

Indian Political Conservatism Scale: Development and Psychometric Evaluation

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ABSTRACT

The present study describes the development and preliminary validation of a Political Conservatism Scale designed for the Indian socio-political context. Existing Western measures of conservatism often fail to capture culturally specific domains such as caste, reservation policies, religiosity, and nationalism. An initial 30-item pool was created, including both reverse-scored and filler items. Data were collected from 41 college students aged 18-25 years using a 5-point Likert-type scale. Exploratory factor analysis using principal component analysis with Varimax rotation revealed a multidimensional structure with 10 components explaining 76.95% of total variance, with the first four factors accounting for 49.21% of variance and demonstrating clear interpretability. Reliability analysis indicated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .784$). The findings suggest that the scale provides a culturally relevant tool for measuring political conservatism in India, with implications for political psychology and survey research.

Keywords: *political conservatism, India, factor analysis, cultural measurement, political attitudes*

Political conservatism represents a fundamental ideological orientation that shapes social and political attitudes across cultures. In Western contexts, this construct has been extensively studied using established measures such as the Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) Scale (Altemeyer, 1996) and the Social and Economic Conservatism Scale (SECS; Everett, 2013). However, these instruments face significant limitations when applied to non-Western contexts, particularly regarding their cultural relevance and conceptual validity.

Limitations of Western Conservatism Scales

Everett (2013) acknowledged that Western conservatism scales suffer from "socio-cultural time dependence," being deeply embedded in the cultural debates of their societies of origin. The SECS, for instance, measures attitudes toward issues highly salient in Euro-American political discourse—such as abortion, gun ownership, and welfare benefits—that may not reflect primary axes of conservative debate in other cultural contexts. Similarly, the RWA Scale (Altemeyer, 1996) focuses on authoritarian submission, aggression sanctioned by

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authorities, and adherence to social conventions, often assuming a dichotomy between establishment and radicalism that aligns with Western histories of protest and authority.

When these Western scales are adapted for new contexts, researchers often face the loss of both conceptual clarity and empirical validity, being forced to select or omit items without clear rationale or systematic validation (Everett, 2013). This problem is particularly acute in India, where the liberal-conservative spectrum does not translate directly to the political landscape.

The Indian Political Context

Research consistently demonstrates that the traditional left-right ideological spectrum fails to capture the complexity of Indian political attitudes (Chhibber & Verma, 2023; Yadav, n.d.). As Chhibber and Verma (2023) noted, "standard survey items rooted in Western debates do not appear to effectively encapsulate ideological cleavages in the Indian context." Indian political conservatism is better understood through multidimensional perspectives encompassing distinct but interrelated domains.

Four key areas distinguish Indian conservatism from its Western counterparts: (1) **Caste and reservation policies** - attitudes toward traditional caste hierarchies and government affirmative action programs remain central to Indian political identity; (2) **Gender roles and family values** - adherence to patriarchal family structures and traditional gender divisions; (3) **Religion and politics** - the relationship between religious practices, national identity, and governance; and (4) **Nationalism and authority** - emphasis on cultural preservation, respect for tradition, and national pride over individual freedoms (Pew Research Center, 2021).

Study Objectives

The present study aimed to develop and evaluate a culturally grounded Political Conservatism Scale for India. Specifically, we sought to: (a) create items reflecting culturally relevant domains of conservatism in India, (b) explore the underlying factor structure of the scale through exploratory factor analysis, and (c) examine the internal consistency reliability of the instrument.

METHOD

Participants

Participants comprised 41 college students ($N = 41$) aged between 18-25 years ($M_{age}=21.5$), enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate courses at Era University. The sample was recruited through classroom announcements, and participants were randomly selected from approximately 50 registered volunteers. No compensation was provided for participation. Gender distribution was not systematically recorded during this pilot phase. All participants provided informed consent before data collection.

Materials

The Political Conservatism Scale consisted of a 30-item pool designed to assess five theoretical domains: caste and reservation-related attitudes, gender-roles and family-values, religion and politics, nationalism and authority, and filler items for attentiveness checks. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*). The scale included nine reverse-coded items (Items 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 16, 17, 21, 26) and three neutral filler items (Items 20, 23, 30) designed to identify inattentive responding.

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Sample items include:

- Gender-Roles: "Women should primarily take care of the household, while men provide for the family"
- Caste & Reservation: "Reservation policies undermine merit and create inequality"
- Religion & Politics: "Religious practices should guide how laws are made in India"
- Nationalism: "National pride should always come before individual freedoms"

Procedure

Data collection was conducted using Google Forms over a period of 30 days. Participants received registration and survey links through classroom announcements. The survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete on average. No missing responses were recorded in the final dataset.

Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 20. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation. Factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were retained, supplemented by scree plot inspection for interpretability. Assumptions for factor analysis were not formally tested in this pilot study due to the limited sample size. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with item-total statistics examined to evaluate individual item contributions.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Item means ranged from 1.44 to 3.90, with standard deviations between 0.743 and 1.327, indicating adequate variability without floor or ceiling effects. The overall scale demonstrated a mean of 79.85 (SD = 11.51) across the 30 items.

Factor Analysis

Communalities and Variance Explained

Communalities ranged from .607 to .874 ($M = .759$), indicating that most items were well-represented by the extracted factors. Using PCA with eigenvalue > 1 criterion, 10 components were extracted, accounting for 76.95% of total variance. The eigenvalues and variance explained for the first 10 factors were as follows (Table 1):

Table 1 Total Variance Explained by Extracted Components

Component	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	6.461	21.54	21.54
2	3.605	12.02	33.56
3	2.485	8.28	41.84
4	2.213	7.38	49.22
5	1.894	6.31	55.53
6	1.552	5.17	60.70
7	1.399	4.66	65.36
8	1.257	4.19	69.55
9	1.135	3.78	73.34
10	1.085	3.62	76.95

Factor Interpretation

Examination of the rotated component matrix revealed that the first four factors were most theoretically interpretable and meaningful:

- **Factor 1: Gender Roles and Family Values (21.54% variance)** High loadings included items emphasizing traditional gender divisions, women's domestic roles, and patriarchal family structures.
- **Factor 2: Caste and Reservation (12.02% variance)** Items loading on this factor reflected attitudes toward caste-based trust, opposition to reservation policies, and beliefs about merit-based selection.
- **Factor 3: Religion and Politics (8.28% variance)** This factor captured beliefs about religion's role in governance, the inseparability of national and religious identity, and secular versus religious approaches to policy.
- **Factor 4: Nationalism and Authority (7.38% variance)** Items emphasized cultural preservation, national pride over individual freedoms, respect for tradition, and authority.

The remaining six factors (5-10) showed less clear theoretical interpretation and may represent method artifacts or item-specific variance, consistent with the scree plot showing a clear break after the fourth factor.

Reliability Analysis

Internal Consistency

The overall 30-item scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency with Cronbach's $\alpha = .784$ (confidence interval: .784-.786). Item-total correlations ranged from -.268 to .773, with most items showing positive correlations with the total score (Table 2).

Item Analysis

Several items showed negative or very low item-total correlations, including the three filler items (Items 20, 23, 30) which were intended to be uncorrelated with the substantive construct. Additionally, some reverse-coded items showed weaker relationships with the total score, potentially indicating response style effects or comprehension difficulties.

Table 2 Reliability Statistics for Indian Political Conservatism Scale:

Scale Statistics	Value
Cronbach's α	.784
Number of Items	30
Mean	79.85
Variance	132.43
Standard Deviation	11.51

Comparison With Western Scales

The present findings highlight fundamental differences between Indian and Western conceptualizations of conservatism. Unlike the Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale's emphasis on authoritarian submission to established authorities (Altemeyer, 1996), Indian conservatism appears more nuanced in its relationship with authority, emphasizing cultural and traditional sources of legitimacy rather than state-based authority alone.

Similarly, while the Socio-Economic Conservatism Scale (Everrett, 2013) focuses on economic and social issues central to Western political discourse—such as abortion, gun

ownership, and welfare policies—the Indian scale reveals different priority domains. Issues of caste, reservation policies, religious nationalism, and traditional gender roles emerged as primary organizing principles, reflecting the unique social and political landscape of contemporary India.

These differences support Demel's (2024) call for culturally nuanced measures of political ideology and underscore the inadequacy of applying Western frameworks to non-Western contexts without substantial adaptation.

DISCUSSION

Principal Findings

This pilot study developed and preliminarily validated a Political Conservatism Scale tailored to the Indian socio-political context. The exploratory factor analysis revealed a complex, multidimensional structure with four primary interpretable factors capturing gender roles, caste attitudes, religion-politics relationships, and nationalism-authority orientations. Together, these factors accounted for nearly half (49.22%) of the total variance, suggesting they represent core dimensions of Indian conservative ideology.

The scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .784$) for a preliminary instrument, though this falls short of the .90 threshold typically desired for clinical or high-stakes applications. This level of reliability is reasonable for research purposes and early-stage scale development (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Theoretical Implications

The multifaceted factor structure aligns with theoretical accounts of conservatism as a culturally embedded ideology (Graham et al., 2009; Haidt & Graham, 2007). Rather than a unidimensional construct, Indian conservatism appears to encompass distinct but related attitude domains that may operate independently across individuals and contexts.

These findings challenge universal models of conservatism and support the need for context-sensitive measurement approaches. The prominence of caste-related attitudes highlights a dimension of social hierarchy and group relations that has no direct parallel in Western conservatism research, yet appears central to Indian political psychology.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several important limitations must be acknowledged. The small sample size ($N = 41$) restricts generalizability and prevented formal testing of factor analysis assumptions. The sample was also limited to college students from a single educational context, raising questions about representativeness across age, education, and socioeconomic groups.

The extraction of 10 factors, while mathematically defensible, may reflect over-extraction given the sample size. Kaiser's eigenvalue > 1 criterion is known to overestimate the number of factors in smaller samples (Fabrigar et al., 1999). Future research should employ larger samples and confirmatory factor analysis to test the stability and replicability of the factor structure.

Additionally, the study lacks external validation criteria. Convergent validity with established measures of related constructs (e.g., social dominance orientation, system justification), discriminant validity with unrelated constructs, and predictive validity for political behaviors remain to be established.

Practical Applications

Despite these limitations, the scale shows promise as a research tool for understanding political attitudes in India. Potential applications include:

1. **Survey research** examining the distribution and correlates of conservative attitudes across Indian populations
2. **Political behavior studies** investigating relationships between ideological orientations and voting patterns
3. **Cross-cultural research** comparing conservative ideologies across different cultural contexts
4. **Longitudinal studies** tracking changes in conservative attitudes over time and across generations

CONCLUSION

This study represents an initial step toward developing culturally appropriate measures of political conservatism for the Indian context. The preliminary findings suggest that Indian conservatism is multidimensional, encompassing attitudes toward gender, caste, religion, and national authority that differ meaningfully from Western conceptualizations.

While additional validation work is needed, the Political Conservatism Scale offers researchers a culturally grounded alternative to Western instruments for studying political ideology in India. Future research should focus on scale refinement, validation with diverse samples, and establishment of psychometric properties necessary for broader application.

The development of such context-sensitive measures is crucial for advancing cross-cultural political psychology and ensuring that research findings accurately reflect the ideological landscapes of diverse democratic societies.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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