

## Cultural Cognition and Voting: Understanding Values and Perceived Risks in the Colombian Population

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**Abstract :** Recently, electoral results across many countries have shown to be inconsistent with rational decision theory, which states that individuals make decisions based on maximizing benefits and reducing risks. An alternative explanation has emerged: Fear and rage-driven vote have been proved to be highly effective for political persuasion and mobilization. This phenomenon has been evident in the 2016 elections in the United States, 2006 elections in Mexico, 1998 elections in Venezuela, and 2004 elections in Bolivia. In Colombia, it has occurred recently in the 2016 plebiscite for peace and 2018 presidential elections. The aim of this study is to explain this phenomenon using cultural cognition theory, referring to the psychological predisposition individuals have to believe that its own and its peer's behavior is correct and, therefore, beneficial to the entire society. Cultural cognition refers to the tendency of individuals to fit perceived risks, and factual beliefs into group shared values; the Cultural Cognition Worldview Scales (CCWS) measures cultural perceptions through two different dimensions: Individualism-communitarianism and hierarchy-egalitarianism. The former refers to attitudes towards social dominance based on conspicuous and static characteristics (sex, ethnicity or social class), while the latter refers to attitudes towards a social ordering in which it is expected from individuals to guarantee their own wellbeing without society's or government's intervention. A probabilistic national sample was obtained from different polls from the consulting and public opinion company Centro Nacional de Consultoría. Sociodemographic data was obtained along with CCWS scores, a subjective measure of left-right ideological placement and vote intention for 2019 Mayor's elections were also included in the questionnaires. Finally, the question "In your opinion, what is the greatest risk Colombia is facing right now?" was included to identify perceived risk in the population. Preliminary results show that Colombians are highly distributed among hierarchical communitarians and egalitarian individualists (30.9% and 31.7%, respectively), and to a less extent among hierarchical individualists and egalitarian communitarians (19% and 18.4%, respectively). Males tended to be more hierarchical ( $p < .000$ ) and communitarian ( $p = .009$ ) than females. ANOVA's revealed statistically significant differences between groups (quadrants) for the level of schooling, left-right ideological orientation, and stratum ( $p < .000$  for all), and proportion differences revealed statistically significant differences for groups of age ( $p < .001$ ). Differences and distributions for vote intention and perceived risks are still being processed and results are yet to be analyzed. Results show that Colombians are differentially distributed among quadrants in regard to sociodemographic data and left-right ideological orientation. These preliminary results indicate that this study may shed some light on why Colombians vote the way they do, and future qualitative data will show the fears emerging from the identified values in the CCWS and the relation this has with vote intention.

**Keywords :** communitarianism, cultural cognition, egalitarianism, hierarchy, individualism, perceived risks

**Conference Title :** ICCSED 2019 : International Conference on Civil Society, Election and Democracy

**Conference Location :** London, United Kingdom

**Conference Dates :** August 20-21, 2019