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Review of Martin et al. (2024)

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The article “Psychosocial development is negatively correlated with political extremism” by Martin, Hartin, and Vonnahme identifies an exploratory finding that psychosocial development (as measured by the Modified Erikson Psychosocial Inventory, MEPSI) is related to political extremism. The analysis given is based on data collected for the purpose of studying a different question relating to correlations between psychosocial development and economic conservatism.

As a non-expert in this field, I found much of the discussion hard to follow, as some terms seem to be used differently than they are in everyday vernacular. For example, “libertarianism” and “social liberalism” appear to be used interchangeably, but for me these two carry a different meaning. Similarly, the confusion of the article, relating psychosocial development to political extremism seems to implicitly equate political extremism specifically with liberalism, or whatever should be considered the opposite of conservatism, on the MEPSI scale. On initial reading, I would have expected extremism to be defined as extreme positions on both the conservative and liberal scale.

Those points of confusion aside, I have doubts about the validity of these conclusions based on the information provided. The opening discussion mentions that previous findings show that Conservatism is positively correlated to Conscientiousness and Age and negatively correlated to Openness. Yet the summary of regression analyses in Table 4 show a non-significant relationship with both Age and Conscientiousness. Moreover, the direction of the relation to Conscientiousness, though non-significant, is in the opposite direction of what is expected.

Given the seemingly well-established relationship between Age and Conservatism, I would expect this relationship to persist in the current analysis. The fact that it doesn't is a red flag, suggesting that there is a deficiency either with the sample of data being used or with the analysis. This, in turn, raises doubts about any subsequent conclusions drawn from this dataset and/or analysis.

Because the dataset in question is relatively small, it should be possible to provide more illustrative plots of the data, which could help to identify potential outliers or other anomalies

that may be impacting the conclusions.

From their analysis, the authors suggest that a replication study may be warranted to further study the stated conclusion. Based on the above comments, I would not suggest this until the above questions concerning the relationship between Conservatism and Age are clarified in the current dataset. If clarified, the proposed conclusion may be bolstered, lending further support to the conclusion, or may disappear. However, if the above issue cannot be resolved, then the authors may be encouraged to collect more data for answering the original question relating to economic conservatism, which was found not to replicate on the basis of a possibly unreliable sample of data.

Beyond the questions of data quality and/or analysis, the authors suggest that the proposed finding will have important implications in our understanding of broad sociopolitical trends, but don't provide details on what these implications might be.

Readers may be interested in such discussion, not only to communicate the significance of the proposed conclusion but also to justify the potential attempt at replicating such a result.