Rebels Without a National Cause? Is Youth a Better Predictor of Socio-Political Values Than Nationality?

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Abstract

Using data from the World Values Survey (1990), this paper examines a series of strongly held values and beliefs concerning the political and wider social world, on a cross-nationally comparative basis. Orientations such as political outlook, attitudes towards religion, political participation, social movements, women’s roles and satisfaction with life are examined. Tentative groupings of young people by country are attempted, revealing a commonality of values amongst the old and young in certain clusters of societies. Within these clusters the relative magnitude of gender and age differences in attitudinal positioning are analysed, to show how nationality and youth interact differently when examining different attitudes. It is found that young people do have common values cross-nationally, but only within certain supra-national limits.
“The young always have the same problem – how to rebel and conform at the same time. They have now solved this by defying their parents and copying one another.” (Quentin Crisp 1968, *The Naked Civil Servant*)

**Introduction**

Post-materialism and globalisation theses have at their heart the idea that national differences between individuals are becoming less important via a generational mechanism. Newer generations of different nationalities have more in common with each other than with the elders in their own country. Inglehart’s theory of increasing post-materialism postulates a generational process whereby newer cohorts are more post-materialist in their attitudes than the old. It is argued that the emergence of advanced industrial society is making particular values of attributes more common among members of those societies (Abramson and Inglehart 1987, Inglehart 1977, 1990, Inglehart and Abramson 1994). Inglehart states “… we may be witnessing a broad cultural shift, with one world view replacing another…” (Inglehart 1990, p. 424). For this to be the case, one must postulate strong generational processes within countries. Mannheim (1952) characterises generations, those individuals born in close temporal proximity to one another, as being concrete social groups in a similar manner to social classes. Thus, Mannheim argues that cohorts (and hence at any one point in time, age groups) will share similar attitudes.

If these generational theories of increasing differentiation between young and old are correct then there is potential for an interesting situation in which international differences are of much smaller magnitude than intra-national age differences. Inglehart argues that this will be the case with societies increasingly internally divided by the post-materialist/materialist labels (which are a function of age). Thus nationality becomes less important and supranational organisations, institutions and movements increase in importance. In particular, young people will appear quite different to previous generations. Across nations, the young will be more post-materialist and more likely to be interested in supra-national causes such as the ecology and women’s movements (Inglehart 1990, 1995). In terms of the future paths taken by international and supra-national organisations, such as the European Union and the United Nations, this process is clearly of some importance.

The aim of this paper is to assess to the degree to which this possible commonality by age group overshadows commonality by nationality. Whilst intra-national comparisons between age groups and international comparisons between countries are often made separately, it is rarely considered whether or not the young are an internationally cohesive group. If Inglehart *et al.* are correct then this is a very relevant question, for one would expect greater similarity between young people cross-nationally than between people of different ages in the same country.

There is certainly evidence for generational processes affecting attitudes and values in many differing national contexts. For example, young people have different attitudes towards political parties and political ideologies; both their behaviour and attitudes in the political domain differ from those of their elders. It is a well documented fact, at least in Britain and the US, that the young are more left wing in voting behaviour and beliefs (Butler and Stokes 1974, Campbell *et al.* 1960). The same can be said of other fundamental values such as religious beliefs and attitudes towards the family and work. Younger people are often seen as less involved with these institutions. For example, they are less religious in practice and beliefs (Chaves 1989, Stolzenberg 1995).
Although age is thought to be an important predictor of values, cross-national variation in socio-political attitudes is also taken for granted. Differences in income, education processes and historical and religious contexts inevitably mean that attitudes towards various issues will differ. Equally, processes of post-industrialisation should be expected to be more advanced in some countries, which will be accordingly more post-materialist in their outlook. To over simplify somewhat, one might expect those living in richer countries to exhibit a greater tendency to focus on post-materialist issues, such as environmental protection, and those in poorer countries to tend to be more concerned about materialist issues such as the control of inflation (Inglehart 1977). However the historical legacies of nations will clearly affect people’s attitudes also. Catholicism and communism are likely to mould individuals’ beliefs in specific ways.

Allied to this, men and women may well react to the world differently, due to their gender and consequent differences in upbringing and opportunities. The influence of gender upon attitudes amongst young people is also clearly of interest and this aspect of attitudinal difference will also be referred to when relevant.

Given these two main factors, the operation of nationality and youth upon attitudes, which is dominant and to what extent? Is it reasonable to argue that ‘the young’ are a coherent grouping with a common base of values regardless of nationality, or are age differences swamped by large international differences amongst youth? The reality is likely to be somewhere in between these two positions. In particular it is likely that young people in certain sets of countries will exhibit quite similar attitudes due to shared historical experiences, similar institutional arrangements, simple geographical proximity and correlated levels of economic development. Attempting to compare a large number of separate societies is perhaps not realistic. To try and group these societies and then see how these groupings differ is a much more feasible proposition.

The first aim of this paper is an attempt to separate countries into groupings that do have a set of values that young people hold cross-nationally. The assumption is that there are clusters of societies in which people share both similar prescriptive attitudes towards society and similar beliefs about the objective reality of the world. The second and wider-reaching objective is then to see how these groupings differ from one another and whether age or national grouping is a better indicator of attitudinal position.

It is important to be clear which attitudes are amenable to this sort of international generalisation. When attempting cross-national comparisons, one must think of fairly fundamental attitudinal stances that one would expect to see manifested in similar ways cross-nationally. A number of factors have been cited as important components of cultural shifts associated with the emergence of ‘advanced industrial society’. Work motivations, political outlook, attitudes to the role of women and religion are all often mentioned. Given this, the focus will be on attitudes in three main areas. Firstly, in the political realm both ideological and participatory values will be analysed. Secondly, attitudinal positions to religion and the role of the family will be explored. Finally, the world of work and general life satisfaction will be examined.
Data

The data presented in this paper are from an age representative survey, the 1990 World Values Survey (WVS). We chose this data set as its coverage is especially broad; surveys were carried out in 43 countries in 1990.¹ No other attitudinal survey series can claim this many contributing countries. Not only is the country coverage broad, but so is the question coverage. A large number of questions were asked in all three areas of proposed investigation and since these questions all come from one survey, comparisons between these areas are made somewhat easier.

Having said this, the sample design for most countries meant that fewer than 2000 individuals were surveyed. Given that this paper is primarily interested in young people, here defined as those under 35, the sample sizes are inevitably somewhat small. Nonetheless, samples were typically 500 cases or over as Appendix 1 shows. However, in Northern Ireland there were only 114 respondents under the age of 35. Consequently, Northern Ireland was dropped from the sample.

There are also particular problems with sampling in certain countries, particularly India and Nigeria samples. The Indian survey concentrated upon the literate members of society, only half the actual population, and thus up-weighting the small numbers of young illiterates surveyed is liable to produce anomalous results. The Nigerian survey mainly sampled individuals from urban areas so weighting the rural young is similarly problematic. Given this, both the Indian and Nigerian samples have been excluded from further analysis.

Deriving International Groupings

Before attempting to assess the impact of youth in determining attitudes, it is necessary to try and group similar countries together. A rigorous way of determining clusters of societies is multi-dimensional scaling (MDS). This involves standardising a series of measures, then constructing a range of Euclidean distances between countries for each of these variables. By using a two-dimensional solution, one can plot a graph on which each country is represented and see which nationalities tend to group together. This is rather like the more commonly used factor analysis; countries with similar values will cluster together and those with differing values will not cluster. The more culturally similar the countries are, the closer they cluster together. Moreover, this analysis can then be carried out for those under and over 35. This made it easy to test whether the young cluster differently by country than the middle-aged and elderly.

As discussed earlier, when trying to build up an attitudinal picture of different nationalities, the focus will have to be on fairly deeply held beliefs. For this reason, the MDS procedure used here only includes measures of political beliefs and involvement, religious beliefs, attitudes to the role of women and two measures of satisfaction with the world. These are examined in detail in later sections. The items that were included were:

a) the mean score on a religious belief scale,
b) the mean score on a scale measuring traditionalism towards women’s roles in society,
c) the mean score on a left-right scale,
d) coherence of left-right position (as measured by Cronbach’s Alpha for the reliability of the left-right scale),
e) the mean score on a political action scale,
f) the mean score on a scale indicating approval of new social movements,
g) the mean job satisfaction score,
h) the mean life satisfaction score.

Since not all countries’ surveys asked every one of the attitudinal questions mentioned, young people from some societies cannot be included in this multi-dimensional scaling procedure: China, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, South Africa, South Korea, Switzerland and Turkey have therefore been excluded.

The two-dimensional scaling plot for young people, Figure 1, shows that there are distinct clusters of countries that appear to group in an intelligible manner. Finland, Norway and Sweden group rather well in a Northern European cluster. Western Europe (Belgium, France, Italy, Netherlands, and West Germany) forms a central group, with another group consisting of the English speaking countries of Canada, USA and Britain close by. The countries of the Iberian Peninsula and South America form another coherent grouping, with Ireland and Mexico lying between this and the Western Europe group. Belarus, Bulgaria and Russia form a tight-knit cluster, but Japan appears to be quite singular.

![Figure 1. Multi-Dimensional Scaling (Euclidean Distance Model) Under 35 Year Olds Only](image)

Finally, Austria and Hungary seem quite similar, which given their very divergent history since the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, is quite surprising. There does however appear to be a central European group comprising Austria, Hungary and Slovenia. With the religious belief scale removed, a series of questions that the Baltic States failed to include in their surveys, another multi-dimensional scaling procedure was run. This revealed a similar pattern to the one above with the Baltic States grouped together quite closely in between East Germany and the Russia/Belarus/Bulgaria cluster. In fact two other East European nations, Romania and Poland also seem to be fairly close to these other former communist countries.

These groupings seem plausible; young people’s attitudes to a very broad set of issues appear to be consistent across some groups of societies. Moreover these groups appear cultural as well as geographical. Latin American youth attitudes are very close to Iberian youth attitudes and British young people have more in common with their Canadian peers than with those in the rest of Europe.
Figure 2 shows an identical piece of analysis for those over 35. As one can see, the picture is not in fact greatly altered, but there are a few differences from the plot for under 35-year-olds. Northern Europe is somewhat more distinctive and less like the rest of Western Europe. Britain, Canada and the US form a more tightly knit group. In fact it appears that young people within Western Europe, Northern Europe and North America are more homogenous in respect to their attitudes than their parents’ generations. Most clusters seem quite similar though, Russia, Bulgaria and Belarus grouping in a very similar manner for example.

Figure 2. Multi-Dimensional Scaling (Euclidean Distance Model) Over 35 Year Olds Only

However these two diagrams do not help to establish the relative size of age-related and national-level difference. Rather they show that young and old cluster similarly and the working hypothesis that there are distinctive groups of societies (which can be condensed to simplify analysis) is largely confirmed. Without examining individual attitudinal measures, it is impossible to say whether there are large age differences within the clusters or not. Although people within different clusters appear differentiated from one another, it may be that these differences are actually quite small when compared to age differences within the clusters. If the old are substantially more religious than the young, then the young in two different clusters may be more alike than the young and old within one cluster.

These MDS procedures are however useful for determining some division into clusters to enable aggregate analyses. The breakdown into groupings, which I will use for further analysis, is based on the results in Figure 1 and 2. The clear similarities that the analyses for both over and under 35 year-olds share give rise to the groups shown in Table 1 below. The only country that could be distinguished with the MDS procedure, but does not fall naturally or easily into a cluster is Japan. Rather than have a group with only a single member, Japan has been excluded from further analysis.
Table 1. Countries and Their Cluster Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-Saxon</td>
<td>Britain, Canada, Ireland, USA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nordic</td>
<td>Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western European</td>
<td>Belgium, France, Italy, Netherlands, West Germany.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Portugal, Spain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central European</td>
<td>Austria, Hungary, Slovenia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern European</td>
<td>Belarus, Bulgaria, East Germany, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Russia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the analysis of these groups, mean values of attitudinal variables have been derived by giving each country equal weight within its cluster. Therefore, the larger sample sizes in some countries will not affect the average for that group. The next step is to establish the extent to which differences between these clusters of countries are over-shadowed by age-related differences.

Religious and Family Values

Religious Beliefs

The sociology of religion often emphasises the significant age differences in religious beliefs. Work in the US has demonstrated that disparities in religious practice are often correlated with age and that the young are noticeably less religious than the middle-aged (Stolzenberg 1995). Equally, theories of secularization depend to some extent on the idea of generational succession, successive cohorts becoming less religious (Wilson 1982). Inglehart argues that “… the worldview espoused by most of the established religions seems increasingly out of touch with the perceptions and priorities of the younger generation…” (Inglehart 1990, p. 187). An intergenerational value shift is argued to be occurring, leading to a secular youth culture as opposed to the more religious set of values that older generations hold. To what extent is this picture of more secular young people replicated across societies? Is it replicated in a way that would incline one to treat youth as a more coherent group than nation?

The WVS contains a number of questions about adherence to essentially Christian beliefs; belief in the existence of a God, an afterlife, the soul, heaven, hell, the devil and sin. Although these questions were asked in most nominally Christian countries, they were not asked in the Baltic States. Thus, the Eastern European grouping includes only Belarus, Bulgaria, East Germany, Poland, Romania and Russia. Regardless of nationality, answers to these questions cohere extremely well. When constructed, a Likert scale had a Cronbach’s Alpha of around 0.75 in most countries, and, although this is somewhat lower for the younger age groups, it indicates the consistency of these attitudinal positions.
Figure 3 shows the mean scores on the religious belief scale (0 indicating belief in none of the above pieces of Christian doctrine, 10 indicating belief in all) for each cluster separately by gender and age group. There are therefore four possible factors of interest here: differences by gender, differences by age, differences between clusters, and interactions between age, gender and country cluster.

Before turning to the question of nationality and age it is worth noting that women are clearly more religious than men in every country cluster, an established finding in many studies.
Women on average score almost an extra point on the scale compared to men. What is perhaps more interesting is the large disparity in religiosity between different clusters of countries and how this interacts with age related differences. There is a huge gap between the Anglo–Saxon countries and rest of the Western industrialised world. 18-24 year-olds from Western European and the Nordic countries have mean scores of around 4, while the score is over 6.5 for the corresponding age group in the Anglo-Saxon countries. The enforced secularisation of the former communist countries shows in the low scores for the Eastern and Central European societies and the practised Catholicism of the Hispanic nations shows in the high belief scores displayed by this cluster.

There is also an age differential in religious beliefs. The young are noticeably less religious than the old and this relationship appears almost linear in many cases. In the Anglo-Saxon grouping, 18-24 year-olds differ by just under 1 point when compared with those over 65. However, what appears a very constant trend in the more religious Hispanic and Anglo-Saxon countries is non-linear in other societies, this being particularly notable amongst women. Those under the age of 35 in Western and Scandinavian Europe are remarkably similar, and it is only amongst older generations that a noticeable trend to more religious belief is apparent. If this is a generational process of secularisation then it appears to have slowed somewhat in these countries over the last 20 years.

In Eastern Europe, there is very little difference between the old and young. Given these provisos, it does seem that national differences are of greater magnitude when considering religious beliefs. Therefore, it seems that youth is not the defining characteristic that determines attitudes towards religion. Instead it is nationality: specifically the difference between the East and secularised West (Western Europe) on one hand and the South (Hispanic cluster) and English-speaking countries on the other. Within these groupings, age does have an effect, but it is less pronounced the cluster effect.

**Women’s Role in Society**

Religious beliefs are often linked with attitudes towards the family and the role of women in society. Given the clear differences in religious attitudes between country clusters and the pace of change of these beliefs, is it reasonable to say that there is a coherent set of youth values about family structure? There is a popular perception that ‘traditional’ family structures (with women working in the home) have a tendency to be more strongly supported in religious societies. This intuition has been confirmed by work on the ISSP (Harding 1989, Scott *et al.* 1993). Country level differences have also been accounted for by post-materialist theories with industrial structure and change proposed as the important factors in explaining national differences. Of course, given the generational nature of the theory, one ought to see age-related differences within countries as well. Indeed age is certainly a confirmed predictor of “traditionalism”. The same ISSP studies showing that younger people were more inclined to give liberal responses.

A number of questions about women’s employment were included in the WVS. Respondents were asked whether they approved or disapproved of the following statements:

a) A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not,
b) A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works,
c) A job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children,
d) Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay,
e) Having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person,
f) Both the husband and wife should contribute to household income.

These items have been combined into a Likert scale designed to try and measure the ‘traditionalism’ of respondents’ opinions.\textsuperscript{10} The reliability statistics for this scale are not particularly high, at best 0.65 in West Germany, although most Western countries have figures well above 0.50. The responses from individuals in Eastern Europe and less developed countries are generally of lower coherence than this. Therefore by using this sort of scale one is sacrificing some detail from the responses. In addition, the first two questions about working mothers are measuring something somewhat different from the last two questions about contributions to household income and independence.\textsuperscript{11}

Bearing this in mind, there are still some very interesting disparities in responses as Figure 4 shows. As might be anticipated, men are generally more ‘traditional’ in their outlook than women. This seems to be true of all age groups in all societies. As might also be expected, the inhabitants of the Nordic countries are the most liberal. However, it is not the Catholic South Americas that are the most traditional but the Eastern European cluster.\textsuperscript{12} Those under 24 in these former communist societies are by far the least liberal. The mean for this group is around 1 point higher than the same age group in the Nordic countries. Elements of this pattern tend to coincide with findings elsewhere. Despite high workforce participation rates among women, Eastern Europeans (including the young) remain more ‘traditional’ in their beliefs about the role of women in society (Scott \textit{et al.} 1993, Pilkington 1996). Aside from the Nordic and Eastern European clusters though, other nationalities appear quite similar.

What is also interesting is the variety of age differences that one can see amongst the young and the old in attitudes towards women’s work. Figure 4 shows that there is really very little difference between the old and young in the Eastern European cluster, but elsewhere there is a steady trend for the young to be more liberal than their elders are. One obvious explanation is simply that attitudes in the industrialised West have had to accommodate the feminist revolution of the last 30 years. Arguably, the lack of change towards a more advanced post-industrial economy in Eastern Europe has meant not only that women’s movements have been less successful, but that the impetus to post-materialist values in this form has been much less strong.
When examining attitudes to social conservatism, as typified by the role of women in society, there is an interesting picture of national difference, age-related divergence and interaction effects between the two. One sees little attitude change in Eastern Europe by generation, the old being indistinguishable from the young, but large intra-country differences by age group exist elsewhere. Thus youth in Eastern Europe is much less important than nationality, but youth in the West supersedes national boundaries to a large extent. By contrast with religious values, in the field of women’s roles, the young in Britain and Belgium have much more in common with each other than they do with their respective groups of elders.
Political Values

Young People’s Positioning on a Left-Right Ideological Spectrum

The notion that attitudes towards political parties, groups and issues can be reduced to a single dimension, a socialist-laissez faire economic divide, is a little simplistic. However, it has been shown in numerous Western societies that this is an important underlying dimension to political behaviour and more focused political attitudes. Rokeach (1973) puts forward a two-value model of political beliefs with core values of “equality versus inequality” and “freedom versus authoritarianism” forming people’s attitudes. He argues that these values underlie popular political ideologies and he proceeds to fit systems to value combinations, that is capitalism would be unequal but free and communism equal but authoritarian. Thus, his value of equality is analogous to a left-right dimension in political belief and many have used this as a starting point to analyse behaviour on left-right scales (Feldman 1988, Heath et al. 1994, Evans et al. 1996).

Moreover this dimension has often been shown to be age-related. In many Western societies, the young tend to be more left wing than the middle-aged and elderly (Butler and Stokes 1974, Jennings and Niemi 1981). Given this, it seems reasonable to ask about the extent to which these differences are replicated across societies. Is this age dimension more important than cross-national dispersion?

This paper will attempt to answer that question using a Likert scale constructed from a series of six questions in the WVS which tap into this economic liberalism versus state interventionism divide. Questions were asked on the equalisation of incomes, the ownership of industry, private versus state provision of goods and services, unemployment, the desirability of competition and the role of hard work in achieving success. This sort of scale, comprised of similar questions, has been used previously in research in Britain, and has been found to be fairly robust (Heath et al. 1994, Evans et al. 1996). However, it is reasonable to ask whether this robust scale reliability can be maintained when looking at such a diverse range of countries.

What emerges from examining scale reliabilities for these items, as measured by Cronbach’s Alpha, is that inter-country differences in scale reliability are of a fairly large magnitude. A Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.7 is generally taken to indicate a relatively coherent scale. As Table 2 shows, in some countries one can expect a much more coherent set of answers to questions involving left-right economic matters than in others. The countries in the Nordic, Anglo-Saxon and Western European groups score much more highly than countries in the other three groups (and are in fact quite close to the 0.7 boundary).

These groupings are supported by another piece of evidence. If individuals do have a political world-view predicated on a left-right dimension, one would expect their subjective view of their own left-right position to correlate in some way with the more objective scale measure. As Table 2 shows, this is only really the case in the Nordic and Western European clusters.
Table 2. Left-Right Reliability (Cronbach’s Alpha and Correlation Between Self-Placement and Left-Right Scale Score)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-Saxon</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.23*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nordic</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.47*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western European</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.33*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.18*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central European</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern European</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.06*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at the 0.01 level.

The correlations in the Anglo-Saxon cluster are almost as weak as they are in the Hispanic countries. This is due to the lack of any correlation in North America, which may be an artefact of asking about “left” and “right”, when liberal and conservative might be more appropriate synonyms in Canada and the US.\(^\text{14}\) It seems clear that the inhabitants of the Anglo-Saxon, Nordic and Western European clusters have attitudes that conform most consistently to the left-right dimension. This is perhaps not very surprising given that politics in these countries can be easily caricatured as operating mainly on a left-right axis and issues are often articulated in these terms.

Figure 5. Mean Male Score on the Left-Right Scale (Higher Scores Indicate a More Left Wing Position)

As Figure 5 shows, even given problems of comparability, some patterns can be discerned. There is some tendency for women to be marginally more left wing than their male counterparts, but this is certainly not as obvious as international differences. The Hispanic cluster of countries is clearly the most left wing while the Nordic and Anglo-Saxon countries are the most right wing. These differences at the maximum are around one point, for example the Nordic 18-24 year-olds have a mean score of around 4.4 compared to the mean score of over 5.5 for their Hispanic equivalents. Of the three clusters for which the scale was proved most reliable, Western Europe seems the most left wing and the Anglo-Saxon and Nordic clusters are more right wing.
If nationality seems a reasonable predictor of political positioning, so does age. The clearest trend is that the young, outside Eastern and Central Europe, are more left wing than their elders. Outside the former communist countries, the young do appear somewhat different from the old, the mean score for those over 65 in most clusters being around 0.4 less than that for those between the ages of 18 and 24. This scale of difference means that (within the three clusters with most scale reliability) it is age differences that are most prominent.

However, when examining all nationalities, it seems that it is international differences that predominate. It is only in the Nordic, Western European and Anglo-Saxon clusters that age effects outweigh national differences. In looking for more obviously coherent youth attitudes, perhaps those towards the political process, rather than prescriptive political positions will prove more fruitful.

**Young People’s Political Activism**

Young people in the West are often pictured as simultaneously politically apathetic and, paradoxically, also activist and radical. (See for example Wilkinson and Mulgan 1992, Jennings 1979.) There is also plenty of evidence to suggest that institutional and cultural arrangements affect levels of participation and attitudes to involvement. Almond and Verba’s *The Civic Culture* showed quite clearly that attitudes to the political arena differed markedly from society to society (Almond and Verba 1963). Thus, it is of interest to ask not only whether young people’s attitudes to politics can be characterised as indifferent or radical, but also how large the magnitude of age differences are when compared with cross-national differences.

One way of approaching this question is to attempt a comparison of levels of willingness to perform political actions. A series of questions in the WVS focused on whether people had, would, or would never perform certain acts. These were signing a petition, joining a boycott,
attending a lawful demonstration, joining an unofficial strike and occupying a building or factory.

Opportunities to take part in these activities obviously vary across societies and comparing these responses will inevitably confuse predispositions with opportunities. Thus only those saying that they would never perform an act have been included. ‘Never’ responses for each of the actions were aggregated into a 0-10 scale, 0 indicating that the respondent would never perform any of the listed actions and 10 that they would perform all of them. The lower the score, the more willing individuals are to engage in political action.

Figure 6. Mean Male Scores on the Political Action Scale (Higher Scores Indicate Greater Political Activity)

As Figure 6 shows, there is a clear sex differential with men showing more political activism than women. This does not seem to interact with cluster membership or age. Women regardless of country or age group score less on this scale. This is a common finding across societies. Women tend to be less interested in national politics and related political activities (Hayes and Bean 1993, Verba et al. 1993, and Verba et al. 1997).

The Hispanic and Central European groups appear to be the least willing to engage in political activity and the Nordic nations are the most willing. Eastern European scores are quite mixed and do not cohere very well for this measure. In fact, the group of countries with the least politically active young people are essentially in South America and parts of the formerly communist Eastern Europe. What characterises these societies is that in 1990, or somewhat before that, they had fairly repressive political regimes. Protest was (at the least) not encouraged and in places actively discouraged. These are countries with essentially weak civil societies. There is no culture of protest and few mechanisms by which protest can take place.
This is perhaps to be expected, so international differences are probably not as illuminating as age differences within these countries. Young people are certainly distinct from their elders. As age increases, people are less likely to agree to political activism and this seems to be a trend regardless of country cluster. To highlight these large age differences, the mean score for the Anglo-Saxon 18-24 year-olds is over 6, yet for the over 65 it is under 4. This magnitude of difference is apparent in all six clusters. Clearly age differences are of much greater size than any national-level disparities. It is youth and not nationality that is the better predictor of political activism in this sense.

Approval of New Social Movements

New social movements are often thought to have a special resonance for the young. It is also suggested that these movements may be a more important outlet for political action than the conventional array of political parties and interest groups (Ganzeboom and Flap 1989, Abramson and Inglehart 1987). Thus one might expect to find greater support amongst the young for the women’s movement, the peace movement and the ecology movement than amongst the elderly. Equally, theories of post-materialism might predict greater social movement support in wealthier countries. Given that new social movements embody many post-materialist attitudinal positions, from increased concern for the environment to increased legal rights for citizens, one might expect to see more favourable attitudes to such movements in materially wealthy and secure societies (Inglehart 1977, 1990). To what extent then are any age (or generational) differences overshadowed by these international differences?

To examine this question, a Likert scale was constructed using questions on respondents’ approval or disapproval of various new social movements; the ecological movement, the disarmament movement, various human rights movements, the women’s movement and the anti-nuclear movement. The reliability of this scale is very good in all countries. Young people approved or disapproved in similar ways to all five movements. One could therefore
argue that approval is linked to approval of the typology of political discourse embodied by ‘movements’ as well as for the issues underlying their formation.

Figure 7. Mean Male Score on the New Social Movements Scale (Higher Scores Indicate Greater Approval)

Figure 7 shows the mean cluster scores for this scale. Women are somewhat more approving of these movements in general. Unsurprisingly, the higher level of support they express for the women’s movement accounts for this difference. There are somewhat larger discrepancies between male and female support for movements in the Nordic and Anglo-Saxon clusters.

However, the differences between cluster groups seem more significant. Mean approval ratings generally follow the same pattern, with wealthier societies being the most hostile and
poorer societies, that is Eastern Europe and South America, being more approving. This may seem surprising though. Why is it that in more developed countries, in which, following Inglehart, one would expect to find high levels of support from younger generations for post-materialist ‘organisations’, that support is actually lowest? Moreover if one examines which particular rich countries have young people exhibiting hostility, it is those with well-developed and long-standing movements. It is the Anglo-Saxon and Nordic countries that have the lowest ratings and yet have the most active and visible movements.

Although this initially appears difficult to explain, it is perhaps less surprising than one might think, for the simple reason that individuals are not making choices informed by the same experiences. This again ties in with the idea of weaker civil societies within certain countries. In the abstract, movements dedicated to the improvement of women’s position in society or protection of the environment may sound uncontroversially admirable. However, in countries with fewer outlets for political activity (including social movements) people are essentially forced to answer about, what is for them an abstraction. In most countries in the Hispanic cluster there are simply not large visible ecology movements. Thus, there may be an approval of vague gestures towards a ‘better environment’, but this is different to concrete approval for, say, higher taxes on fuel, which may be a well-known objective of the environmental movement in Western Europe.

Compared to this, age differences show a much less surprising picture. Older people seem to be somewhat less approving of these new political movements in most countries. There are, however, some significant interaction effects between age and cluster, for the greatest disparity by age is clearly in the Anglo-Saxon, Nordic and Western European clusters. These are, of course, are the countries in which much new social movement activity developed and they are thus likely to have generational differences.

The young in these developed Western societies have much more in common with each other than they do with their own more elderly countrymen. The over-riding effect in the West is of age and not of nationality. Young people in the West are thus more left wing, more likely to protest and more approving of new social movements than their elders. The same pattern cannot be discerned in the Hispanic and Eastern/Central European clusters, where not only do most people have fairly incoherent left-right attitudes, display more approval of social movements and less inclination to protest, but the existence of age disparities is also much more debatable. The reasons behind these cluster characteristics seem to depend on the nature of economic change and civic society within each cluster. Economic change has manifested itself in generational differences in the industrialised West. The lack of post-materialist change in the Hispanic and Eastern European societies and the additional lack of an established civil society within which movements, protest groups and political parties can operate, has meant that generational differences are few, while participation and knowledge are generally lower.

**Job and Life Satisfaction**

This final section examines young people’s satisfaction with their work and their life more generally. Why do people work, what level of satisfaction does it give them and how does this relate to their life satisfaction more generally? International differences might be expected, with people deriving different benefits and looking for different rewards from work cross-nationally. There may also be an expectation that young people approach work differently to their elders. As individuals pass through the life-cycle their priorities probably change, the
stereotype of the ambitious youth and more passive, security seeking older individual appear to have some basis in fact (Hagstrom and Gamberale 1995).

Standard 1-10 scale questions were asked on job satisfaction and general life satisfaction. The WVS asked the employed “how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your job?” and sought a figure between 1 and 10 in response. Mean values for this score, adjusted to a 0-10 scale to make comparability between all attitudes across countries easier, are shown below in Figure 8.

The most obvious pattern is that young people in poorer countries tend to be less satisfied with their jobs than those in richer societies. The Nordic and Anglo-Saxon clusters rank quite highly and the Eastern European young people are at the bottom of the rankings. Low job satisfaction ratings in the former communist countries have been found before, work on the ISSP showing that Hungarian workers were noticeably more dissatisfied than their Western counterparts (Curtice 1993).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country Cluster</th>
<th>Great Deal of Pride (%)</th>
<th>Some Pride (%)</th>
<th>A Little or No Pride (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Anglo-Saxon</td>
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<td>Eastern European</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>41.2</td>
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This finding is further corroborated in Table 3. This shows the extent to which young people from different countries gave differing responses to the question “how much pride do you take in your work?” The Eastern European cluster consistently scores in a manner indicating a lack of pride on this scale. Again the Anglo-Saxon countries are much more positive. Over 75% of working young people report that they take a great deal of pride in their work.
Older people appear to be considerably happier with their work on the measure of satisfaction. The differences for job satisfaction are quite large, the males aged 55-64 in the Anglo-Saxon grouping having a mean score of over 1 point more than those under 24. This is typical of age differences across clusters. Some authors (for example, see Blanchflower and Oswald 1997) have found a U-shaped pattern to age-related differences in job satisfaction. However, the mean values in Figure 8 show that satisfaction with work rises at a fairly uniform rate in all clusters apart from the Central European grouping where the old appear no more satisfied than the young.
In the main, for those under the age of 65, differences by gender are not large. However, since the number of women working after the age of 65 is so strongly self-selected, there are apparent differences between the men and women in this age-group. It is quite clear though that it is age and inter-cluster differences that are of most importance in describing attitudes to job satisfaction. As Figure 8 shows, these are effects of a comparable magnitude to each other in most cases. Since a large proportion of life is spent in work, one would expect some correlation between job and life satisfaction; when one is satisfied at work one is satisfied in life. At the individual level, there is a relatively strong level of correspondence between the two ratings and correlations are relatively high in most countries. (Virtually all are over 0.3 and most are considerably higher).

Figure 9 plots GNP per capita against the mean country scores for the job and life satisfaction of those under 35 in all surveyed countries. This confirms the correlation between job and life satisfaction on the aggregate level, but also suggests that there may be a relationship between GNP and job/life satisfaction. As national wealth increases young people give responses that indicate that they are happier in their jobs and in their lives. Other authors have found differing results. Easterlin (1974) concluded that individual happiness appeared to be similar across poor and rich countries. Subsequent work on time series has shown that GNP differences between nations may have an effect on happiness/satisfaction (Veenhoven 1991). This supports the trend shown in Figure 9, which is virtually linear. If it were not for some of the Hispanic nations with fairly low GNP per capita ratings, but also relatively satisfied inhabitants, the fit for a simple linear relationship would be remarkably good.

Due to the apparent linkage between national wealth and job/life satisfaction, cluster patterns for life satisfaction are similar to those for job satisfaction. As Figure 10 shows, the Eastern and Central Europeans are the most dissatisfied and the Nordic and Anglo-Saxon countries the most satisfied. However, these clear international differences are not matched by clear age differences. In fact, unlike the increased job satisfaction older people show, there is little difference between the young and old in terms of how satisfied they are with life. The differences are clearly between cluster membership and attitudes and not between age and

![Figure 9. Young People’s Mean Scores for Job and Life Satisfaction by Country](image-url)
attitudes. Youth is not a helpful factor when attempting to explain differences in the life satisfaction of individuals.

**Figure 10. Mean Male Score for Life Satisfaction (Higher Scores Indicate Greater Satisfaction)**

In the case of life satisfaction, it is clearly international differences (which appear related to national income) which are the most explanatory. Job satisfaction, on the other hand, is related to both age and nationality. The latter linkage between job satisfaction and nationality apparently works through a similar mechanism to that for life satisfaction, namely national income. It appears to be of greater magnitude when compared to age disparities. In summary,
the old seem no happier than the young in life, but in work there is an age gradient which seems of somewhat less importance than cluster membership differences.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this paper was twofold. Firstly, to try and group young people from different countries into clusters of societies which are similar with regard to attitudes and beliefs. Secondly, to determine whether young people had more in common with other young people from different clusters of societies, or with the elders from the same country cluster.

Groupings of societies do seem to exist. Individuals in different countries with shared histories and languages, similar levels of economic development (and to some extent geographical proximity) do have beliefs that often coincide. These groupings appear quite distinct, but are they more distinct than cross-national age groups?

As the previous sections have shown, the level of age-related differences and cluster level differences vary to some degree, as one might expect, across the range of attitudes. Whilst political activity appeared to be predicated mainly on age, life satisfaction appears not to be linked to age/cohort at all. To test all these attitudes together and to see whether youth or country is more important in determining young people’s values, one can use a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) procedure.

The factor variables of cluster, age and sex divide the population into groups. Using a general linear modelling procedure it is possible to test the effects which these three variables have on the means of various groupings for a joint distribution in the attitudinal dependent variables. Table 4 shows the results of a MANOVA run with the three explanatory variables and an interaction term between cluster and age group. Interactions between gender and cluster and gender and age group were also tested, but not found to be significant. All the attitudinal measures examined previously have been included, apart from job satisfaction. The latter was excluded to try and keep the sample numbers fairly high. Since job satisfaction was only asked of those in work, this question has the most missing responses of any of the attitudinal questions used in this paper, and thus is not included in the MANOVA. For the items that were included the F-value indicates the explanatory power of the fixed effect, cluster and so on. The higher this value, the better that effect is at explaining values of the attitudinal variable.
Table 4. MANOVA, Attitudes as Dependent Variables and Cluster, Age and Gender as Fixed Effects

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<td>New Social Movements</td>
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<td>Life Satisfaction</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Life Satisfaction</td>
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</table>

* Significant at the 0.01 level.

What Table 4 shows is that, apart from political activity, cluster membership has a greater effect than age group. Knowing that a young person is from a particular national grouping is a better predictor of their attitudes, aside from willingness to participate in political activities, than is their youth. Some of these differences are more striking than others, but it is only really the effect of youth on attitudes towards women’s roles that comes close in magnitude to the national grouping effects. Although all age-group effects are significant (apart from life satisfaction), they are generally dwarfed by the much larger effects of nationality. The young do not appear to be a coherent grouping with a common base of values.

Table 4 also shows that gender is clearly an important determinant of attitude. Whilst gender differences are not the core focus of this paper, it is clear that this divergence of attitudes by gender outweighs differences by age quite substantially. Gender differences within clusters are a better predictor of attitude then is youth. Equally, aside from life satisfaction and religious beliefs (which are dominated by cluster effects), gender differences are of comparable magnitude to international effects.
Interaction effects between cluster and age group are significant for all attitudes, suggesting that youth does not have a uniform effect globally. These interactions were seen clearly in earlier sections. The large interaction effect for attitude to women’s roles is unsurprising given that Eastern European mean values were virtually unchanged by age, but the young were noticeably more liberal than their elders in most Western countries. The presence of these interaction effects between age and cluster are helpful in showing that whilst a coherent fully international view of youth is not tenable, a more limited position is not unreasonable.

Some clusters are actually rather similar. The main divide is in fact between the East, West and, to a lesser extent, Hispanic clusters. Often the mean scores for the Anglo-Saxons, Nordic and Western European citizens are relatively similar. Moreover, age differences are generally much more pronounced in these countries. Whether concerning attitudes towards women’s work or approval of new social movements, the old tend to differ from the young to a greater degree in Western societies than in the Eastern and Southern nations.

This clearly ties in with the post-materialism thesis, for Inglehart et al. would predict that only in countries where ‘advanced industrial society’ is emerging, that is in the Western World, would large generational differences exist. As one can see in the case of political attitudes, without the foundation of politicised society enabled by post-modernisation and the changes caused by economic growth and increased security, newer generations do not appear distinctive. Although the previous analysis has shown the predominance of nationality as a predictor of attitude, it is important to note that within more limited groups of countries young people appear to hold quite similar values. Hence young people do have common values cross-nationally, but within prescribed supra-national limits. It is difficult to argue that there is a recognisable global youth view of the world, for differences in values by age are generally overshadowed by national effects. However within clusters of societies, and more broadly within the industrialised West, young people are distinct from their elders and have more in common internationally with their own age-group, than nationally with their parents and grandparents.

Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges the useful suggestions and comments of Anthony Heath, Frank Furstenberg, Anne Gauthier, Diego Gambetta and Gillian Penlington on earlier drafts of this paper. The World Values Survey dataset was supplied by The Data Archive, University of Essex, and was originally assembled and documented by Ronald Inglehart. Neither bears any responsibility for the analysis presented here.
References


## Appendix 1

<table>
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<th>Country</th>
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<th>35 and Over (N)</th>
<th>Total (N)</th>
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<td><strong>58298</strong></td>
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</table>
Appendix 2

Left-Right Scale

Now I’d like you to tell me your views on various issues. How would you place your views on this scale? 1 means you agree completely with the first statement, 10 means you agree completely with the second statement, or you can choose any number in between.

A) Incomes should be made more equal.  
   There should be greater incentives for individual effort.
B) Private ownership of business and industry should be increased.  
   Government ownership of business and industry should be increased.
C) Individuals should take more responsibility for providing for themselves.  
   The State should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for.
D) People who are unemployed should have to take any job available or lose their unemployment benefits.  
   People who are unemployed should have the right to refuse a job they do not want.
E) Competition is good. It stimulates people to work hard and develop new ideas.  
   Competition is harmful. It brings out the worst in people.
F) In the long run, hard work usually brings a better life.  
   Hard work doesn’t generally bring success - it’s more a matter of luck and connections.
G) People can only accumulate wealth at the expense of others.  
   Wealth can grow so there’s enough for everyone.

The last response was excluded from the scale, as it did not improve reliability in virtually any country.

Political Action Scale

Now I’d like you to look at this card. I’m going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I’d like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under any circumstances, do it.

A) Signing a petition,  
B) Joining in boycotts,  
C) Attending lawful demonstrations,  
D) Joining unofficial strikes,  
E) Occupying buildings or factories.

New Social Movement Approval Scale

There are a number of groups and movements looking for public support. For each of the following movements, which I read out, can you tell me whether you approve or disapprove of this movement?

A) Ecology movement or nature protection  
B) Anti-nuclear energy movement  
C) Disarmament movement  
D) Human rights movement at home or abroad  
E) Women’s movement  
F) Anti-apartheid movement

The last of these was not included in the scale as it did not improve the reliability figure and was clearly associated with a specific issue rather than a broader agenda.
Religious Belief Scale

Which, if any, of the following do you believe in?

A) God  
B) Life after death  
C) A soul  
D) The Devil  
E) Hell  
F) Heaven  
G) Sin  
H) Resurrection of the dead  
I) Reincarnation

The last two possible responses were not used as they were not felt to tap into Christian belief in quite the same way as the other parts of the question.

Women’s Role in Society Scale

People talk about the changing roles of men and women today. For each of the following statements I read out, can you tell me how much you agree with each (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree).

A) A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not,  
B) A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works,  
C) A job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children,  
D) Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay,  
E) Having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person,  
F) Both the husband and wife should contribute to household income.

Endnotes

1 Most of the surveys were carried out in 1990, but two (in Switzerland and Poland) were carried out the year before. Two surveys (those in Russia and Turkey) were completed in early 1991 while another (in Slovenia) was carried out during 1992. The Romanian survey was carried out in early 1993.
2 Slovenia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the end of the First World War and gained independence only in 1918.
3 To include Romania and Poland, the item concerning women’s role in society had to be excluded from the MDS procedure.
4 Again when this MDS analysis was repeated for other Eastern European countries they appeared to lie between East Germany and the Russian cluster.
5 All figures are weighted within countries to account for the over-sampling of certain sectors of society in each country.
6 With “don’t knows” given a score of 1 compared to 2 for belief and 0 for disbelief. “Don’t knows” in this context presumably indicate an agnosticism which it is desirable to capture. The responses to these questions have been aggregated and scaled to produce a 0-10 scale.
7 The reliability of an indicator made up of a number of measured items is often assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha. This is calculated as a function of the mean inter-item correlation and the number of items: \( \alpha = \frac{N \rho}{1 + (N-1) \rho} \) where \( \rho \) is the mean inter-item correlation and \( N \) the number of items. Conventionally, scores above 0.70 are taken to mean the scale is extremely coherent (Nunnally 1978).
8 In fact the former would be even lower, were it were not for the inclusion of Poland with its continued history of Catholicism under communist rule.
9 Both studies examine only a small number of countries, but religiosity did appear to be one of the explanatory factors in explaining traditional family attitudes.
10 Question c was not asked in Sweden and thus for this country the scale uses only the other five questions weighted accordingly. All questions a-f were not asked in Poland and Romania; hence the Eastern European cluster does not contain these countries. Strong approval scored 0, moderate approval 1, moderate disapproval 2 and strong disapproval 3. The answers to b, c, and d were reversed so the higher the score the more traditional the scale score. The scale again runs from 0 to 10.
Factor analysis on these questions reveals that in some countries there are potentially two dimensions to responses. The first scores more highly with the four questions that mention children and housework explicitly, whereas the second is more heavily loaded to the last two questions which concentrate more on income and pay. Removing either dimension’s questions from the scale does not significantly improve the reliability of the scale.

It should be noted that the young people of Spain and Portugal are among the most liberal, which brings down the average of the Hispanic cluster.

The exact wording of these questions is contained in Appendix 2.

To test the reliability of the scale further, a factor analysis was run using the six items. This used maximum likelihood as the estimation method with a varimax rotation and was repeated independently for each country. If there is a coherent notion that these questions address, one would expect to find a single major dimension, the left-right dimension, to individuals’ responses. Outside Northern Europe, parts of Western Europe and North America, this was not the case.

Reliability for this scale is very high, with alpha values over 0.7 in most countries. Individuals, both young and old, tending to have an attitude of either action or inaction.

A score of 1 indicated ‘approving strongly’, 2 ‘approving somewhat’, 3 ‘disapproving somewhat and 4 ‘disapproving strongly’. The answers to each movement question were then averaged, and uprated to make a ten-point scale.

For all respondents in the youth category the alpha statistic is 0.714. Somewhat lower figures were recorded in Eastern Europe and South America, but none fell below 0.60. The responses of those over 35 were marginally more coherent than those in the younger age group.

The three Baltic States are much more disapproving than the rest of Eastern Europe, all age groups scoring below 7 on the scale. The main driving force behind these low scores is the very widespread disapproval of the disarmament movement. This is hardly surprising given that there was, in fact, a widespread movement for re-armament in the Baltic States. As former communist countries that directly border Russia, and moreover contain sizeable Russian minorities, there is a widespread fear of potential Russian imperialism. Without these countries in the Eastern European cluster, this grouping would appear the most approving of new social movement activity.

Those over 65 are generally the happiest in most countries but given that retirement ages are around 60-65 in most societies, this group may be somewhat self-selected, with those who enjoy their jobs continuing to work after retirement age. Given this, the high satisfaction ratings from this group might usefully be disregarded. The pattern of age-related increase in job satisfaction remains however.

These are 1990 per capita Gross National Product figures, as provided in the World Bank World Development Report 1993.

If an ANOVA is run with job satisfaction as the dependent variable then the same pattern appears to prevail. Cluster is more important than age, although both are significant at the 0.01 level.

The MDS procedure showed that although the Nordic, Anglo and Western European clusters were distinct the greatest distance was between East, West and South.