# A study of relationships
# between worldview, political orientation and art preferences

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## Abstract

As one of the definitions art is one way of self-expression. From a larger perspective, individual's self-expression, understanding and identity shaped by living environment, socio-economic conditions, cultural environment, societal perceptions and norms, and through complex interrelationship of all of these. This complexity is defined and used in this study as 'worldview'. The 'worldview' as defined in *Actual Turkish Dictionary*, is the general view that includes understanding universe; meaning, purpose and value of life; human's existence and behavior as a whole. Worldview is also the final point where all values put together in a pot; and shape all; including beliefs, behavior, will, passion, choices, and preferences. In short, it is the end process which influences all choices regarding life. Art preferences in relation to political orientation were our research interest. According to findings there was a relationship between political orientation and participants' art preferences.

*Keywords*: Art preferences; political orientation; art and politics.

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## 1. Introduction

The sophisticated interrelationship between art and politics was explained in Tool (2013)'s study. He pointed out the role of art as a voice of protest, showed the power of art as an expression. While art is born out of individual's internal conflicts, politics are born out of societal conflicts. In this regard, art as an expression carries a political meaning of conflicts within self and against society. As such examples, Voltaire and Rousseau's works were the tools of French Revolution, and strengthened revolution's background through Enlightenment period. Famous work of Picasso, Guernica, was a work of art, created against war and has become an icon of a political voice ever since. Goya, with his famous 'May 3, 1808' expressed aggressively violent nature of war. As observed through history, Art and politics are two significant phenomena that carry information about human life.

Art and politics has been almost the cause of existence for each other throughout history. The association between art and politics has been always existed within various perspectives and trends throughout centuries (Ulusoy, 2005).

For Plato (427-347BC), art can never truly represent reality, for life itself, of which art is merely a copy, does not represent reality. Our world, the so-called 'real world', as we experience it; is an illusion like reflections in a mirror or shadows on a wall. For Plato, art is a powerful manipulative tool that can manipulate human nature. Under these emotional influences, we cannot use our minds, nor can think rationally. We need to escape from the illusions including art and poetry and see the reality. Therefore, there was no place in his Republic for artists.

According to Tool (2013), from Ancient Ages to the Modern period, Art was functional; and it was an agent for societal purposes. Between 18th and 20th Centuries this view started to be criticized and rejected. Art started to be an individual phenomenon during these times; however, art started to become increasingly political over the time; more art with political content has been created. While it has been more of a free expression, it also has become more political; and has become a political voice against politics. Art by its own nature is an expressional tool. Artist, on the other hand, is a subject expressing himself not directly but through metaphors, therefore is an expression of potential objection within himself. Henceforth, art is a political expression in a direct or indirect way.

Every work of **art** is the **child** of its time; each period produces an **art** of its **own**, which cannot be repeated (Wassily Kandinsky) (Baynes, 2002, p. 39). From Marxist point of view, art also is a part of the political, economic, and cultural context it was created within; it is also a creative result of power dynamics and interrelationships within society. While art was created for kings, pharaohs and emperors in the old times; today it is created for, manipulated or controlled by power relationships of global capital. As Danto (2010, p. 38) suggested: "The products created today as contemporary art are becoming endlessly diversified, the market gives everything a monetary value and it also succeeded at bringing art into market." (Akbulut, 2012).

The term 'worldview' was first introduced to the literature by Kant in his *'Critique of Judgment'*. German term 'welt anschauung' was translated into English as 'worldview' (Tokat, 2006).

'Worldview' is the belief systems that decides and builds frame for individual's perception, thinking, knowing, actions and all reality grounds. It is also opinions and foundational accepted norms hidden in the surroundings including society, traditions, institutions, rules and language (Tokat, 2006). We are either aware or not, we are all under pressure of a worldview. Prevailing worldview is the one that is accepted by the majority of society. For example, prevailing worldview in the Western societies is 'industrial worldview' (Orsen, 1992).

In Hegelian approach this concept is associated with art. According to Hegel, an art expressing a worldview may differ from another art expressing another worldview. According to Otgun (2009),

Modernism's conceptual background is based on Enlightenment understanding of rationality, and mind over creativity. Romanticism is the first reaction to Modernism. According to Hauser, Romanticism can come to a consensus with Modern Art that supports individual's free expression, escaping from all environmental powers, and indifference to all limitations and rules. However, according to McLean and McMillan (2009), when we think about the conservatism that reacts against changes in society, but supports conserving societal-cultural values; we expect that conservative worldview's art preferences would be toward traditionalist styles and aesthetical canon.

Worldview and art are in such an interrelationship that aesthetics becomes the panorama of worldview; because worldview puts his own signature on aesthetical understanding. What we see as music, painting, poetry, literature, architecture; are all also worldviews in this sense (Hans, 1993).

## 2. The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate possible influences of individuals' worldviews and political orientations on their art preferences. Worldview, especially in recent years in Turkey, is described as political orientation and where someone feels belonging to in the political scope. Therefore, worldview, political orientation and art choices and their interrelationships; is a sociological phenomenon and is focus of investigation in this study. Accordingly, research questions are:

1. Is there a relationship between political orientation and art preferences?

2. Is there a relationship between educational attainment and art preferences?

3. Is there a relationship between income level and art preferences?

## 3. Methodology

This study is designed as phenomenology as a model of qualitative inquiry. In the study, subjects were selected from the age group of 25-46. The study's universe consists of residents of Bursa, the fourth largest city in Turkey. The study included 178 participants from various educational and occupational backgrounds. Purposive-random sampling method was used to select participants. 178 participants involved from three central districts of Bursa: Yildirim, Osmangazi and Nilufer. The age group of participants is 25-46, which is the most common age group of political involvement, according to Kislali (1995). This age group commonly consists of settled individuals, who have their jobs and adapted to their roles in society. According to Cukurcayir (2000), starting from later ages, individuals start to maintain and stabilize their political opinions and orientations. Political involvement and voting rates also start to increase by older ages.

Another criterion in selection of participants is whether or not someone has education in art or a related area. If so, these individuals were not selected as participants. If someone has education in art, it is likely that who has a larger view, a critical view and understanding toward artworks. Therefore, people with art education, are likely to isolate their political orientations from art preferences.

## 4. Instruments

In this study the term 'traditional-style painting' describes a painting that depicts concrete, real objects, such as nature, figures, environment and landscapes. Another term used in the study, 'modern' describes a painting that depicts themes against traditional, depicts abstract and geometric forms, concepts and ideas, and are not understood at first sight.

Two instruments were used in the data collection. The first is a survey questionnaire designed based on the literature review (Kadir Has University, 2015; Sonar Public Survey Company, 2010). The

questionnaire included six questions. Demography questions were used for classification during analysis. A study (Altan, 2011) it was suggested that married individuals' political involvement was higher compared to singles. Other questions included are about educational attainment, occupations, and income levels. And these demography questions were relevant to compare with art preferences. Neither names, nor other personal information were collected to make participants feel comfortable regarding uses of personal information.

The second instrument used for data collection is the art preferences survey. The survey consisted of a catalogue of artworks. The artworks in the catalogue were selected from Traditional and Modern categories and their sub-categories accordingly. Both categories included sub-categories of Figurative, Landscape and Abstract.

The catalogue size is 58cmX69cm and included 15 traditional and 15 modern paintings with the same sizes of 10cmX10cm. The paintings were shown all at the same page for the purpose of viewing all paintings all at once. The artworks were selected from exemplary works known by art historians but not well known to everyone as part of popular culture. For example, Osman Hamdi Bey's famous work of 'turtle tamer' is not preferred, since it is popular and well known to everyone. His painting in the same style, '*playing chess in kahvehane'* is preferred instead.

## 5. Data Collection and Analysis

In data collection process, we appropriated a small-sized pilot study with 10 participants. The pilot study helped to determine which instrument should be the first to administer for data collection. It was clear that when participants were asked to fill out their demographic information and their political orientation; then they preferred to pick an artwork in the catalogue, which is parallel to their political orientation, and was possibly under influence of the political orientation questionnaire. So, the order of instrument to administer had effect on preferences. This was a problem since it could have caused a bias.

### *Application of Instrument # 1*

Participants selected paintings from catalogue. The question asked was: "Which painting would you like the most?", following the participant's selection, they were asked to fill out the descriptive demography questions.

### *Application of Instrument # 2*

On this stage, another instrument was used. A different participant group was asked the question: "Which style of paintings do you like the most?" Then, follow up questions were asked based on their answer. The follow up questions were asked to identify exact style of paintings, they would prefer. Following the participant's final answer, they were asked to fill out the descriptive demography questions.

The reason data collection included two different instruments were to limitation of the art preferences survey-catalogue and the limited number of painting selections. Since paintings from art history included endless possibility and varieties of paintings, this could have been a limitation in developing the instrument, art preferences survey. For example, if someone preferred a traditional painting from the catalogue, this could have been just because of the particular choices given in the catalogue. We could never have been sure that our selection of paintings had showed all the alternative options to decide someone's painting-choices. We decided to administer two different instruments to two different groups of participants as known as parallel forms method in the literature.

Parallel forms method is useful to see whether or not one of the instruments are reliable to measure expected criteria. In our method, descriptive demography questions remained the same but we used two different instruments to measure art preferences. This method provided us not only testing reliability of the instruments but also consistency of instruments measuring the same criteria. Collected data was analyzed in SPSS statistics software.

## 6.Results

The findings collected through the use of instrument 1 showed the percentages of the art preferences categorized based on political orientations as seen on Table 1.

**Table 1. Art preferences distributed based on data collected with instrument #1.**

| | Art Preferences | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Political Orientation* | Traditional | Modern |
| Conservative | 44.6 % | 16.7 % |
| Republican | 16.9 % | 58.3 % |
| Nationalist | 18.1 % | 8.3 % |
| Social Democrat | 10.8 % | 4.2 % |
| Socialist | 6.0 % | 0 % |
| Turkish-National-Socialist | 3.6 % | 12.5 % |

Political categorization and terminology show differences in various cultures. Our political orientation categories are classified according to commonly accepted Turkish traditional political terminology. In Turkish political understanding, political orientation is divided as Left and Right. Conservative and Nationalists are grouped as Rightist; and others are grouped as Leftist. The findings based on the instrument #1 showed that, the participants who selected traditional paintings are 62.7% Rightist; 37.3% Leftist. The participants who selected modern paintings are 25% Rightist; 75% Leftist. The choices show that majority of Rightist participants preferred paintings that are seen as traditional; on the other hand majority of Leftist participants preferred paintings that are Modern.

**Tablo 2. Art preferences distributed based on data collected with instrument #2.**

| | Art Preferences | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Political Orientation* | Traditional | Modern |
| Conservative | 34.2 % | 8.6 % |
| Republican | 31.4 % | 60 % |
| Nationalist | 28.6 % | 11.4 % |
| Social Democrat | 0 % | 5.7 % |
| Socialist | 5.7 % | 14.3 % |
| Turkish-National-Socialist | 0 % | 0 % |

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Based on the application of Instrument #2, the participants who selected traditional paintings are 62.9% Rightist; 37.1% Leftist. The participants who selected modern paintings are 20% Rightist; 80% Leftist. The choices show that majority of Rightist participants preferred paintings that are seen as traditional; on the other hand majority of Leftist participants preferred paintings that are Modern. The findings from two instruments were consistent and showed a very close distribution. Art preferences were closely correlated with individuals' political orientation and 'world views'.

## 7.Conclusion

When we think about worldview and political orientation as cultural constructs, we infer that these complexities are shaped by social environment, life experiences, language, religion and other phenomena. Art preferences as an aesthetical taste, would undoubtedly differ accordingly, and are shaped by the culture people live within. The differences in aesthetical taste could be results of each and every culturally constructed phenomenon, and could be shaped in a sophisticated interrelationship among all of these.

In this study we can conclude that Right politically oriented individuals prefer traditional artworks in most cases. The term 'conservative' means a worldview based on conserving existing values in a culture, so it is not surprising that Right politically oriented individuals preferred the traditional. On the other hand, Left in political terminology signifies a worldview that is against conservative values and these individuals are rather pursuing protesting, activism and revolutionary approaches for societal progress. This progressive worldview may conflict with cultural and traditional values at times. Modernism itself was a philosophy based on rejecting old and traditional values in favor of new which signified the progress in life, and art as well. As expected, Leftist participants preferred modern artworks based on the findings.

The results of this study help us understand artistic tastes and how this construct is shaped by other cultural phenomena; so it may help designing cultural policies and educational policies accordingly. Symmetrically, whether art policies and art education also influence worldviews and political orientation is a fundamental question at this point.

Based on the results, we have not found meaningful relationship between art preferences and sex, educational attainment, and income level.

## 8.Discussion and Recommendations

Results of this study are limited to the sample group and the universe and may not apply to general populations. However, there may meaningful inferences based on the sample size. Further studies are suggested in different geographical and cultural regions of Turkey and in other countries. Replication or similar studies with larger samples sizes may be required to see a clear picture of the phenomenon. Political orientation gamut may show differences in different societies. Further research should be designed according to political and cultural construct of the societies that are under focus. Studies within various sex categories and income levels may be useful although no meaningful connection was found in this study. Similarly, various populations living in urban and rural areas and representing various ethnicities may be suggested.

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