Images of God and their mediating role in the relationship between right-wing authoritarianism and attitudes towards homosexuality in Peruvian Catholic and evangelical believers

Giacomo Olano Raffo
Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Perú
giacomo.olano@pucp.pe
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2067-7695
Mathias Schmitz
Université catholique de Louvain, Pontificia Universidad
Católica del Perú, Bélgica
mathias.schmitz@uclouvain.be
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9272-5874
Harry M. Lewis
Sussex University, Reino Unido de Gran Bretaña e
Irlanda del Norte
hl89@sussex.ac.uk
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2504-4611
Agustín Espinosa
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Perú, Perú
agustin.espinosa@pucp.pe
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2067-7695

Abstract

A dichotomous representation of God is identified within Christianity; on the one hand, the figure of God is represented as a benevolent entity; on the other, He appears as a judge who judges sin. Both images are positively associated with right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), although to a greater extent with respect to the punishing vision of God. Both images are inversely associated with positive attitudes towards homosexuality. Again, the magnitude of this relationship is greater with the image of a punishing god. Mediation analysis found that the relationship between RWA and positive attitudes toward homosexuality are mediated by the image of a punishing God, but not by the benevolent image. Participants could be categorised in line with their levels of accordance with each of the two images of God presented; the first, labelled 'non-fundamentalist´ reported a high level of endorsement for the image of God as benevolent, but a low level of endorsement for the image of God as punishing. The second, labelled 'fundamentalist' captured those who endorsed the inverse of this relationship.

Comparisons between the two groups show that the latter are systematically more authoritarian and report higher levels of negative attitudes towards homosexuality. In the discussion we consider the idea that religious belief can have a paradoxical effect on prejudice.

Keywords: AUTHORITARIANISM, CHRISTIANITY, IMAGES OF GOD, ATTITUDES TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY.

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Religiosity is conceptualized as a belief system in a divine or superhuman power, accompanied by a set of practices and rituals directed towards a transcendental entity, which are practiced within a social context. (Fuentes, 2019). It also implies an expression of emotions, thoughts and behaviours directed towards "the sacred", understood as a divine being or object, the ultimate reality, or the absolute truth of which is perceived by the individual. Religiosity also entails a presence of beliefs, ritualized experiences and an adherence to group norms that are connected by a shared perception of the entity of worship (Fuentes, 2019; Van Cappellen et al., 2016).

Alignment with a religious faith or set of spiritual beliefs can provide individuals with a sense of coherence and associated well-being, as the accompanying belief system creates a lens through which the world and the actors within can be understood (Van Cappellen et al., 2016). This sense of well-being can be mediated by other variables such as a greater network of social support when compared with non-believers, feelings of respect and the holding of a sense of purpose or meaning in one's life.

Adherence to established religious rituals and personal prayer can enhance well-being by providing symbolic meaning, facilitating cognitive clarity, and serving to communicate with a higher power (Oishi & Diener, 2014). Similar mechanisms underlying social relationships can explain how a relationship with a caring and loving God can improve well-being. Engaging in religious activities fosters greater levels of well-being, as it satisfies needs for community and belonging (Newman & Graham, 2018), as well as reinforce positive emotions such as gratitude, surprise, tranquillity and love (Van Cappellen et al., 2016).

Studies looking at further moderating variables on the relationship between subjective well-being and religiosity have found that standard of living is strongly associated with levels of religious belief. For instance, it has been found that, in countries with a lower socioeconomic status such as lower life expectancy, higher levels of poverty and overall greater insecurity, the population tended to be highly religious (Inglehart, 2020). On the other hand, it was found that religion is less prevalent in countries in which there is greater overall prosperity, with both religious and non-religious individuals reporting similar levels of well-being. In this sense, religion can be seen to provide support for individuals facing adverse conditions, but, when these conditions are controlled for, well-being can be attained without the need to observe religious practices or affiliate with religious institutions (Diener et al., 2011; Tay et al., 2014).

Within the Christian tradition, representations of God can be broadly categorised as conforming to one of two characterisations. The first corresponds to a figure of positive attachment, where God is conceived as a loving and protective father-figure, always reliable and available in times of need (Kirkpatrick, 2005; Lecaros, 2017). God is represented as a caretaker who loves deeply, observes and protects from danger and, when sought, gives what is necessary for people to be happy (Cavanagh, 1992). Attachment to God will depend, in this case, mostly on psychological rather than physical proximity, and through his ubiquitous presence, will allow believers to feel constantly close to him.

The second representation involves a fearsome, implacable judge and punisher of evil (Lecaros, 2017). This conception is related to the general characteristics of all gods in the world: their omniscience means they are the perfect monitors. In this regard, their moral infallibility and omnipotence allows them to effectively punish those who deserve it. (Laurin, et al., 2012). According to Christian traditions, everyone will experience someday a judgment at which their fate will be decided, frequently based on what they believed or did during their time alive. This looks associated with the motto "you reap what you sow": while negative actions and deeds will receive punishment, good actions and deeds will be rewarded (Newman & Graham, 2018). It´s

suggested that those who prioritise this representation of God, moral behaviour is motivated not by a sense of moral duty, but rather by a consequentialist avoidance of divine punishment (Greenway et al., 2003).

Regarding the second conception of God, Lecaros (2017) finds in Pentecostal believers that, more than solely a punishing entity, God is conceived as a just judge who rewards each individual according to what they deserve. Thus, the benevolent God and the punishing God are seen as complementary faces of the same being. For the believers, if God does not punish, he does not restore nor guarantee an order for the world and, if there is no order, then individuals are left abandoned and without resources in a chaotic, evil or meaningless world (Lecaros, 2017).

On the assumptions described, fundamentalism can be seen as a set of irreducible religious beliefs and teachings that supposedly contain the basic, intrinsic and inherent truth about God and humanity. These essential truths are manifest in opposition to the forces of evil, and generate a set of practices which should be followed accordingly, with those who are successful in this sense able to enjoy a special relationship with their deity (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2009). In this regard, a direct relationship can be observed between religious fundamentalism and political conservatism, often manifest through the expression of a right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) (Altemeyer, 2003). Through this lens, the expression of various social and political attitudes often associated with religiosity, such as religious ethnocentrism, prejudice towards minority ethnic groups and a rejection of homosexuality, among others, can be understood (e.g., Altemeyer, 2003; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2009; Jonathan, 2008).

Specifically, the relationship between religious fundamentalism and right-wing authoritarianism can be explained by a fear of threats against the social order and the traditions established in relation to the divine entity (Altemeyer, 2003). In this sense, fundamentalists are more likely to be submissive to the authorities and institutions that they consider legitimate (e.g., the Church, the Pope, priests and pastors). Likewise, from an authoritarian perspective, fundamentalists will accept many forms of aggression and punishment towards sinners and non-believers (e.g., those perceived as a threat to their belief system), who will be judged and corrected by God for their deviations. Finally, fundamentalists endorse the protection of traditional values and norms through both talk and action, in an expression of authoritarian conventionalism (Altemeyer, 2003; de Regt, 2011). On this conception, fundamentalism can be understood as a manifestation of authoritarianism underpinned by religious discourse; where the cognitive style would be rigid and dogmatic, assuming a single truth which should be put into practice by all individuals who believe in God and religion in the terms described (Altemeyer, 2003; Perry, et al., 2015).

From the perspective of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981), religious fundamentalists give an exaggerated emphasis to an orientation that divides the world into 'us versus them', resulting in a greater tendency towards discriminatory behaviour than non-fundamentalist individuals (Altemeyer, 2003; Perry et al., 2015). However, whilst beliefs based on religious fundamentalism have been associated with different forms of prejudice and discrimination, it has also been found that when religiosity does not acquire a fundamentalist character, it can act as a mitigating factor for prejudice and discrimination. In this regard, Allport (1954) argued that the role of religion is paradoxical since it can both make and mitigate prejudice. This latter feature of religiosity is most notably manifest through the rejection of fundamentalism, but adherence to a religious orthodoxy.

Fundamentalists maintain negative attitudes towards perceived threats to the existing social order. For example, prejudice towards homosexuality can be understood in terms of the literal interpretation of verses such as Leviticus 18:22 or Romans 1: 26-27, which dictate that homosexuality is unacceptable, immoral and a threat to good manners – attributes deserving of punishment (cf. Altemeyer, 2003). In contrast, religious orthodoxy can be understood as the acceptance of and internalization of the broader teachings of a particular religion, such as the duty to 'love thy neighbor' found in verses such as 1 Peter 4: 8 and 1 John 4: 7. Religious orthodoxy, perhaps due to the less literal interpretation of biblical precepts, has been shown to decrease prejudice towards homosexuals (Jonathan, 2008),

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3

Religious fundamentalists' preference for the maintenance of the existing social order is suggestive of what is known as cognitive rigidity. Cognitive rigidity is associated with the rejection of uncertainty and ambiguity in favour of a preference for orderliness and predictability - a cognitive style consistent with the notion of authoritarian conservatism (Jost, et al., 2003). Furthermore, cognitive rigidity is associated with the persistence of social stereotypical beliefs and a greater adherence to the dominant ideological and moral framework of the society in which one lives (Jost et al., 2003, Haidt & Graham, 2007). Broadly construed, this morality is defined in relation to social standards that establish prescriptive judgements about justice, rights and well-being in the domain of interpersonal relations and, therefore, what is considered immoral in one context, would not necessarily be so in another (Haidt, et al., 1993).

There are three models of morality with different ontological bases to which people adhere (Shweder et al., 1997). The first corresponds to the ethics of autonomy, aligned with Turiel's definition of morality (1983 in Shweder et al., 1997), where it is hypothesized that the purpose of moral regulation is to protect discrepancies between the decisions of individuals, in addition to facilitating the pursuit of individual goals whilst adhering to principles of respect and no harm. The second is the ethics of community, which starts from a different ontological basis: the world is not comprised of individuals, but is made up of institutions, families, guilds, etc. The objective is to protect the moral integrity of the society or community, as it is an entity with identity, position and reputation. In this case, moral integrity is safeguarded through regulations of the many institutions that constitute the society (Shweder et al., 1997, p.138). Finally, the ethics of divinity assumes that there is a god or gods. The soul of each individual is a little piece of this God and therefore the purpose of moral regulation is the protection of the soul and spirit from moral degradation (Shweder et al., 1997). This code seeks to control and inhibit people from spiritual contamination in matters related mainly to sexuality and religious laws (Haidt & Graham, 2007).

It is known that ideology has a significant influence on what kind of morality an individual is going to ascribe. From an authoritarian conservative perspective, individuals would tend to share the ethics of the community, which is why they would be morally against the extreme individual freedom promoted by the ethics of autonomy (Haidt & Graham, 2007). Likewise, in the religious sphere, from a conservative perspective, secularism would be seen as an organized way of empowering people to live away from God's laws, because they would be choosing goals and values not prescribed by God (Haidt, 2012). In this respect, politically and religiously conservative individuals are more likely than politically and religiously liberal individuals to question behaviours that, although not implying direct or indirect harm to third parties, are far from their personal conceptions of morality (Haidt & Graham, 2007).

In the Peruvian context, where this study has been conducted, 76% of the total population identifies as Catholic (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2017). In addition, the Peruvian State, through article 50 of the Peruvian Constitution, recognizes the Catholic Church as an "important element in the historical, cultural and moral formation of Peru" (Constitución Política del Perú, 1993, p. 13). On this basis, religion has extended its domains to the political and social sphere, actively playing a role in discussions on different social issues such as the civil union between people of the same sex, abortion for rape cases, the introduction of a gender approach in basic educational training, among other matters of societal interest. As an example, there is currently a conflict over the incorporation of a gender approach by the Peruvian State in its various institutions and public policies. The gender approach is proposed as a tool that integrates the needs, responsibilities and concerns of women and men in an equitable and fair way (Ministerio de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social, 2016). However, fundamentalist religious groups have described the gender approach as "gender ideology", which seeks to "homosexualise" the population. Such groups campaign using slogans such as "con mis hijos no te metas [Do not mess with my children]", the purpose of which is to prevent the inclusion of the gender approach in the new school curriculum (Perú21, 2017).

On a more current level, this group has also incorporated another type of discourse, where they state that they are in defense of freedom and "real" families. This is exemplified by statements such as: "We, as

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4

organizations in defense of life, are against the implantations that they want to put in every country, such as abortion, not choosing, wanting or not wanting to vaccinate. We are against vaccination because this comes from above, the world elites want to reduce the population in the world. This is not new, it has been going on for years" (El Comercio, 2022). Likewise, they also demonstrate against international organizations such as the OAS, considered entities that threaten the integrity and national values: "Peruvian families are marching today to preserve the soul of America, pro-life and pro-family, regarding the OAS sessions in Peru, we are marching for a continent without abortion or gender ideology" (El Comercio, 2022).

In the context of the last presidential elections in 2021, it was observed that different political parties had no concrete proposals regarding gender violence. There was also the case of simply not presenting proposals on specific issues such as education and gender, health, sexual and reproductive rights, as well as civil rights for the LGTBI population (Instituto de Defensa Legal, 2021). In the same way, the maximum representative of one of these parties: Rafael López Aliaga, pointed out that the whole gender doctrine, which violates the rights of children, will be exterminated, since it is an ideology that destroys families, life, and the innocence of children (El Comercio, 2021). From the conservative sphere, it is considered that the State has the responsibility to safeguard the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, therefore, they act, either from the State itself in representative positions such as the Congress, as well as other pressure groups with the purpose of making political leaders comply with what they consider "sacred obligations" regarding the religious dogma. Given this, the State is expected to intervene in the affairs of citizens to preserve a desirable order, which means defending the illegality of abortion and homosexual marriage (Casey-Pariseault, 2022).

Peru stands out, on a par with Paraguay, as one of the countries that is most against LGBTQ+ rights, being an example that, so far in the present 21st century, Congress has rejected or shelved bills to legalize civil unions between same-sex couples on six occasions, covering the period between 2003 and 2016 (Chávez and Ester 2021). In this context, rather than encouraging equal treatment among Peruvians, the fundamentalist expression of religion can justify and create social gaps at the same time of violating access to fundamental rights for important sectors of the population, such as in this specific case an attack against the rights of LGTBIQ+ people.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between images of God as either a benevolent or punishing entity, endorsement of an authoritarian political ideology and individuals' attitudes towards the fundamental rights of the homosexual population in a group of Christian believers from the city of Lima, Peru. As a central hypothesis, an inverse relationship is expected between authoritarianism and positive attitudes towards homosexuality. Likewise, this relationship would be mediated by the vision of God as a punishing entity. Specifically, it is expected that a direct and significant relationship will be found between the punishing image of God and RWA, and an inverse and significant relationship will be found between the punishing image of God and positive attitudes towards homosexuality. On the other hand, the benevolent image of God is expected to be directly related to RWA and positive attitudes towards homosexuality.

An additional objective of this research is to analyse the psychometric characteristics of a questionnaire about the images of God as a punishing or benevolent entity and to establish a classification of participants based on these representations.

Method

Participants

The sample was made up of 359 participants of Peruvian nationality; 226 women (63%) and 131 men (36.5%) with an age range between 18 to 82 years (M = 35.64; SD = 15.25). The only inclusion criterion in the study was that the participants self-classify as believers in God.

Participants self-reported as either Catholic (89.1%), evangelical (6.7%) or other religious ascriptions of the Christian tradition (4.2%). Many reported as attending their church / prayer center at least once a week (42.3%); most participants reported as having been educated to either graduate or postgraduate level (74.8%), the rest have either a higher-technical education (14.3%), secondary education (9.8%) or primary education (1.1%).

Measures

Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA): An adapted version of the Right-Wing Authoritarianism Short Scale (Zakrisson, 2005) was used which has been translated into Spanish and validated in Chile by Cárdenas and Parra (2010). The scale is made up of 12 questions such as "Our society needs strong leaders who can eradicate the extremism and immorality that currently prevail" (direct item) and "Many people challenge the state, criticize the Church and ignore normal ways of life but, even so, they don´t stop being good people" (inverse item). The questionnaire used a 7-point response scale with options ranging from 1 = "Totally Disagree" to 7 = "Totally Agree". This scale presented an adequate level of reliability ($\alpha = .69$), for the general dimension of right-wing authoritarianism.

Images of God Questionnaire: 65 items that assess participants' conceptions of the nature of God using a 5-point Likert scale with 1 = "Totally disagree" and 5 = "Totally agree". Items were developed using verses collected from the Bible, speeches by religious leaders and comments from social networks regarding God.

The 65 items were subjected to an Exploratory Factor Analysis using the Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation. No item was eliminated since all had a good factor load. Thus, there is a good level of fit (KMO = .945; gl 2080 (359), p <.001). The results indicate a two-dimensional model explaining 47.25% of the shared variance.

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6

Table 1

Table 1 *Exploratory Factor Analysis of God Images Questionnaire*

| | Factor loads | | |
Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Communalities
41. God shows his love by accompanying us from the beginning until the end of our lives	**.85**	-.002	.722
35. God is the source of all love in the world	**.828**	.099	.695
45. God has given us existence and life for his immense love and goodness	**.818**	.081	.676
44. God loves us in such a way that he gave his Son so that everyone who believes in him will not perish and have eternal life.	**.795**	.18	.664
53. God's message is addressed to all by loving us as we are	**.77**	.002	.593
15. The lifestyle that God promotes is the best for us because it is based on love	**.769**	.153	.615
5. God's love has no limits or conditions for anyone	**.766**	-.049	.590
33. God's love is so great that he created a beautiful world for us	**.765**	.162	.612
2. The true nature of God is unconditional love for all	**.764**	-.03	.585
32. God's love and compassion is the most wonderful thing we can have in life	**.761**	.142	.599
14. God cares for the good of each human being	**.744**	.102	.563
42. The greatest work of God is the human being; his infinite love is manifested in us	**.738**	.05	.547
22. You can always feel the infinite love of God	**.719**	.095	.526
3. When there are problems we can turn to God for love and protection	**.716**	.032	.514
12. Being close to God implies feeling his paternal essence, care and love	**.711**	.185	.540
54. God presents a compassion so great that he calls on us to forgive enemies	**.71**	.019	.505
34. God has put us in this world so that we can be happy	**.706**	-.08	.505
31. We are all children of God; therefore He loves us	**.695**	-.106	.494

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7

13. The destiny that God has for everyone is the best, given his goodness and wisdom	**.664**	.302	.532
4. Jesus' main teaching was that God loves human beings just as they are	**.66**	-.07	.441
23. There is no one whom God cannot love.	**.643**	-.049	.416
11. God's mercy and compassion embraces everyone, including atheists, homosexuals, and adulterers	**.638**	-.133	.425
21. The kingdom of God is open to all without any conditions.	**.637**	-.12	.421
1. We are all imperfect, despite this God loves us	**.608**	-.054	.372
43. God dwells in the hearts of all; therefore, we will never be far from him	**.604**	-.014	.365
24. God always provides only the good because he protects and loves us	**.601**	.131	.378
51. Our dignity as human beings is based on love because we are a "part of God".	**.541**	.283	.373
10. We must feel sorry for our wrongdoings to seek God's forgiveness	**.535**	.427	.469
55. God's love does not make distinctions towards people of other religions	**.515**	-.051	.268
40. We are all sinners; redemption is possible through repentance and asking God for forgiveness	**.513**	.336	.375
25. God's compassion knows no sexual orientation	**.501**	-.259	.317
62. God is always at the side of the poor, not through matter, but through truth	**.484**	.145	.255
52. Baptism is a form of redemption that God gives as part of his great compassion	**.425**	.366	.315
61. The first commitment is to live from what is believed, following Jesus, the second is the reflection of faith, theology	**.425**	.273	.255
64. Losing God's way will lead to punishments similar to those presented in the Bible	.045	**.801**	.644
65. God has established an order in the world, if we don't follow it, He will punish us	-.006	**.794**	.631
56. Whoever does not follow God's commandments will be condemned	.058	**.776**	.605
30. Sins are paid with punishment and even death, the gift of following what God dictates is eternal life	-.001	**.759**	.576

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8

19. If we do not faithfully follow what is said in the Bible, where the laws of God are indicated, we will cause His anger	-.086	**.754**	.575
60. Great disasters occur when we do not follow what God dictates	-.025	**.748**	.561
36. God's laws are fair and must be followed, not doing so implies that we must be punished	.105	**.720**	.529
29. The world tries to corrupt us and divert us from the path of God, it is our duty to follow God and avoid His punishments	.138	**.717**	.533
20. God controls the entire universe according to his laws that we must all abide by	.132	**.713**	.525
50. God is a fair judge who will severely punish sinners	.073	**.709**	.509
63. Eternal punishment is only avoidable if we follow God's laws	.164	**.707**	.527
7. If what is established by God is disobeyed there will be some punishment on His part	-.16	**.688**	.498
18. We must follow God's orders, since there is already an established natural order	.236	**.685**	.525
37. Premarital sexual relations are a direct offense against God, unleashing His wrath	-.024	**.685**	.469
57. It is our obligation to follow God's laws, only then will we be saved	.252	**.678**	.523
17. Eternal punishment is the fate of all who violate God's laws	.025	**.665**	.444
28. Only by moving away from the temptations of the world will we achieve eternal life and save ourselves from the Final Judgment	.144	**.665**	.462
39. Whoever takes God's name in vain deserves a sanction	.176	**.660**	.466
58. Gender ideology directly violates God's law	.006	**.648**	.420
27. Having impure thoughts is a direct violation of God's mission, which implies a penalty.	.023	**.644**	.415
48. God delays but does not forget to exercise his punishment on sinners	-.009	**.639**	.409
8. Sooner or later the Final Judgment will come, where all sinners will pay for their actions	.149	**.623**	.411
6. When God's standards are not followed, God will cause bad things to happen.	-.131	**.589**	.365

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9

38. Homosexuals represent an aberration to the natural order of God, they will be excluded from his kingdom	-.154	**.581**	.362
46. God chooses some to be eternally punished	-.187	**.564**	.353
9. God has drawn a destiny for us and it is our duty to follow it for our well-being	.198	**.514**	.303
47. Salvation from sin, death and hell is only possible through the grace of God	.436	**.500**	.440
49. We must make sacrifices to ask for God's forgiveness	.128	**.497**	.263
59. Promoters of gender ideology will be judged and punished by God	-.02	**.491**	.242
16. God only loves those who follow His precepts, others are sinners and deviants	-.35	**.462**	.336
26. The teachings of God offer the absolute truth to any doubt in life, therefore there is no doubt	.34	**.399**	.275

Exploratory Factor Analysis of God Images Questionnaire
% of variance 25.18 22.06
Total variance 47.25

Positive attitudes towards homosexuality: A set of questions about the homosexual population (civil union, the adoption of children and the existence of homosexual people) were included in order to measure attitudes towards homosexuality. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = "Strongly disagree" and 5 = "Strongly agree", with a higher score indicating a more favourable assessment of homosexuality. The 3 items were subjected to an Exploratory Factor Analysis using the Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation as the analysis method. The results showed good levels of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) =. 72; Bartlet's sphericity test, $\chi 2$ (359) = 401.914, p <.001. The results obtained indicate a one-dimensional model that explains 75% of the variance, obtaining a Cronbach's alpha index of .83 for the dimension.

Table 2

Table 2

Exploratory factor analysis of positive attitudes towards homosexuality

Items	Factor loads
Civil union approval	.88
Adoption by homosexuals	.86
That homosexuals exist	.86

Exploratory factor analysis of positive attitudes towards homosexuality

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10

By corroborating that the proposed items made up a single factor, we proceeded to create a general index of positive attitudes towards homosexuality so the statistical analysis could be executed in a more parsimonious way.

Procedure

Data collection was carried out by submitting a questionnaire in printed and digital versions. In all cases, participation was voluntary. The main objective of the research was reported and an informed consent was submitted, in which it was clearly stated that individualized results could not be returned and that the information collected was strictly for academic purposes. Furthermore, all participants were informed that participation was strictly voluntary, and consent could be withdrawn, and participation ceased at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality of the participants' responses was guaranteed.

Results

It was found that RWA is positively correlated with the image of a punishing God and, to a lesser extent, with the image of a benevolent God. Conversely, a negative correlation was found between positive attitudes towards homosexuality and the other variables measured. Finally, the analysis indicated a moderated correlation between the vision of a punishing God and a benevolent God (Table 3).

Table 3

Table 3				
Correlation between RWA, images of God and attitudes towards homosexuality				
	1	2	3	4
1 RWA	-			
2 Benevolent God	.13*	-		
3 Punishing God	.54**	.20**	-	
4 Positive attitudes towards homosexuality	-.57**	-.09	-.55**	-
*Notes *p< .05; **p<.01*				

Correlation between RWA, images of God and attitudes towards homosexuality

To corroborate the predictive power of the variables regarding positive attitudes towards homosexuality, a regression analysis was carried out. It was found that attitudes are predicted by a conception of God as punishing (PG) and RWA, $F(3, 302) = 68.226$, $p < .001$, with an explained variance of 40.7% where PG ($\beta = -.015$, $p < .001$) and RWA ($\beta = -.567$, $p < .001$).

Since the application of a 65-item scale is complicated, we proceeded to eliminate the items that had a high factorial load in more than one factor, and also those that had the lowest extraction values. As a result, 14 items were obtained for the benevolent God factor and 6 for the punishing God factor. To maintain a balance between both factors, the 4 items with the lowest factorial load of the first factor were eliminated, thus adding 4 more items to the second, considering its extraction value and its semantic sense. Based on these items, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis was performed on the 2-dimensional structure with the maximum likelihood method. Finally, this model obtained good levels of fit and adequate error $\chi^2 / gl = 4.27$ ($p < .001$); RMSEA = .068; SRMR = .070; GFI = .90.

Table 4

Table 4 *Confirmatory factor analysis of the God Image Scale*

	Factor loads	
Items	Benevolent God	Punishing God
2. The true nature of God is unconditional love for all	.679	
15. The lifestyle that God promotes is the best for us because it is based on love	.775	
32. God's love and compassion is the most wonderful thing we can have in life	.796	
33. God's love is so great that He created a beautiful world for us	.768	
35. God is the source of all love in the world	.851	
41. God shows His love by accompanying us from the beginning to the end of our lives	.85	
42. The greatest work of God is the human being; His infinite love is manifested in us	.766	
44. God loves us in such a way that He gave his Son so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish and have eternal life.	.826	
45. God has given us existence and life for His immense love and goodness	.858	
53. God's message is addressed to all by loving us as we are	.708	
65. God has established an order in the world, if we don't follow it, He will punish us		.82
64. Losing God's way will lead to punishments like those presented in the Bible		.848
57. It is our obligation to follow God's laws, only then will we be saved		.713

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12

56. Whoever does not follow God's commandments will be condemned	.789
63. Eternal punishment is only avoidable if we follow God's laws	.749
36. God's laws are fair and must be followed, not doing so implies that we must be punished	.728
30. Sins are paid with punishment and even death, the gift of following what God dictates is eternal life	.72
29. The world tries to corrupt us and divert us from the path of God, it is our duty to follow God and avoid his punishments	.713
20. God controls the entire universe according to His laws that we must all abide by	.72
19. If we do not faithfully follow what is said in the Bible, where the laws of God are indicated, we will cause His anger	.722

Confirmatory factor analysis of the God Image Scale

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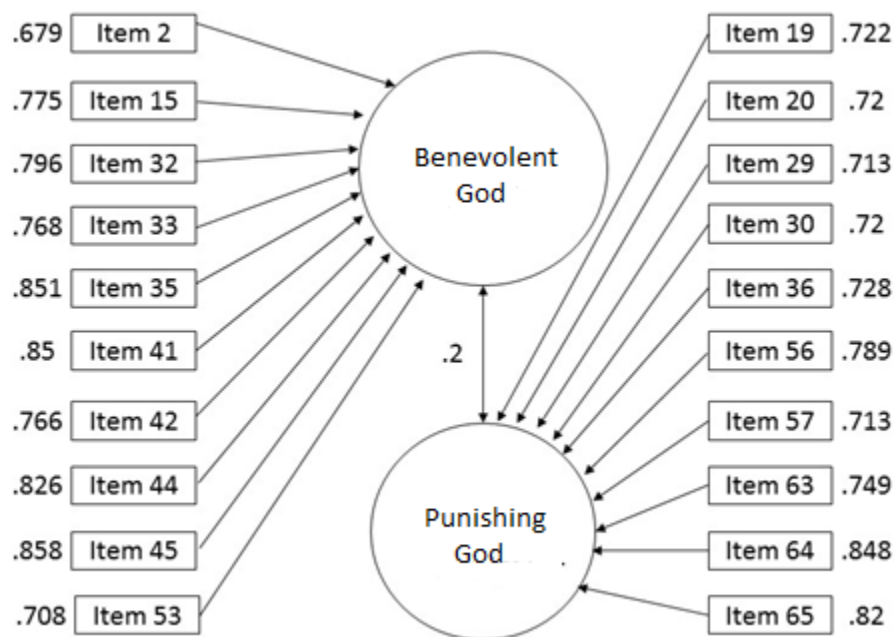
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Figure 1
Confirmatory factor analysis of the God Image Scale

To corroborate the consistency of the abbreviated version of the questionnaire, the correlation and regression analyses were performed again with the expectation that the trends identified in the previous analysis would be replicated.

In the linear regression model, attitudes are predicted by the conception of God as punishing (PG) and RWA, $F(3, 316) = 63.346$, $p < .001$, with an explained variance of 37.8% where PG ($\beta = -.323$, $p < .001$) and RWA ($\beta = -.635$, $p < .001$).

Subsequently, a mediation analysis was carried out (Figure 1) with the RWA as the independent variable, the attitudes towards homosexuality as the dependent variable and the image of the punishing God as the mediating variable. The Joint Significant Test (MacKinnon et al., 2002) confirms the presence of a mediation with both regression coefficients a and b returning as significant. The confidence interval of the indirect effect was estimated using the Monte Carlo Test (Yzerbyt et al., 2018), which was also significant (ab = -.22, 95% CI [-.30, -.14]). It is a partial mediation since the direct effect c' remained significant (figure 2).

A further mediation analysis was performed (Figure 3) with the RWA as the independent variable, attitudes towards homosexuality as the dependent variable, and the image of a benevolent God as the mediating variable. The presence of a mediation could not be confirmed by the Joint Significant Test (MacKinnon, et al, 2002) since the coefficient b returned as non-significant.

Having both images of God as a reference, profiles were created to have a better understanding about how the sample interprets God. A hierarchical analysis was constructed using the link grouping method between groups to obtain the number of suitable clusters, corroborated by the K-Means analysis method. As a result, there were two groups, the first made up of 167 individuals while the second contained 175 individuals, 18 were left out of both groups. It was found that the benevolent image of God was predominant in both groups, although the second group had a higher endorsement of the punishing image of God than the first. The first group will be named as non-fundamentalist and the second fundamentalist.

To corroborate the differences between the two groups and generate a better understanding of their profiles, we proceeded with a comparison of means between the variables of RWA, positive attitudes towards

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14

homosexuality, educational level and self-report attendance at church or a prayer center. Significant differences were found between the two profiles along these measures (Table 7).

Table 5

Table 5

Summary of the correlations between the study variables (with abbreviated scale of images of God

	1	2	3	4
1 RWA	-			
2 Benevolent God	.14**	-		
3 Punishing God	.52***	.20**	-	
4 Positive attitudes towards homosexuality	-.58***	-.15**	-.49***	-

Notes. *p< .05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Summary of the correlations between the study variables (with abbreviated scale of images of God

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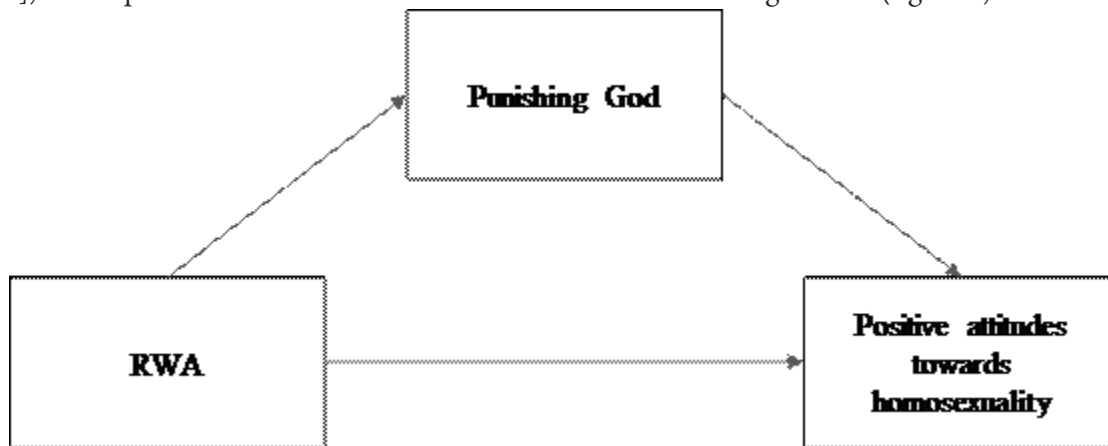

Figure 2.

Mediation model. The regression coefficients are not standardized. Standard errors in parentheses. The coefficient c in parentheses represents the total effect of RWA on Positive Attitudes towards homosexuality. *p<.05; * p< .01; *** p< .001.

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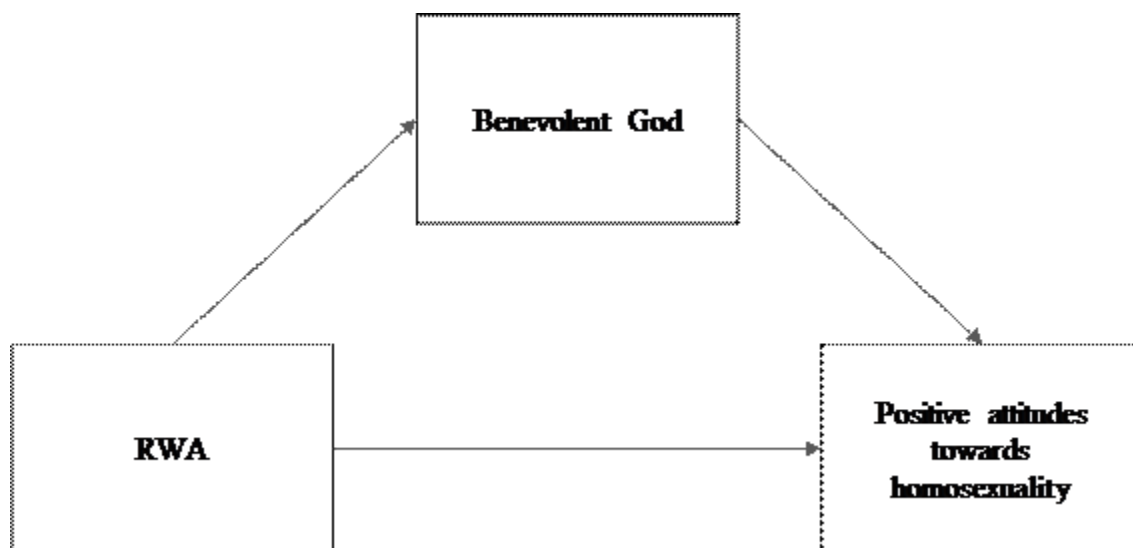
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Table 6

Table 6 Final centers of the clusters according to the images of God		
	Non-fundamentalist (n=167)	Fundamentalist (n=175)
Benevolent God	4.33	4.65
Punishing God	1.78	3.52

Final centers of the clusters according to the images of God

To corroborate the differences between the two groups and generate a better understanding of their profiles, we proceeded with a comparison of means between the variables of RWA, positive attitudes towards homosexuality, educational level and self-report attendance at church or a prayer center. Significant differences were found between the two profiles along these measures (Table 7).

Evaluating the profiles of both groups, the fundamentalist group presented higher levels of authoritarianism, as well as a greater disapproval of homosexuality. In terms of the demographic variables measured, the non-fundamentalist group presented a higher degree of education, attended churches / prayer centres less frequently and are younger compared to fundamentalists.

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16

Table 7

Table 7

Differences in variables according to group segmentation

Variable	Non - fundamentalist M(SD)	Fundamentalist M(SD)	gl	p	t	d
RWA	3.39 (.76)	4.08 (0.76)	322	001***	-8.113	.89
Positive attitudes towards homosexuality	3.76 (1.12)	2.68 (1.17)	333	.001***	8.624	.94
Degree of education	3.88 (.72)	3.69 (0.89)	331.452	0.31*	2.176	.12
Degree of attendance at church or prayer center	3.26 (1.6)	3.7 (1.42)	326.221	.001***	-2.735	.29
Age	32.9 (15.21)	37.53 (14.95)	335	.005*	-2.813	.3

Notes: *p< .05; **p< .01; ***p< .001

Differences in variables according to group segmentation

Discussion

The goal of this research was to investigate how conceptions or images of God relate to the holding of an authoritarian political ideology and positive attitudes towards homosexuality. In this regard, a central contribution is the development of a scale establishing levels of accordance with particular images of God. The scale presents a two-dimensional factorial structure that clearly represents a dichotomy in the way in which the divine entity is conceived in the Christian tradition: God as a benevolent or a punishing entity (Froese & Bader, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2005; Laurin et al., 2012; Lecaros, 2017).

At a correlational level, the results show a partial fulfilment of the central hypothesis of the study; whereby strong associations between the image of a punishing God, RWA and a prejudicial assessment of homosexuality was found. These results were expected since, from an authoritarian perspective, homosexuality is considered a threat to the existing social order and, from a fundamentalist view, homosexuality is antithetical to the structure of the world as dictated by God. This tendency is also observed when the image of a benevolent God is analysed, although the magnitudes of the relationships are less intense. This can be explained by a degree of overlap between the two images, which means that, although the representation of a punishing God is more strongly linked to a conservative vision susceptible to threat and prejudice; the benevolent vision would also embody aspects of this characterisation. Therefore, these results can be interpreted as validation of the hypothesis that it is a conception of a punishing God that poses a risk factor for prejudice towards homosexuality.

Furthermore, mediation analyses reveal that the negative relationship between RWA and positive attitudes toward homosexuality are mediated in part by the image of God. More specifically, it is the image of a punishing God, and not a benevolent God, that partially mediates this relationship. In other words, the effect of RWA on the positive attitudes towards homosexuality can be explained, in part, by a tendency in those who are more authoritarian towards perceiving God as a punishing entity. In turn, this belief in a punishing God

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17

diminishes the level of positive attitudes towards homosexuality. This pattern makes sense to the extent that the punishing image of God is aligned with religious fundamentalism.

Through the segmentation in profiles a better understanding is established on how people interpret the nature of God, and with it, the differences in their attitudes towards homosexuality. This is important because, although the two images of God identified maintain a certain autonomy from each other, the images together have a common relationship: God acts as an entity that restores order through the punishment of deviations and sin, providing security and accompanying his faithful, thus demonstrating his love (Lecaros, 2017).

The conception of God as a threatening and punishing entity is more prolific in those who hold fundamentalist religious beliefs could be a result of the presence of a negativity bias that, in most situations, highlights negative events more prominently and powerfully than positive events (Johnson & Tierney, 2018). In turn, this corresponds to the hypothesis of "supernatural monitoring", which outlines a belief in the capacity and will of gods to intervene in individuals' lives and an associated following of religious norms (Atkinson & Bourrat, 2011). Given these aspects of the fundamentalist view of God as a punishing entity, a prejudicial attitude towards homosexuality can be seen as a manifestation of a faithful adherence to established religious precepts motivated by a fear of potential punishment in case of deviation (Newman & Graham, 2018).

A further observation relates to the finding that authoritarian tendencies are significantly more pronounced in those with fundamentalist beliefs that in those with non-fundamentalist beliefs. This could be due to the difference in interpretation of the divine nature between the two groups, resulting in both groups responding to what religious dictates in different ways: an acceptance of punishment towards those considered deviants in the fundamentalist group and a more tolerant view in the non-fundamentalist group. Such an interpretation is consistent with the findings of Altemeyer and Hunsberger (2009) on the relationship between religiosity and authoritarianism in the case of fundamentalists.

Whilst those holding fundamentalist belief have a greater tendency towards thinking of God as benevolent, their marked authoritarian character is suggestive of an interpretation of this benevolence as only applying to those who strictly adhere to the established religious precepts. In this sense, the fundamentalist group can be seen as expressing an ingroup favouritism, whereby those not following the dictates of God – the outgroup – are deserving of punishment. In this regard, RWA facilitates the maintenance of group cohesion insofar as it is beneficial for an individual to ally with other people who have the same or similar motivations - in this case the safeguarding of Christian traditions and values. Furthermore, recognition from one's community for adherence to the most valuable collectively held norms confers an important social benefit; namely, by projecting an image of oneself and being recognised as a model Christian, individuals can expect to experience higher overall levels of well-being (Van Cappellen et al., 2016).

Through the lens of cognitive needs (Jost et al., 2003), the relatively lower prejudice exhibited by non-fundamentalists towards homosexuality can be seen as a by-product of greater exposure to discourses referring to social justice. In contrast with the authoritarianism of those with fundamentalist beliefs, non-fundamentalist authoritarianism is manifest in an adherence to wider social norms than those advanced within strict religious doctrine – a thesis supported by research showing that RWA is a significant and positive predictor for the support of the prohibition of speeches hatred towards minorities (Bilewicz et al., 2017). Fundamentalists, on the other hand, are postulated to have a higher incidence of cognitive closure linked to their defence of traditional roles and institutions and as manifest in their negative attitude towards gay marriage, civil union, and adoption rights for homosexuals. Such legalistic changes are seen by fundamentalists a challenge to the existing, legitimate, social order and are thus rejected along with those who do not share their vision of the world; one which is largely defined by religious precepts and one in which they feel safe. It should be noted that, of the two groups identified, fundamentalists have the highest rates of attendance at Church / prayer centres. It is possible that this high attendance is driven by fear underpinned by a motivation, to appease God for any sins committed (Hermann et al., 2015). Those with fundamentalist beliefs also report

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18

as having a lower degree of educational instruction than non-fundamentalists, which suggests that lower levels of education could act as a risk factor for prejudice resulting from (1) a lack of discussion and reflection on the nature of homosexuality and (2) an uncritical adherence to religious principles, even when some of these are contradictory.

The differences in attitudes towards homosexuality between both groups could also be understood through the lens of morality. Regarding those with non-fundamentalist beliefs, it could be argued that they have a tendency towards an ¨ethics of autonomy¨ which is why, in general, they are more open to homosexuality. The existence of homosexuality, the fact that they can adopt, and a legal recognition of homosexual relationships through civil union would not be taken as a threat to the social order; on the contrary, they would have a positive representation insofar as they allow each individual to personally develop and continue with their objectives, prioritizing the individual character. Such a state of affairs can be viewed as contributing to the creation of a fairer system, founded upon the primacy of the individual. In contrast, fundamentalists can be seen to have a close relationship with an ¨ethics of community¨ and an ¨ethics of divinity¨ insofar as they conceive of homosexuality as damaging to the group image and honour, threatening important established values and morality. On this view, although homosexuality is not seen as causing direct damage to individuals, the damage would be significant in the symbolic sphere.

Conclusions

It was found that there is a direct relationship between RWA and both images of God and, in turn, both images influence salient attitudes to various issues of public relevance. Within the Peruvian context, religion has a very important role in individual's lives, as it gives meaning and coherence to the self and the world, as well as providing the comfort and support associated with a sense of broader purpose- something which is highly useful in an aggressive context with few opportunities such as that found in Peru.

The obtained results suggest, along with previous research, that one's representation of God has a direct impact on their interpretation of the world: either encouraging greater benevolence and openess, or encouraging a dogmatic adherence to religious norms with associated punishment for infractions of those norms.These findings can be taken to shed light on Allport's paradox that religion can both make and break prejudice since, within the duality of discourse on the nature of God, one version can be considered as a protective factor, and the other can lead to higher levels of prejudice and discrimination.Studying religion in the Peruvian environment is of great importance given the high number of people who are attached to a religion. In this regard the findings of this study help illuminate how aspects of one's religiousity play a role in determining how individual's react to certain social phenomena. At a political level, whilst Peru is constitutionally secular, findings suggesting that one's persepctive on God's image can influence responses to issues of social importance. This can have a bearing on aspects of political decision and accountability in a context, such as Peru, where the majority of elected politicians are openly religious.

Limitations and recommendations

Firstly, the inclusion criterion that participants consider themselves "a believer in God" can be taken as very broad, since this does not necessarily imply affiliation with a religion and an associated adherence to religious principles However, measures were included at the point of engagement with the study that allowed for a knowledge of participants' levels of religious affiliation, as well as their ideological motivations. Secondly, the length of the survey used was such that participants may have disengaged whilst completing it. However, good levels of reliability were obtained and, most of all, the questionnaire was validated. Thirdly, for future research, given the emphasis that it had on people's attitudes in general, it would be valuable to include a measure of issues relating to morality. The inclusion of such a measure would allow researchers to conduct a more in-

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19

depth analysis. Finally, given the importance of religion in Peru, future research could attempt to build on the findings within this paper more generally, to contribute to a better understanding of how religious beliefs, rigid by their very nature, can affect individuals' judgement and perception of the world.

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20

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22

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Giacomo Olano Raffo, Mathias Schmitz, Harry M. Lewis,
Agustín Espinosa
**Images of God and their mediating role in the relationship
between right-wing authoritarianism and attitudes
towards homosexuality in Peruvian Catholic and
evangelical believers**