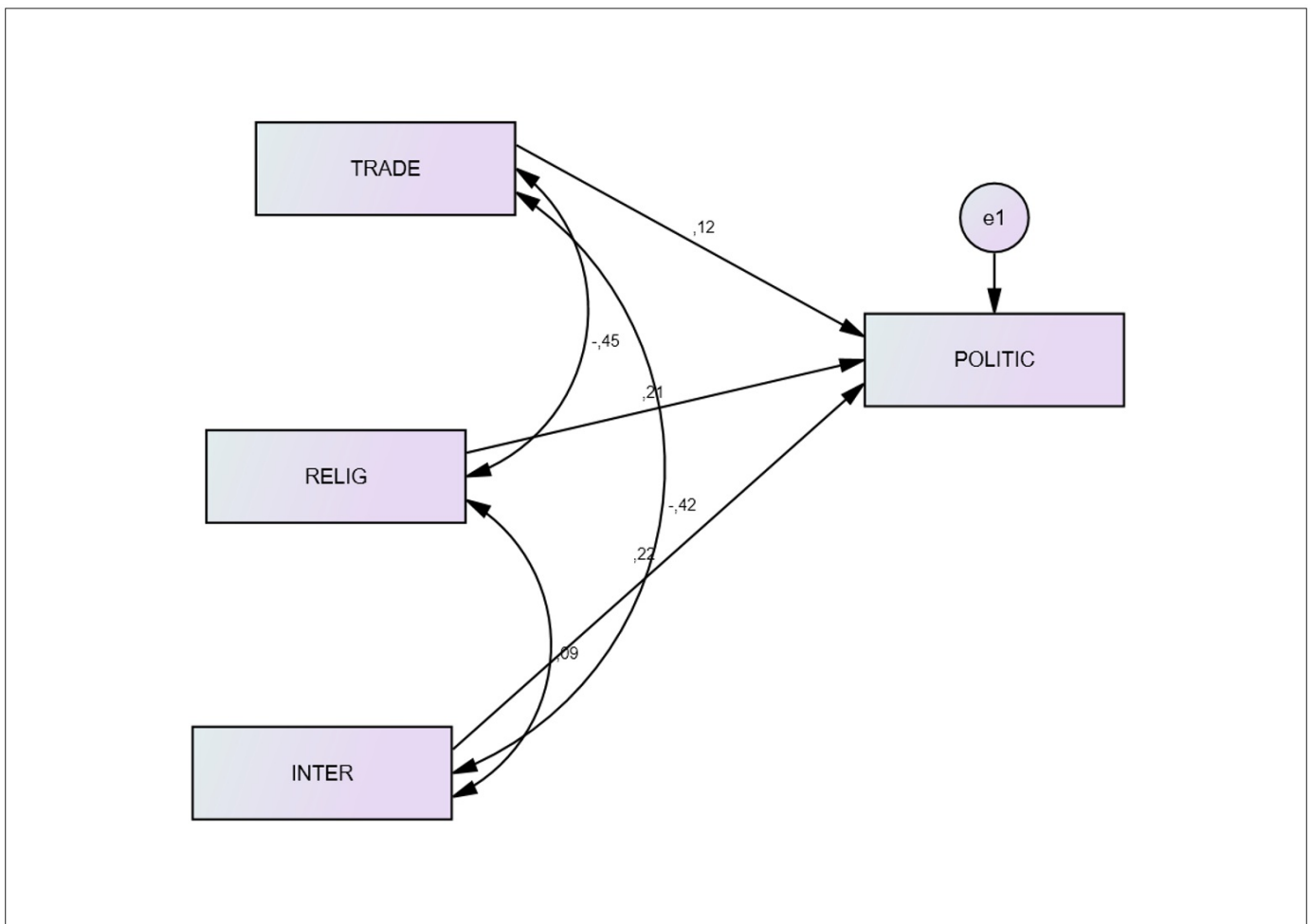


Figure 1. Moderation Effect of Religiosity on the relationship between Tradeoff factors and political positioning.

Note. Trade = Tradeoff Factor, Relig = Religiosity, INTER = Intercorrelation between Tradeoff Factor and Religiosity, Politic = Political Positioning

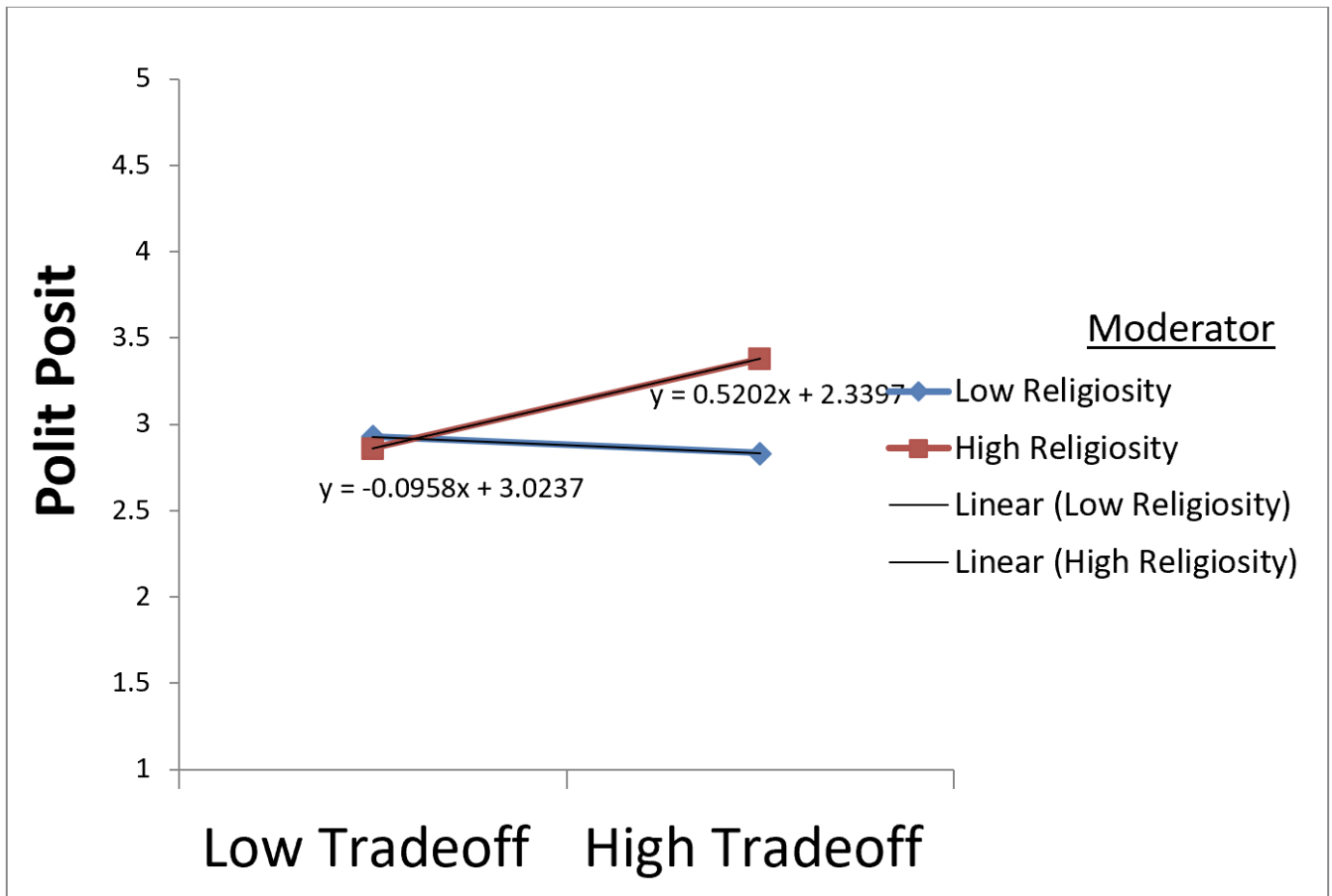


Figure 2. Moderation effect: The relationship between tradeoff factors and right-wing political positioning at lower (-1 SD) and higher (+1 SD) levels of religiosity.

Note. *Polit Posit* = *Political Positioning*

4. Discussion

Recent research data show that the significance of parenthood and parental care motive may influence fundamental components of social attitudes and cognition (Kerry et al., 2022). However, although parental care motivation has apparent advantages, it also has drawbacks that may deprioritize other significant aspects of parents' lives (Kerry et al., 2022).

The current study provides evidence of a relationship between the higher perceived cost of having children and social conservatism (in terms of right-wing political positioning and religiosity). In particular, this study's results show that higher levels of religiosity strengthen the positive relationship between higher perceived costs of having a child and political conservatism. This link is evident in traditional societies since having children is strongly influenced by the instrumental values of children associated with upholding religious and traditional standards (Bein et al., 2021). Thus, the current study coincides with previous studies demonstrating that religious people are typically less likely to weigh the costs of having children (Bein et al., 2021). Based on the moderation results, only stronger religiosity significantly influenced the relationship between the perceived costs of having children and participants' ideological leaning. Thus, higher religiosity

increased the influence of the perceived costs of having children on right-leaning ideology. According to theoretical considerations and earlier research on this subject, religions affect how people perceive the costs and benefits of having children.

Religious people may view parenthood as having higher benefits and fewer costs, making them more likely to want to have a child or children (despite the perceived costs) than their non-religious counterparts (Bein et al., 2021). Due to their participation in Church activities, highly religious individuals frequently interact with other highly religious individuals, providing them with essential social support for dealing with issues and stressful situations that may develop in their families (Krause et al., 2001). More religious people may rely on their faith to be protected from the high costs of raising children (Philipov, 2011), and religious beliefs can also provide more spiritual support in difficult family circumstances (Maton, 1989). Moreover, religious individuals may view the costs of having children as less important because many religions advocate conventional gender roles and view childrearing and housekeeping as areas of expertise for women (Seguino, 2011; Klingorova & Havlicek, 2015). Differences in the desire for material gains are another factor. According to previous studies, more religious people may be less materialistic than less religious people (Veer & Shankar, 2011; Rakrachakarn et al., 2015). Therefore, it is likely that religious people regard children as having lower expenses because they make decisions without as much consideration for economic advantages and costs. In light of this, this study's results provided evidence for the moderating effect of religiosity.

This study's results suggest that considering the inherent costs of having children could constitute a threat component, making right-leaning ideology more appealing because socially conservative ideals stress safety, stability, and family values (Kerry et al., 2022). Thus, higher perceived costs of having children, a significant factor that affects fertility intentions (Bein et al., 2020), may increase an individual's conservatism as it emphasizes the possible dangers and barriers that may undermine parental care and family stability. There is a wide range in the time and effort parents put into raising their children due to the costs and rewards of doing so. This difference may impact political opinions because persons typically involved in or desire to be involved in childcare may be more motivated to promote stable, family-centered environments, making them more receptive to political policies that advance these objectives (Kerry et al., 2022). Hence, the current study adds to the evidence that the perceived costs of having a child and social conservatism correlate and may significantly contribute to understanding the connection between parenthood, parenting motivation, and political beliefs (Kerry & Murray, 2019). This study's results also align with the concept that parental motivation increases social conservatism due to tactical adjustments about particular threat-avoidance-related difficulties (Kerry & Murray, 2019). Kerry et al. (2022) discovered strong correlations between parental care motivation and social conservatism in ten different nations.

The current study suggests a potentially significant implication: People may change their ideologies, considering other factors as decisions about having children become more realistic and pressing. This implies that people more cognizant of the various difficulties that raising a child may entail may become more conservative in their ideology as those plans get closer to coming true. Parenting a small child entails caring for a physically weak person, and social conservatism provides a threat-management purpose supporting institutional safety. Children require incredibly high care and supervision as they grow and develop. As a result, parenting seems to prioritize averting risks more (Kerry et al., 2022).

According to longitudinal research, people tend to become more risk-averse right before becoming parents and for a few years afterward before reverting to normal levels once the child enters adulthood (Görlitz & Tamm, 2020).

This significant association may extend the understanding that a critical driver of conservative ideology is viewing the world as riskier (i.e., the threat component of higher perceived costs of having children). Researchers contend that when people with a certain disposition encounter particular threats, conservative views become more prominent (Cohrs, 2013; Onraet & Van Hiel, 2013). According to research data, social conservatives pay more attention to information warning of potential hazards and are warier of physical threats than liberals (Crawford, 2017; Jost et al., 2003). From a social-cognitive approach, psychological insecurity lies at the heart of conservatism (Oesterreich, 2005). In the same line, the current study provides evidence that higher perceived costs of children can lead to higher levels of social conservatism, suggesting that under certain circumstances, social conservatism may be a condition-dependent solution to an analogous childrearing perception.

The component of tradeoff considerations (i.e., the costs of having a child, such as the time, financial, and social costs) was the best predictor of fertility intentions in those in significant committed partnerships or with children already. This result shows that when people approach the circumstances of actual fertility decisions, the factors linked with fertility intentions, and consequently actual fertility behaviors, may vary in fundamental ways (Kerry et al., 2022).

4.1. *Limitations*

Due to the current study's cross-sectional nature, we cannot draw any inferences about the causal relationships between the variables. Studies that may presume causal relationships and provide a more accurate portrayal of the study variables' relationships would be made possible by longitudinal investigations. We should be cautious in extending the study's findings to the entire community because the participant sample was not representative. Even though the costs in this model were treated as a single dimension, other categories, such as direct economic implications, opportunity costs, or non-economic costs, could have distinct effects on religious and non-religious persons. Differentiating between various forms of child-related costs could illustrate more complex mechanisms through which child-related costs influence general ideological leaning.

4.2. *Conclusion*

The current study coincides with previous studies providing evidence that individuals may exhibit a more conservative ideology when faced with a threatening worldview (in this study, higher perceived costs of having children). Hence, people's ideological leaning may be shaped by various considerations, including being cognizant of the cost of having children. The current study suggests that the perceived costs of having children are associated with people's political leaning and that religiosity intensifies this relationship.

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