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# **YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT: HOW DOES POLITICAL IDEOLOGY PREDICT DISGUST TOWARD FOOD IN INDIA?**

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*The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose. The study has been preregistered in the OSF repository. Registration DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/K6MVU>. The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in the OSF repository: <https://osf.io/n5v49/>. This study was approved by the ethics committee at Monk Prayogshala in March, 2020(#048-020).*

## **You Are What You Eat: How Does Political Ideology Predict Disgust Toward Food in India?**

### **Abstract**

This study advances the exploration of food disgust by examining its relationship with political ideology and moral attitudes towards non-vegetarianism in India. Our non-experimental research delves into the influence of political ideology, vote preference, and trait disgust on aversion towards non-vegetarian food and its consumers, predicting their role in fostering disgust and perceiving these individuals as morally questionable in India. The study reveals insights into the complex relationships between political orientation, personal traits, and dietary attitudes. These findings emphasize the necessity of considering a broader array of factors beyond conventional variables in political and food psychology research, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of how political ideology and disgust shape attitudes towards non-vegetarianism in India. Limitations have been discussed in detail.

**Keywords:** disgust, food, moral attitudes, non-vegetarianism, party preference, political ideology

## **You Are What You Eat: How Does Political Ideology Predict Disgust Toward Food in India?**

Consider the following two scenarios: (i) finding hair in your bowl of rice, and (ii) a vegetarian watching their non-vegetarian friend eat shrimp. What would be the behavioral, emotional, and physiological reactions of most people to both of these events? In the case of the first one, most individuals (vegetarian or otherwise) will have an immediate feeling of disgust, evident through an immediate gag reflex. Scholarly opinions (e.g., Hartmann & Siegrist, 2018) point out that such reactionary disgust serves as a defense mechanism against environmentally-produced pathogens and viruses, the ingestion of which is detrimental to human well-being. These suggestions are encapsulated within the Behavioural Immune System (BIS) theory (Schaller, 2011) which posits disgust as a human emotion, one that produces a regulatory response for threat detection and disease prevention by influencing our perceptions about the event at hand.

As an evolutionary mechanism with a highly adaptive function, disgust cognitively prevents health hazards by triggering certain preventative action tendencies (Terrizzi et al., 2013). The BIS system is an essential adaptation with defined psychological (disgust reaction) and behavioral responses (social withdrawal) to disgusting stimuli, both at a context- and person-specific level, after detecting the presence of microbes or infectious stimuli in the surrounding environment (Curtis et al., 2011). However, its explanation of disgust as a defense is rather simplistic and inconsistent. Because when we consider the second scenario of a vegetarian overlooking a non-vegetarian person eating shrimp, it may evoke a similar disgust reaction from the vegetarian who is simply witnessing someone else consume it. In this scenario, there is no immediate threat of infection to the observer that would explain their disgusted reaction.

### **Disgust Classification and Disgust Sensitivity**

Disgust, as a fundamental emotion, is a universal phenomenon (Chapman & Anderson, 2012), encompassing a wide spectrum of triggers that span from the palpable, such as encountering unsanitary restrooms, to the highly abstract and speculative, like instances of moral degeneracy. Despite the diversity of these triggering factors, the underlying core of disgust remains consistent—a profound sense of revulsion and abhorrence towards the stimuli responsible for its elicitation. This universal detestation is typically accompanied by distinctive facial expressions (Rozin et al., 2000), notably the opening of the mouth and the wrinkling of the nose.

Disgust has been a subject of extensive categorization, with one of the earliest systematic classifications offered by Rozin et al., (1994), which delineates four distinct sub-factors: core disgust, animal-related disgust, interpersonal disgust, and moral disgust. These sub-factors encompass a range of disgust-related scenarios, each with its own distinct relevance and function. Core disgust, as the foundational component, emerges early in an individual's life and is primarily associated with responses to perceived threats arising from the potential ingestion of noxious substances or refusal. This form of disgust serves as an evolutionary mechanism designed to safeguard against the consumption of materials that may be harmful to one's well-being. Conversely, animal-related disgust is linked to a more complex array of triggers, including moral transgressions and primal instincts. It encompasses various elements, such as disgust elicited by death, sexual practices, and bodily violations. For instance, sexual disgust is interconnected with the avoidance of sexual contact with individuals deemed unacceptable from an evolutionary perspective, such as biological relatives, the elderly, the very young, or those from different species (Fessler & Navarrete, 2003). Furthermore,

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disgust associated with blood and injuries—which are related to physical integrity violations—serves as a sharp reminder of the inherent fragility and impermanence of human existence. Interpersonal disgust results from transgressions of social and spiritual order, whereas moral disgust is based on the breaching of ethical norms and principles. Together, these sub-factors provide a thorough framework for comprehending disgust’s complex nature and wide range of expressions in diverse spheres of human experience (Olatunji & Sawchuk, 2005).

The three-domain disgust model proposed by Tybur et al. (2009) also draws inspiration from Rozin’s classification system. The model suggests that disgust can be classified according to its function, namely as a helpful tool for disease aversion, reproductive success during mate selection, and assessing social norms and morality (Tybur et al., 2009). As such, disgust aimed at non-vegetarian food may arise from pathogen disgust related to the food itself or moral disgust for those who consume it. By this logic, disgust towards a food or food group is essentially characterized as an emotion to avoid the ingestion of possible harmful or pathogen-laced substances. This avoidance is propelled through an oral rejection of foods that are typically bitter (because bitterness is associated with poison), intrinsically spitting out the disrelish that accompanies it (Chapman & Anderson, 2012). These findings highlight the complex relationship that exists between disgust, sensory perception, and the natural desire to protect one’s health and welfare, highlighting the flexibility and usefulness of disgust as a feeling.

### **Disgust Sensitivity and Morality**

Popularly argued to be a protector from infections and germs, disgust has also been associated with the social order of society, especially with the moral perception of societal groups and their behaviors

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(e.g., Crawford et al., 2014). Myriad researchers are questioning the importance and accuracy of disgust reactions when making moral judgments. The dilemma then is whether or not disgust should play a role in situations of morality. Haidt et al., (1993) are of the view that the morality of an event should be gauged based on whether or not an individual's or group's actions infringe upon the rights of another individual or group. They justify this argument further by stating that many so-called disgusting events (such as eating non-vegetarian food) are harmless and cannot be morally condoned. This argument has persisted without any clear answers for decades. Numerous studies have documented a positive association between self-reported disgust reactions and moral judgments, implying that the stronger the disgust reaction, the more severe the immorality attached to that situation (Gutierrez & Giner-Sorolla, 2007; Horberg et al., 2009; Inbar et al., 2009). Further evidence supporting the link between morality, anger, and disgust comes from (Giner-Sorolla & Chapman, 2017), the conclusions of which show that disgust related to morality is activated as a response to information about the moral character (animal cruelty), whereas anger related to morality is activated in response to actions that are considered wrong (murder). Additionally, the community/contempt – autonomy/anger– divinity/disgust (CAD) hypothesis (Rozin et al., 1999) also supports the aforementioned claim by stating that disgust reactions are a function of divinity, purity, or moral transgressions.

Consuming meat has recently been associated with negative environmental effects, which have been linked to negative moral self-image and ideology (Dhont & Hodson, 2014; Minson & Monin, 2012). This realization is now crucial for determining one's own social identity as well as evaluating the moral standing of others. As a result of this ideology, stronger reactions towards a non-vegetarian diet and individuals who consume it have been reported. For instance, in a study by Bagci

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et al., (2021), vegans and vegetarians were shown to possess the greatest discrimination perception of outgroups, the strongest ingroup favoritism, and greater moral consideration as opposed to flexitarians and meat eaters.

According to the appraisal-tendency framework, every emotion has an associated core appraisal that defines it; thus, thematically similar appraisals end up eliciting those emotions (Lerner & Keltner, 2001). By extension, simply experiencing disgust may lead to a heightened sense of moral rightness and wrongness. Moreover, due to the existing relationship of disgust with purity and contamination, the perceptions of contamination are labeled as immoral and those of purity as moral. Extraneous factors like cultural differences, context, emotional intensity, and individual differences in disgust perception might further complicate this relationship.

### **Factors Impacting Food Disgust and Behavior**

As it is unlikely that disgust toward food preferences emerges in a vacuum, it could be useful to consider the influence of contextual factors such as culture and political ideology. According to Parekh (2014), foodways (i.e., dietary and food preferences) not only teach us about a group's diets and their environment but also relate to issues about power, group affiliation and identification, hierarchy in society, and inclusion and exclusion in society. This was further validated in a study wherein meat eaters, flexitarians (people who often restrict their meat intake), and meat avoiders (vegans and vegetarians) were tested on inter-group attitudes in a sample of Turkish people (Bagci et al., 2021). The study found increased ingroup favoritism among meat-avoiders, driven by perceived discrimination toward other dietary groups. Meat-eaters identified with their group based on enjoyment of meat, moral considerations, and perceived threats from meat-avoiders. Perceived



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discrimination among meat-avoiders resulted in more negative social consequences for other dietary groups.

### **Indian Caste System and Food Disgust**

Culture shapes perceptions of disgust among community members (Olatunji & Sawchuk, 2005). One pertinent aspect of culture in the Indian context dwells on the historically entrenched caste system.

The caste system is a social stratification system that has played a fundamental role in deciding the extent of physical and economic access to food among the members of society (Thorat & Lee, 2005).

Historically, the social status of a person was ascribed based on where they were born and what food they ate (Sankaran et al., 2017). The vegetarian diet was viewed as a means to preserve the intrinsic morality of the upper castes, and hence consuming a non-vegetarian diet or even simply accepting food or beverages from people of lower castes or meat-eaters would be considered highly immoral.

This moral code associated with diet and water consumption brought the concepts of purity and pollution to the Indian kitchen, thus making it a sign of identification with one's standing in society and creating an environment of bias and moral hierarchy (Kikon, 2022).

Caste influences every aspect of Indian society, including socio-political and moral values.

Consumption of non-vegetarian food is deemed impure, dirty (*'ganda'*) and immoral (Kikon, 2022), to the extent of being lynch-worthy, by the "upper" castes, whereas the "lower" castes have been vilified for consuming meat, especially by those who identify as politically right-wing (Sathyamala, 2018).

Regulating and endorsing dietary taboos and prohibitions grounded in the caste system, superiority, and the argumentation of sanitation, uncleanliness, and contamination form an indispensable agenda of hierarchical power (Kikon, 2022).

### **Political Ideology and Disgust Sensitivity**

The intertwining of caste dynamics and dietary practices in Indian society extends to the realm of socio-political ideologies. The phenomenon of disgust, characterized by its facile elicitation concerning members of perceived out-groups is deemed immoral. Research indicates that individuals harboring strong aversions to socially deviant groups exhibit heightened susceptibility to disgust and are more inclined to align with conservative ideologies (Aarøe et al., 2017; Tybur et al., 2015). This association between the sensitivity to disgust and an individual's political ideology is traced back to ancestral notions of purity and conformity, posited to have functioned as a mechanism to safeguard in-group populations against novel pathogens for which they lacked antibodies (Haidt & Graham, 2007; Inbar et al., 2009). Consequently, disgust plays a pivotal role in shaping an individual's worldview, attitudes, and behavior, extending its influence even to political voting behavior in elections (Stewart et al., 2019). Meanwhile, liberals are less influenced by disgust reactions as they regulate such responses through emotional reappraisal on a more frequent basis than conservatives (Feinberg et al., 2014).

### **The Present Study**

The study of disgust, particularly related to foodways, has come a long way from the issues of contamination (both physiological and psychological) to the role of social processes and moral concerns. Yet, it remains arguably one of the most complex and understudied human emotions. Therefore, the present study goes a step further to evaluate salient determinants of food disgust. For example, conservatism—the ideology associated with preserving the status quo—is also linked to purity as a moral concern (Inbar et al., 2009). The present research, thus, aims to explore the

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relationship between political ideology and disgust toward non-vegetarian foods and people who consume them in India.

The association between explicit moral attitudes towards non-vegetarianism and political ideology was explored. Further, we also explored whether party preference is associated with disgust toward food. Given the highly salient moral politics of food in India, understanding the explicit mechanisms of moral attitudes, specifically disgust, towards non-vegetarianism would have long-lasting sociopolitical implications.

In sum, we hypothesized the following:

H1a/b: Conservatism (or leaning politically right in the norms/hierarchies subscale) predicts higher disgust towards non-vegetarian food.

H2a: Party preference predicts higher disgust towards non-vegetarian food.

H2b/c: Conservatism (on the norms/hierarchies subscale) moderates the relationship between party preference and disgust towards non-vegetarian food.

H3: Higher trait disgust predicts higher disgust towards non-vegetarian food.

H4a/b: Conservatism (or leaning politically right in the norms/hierarchies subscale) predicts higher disgust towards people who consume non-vegetarian food.

H5a: Party preference predicts disgust towards people who consume non-vegetarian food.

H5b/c: Conservatism (on the norms/hierarchies subscale) moderates the relationship between party preference and disgust towards people who consume non-vegetarian food.

H6: Higher trait disgust is associated with higher disgust towards people who consume non-vegetarian food.

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H7a/b: Conservatism (or leaning politically right in the norms/hierarchies subscale) is associated with viewing consumers of non-vegetarian food as immoral.

H8a: Party preference is associated with viewing consumers of non-vegetarian food as immoral.

H8b/c: Conservatism (on the norms/hierarchies subscale) moderates the relationship between party preference and viewing consumers of non-vegetarian food as immoral.

H9: Higher trait disgust sensitivity will predict perception of people consuming non-vegetarian food as immoral.

The study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board at Monk Prayogshala in 2020 (#048-020).

### **Participants**

A power analysis using  $G^*$ power was computed (latest ver. 3.1.9.7 Faul et al., 2007, 2009). In a study by Guidetti et al., (2022), they found that higher conservatism is related to greater neophobia towards food  $R^2 = .16$ ,  $F(6,165) = 5.32$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $f^2 = .19$ . Using the effect size of .19, a power of .80, an alpha value of .05 and 10 predictors, the sample size was estimated to be 96. Data from a total of 367 participants were collected and incomplete/ invalid responses were discarded from final analysis based on the exclusion criteria (not being a citizen of India, age < 18 years, and not passing 2/2 attention checks). Finally, data from 325 participants ( $M_{age} = 27.13$  years,  $SD_{age} = 8.23$ , age range = 18–60 years, Males = 141, Females = 184) were retained.

### **Measures**

#### ***Political Ideology* (Puthillam et al., 2021)**

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The scale contains 34 items (e.g., “*I think some crimes should be given death penalty*”) that measure political ideology among Indians based on three subscales: purity-based cultural norms ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ) obedience to hierarchical authority ( $\alpha = 0.9$ ), and economic ideology ( $\alpha = 0.48$ ) measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 7 = *Strongly Agree*). Since the economic ideology subscale showed poor internal consistency, only the purity and obedience subscales were used for this study.

### ***Explicit measures***

Participants’ attitudes toward vegetarian and non-vegetarian food were assessed through explicit measures evaluated on a 7-point scale (1 = *Completely Disagree* to 7 = *Completely Agree*). Eight items (e.g., “*I believe that non-vegetarian food is disgusting*”) were framed by the authors to understand their attitudes concerning vegetarian and non-vegetarian food and people who consume it (See Appendix).

### ***Death-related disgust (Eickmeier et al., 2019)***

The death-related subscale of the Five Factor Disgust scale (5-FES) with a total of 15 items (e.g. “*If I get the opportunity, I visit exhibitions with mummies or skeletons*”) measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1= *Strongly Agree* to 7= *Strongly Disagree*) were used to evaluate disgust with death-related thoughts and behavior. Cronbach’s alpha was computed to be just adequate  $\alpha = 0.74$

### ***Food-related disgust (Eickmeier et al., 2019)***

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The scale measures the repugnance to edible (consumable), non-spoiled food through 9 items (e.g. “*I eat liver sausage*”) from the 5-FES measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1= *Not at all disgusting* to 7= *Very disgusting*). Cronbach’s alpha  $\alpha = 0.9$  indicated excellent internal consistency.

### ***Moral Disgust Scale (Tybur et al., 2009)***

The scale measures a sub-component of disgust from the Three Domains of Disgust Scale (TDDS) pertaining to violation of social norms and conduct such as lying and dishonest behaviour (e.g. “*forging someone’s signature on a legal document*”) through 7 items measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Not at all Disgusting* to 7 = *Very Disgusting*). The scale exhibited excellent reliability  $\alpha = 0.9$

### ***Pathogen Disgust Scale (Tybur et al., 2009)***

The sub-scale from the TDDS measures disgust elicited by the presence of infectious microorganisms like those on faeces, such that it propels an avoidance of that stimuli. It was estimated through 7-items (e.g. “*stepping on dog poop*”) measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1=*Not at all Disgusting* to 7 = *Very Disgusting*). Cronbach’s alpha  $\alpha = 0.84$  demonstrated good internal reliability.

### ***Self-reported Ideologies***

Participants were asked to report where, on average, they lie on political, social, and economic issues to understand their self-reported political ideologies. They rated their responses on a 7- point likert scale ranging from 1 = *I am extremely liberal/left-leaning* to 7 = *I am extremely conservative/right-leaning* (See Appendix).

### ***Political Party Preference/Voting Behaviour***

Using a single item (“*If there were an election at the national level tomorrow, which of these parties would you vote for?*”), participants were categorically asked to indicate the political party that they would vote for if there were a supposed election at the national level the next day. The responses were categorized as BJP (Bharatiya Janta Party) or non-BJP.<sup>1</sup>

### **Procedure**

Participants were recruited online via multi-site entries. The link to the survey was posted on various social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram. The link directed the participants to a Qualtrics form where they were asked to fill out the survey consisting of the self-report measures described above along with a few demographic questions. Finally, participants were thanked and debriefed about the study.

### **Results**

Data analysis<sup>2</sup> was computed using RStudio (RStudio Team, 2023). Table 1 displays sample descriptives and zero-order correlations.

### **Disgust Towards Non-Vegetarian Food**

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<sup>1</sup> Non-BJP parties are the Indian National Congress (INC), Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India - Marxist (CPI-M), All Indian Trinamool Congress (AITC), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), or any other.

<sup>2</sup> [Anonymous view-only link](#)

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For H1 (a and b) and H2a separate hierarchical multiple regressions were computed.<sup>3</sup> Older individuals and those with greater obedience to hierarchical authority were more likely to report higher disgust towards non-vegetarian food (Table 2). Norms and vote preference were not significant predictors (Tables 2 and 3). For H2b/c, the moderation analyses<sup>4</sup> computed revealed non-significant results indicating that conservatism did not moderate the relationship between vote preference and disgust towards non-vegetarian food (Table 4a and 4b). Additionally, only greater trait disgust toward food and being older was related to disgust towards non-vegetarian food (H3; Table 5).

### Perception Towards People Consuming Non-vegetarian Food

For H4 (a and b), H5a, and H6 zero-order correlations<sup>5</sup> are presented in Table 1. We did not find a significant correlation between conservatism—on both the norms and hierarchies subscales—and disgust towards consumers of non-vegetarian food (H4 a/b). However, vote preference for BJP was correlated with higher disgust,  $r(325) = .16, p < .01$ , towards consumers of non-vegetarian food (H5a). With respect to trait disgust, only food disgust,  $r(325) = .34, p < .01$ , and pathogen disgust,  $r(325) = .17, p < .01$ , were positively associated with disgust towards people who consume non-vegetarian food (H6; Table 1). For H5 b/c, the moderation analyses<sup>6</sup> revealed that conservatism was not a significant moderator in the relationship between vote preference and disgust towards people who consume non-vegetarian food (Table 6).

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<sup>3</sup> Age was added in Step 1, PI obedience, PI purity, and Vote preference added separately in Step 2.

<sup>4</sup> Two separate moderation analyses were computed with age in Step 1, vote preference and PI obedience (Step 2a) and PI purity (Step 2b) in Step 2, and vote preference \* PI obedience (Step 3a) and vote preference \* PI purity added in Step 3.

<sup>5</sup> Correlations were computed instead of hierarchical regressions since no sociodemographic variables were found to significantly correlate with the outcome variable.

<sup>6</sup> Two separate moderation analyses were computed with PI Purity (Step 1a) and PI obedience (Step 1b) added in Step 1, and vote preference \* PI obedience (Step 2a) and vote preference \* PI purity (Step 2b) added in Step 2.



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We did not find a significant correlation<sup>7</sup> between conservatism and viewing consumers of non-vegetarian food as immoral (H7 a and b) and between vote preference and viewing consumers of non-vegetarian food as immoral (H8a). None of the moderation analyses computed for the perception of non-vegetarian individuals as immoral were significant (H8 b/c; Table 7) With respect to trait disgust, only food disgust,  $r(325) = .12, p < .05$ , correlated with the perception of people who consume non-vegetarian food as immoral (H9; Table 1).

### Discussion

The present study examined the influence of political ideology, vote preference, and trait disgust on disgust towards non-vegetarian food and people who consume it, along with their attitudes towards these individuals. We predicted that these factors would play a role in individuals developing a disgust towards non-vegetarian food and their consumers, as well as perceiving these individuals as immoral within the Indian context.

### Political Ideology and Food Disgust

The positive association of disgust toward non-vegetarian food with obedience to hierarchical authority aligns with scholarly discourse delineating the influential role of authoritative structures in shaping moral and dietary convictions (Haidt, 2012). In the Indian socio-political context, it unpacks the relationship between ideology and everyday politics related to values of traditionalism and dutifulness. The current ruling party, BJP adheres more to right-wing ideology (Leidig & Mudde, 2023) a mindset connected to a negativity bias (Hibbing et al., 2014)/ Those predisposed to right-

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<sup>7</sup> Correlations were computed instead of hierarchical regressions since no sociodemographic variables were found to significantly correlate with the outcome variable.

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leaning values may demonstrate an augmented inclination to conform to prevailing societal dietary norms that perhaps see non-vegetarian food with disgust due to religious and moral beliefs. For example, eating beef is considered immoral and associated with dirtiness since the cow is considered a holy animal by Hindus; thus, defying this principle would mean defying the sacred authority of the religion that views it as a disgusting act. In sum, as people oblige more to such moral considerations, for example, related to eating or avoiding certain foods, consuming non-vegetarian items can be consequently related to disgust and disgust reactions to maintain a morally superior image (Parekh, 2014). People will also refrain from consuming foods that society deems repulsive out of fear of being judged as repulsive themselves, according to Rozin's (1997) theory. Thus, in the context of dietary choices, individuals with greater obedience to hierarchical authority may be more prone to adopting and internalizing societal norms regarding food preferences and aversions.

### **Vote Preference and Food Disgust**

The correlation between a preference for the BJP and higher disgust towards non-vegetarian food could reflect the influence of political ideologies on personal values and lifestyle choices, including diet. This finding suggests that political affiliation can be a significant factor in shaping attitudes towards food, possibly due to the alignment with certain cultural, religious, or ethical values promoted by the party. However, we did not find a significant moderation of conservatism in the relationship between vote preference and disgust towards non-vegetarian food. This contradiction suggests a more complex relationship than initially hypothesized. It indicates that while conservatism may be linked to certain attitudes towards food, it does not necessarily amplify or alter the influence of other factors, such as preference for a certain political party in the way we expected. This outcome

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underscores the multifaceted and complex nature of political affiliations and their impact on personal values and behaviors, beyond what conventional moderation models might capture.

### **Other Factors Influencing Food Disgust**

The positive correlation between age and disgust toward non-vegetarian food indicates that people's food preferences become more ingrained and solidified as they age. In other words, they become less receptive and possibly disgusted with dietary variations such as those related to non-vegetarian foods as age increases. Most recent studies (e.g., Oosterwijk et al., 2022) have found no evidence of age-related differences in disgust toward food stimuli. A possible explanation for our findings, however, can be that the consumption of certain foods such as animal-based foods tends to prominently cause conditioned-taste aversions (Fessler & Arguello, 2004). This can be potentially attributed to the elevated susceptibility of animal-based foods to bacterial contamination compared to their plant-based counterparts. Advancing age may correspondingly coincide with heightened encounters with such food-related infections and digestive complications (Smith, 1998), potentially amplifying individuals' sensitivity to food disgust. However, the majority of our sample consists of young to middle-aged adults, and the disgust reported may not directly be associated with the aging process but may be influenced by digestive complaints related to eating certain types of food. Recently, age emerged as a positive predictor of the food disgust score (Egolf et al., 2018), but this effect was small, suggesting a degree of stability during adulthood.

Our results also show that greater trait disgust towards food relates to higher disgust towards non-vegetarian food. This aligns with the idea that personal sensitivity to disgust can influence dietary choices. Individuals with a higher inherent disgust sensitivity might find certain foods, particularly non-

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vegetarian items, more repulsive. This could be due to factors like the appearance, smell, or perceived contamination risk of non-vegetarian foods. Egolf et al., (2018) also found individuals with higher food disgust sensitivity scores reported having more frequent gastrointestinal complaints and sensitive stomachs following animal-based food consumption than those with lower food disgust sensitivity scores. Consequently, it is unsurprising that food poisoning incidents after consuming animal-based foods are more prevalent than those associated with plant-based products (Sockett, 1995). However, irrespective of the food source, research by Hartmann and Siegrist (2018) substantiates a positive correlation between food disgust sensitivity and the reported frequency of food poisoning incidents over the preceding five years.

### **Explaining Non-Significant Results**

Political affiliations may not inherently guide individuals' responses to food-related stimuli; rather, the relationship between political party preference and food-related attitudes may be dependent upon other distinct factors, such as personal socio-political values and attitudes toward the candidates. For example, the findings of this study indicate that purity-based cultural norms and party preference do not significantly predict disgust towards non-vegetarian food. India is a diverse and culturally rich country with a multitude of traditions, practices, and dietary habits. Purity-based cultural norms can vary widely across different regions and communities within India. The heterogeneity in cultural norms might dilute the overall impact of purity considerations on disgust towards non-vegetarian food. This diversity could explain the lack of a significant predictive relationship observed in the study. Individuals within a culture may also interpret and internalize cultural norms differently. While some individuals may strongly adhere to purity-based norms, others may not find them as influential in shaping their

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attitudes towards non-vegetarian food. This individual variation could lead to a lack of consistent predictability across the population, contributing to non-significant results. In a similar vein, political conservatism is a multifaceted construct, and our study might not have captured the specific dimensions of conservatism that are most relevant to food attitudes. The lack of moderation could be a result of failing to differentiate between different aspects of conservatism that might influence the relationship. Moreover, individuals within a particular political ideology, even if classified as conservative, may hold diverse opinions on specific issues, including dietary choices. The heterogeneity within political groups may dilute the moderating effect, making it challenging to identify a consistent relationship between political conservatism and disgust towards non-vegetarian food.

In sum, attitudes towards non-vegetarianism are likely shaped by a multitude of factors beyond political ideology. Personal experiences, exposure to different cultures, and socio-economic factors can all contribute to an individual's attitudes towards dietary practices. For example, the absence of significant correlations between conservatism and viewing consumers of non-vegetarian food as immoral, as well as between vote preference and viewing consumers of non-vegetarian food as immoral, suggests that moral judgments regarding non-vegetarianism may not be strongly influenced by political ideology or party preference in the studied context. Perhaps moral judgments are complex and multifaceted, and may be influenced by a variety of factors including personal, cultural and ethical beliefs which may not align neatly with political ideology or party preference. The study's findings may reflect cultural or regional nuances that influence moral judgments independently of political factors. Different cultural contexts or regional attitudes towards dietary practices may play

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a more significant role in shaping perceptions of morality, overshadowing the impact of political ideology or party preference.

### **Limitation and Future Scope**

The above discussion touches the study limitations. First, the sample predominantly included young to middle-aged adults, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings across different age groups. The underrepresentation of older adults could have potentially skewed our results on perceptions of food disgust, especially since attitudes toward food can change with age. Second, although the study focuses on the Indian context, it does not comprehensively address the diverse cultural, regional, and religious variations within India. India's vast cultural landscape means that dietary practices and political ideologies can vary significantly across regions as well as religions, potentially influencing disgust responses. For example, vegetarian food preference amongst older adults may suggest a cultural dimension of the continuity of Brahmanical values since it is a desired attribute of the so-called upper castes as expounded through religion. Future studies can address this limitation by including a more diverse and representative sample across different age groups, regions, and religious and socio-economic backgrounds which would enhance generalizability.

Additionally, we believe that the study's cross-sectional design may have limited our ability to infer relationships among political ideology and food preferences. Longitudinal studies would be more effective in understanding how disgust towards non-vegetarian food and its consumers evolves and how it is influenced by changing political and social landscapes. Last, our reliance on self-report measures for political ideology and attitudes towards food can introduce biases, potentially affecting the accuracy of the data. To address these limitations, future research might adopt alternative

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methodologies, such as controlled experiments. In these experiments, perhaps with GSR (Galvanic Skin Response) sensors, participants could be exposed to various food-related scenarios, providing a more objective assessment of disgust and its precipitating factors, and thereby reducing reliance on self-reported information.

### **Conclusion**

Our investigation into the complex interplay between political orientation, personal traits, and attitudes towards non-vegetarian food and its consumers has yielded insights that both challenge and enrich our understanding of these relationships. Despite the majority of our hypotheses not being supported by the data, the study has nonetheless contributed valuable perspectives to the field of political and food psychology. Our results provide critical insights into the intricate and sometimes non-linear relationships between political orientation, personal traits, and dietary attitudes. They stress the importance of considering a wider array of influencing factors and interactions, perhaps extending beyond the conventional variables typically examined in political and food psychology research. The notable absence of expected moderating effects invites further research that delves into these intricate interplays with a more nuanced lens. Such investigations are vital for deepening our understanding of how personal beliefs, political affiliations, and inherent traits collectively shape individual preferences and behaviors. Importantly, some of the previous literature has found that disgust generally decreases with age (e.g. Curtis et al., 2004; Fessler & Navarrete, 2005). There is a necessity for longitudinal studies to explore whether there are significant alterations in food-specific disgust sensitivity across different age cohorts. Such investigations would contribute to discerning the potential evolution of individuals' aversion to specific foods over time. Additionally, these studies

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would elucidate the life circumstances that might be linked to discernible changes in food-specific disgust sensitivity, providing valuable insights into the factors influencing these variations across the lifespan.



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Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations with confidence intervals

<i>Variable</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>
1. Age	27.13	8.23										
2. Gender	1.57	0.5	0.01									
3. Socioeconomic Status	5.01	1.71	-0.07	0.06								
4. Employment	1.91	0.29	-.20**	0.07	-.16*							
5. Social	3.33	1.7	-0.01	-.25**	.14*	-0.04						
6. economic	3.54	1.63	-0.04	-.14*	0.12	-0.05	.67**					
7. Political Ideology (self-rating)	3.46	1.52	-0.09	-.23**	0.06	0.02	.66**	.62**				
8. Vote Preference	1.56	0.5	.11*	-0.04	-.16*	0.05	.15**	0.08	.21**			
9. Political Ideology (PI) Total	126.56	32.53	.25**	-.31**	-0.02	0.01	.38**	.26**	.36**	.35**		
10. PI Obedience Subscale	71.21	19.06	.22**	-.24**	0	0.01	.35**	.27**	.35**	.42**	.90**	
11. PI Purity Subscale	35.57	17.58	.20**	-.28**	-0.04	0.02	.31**	.18**	.24**	.14*	.86**	.55**
12. Food Disgust	28.77	14.84	0.11	0	0.1	-0.1	.26**	.16**	.13*	0.09	.33**	.27**
13. Death-related Disgust	51.2	13.86	.13*	.19**	0.03	-0.07	0.01	0.06	0.04	.16**	0.02	0.04
14. Moral Disgust	34.7	11.24	-0.02	0.1	-0.08	0.08	-0.03	-0.04	-0.08	0.05	-.16**	-.13*
15. Pathogen Disgust	32.49	10.04	0.04	0.08	-.15*	0.04	0.03	0.01	-0.05	0.07	-0.05	0
16. Non-veg Food Disgust	0.78	2.16	.14*	0.04	-0.08	0	.15**	0.08	.12*	0.08	.14*	.17**
17. Non-veg People Disgust	0.37	1.83	0.1	-0.04	-0.02	-0.02	.14*	0.04	.12*	.16**	.13*	0.11
18. Non-veg People Immoral	0.18	1.78	-0.06	0.03	0	-0.06	0.08	0.02	0.07	0.03	-0.01	0.04
19. explicitscale_1	2.62	2.12	.11*	-0.03	-0.12	0.03	.19**	0.08	.15**	.16**	.39**	.26**
20. explicitscale_2	1.83	1.55	-0.06	-0.09	-0.05	0.04	0.06	0	0.03	.11*	.33**	.12*

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21. explicitscale_3	2.25	1.88	0.09	-0.08	-.13*	0.01	.17**	0.03	.12*	.20**	.43**	.24**
22. explicitscale_4	1.88	1.57	0	-0.04	-0.12	0.02	0.04	-0.03	-0.01	0.05	.36**	.15**
23. explicitscale_5	2.31	1.87	0.01	-0.05	-0.11	0	.16**	0.02	.13*	.18**	.39**	.25**
24. explicitscale_6	2.12	1.71	0.07	-0.09	-0.12	0.08	0.08	0	0.06	.18**	.42**	.22**
25. explicitscale_7	2.68	2.1	-0.02	-0.02	-.14*	-0.02	.18**	.13*	.16**	.22**	.31**	.20**
26. explicitscale_8	2.67	2.15	-0.01	-0.11	-.13*	-0.02	.13*	0.03	.13*	.24**	.37**	.27**
27. Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP)	2.53	2.4	-0.11	0.06	0	-0.04	-.22**	-.20**	-.26**	-.68**	-.44**	-.52**
28. Indian National Congress (INC)	2.84	1.71	-.13*	0.08	0.02	0.04	0.05	-0.04	0.03	.17**	0.05	0.05
29. Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)	3.53	1.47	-0.1	-0.05	0.01	-0.08	-0.01	0.03	-0.04	0.06	0.04	0.02
30. Communist Party of India (CPI)	4.4	1.41	0.09	-0.1	0.08	0.03	0.04	0.09	0.06	0.1	0.09	0.1
31. Communist Part of India - Marxist (CPI-M)	4.96	1.5	0.01	0.04	0.03	0	0.04	0.04	0.07	.14*	0	0.03
32. All Indian Trinamool Congress (AITC)	5.31	1.67	-0.02	-0.02	-0.08	0.04	0.09	0.02	.14*	.26**	.12*	.16**
33. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)	5.52	1.89	0.1	-0.05	-0.02	0	0.01	0.03	0.01	-0.07	.15*	.17**



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Table 1 (continued). Means, standard deviations, and correlations with confidence intervals

<i>Variables</i>	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
12. Food Disgust	.28**										
13. Death-related Disgust	-0.02	.25**									
14. Moral Disgust	-.19**	0.01	0.04								
15. Pathogen Disgust	-.11*	.19**	.13*	.58**							
16. Non-veg Food Disgust	0.07	.37**	.19**	0.02	.13*						
17. Non-veg People Disgust	0.09	.34**	0.1	0.09	.17**	.55**					
18. Non-veg People Immoral	-0.07	.12*	0.07	0.07	0.08	.46**	.51**				
19. explicitscale_1	.43**	.48**	.17**	-0.05	.15**	.74**	.44**	.32**			
20. explicitscale_2	.49**	.16**	-0.04	-0.09	0.02	-.39**	-.16**	-.20**	.33**		
21. explicitscale_3	.51**	.43**	0.09	0	.15**	.39**	.65**	.30**	.73**	.45**	
22. explicitscale_4	.51**	.13*	-0.01	-0.11	-0.02	-.18**	-.40**	-.24**	.35**	.74**	.44**
23. explicitscale_5	.43**	.39**	0.08	-0.04	0.11	.42**	.46**	.56**	.71**	.39**	.80**
24. explicitscale_6	.55**	.30**	0.02	-0.1	0.03	-0.01	-0.03	-.42**	.45**	.64**	.56**
25. explicitscale_7	.34**	.40**	0.09	-0.01	.12*	.33**	.35**	.27**	.58**	.32**	.59**
26. explicitscale_8	.38**	.34**	0.07	-0.04	0.06	.24**	.28**	.19**	.48**	.31**	.54**
27. Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP)	-.21**	-.13*	-.19**	0	-0.03	-0.1	-.16**	-0.01	-.15**	-0.07	-.17**
28. Indian National Congress (INC)	0.02	-0.04	0.01	-0.07	0.03	-0.01	0.09	0.06	0.04	0.07	.11*
29. Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)	0.02	0.02	0.07	0	0.03	-0.03	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.08	0.04
30. Communist Party of India (CPI)	0.04	.13*	0.02	0.03	-0.01	.12*	.14*	0.01	0.1	-0.03	0.06
31. Communist Part of India - Marxist (CPI-M)	0	.12*	0.07	0.05	0.05	0	0.02	0.05	-0.03	-0.03	-0.02

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32. All Indian Trinamool Congress (AITC)	0.03	0.04	.14*	0	0.01	.13*	0.08	0.08	.12*	-0.01	0.09
33. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)	0.06	-0.08	-0.01	0.04	0.02	-0.04	-0.06	-0.1	-0.06	-0.03	-0.06

Table 1 (continued). Means, standard deviations, and correlations with confidence intervals

	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32
23. explicitScale_5	.42**										
24. explicitScale_6	.71**	.51**									
25. explicitScale_7	.30**	.60**	.38**								
26. explicitScale_8	.32**	.53**	.40**	.60**							
27. Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP)	-0.02	-.17**	-.17**	-.19**	-.14*						
28. Indian National Congress (INC)	0.03	.14*	0.1	0.08	.12*	-.14*					
29. Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)	0.03	0.05	0.03	0.07	0.03	-0.06	.18**				
30. Communist Party of India (CPI)	-0.09	0.01	0	.12*	.13*	-.16**	-.17**	-0.1			
31. Communist Part of India - Marxist (CPI-M)	-0.04	0.01	-0.04	-0.02	-0.01	-.16**	-.24**	-.26**	.16**		
32. All Indian Trinamool Congress (AITC)	0.01	.13*	0.05	.13*	0.07	-.36**	-0.03	-.12*	-0.07	-.12*	
33. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)	0	-0.1	-0.01	-0.07	-0.03	-.17**	-.23**	-.18**	-.14*	-0.08	-0.07

Note. *M* and *SD* denote Mean and Standard Deviation respectively. \* indicates  $p < .05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < .0$ . Gender was coded 1 = Man, 2 = Woman. Employment was coded as 1 = Unemployed, 2 = Employed. Education was linearly measured. Vote preference was coded 1 = BJP, 2 = Non BJP.

Table 2. Conservatism (or leaning politically right in the norms and hierarchies subscale) as predictor of higher disgust towards non-vegetarian food.

Variable	Step 1a		Step 1b		Step 2a		Step 2b	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>			<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
Age	0.038*	0.0151	0.039	0.015	0.038*	0.015	0.031*	0.015
PI_Purity			0.001	0.007				
PI_Obedience							0.014*	0.006
R <sup>2</sup>	0.023		0.023		0.023		0.038	
Δ R <sup>2</sup>					0.0001		0.015	

Note. \* indicates  $p < .05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ . \*\*\* indicates  $p < .001$ .

Table 3. Party preference as predictor of higher disgust towards non-vegetarian food.

Variable	Step 1		Step 2	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
Age	0.038*	0.015	0.03*	0.015
Vote Preference			0.867	0.251
R <sup>2</sup>	0.023		0.023	
Δ R <sup>2</sup>			0.0004	

Note. \* indicates  $p < .05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ . \*\*\* indicates  $p < .001$ .

Table 4a. Conservatism (on the norms subscale) as a moderator in the relationship between party preference and disgust towards non-vegetarian food

Variable	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
Age	0.038*	0.015	0.037*	0.015	0.035*	0.015
Vote Preference			0.081	0.254	0.859	0.56
PI_Obedience						
PI_Purity			0.001	0.007	0.036	0.023
Vote Preference * PI_Purity					-0.022	0.014
R <sup>2</sup>	0.023		0.023		0.032	
Δ R <sup>2</sup>			0.00		-0.014	

Note. \* indicates  $p < .05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ . \*\*\* indicates  $p < .001$ .

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Table 4b. Conservatism (on the obedience subscale) as a moderator in the relationship between party preference and disgust towards non-vegetarian food

Variable	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
Age	0.038*	0.015	0.031*	0.015	0.032*	0.015
Vote Preference			-0.165	0.276	0.902	1.134
PI_Obedience			0.015*	0.007	0.035	0.022
Vote Preference * PI_Obedience					-0.015	0.015
R <sup>2</sup>	0.023		0.039		0.042	
Δ R <sup>2</sup>					-0.019	

Note. \* indicates  $p < .05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ . \*\*\* indicates  $p < .001$ .

Table 5. Higher Trait disgust sensitivity will predict higher disgust towards non-vegetarian food.

Variable	Step 1		Step 2	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
Age	0.038*	0.015	0.029*	0.014
Food Disgust			0.047***	0.008
Death Disgust			0.015	0.008
Moral Disgust			-0.015	0.012
Pathogen Disgust			0.023	0.014
R <sup>2</sup>	0.023		0.189	
Δ R <sup>2</sup>			0.166	

Note. \* indicates  $p < .05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ . \*\*\* indicates  $p < .001$ .

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Table 6. Conservatism (on the norms/hierarchy subscale) as a moderator in the relationship between party preference and disgust towards consumer of non-vegetarian food.

Variable	Step 1a		Step 2a		Step 1b		Step 2b	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
PI Purity	0.007	0.005	-0.001	0.019				
PI Obedience					0.008	0.006	0.004	0.018
Vote Preference	0.48*	0.209	0.287	0.462	0.381	0.229	0.203	0.945
Vote Preference * PI_Purity			0.005	0.011				
Vote Preference * PI_Obedience							0.002	0.012
R <sup>2</sup>	0.027		0.028		0.028		0.029	
Δ R <sup>2</sup>			0.0007				0.0001	

Note. \* indicates  $p < .05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ . \*\*\* indicates  $p < .001$ .

Table 7. Conservatism (on the norms/hierarchies subscale) as moderator in the relationship between party preference and perception of people consuming non-vegetarian food as immoral.

Variable	Step 1a		Step 2a		Step 1b		Step 2b	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
PI Purity	-0.01	0.005	0.007	0.019				
PI Obedience					0.006	0.006	0.011	0.018
Vote Preference	0.006	0.006	0.011	0.018	-0.073	0.229	0.181	0.945
Vote Preference * PI_Purity			-0.011	0.011				
Vote Preference * PI_Obedience							-0.003	0.012
R <sup>2</sup>	0.011		0.015		0.004		0.004	
Δ R <sup>2</sup>	0				0.0002			

Note. \* indicates  $p < .05$ . \*\* indicates  $p < .01$ . \*\*\* indicates  $p < .001$ .