

# Modernization, Culture and Morality in Europe

Universalism, Contextualism or Relativism?

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# Aim of this Contribution

The aim of this study is to answer the following questions:

- Do people in Europe think
  - that there are absolute clear guidelines about what is good and evil (*Moral Universalism/Absolutism*), or do they think
  - that such guidelines do not exist (*Moral Relativism*)?
  - And: If there are absolute clear guidelines, are deviations from these guidelines sometimes justifiable (*Moral Contextualism/Restricted Moral Universalism*)?
- What are the determinants of observable differences in morality perceptions?
- How far are our rather subjective morality perceptions in accordance with our more objective moral judgment behaviour when we are confronted with questions about the moral justifiability of different behaviour?

# Overview

## Theoretical Considerations:

- How is social change related to morality perceptions?
- What are the determinants of our morality perceptions?

## Empirical Part:

- Data and Operationalisations
- Empirical Results

## Conclusions

# Society and Morality

## Traditional, Preindustrial Societies: Moral Absolutism/Universalism

Moral rules like those to be found in the 10 Commandments (Thou shalt not kill, not commit adultery, not steal, ...), exist in all societies.

In traditional societies such rules

- are seen as the will of an omnipotent deity.
- As such they claim absolute validity. (Inglehart 1990, Inglehart/Baker 2000)

# Society and Morality

## Traditional, Preindustrial Societies: Moral Absolutism/Universalism

Function of absolute and steadfast rules:

- **Perspective of the Society:** rules serve a societal function: absolute rules are crucial for a society's viability

Examples (Inglehart 1990,1997, Inglehart/Welzel 2005):

- Thou shalt not kill:

Function: serves the function to restrict violence to narrow, predictable channels and prevents a society from tearing itself apart

- Thou shalt not commit adultery:

Function: serves the function to maintain the family as key economic unit for reproduction

- **Perspective of the Individual:** rules serve a psychological function
  - absolute rule obedience and the belief that an infallible higher power will ensure that things ultimately turn out well fulfills in an insecure environment a basic psychological need (Inglehart 1997)

# Society and Morality

## Modernising Societies: Eroding Moral Absolutism/Universalism

Modernisation (and accompanying Rationalisation and Secularisation):

- religious authority becomes less able to legitimise basic moral rules

Enlightenment:

- in the course of Enlightenment, Kant (1786) established the Categorical Imperative as moral principle which allows to test whether a rule can claim a universally absolute validity
  - that no longer depends on the existence of divine authority
  - but that is based instead of on pure reason

# Society and Morality

## Modernising Societies: Eroding Moral Absolutism/Universalism

- basic moral rules
  - are placed in this way on a secular foundation
  - but nonetheless remain their status as unconditionally/unexceptionally valid duties
- the strict universalistic status *only* applies to negative duties
  - negative duties are duties of omission like “Thou shalt not kill/lie“
  - positive duties are obligations to act like “Do your duty“ (caretaking duties) or “Practise charity“
- negative duties
  - are duties of omission and for that reason cannot collide
  - have strict priority over positive duties.

Thus, negative duties can be kept by everyone and under all circumstances.

# Society and Morality

## Modernising Societies: Eroding Moral Absolutism/Universalism

### Thus, according to Kant:

- strict, universally valid rules do exist that can be generated by the Categorical Imperative
- there always exists only one morally justifiable action (negative and positive duties cannot collide)



# Society and Morality

## Modernising Societies: Eroding Moral Absolutism/Universalism

Negative duties:

- are unconditional valid
- owe their unconditional validity Kant's still religiously based conception of the world
  - according to which a human being is responsible only for the right action
  - the consequences of right action can still be assigned to God who created the world as the world is (Nunner-Winkler 1996, 2000)

In a more and more secularising world ...  
it becomes increasingly impossible to burden the responsibility for the consequences of right actions to God.

# Society and Morality

## Advanced Industrial Societies:

### Moral Contextualism/Restricted Universalism

The *economic prosperity* and the *emergence of the welfare state* in the decades after World War II had mainly two consequences (Inglehart 1997):

- the *welfare state* eroded the functional basis of traditional norms:
  - the ultimate responsibility for economic survival shifted from the family to the state
    - survival of the children no longer depends on a functioning family with 2 parents
    - survival of the parents when they reached old age no longer depends on the children's support
    - moral rules supporting the 2-parent heterosexual family clearly are weakening
- the *economic prosperity* increased the sense of physical and economical security for the individual:
  - the psychological need for steadfast, absolute rules diminishes  
(*Living under insecurity*: Individuals margin for error is slender and they need maximum predictability;  
*Living under security*: Individuals can tolerate more ambiguity)
  - striving for self-expression gets higher priority

# Society and Morality

## Advanced Industrial Societies: Moral Contextualism/Restricted Universalism

Economic development is connected with *educational expansion*

Consequences:

- general cognitive competences are increasing
- more and more citizens fulfill the cognitive prerequisites for the transition from the *conventional* to the *postconventional* level of moral judgement

(Colby/Kohlberg 1986)

# Society and Morality

## Advanced Industrial Societies:

### Moral Contextualism/Restricted Universalism

#### Conventional Level of Moral Development:

- relatively unreserved orientation towards traditional religious or prevailing social rules and conventions

#### Postconventional Level of Moral Development:

- internalised rules will be **questioned** with respect of their genuine moral meaning
  - Consequence: clearer distinction between culture specific conventions and universally valid moral rules/principles (Nunner-Winkler 1996)
- context sensitive **application** of moral rules: weighting up the consequences of rule obedience become part of evaluating the rightness or wrongness of actions (Nunner-Winkler 2000)

# Society and Morality

## Advanced Industrial Societies: Moral Contextualism/Restricted Universalism

Distinction between **Discourses of Application** and **Discourses of Justification** (Habermas 1991/1993):

- ***Discourses of Justification*** (questioning moral rules):

Aim:

- argumentative justification/critique of moral rules/principles
- testing the *universal validity* of moral rules/principles  
(which already implies *impartiality* and *equality*)

# Society and Morality

## Advanced Industrial Societies: Moral Contextualism/Restricted Universalism

**Minimal Principles** of a rationally justifiable moral (Nunner-Winkler 1996, 1997):

- **Impartiality** and **Equality** (by *process-oriented theories* already assumed)
  - inequality has to be justified
- **Avoidance of harm** (*interest based, substantive core of morality*)
  - can be derived anthropologically from the vulnerability of human beings and their common interest in not to be harmed without reason

# Society and Morality

## Advanced Industrial Societies: Moral Contextualism/Restricted Universalism

- ***Discourses of Application*** (applying moral rules):

Aim:

- argumentative *justification* of actions in concrete situations/contexts

Answering the question:

- Which moral rules are *appropriate*?
- Are the consequences of following a rule *reasonable* or is an exception justifiable?

Problem:

- if harm reduction is part of the core of a rationally justifiable, inner-worldly moral then – in contrast to Kant – the possibility of a ***conflict*** arises
  - between negative and positive duties
  - between following a rule and the reasonableness of the consequences of following a rule

# Society and Morality

## Advanced Industrial Societies: Moral Contextualism/Retricted Universalism

Thus, according to Nunner-Winkler:

- universally valid moral rules do exist (**Discourses of Justification**)
- universally valid moral rules only have the status of *prima facie duties* (Ross 1930) (**Discourses of Application**)
- “**Grey areas of legitimate moral dissent**“ do exist (Nunner-Winkler 1996)  
(conflict between duties/between duties and negative consequences of fulfilling duties)
- however, a multitude of situations do exist where an *unambiguous* answer can be given to the question whether or not an action is morally justifiable  
(Violating a universally valid moral rule for *pure self-interest* is morally wrong)



# Society and Morality

## Advanced Industrial Societies: Increasing Moral Relativism?

### Moral Relativism (Rippe 2006, Gowans 2004):

Possible positions: moral judgments are only valid for

- one person

Problem:

- the reliability of expectations generated by moral rules would be destroyed

- one epoch

Problem:

- degree of modernisation of a society decides which moral rules are functional for the society/individuals (Inglehart 1997)
- since modernisation affects all societies over the course of time, it is not possible to interpret the systematic influences of modernisation in the sense of moral relativism

- one cultural zone

- most plausible form of moral relativism, since inside the society it would leave the reliability of expectations generated by moral rules untouched

# Society and Morality

## Advanced Industrial Societies: Increasing Moral Relativism?

A somewhat different position is taken by Inglehart:

„A growing moral relativism is linked with both Modernization and Postmodernization. In traditional societies, moral rules are absolute truths, revealed by God. ... in Postmodern society, absolute standards dissolve, giving way to an increasing sense of ambiguity.“ (Inglehart 1997: 88)

According to Inglehart, **subjectively perceived moral relativism is increasing.**

# Determinants of Morality Perceptions

## H1a: Modernisation

### Modernisation

- ... *fosters* an understanding that grasps existing absolute clear moral guidelines as *prima facie*-rules. (Nunner-Winkler)
- ... *increases* the perception that there can never be absolutely clear guidelines about good and evil. (Inglehart)

## H1i: Education

### Education

- ... *fosters* an understanding that grasps existing absolute clear moral guidelines as *prima facie* rules. (Kohlberg, Nunner-Winkler)

If education is the central factor that fosters moral development, then the highly educated are most likely to reach the postconventional level of moral development.

Thus, the highly educated could be expected to be most likely to reach a level of moral understanding that allows them, under special circumstances, to deviate from the clear *prima facie*-rules.

# Determinants of Morality Perceptions

## H2i: Cohorts

Younger cohorts are assumed to be convinced comparably *more likely* than older cohorts

- ... that there can never be absolutely clear guidelines about good and evil.  
(Inglehart)

If changed conditions of socialisation exert a changed formative influence on morality perceptions (functionality of traditional sexual morality is declining, self-expression becomes more important), then younger cohorts can be assumed to understand moral rules already for *content-related learning processes* as less obligatory compared to older cohorts.

# Determinants of Morality Perceptions

## H3i/H4i: Denomination and Importance of Religion

Members of religious denominations and people to whom religion is important are comparably more likely convinced than others

- ... that absolutely clear guidelines about good and evil exist which can claim unconditional validity. (*Inglehart/Nunner-Winkler*)

Religious needs are according to Inglehart (1997: 42) needs for security.

The most important institutions for transmitting basic moral rules as well as the perception of their unconditional validity are at least in Europe the established Churches (*Döbert/Nunner-Winkler 1986*).

## H2a: Culture

Within the frame of an (objective) cultural relativism

- ... it is assumed that mainly the membership of a respective culture should account for differences in morality perceptions.

From the point of view of Moral Relativism, one has to understand differences in morality perceptions as pure *cultural uniqueness* that are not accessible to a deeper level of systematic explanation and also do not need such an explanation.

# Data and Operationalizations

## Question on Morality Perceptions:

Here are three statements which people sometimes make when discussing good and evil. Which one comes closest to your own point of view?

- A There are absolute clear guidelines about what is good and evil.  
These always apply to everyone, whatever the circumstances.
- B There are absolute clear guidelines about what is good and evil.  
However, deviating from these guidelines is sometimes justified by special circumstances.
- C There can never be absolutely clear guidelines about what is good and evil.  
What is good and evil depends entirely upon the circumstances at the time.



European Values Study 2008  
Fieldwork: 2008/09  
Included Countries: 48

# Data and Operationalisations

## Operationalisations for the Country Level

### Degree of Modernisation of a Society:

Human Development Index 2008:

Geometric Mean of

- Income:           Logarithm of the Gross National Income per capita in PPP US\$
- Education:       Mean and Expected Years of Schooling
- Health:           Life Expectancy at Birth

Observed Range:

0.622 (Moldova)

0.937 (Norway)

# Data and Operationalizations

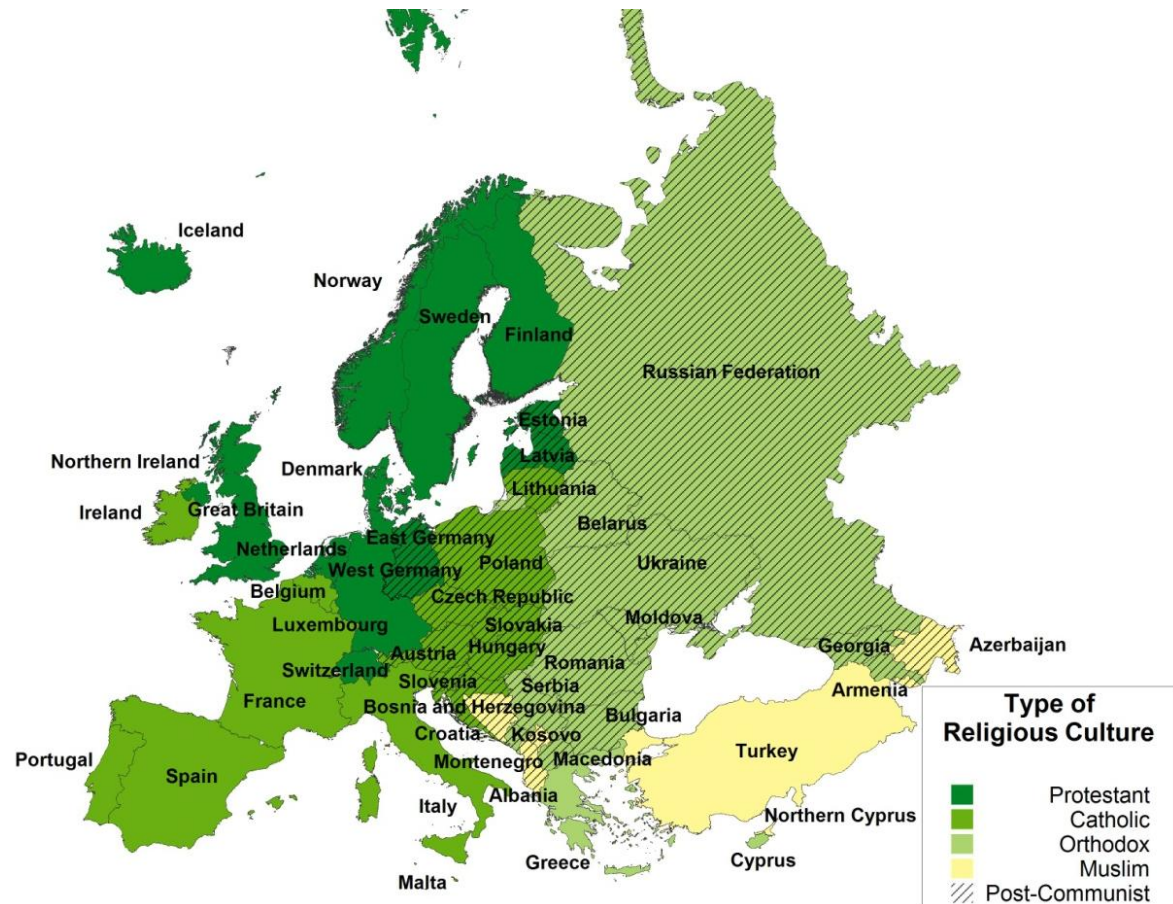
## Operationalisations for the Country Level

### Religious Culture

(historically predominant Religions according to Norris/Inglehart 2004, 45-47)

### Post-Communist:

- none Post-Communist (0)
- Post-Communist (1)





# Data and Operationalizations

## Operationalisations for the Respondent Level

### Education (Basis: 7-point ISCED):

- low: maximal lower secondary education (Reference Category: 28 %)
- middle: secondary education (48 %)
- high: tertiary education (24 %)

### Cohorts:

- Born before 1946 (Reference Category)
- Born 1946-1965
- Born 1966-1991

### Member of Religious Denomination:

- Denomination (0)
- No Denomination (1)

### Importance of Religion:

- not at all important (0)
- ...
- very important (3)

### Gender:

- Male (0)
- Female (1)

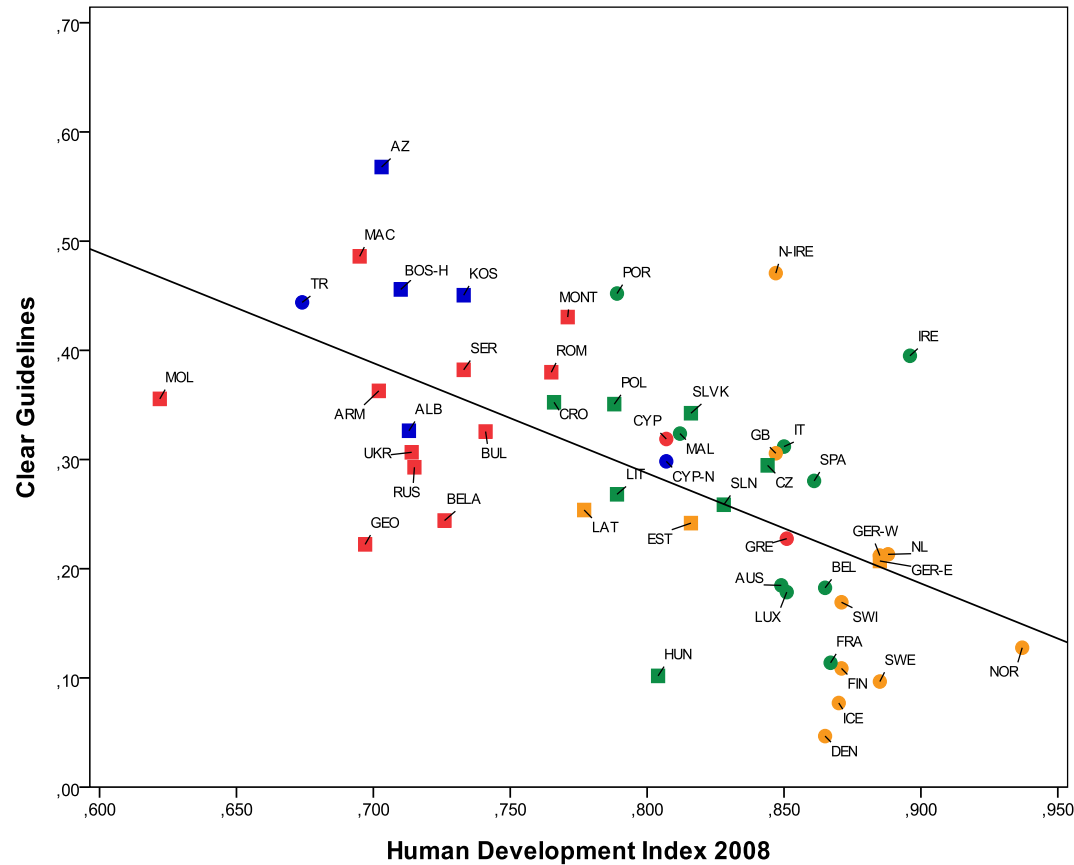
# Empirical Results

## Modernisation and Morality Perceptions

$R^2 = 37.3 \%$   
 $b_{\text{HDI}} = -1.009^{**}$

Cultural Zone:

- Protestant
- Catholic
- Orthodox
- Muslim
- Post-Communist



# Empirical Results

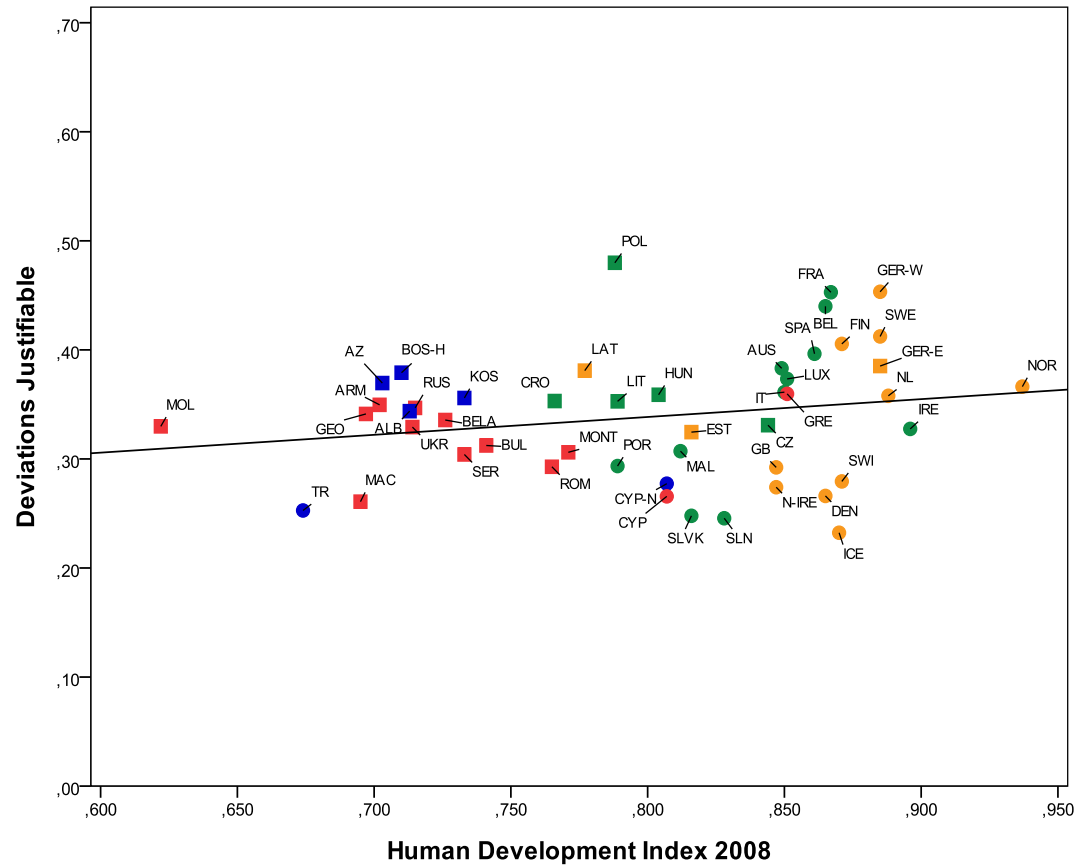
## Modernisation and Morality Perceptions

$R^2 = 4.2\%$

$b_{\text{HDI}} = 0.164$  (n.s.)

Cultural Zone:

- Protestant
- Catholic
- Orthodox
- Muslim
- Post-Communist



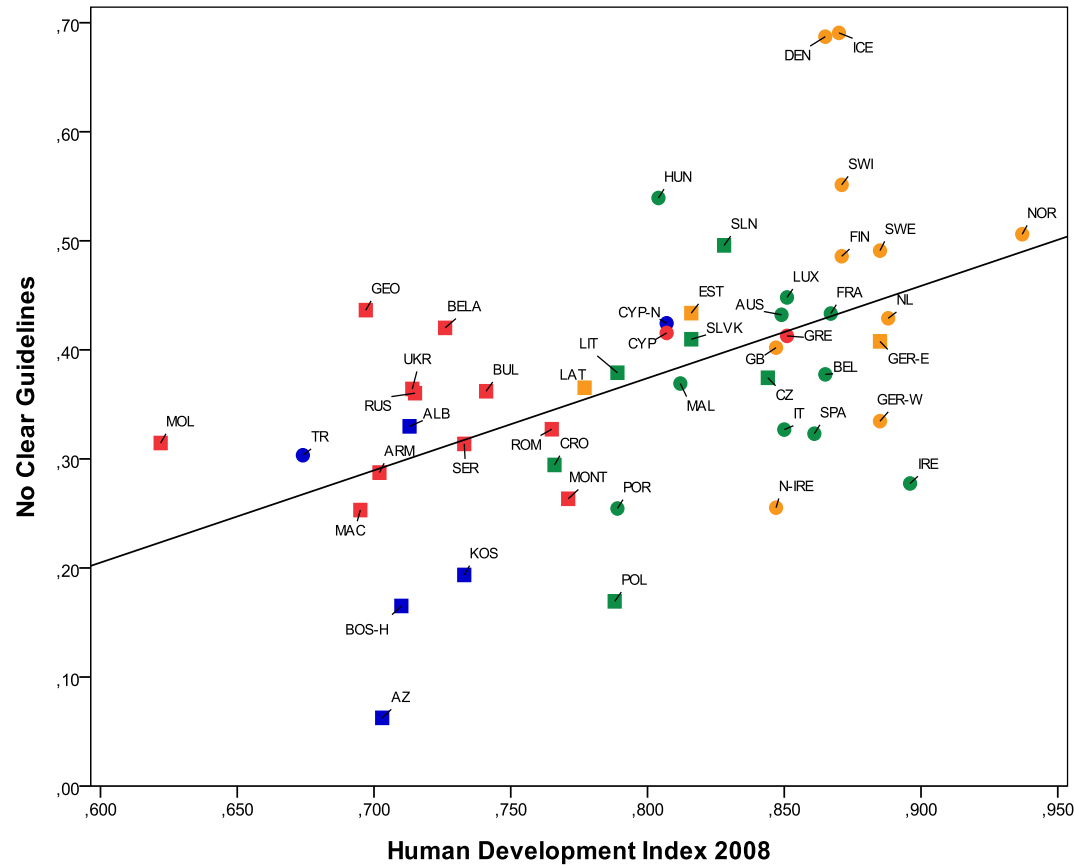
# Empirical Results

## Modernisation and Morality Perceptions

$R^2 = 26.6 \%$   
 $b_{\text{HDI}} = 0.846^{**}$

Cultural Zone:

- Protestant
- Catholic
- Orthodox
- Muslim
- Post-Communist



# Empirical Results

## Morality Perceptions: Multinomial Logistic Multilevel Analysis

Level 1 (62,172 Respondents) Level 2 (48 Countries)	Clear Guidelines / No Clear Guidelines	Deviations Justifiable / No Clear Guidelines	Clear Guidelines / Deviations Justifiable
	Logit- coefficient b	Logit- coefficient b	Logit- coefficient b
Intercept	3.402*	1.339	2.064
HDI 2008	<b>-4.350*</b>	-1.873	<b>-2.478*</b>
Catholic Culture	-	-	-
Protestant Culture	-.082	-.007	-.074
Orthodox Culture	-.365	-.259	-.106
Muslim Culture	-.454	-.048	<b>-.407**</b>
(Post-) Communism	.076	.165	-.090
Education (low)	-	-	-
Education (middle)	-.140**	.038	<b>-.177**</b>
Education (high)	-.214**	.153**	<b>-.367**</b>
Born before 1946	-	-	-
Born 1946-65	<b>-.219**</b>	.001	<b>-.221**</b>
Born 1966-91	<b>-.403**</b>	-.047	<b>-.356**</b>
Importance of Religion	<b>.238**</b>	.083**	.155**
No Denomination	<b>-.186**</b>	<b>-.138**</b>	-.048
Gender (1 = Female)	<b>-.081**</b>	-.050*	-.032

Data: EVS 2008; \*  $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$  (one-tailed test for hypotheses with assumed causal direction);

Weighted data (all countries equally weighted without changing the total number of interviews); Restricted Maximum-Likelihood, Robust Standard Errors

# Empirical Results

## Morality Perceptions: Multinomial Logistic Multilevel Analysis

Level 1 (62,172 Respondents) Level 2 (48 Countries)	Clear Guidelines / No Clear Guidelines		Deviations Justifiable / No Clear Guidelines		Clear Guidelines / Deviations Justifiable	
	Logit- coefficient b	Std. Effect- coefficient $e^{b_x \cdot s_x}$	Logit- coefficient b	Std. Effect- coefficient $e^{b_x \cdot s_x}$	Logit- coefficient b	Std. Effect- coefficient $e^{b_x \cdot s_x}$
Intercept	3.402*		1.339		2.064	
HDI 2008	-4.350*	.729	-1.873	.873	-2.478*	.835
Catholic Culture	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protestant Culture	-.082	.964	-.007	.997	-.074	.967
Orthodox Culture	-.365	.849	-.259	.890	-.106	.954
Muslim Culture	-.454	.859	-.048	.984	-.407**	.873
(Post-) Communism	.076	1.039 (.962)	.165	1.087 (.920)	-.090	.956
Education (low)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Education (middle)	-.140**	.933	.038	1.019 (.981)	-.177**	.915
Education (high)	-.214**	.912	.153**	1.068 (.936)	-.367**	.854
Born before 1946	-	-	-	-	-	-
Born 1946-65	-.219**	.901	.001	1.001 (.999)	-.221**	.900
Born 1966-91	-.403**	.818	-.047	.977	-.356**	.838
Importance of Religion	.238**	1.280 (.781)	.083**	1.090 (.917)	.155**	1.175 (.851)
No Denomination	-.186**	.925	-.138**	.944	-.048	.980
Gender (1 = Female)	-.081**	.960	-.050*	.975	-.032	.984

Data: EVS 2008; \*  $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ ; Estimated with variance component: intercept, education (middle), education (high), Born 1966-91, Importance of Religion, no Denomination; Weighted data (all countries equally weighted without changing the total number of interviews); Restricted Maximum-Likelihood, Robust Standard Errors

# Empirical Results

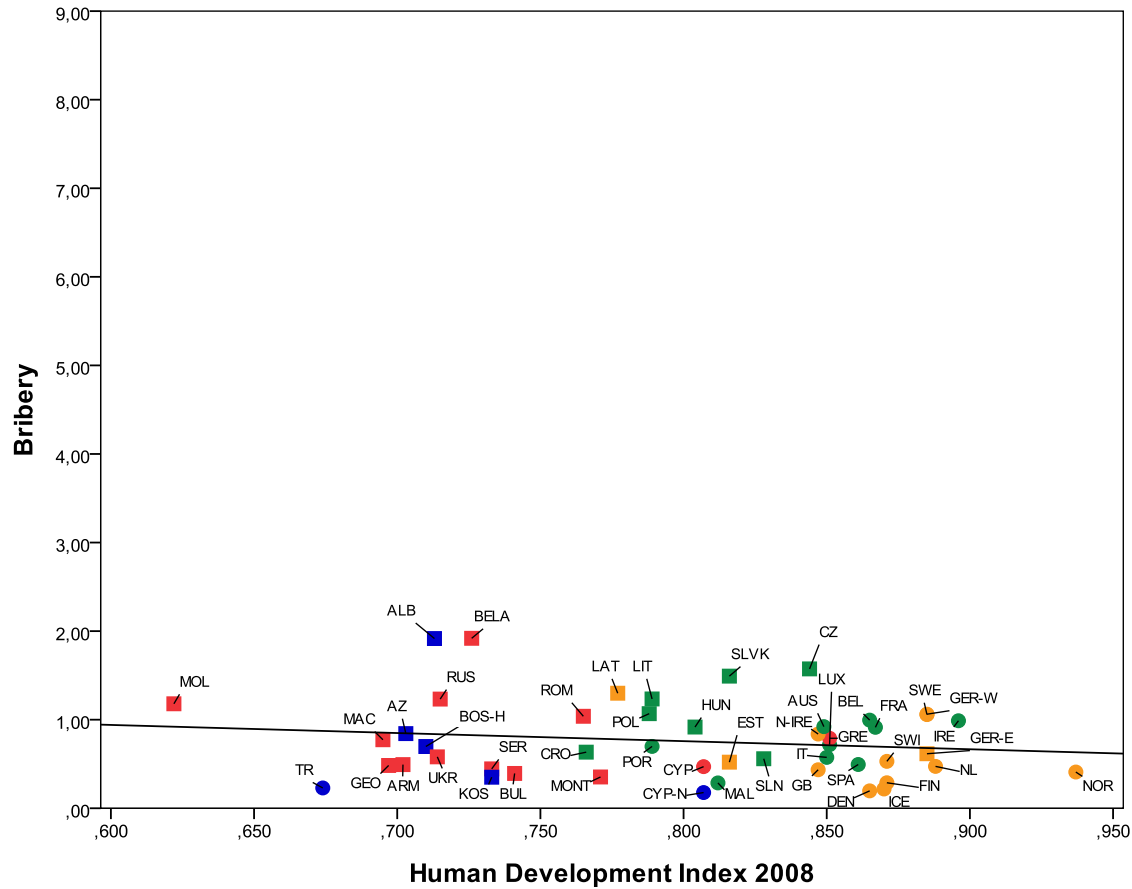
## Modernisation and Justifiability of Bribery

$R^2 = 2.50 \%$   
 $b_{\text{HDI}} = -0.915$  (n.s.)

Answer scale:  
 0: can never be justified  
 9: can always be justified

Cultural Zone:

- Protestant
- Catholic
- Orthodox
- Muslim
- Post-Communist



# Empirical Results

## Moral Justifiability of Different Actions

Is ... Justifiable?		Bribery	Tax Evasion	Abortion	Divorce	Homo- sexuality
Country Level:	n	48	48	48	48	48
Respondent Level:	n	64,646	64,307	63,202	63,672	62,300
Grand Mean ( $\gamma_{00}$ )		.733	1.213	3.183	4.337	2.971
Variance Decomposition:						
Country Level ( $\tau_{00}$ )		.173	.266	1.987	1.621	4.453
Respondent Level ( $\sigma^2$ )		2.432	4.096	7.284	7.481	7.055
Proportion of Country Level Variance in the Total Variance (ICC)		.067	.061	.214	.178	.387

Data: EVS 2008;

Weighted data (all countries equally weighted without changing the total number of interviews); Restricted Maximum-Likelihood



# Empirical Results

## Moral Justifiability of Different Actions: Multilevel Analyses

Is ... Justifiable?		Bribery	Tax Evasion	Abortion	Divorce	Homo- sexuality
Country Level	R <sup>2</sup>	12.68 %	21.78 %	57.79 %	70.80 %	80.10 %
Respondent Level	R <sup>2</sup>	2.75 %	3.93 %	19.88 %	18.94 %	37.62 %
		b	b	b	b	b
Intercept		1.909	2.047*	.264	-2.583	-4.232
HDI 2008		-1.330	-.810	3.896*	8.495**	8.837**
Catholic Culture		-	-.015	-.432	-.120	-.488
Protestant Culture		-.138	-.279	-	-	-
Orthodox Culture		-.139	-	-.267	-.010	-1.248*
Muslim Culture		-.092	-.438*	-.665	-.459	-1.639**
(Post-) Communism		-.003	.075	.006	-.233	-.441
Education (low)		-	-	-	-	-
Education (middle)		-.029	-.039	.479**	.510**	.510**
Education (high)		-.125**	-.120**	.827**	.845**	1.105**
Born before 1946		-	-	-	-	-
Born 1946-65		.150**	.285**	.479**	.511**	.565**
Born 1966-93		.416**	.602**	.541**	.652**	1.045**
Importance of Religion		-.080**	-.147**	-.619**	-.532**	-.402**
No Denomination		.102**	.103**	.427**	.322**	.279**
Gender (1 = Female)		-.143**	-.261**	.236**	.318**	.703**

Data: EVS 2008; \*  $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$  (one-tailed test for hypotheses with assumed causal direction); countries:  $n = 48$ , respondents:  $n = 62.300$  (min.) – 64.646 (max.); all respondent level b-coefficients are estimated with variance component; pseudo R<sup>2</sup> are calculated according to the simplified formula of Snijders/Bosker (1999); Weighted data (all countries equally weighted without changing the total number of interviews); Restricted Maximum-Likelihood; Robust Standard Errors

# Conclusions

## Confirmed Hypotheses:

### H1a: Modernisation

Modernisation fosters *subjectively* perceived

- moral relativism (Inglehart)
- restricted moral universalism/contextualism (Nunner-Winkler).

### H2a: Culture

There exist significant differences in the moral judgement of people from different cultural zones (objective cultural relativism).

## However:

In concrete situations exist examples where

**neither *modernisation* nor *culture*** have an influence on the moral judgement:

Harming others for pure self-interest is, independent of modernisation and culture, morally wrong (Nunner-Winkler).

# Conclusions

## Confirmed Hypotheses:

### H1i: Education (Kohlberg/Nunner-Winkler)

Education fosters the perception that moral guidelines have to be applied context related by taking into account possible consequences (Restricted Moral Universalism).

### H2i: Cohorts

Among younger cohorts increases likewise a *subjectively perceived*

- Moral Relativism (Inglehart)
- Restricted Moral Universalism (Nunner-Winkler).

### H3i/H4i: Membership in Religious Denomination and Importance of Religion

(Inglehart/Nunner-Winkler)

Members of religious denominations and people to whom religion is important are comparably more likely convinced by the position of a strict moral Universalism than others.

# Conclusions

## The results also show:

- *Education* enables people to judge moral questions in a more differentiated way
  - better educated people are more tolerant with respect to sexuality and family:
    - due to take into account the reasonableness of the consequences of following a rule (moral grey area)
    - under circumstances where traditional rules in modern societies are no longer able to contribute minimising harm (former moral questions become questions of good life and of self-realisation)
  - better educated people are less tolerant (bribery, tax evasion):
    - under circumstances where moral guidelines are violated for pure self-interest at the expense of others
- *Cohorts*: formative influence of socialisation fosters internalisation of substantively changed morality perceptions
  - younger cohorts
    - have a morally more tolerant view than older cohorts
    - distinguish less well between areas where others will be harmed by violating rules and areas where this is not the case

**Thank you very much  
for  
your attention!**



# Definition of Cultural Zones

Definition of Civilisations according to Huntington (2003/1996: 43):

A civilisation is defined “both by common objective elements, such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and by the subjective self-identification of people“ with their civilisation, whereby religion is the most important one.

“Civilisations are the biggest ‘we‘ within which we feel culturally at home as distinguished from all the others ‘thems‘ out there.“

Civilisations are beyond that “far more fundamental than differences among political ideologies and political regimes“ (Huntington 1993: 25)

# Empirical Results

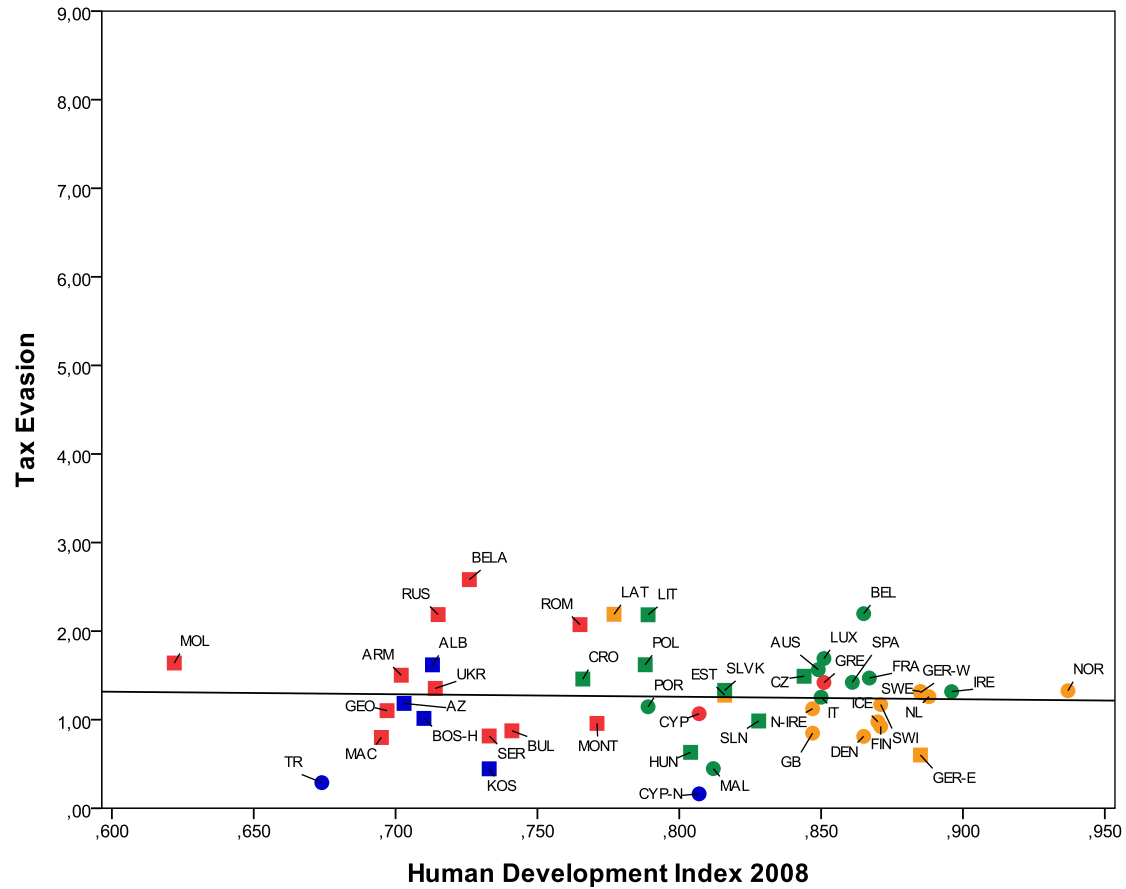
## Modernisation and Justifiability of Tax Evasion

$R^2 = 0.20 \%$   
 $b_{HDI} = -0.283$  (n.s.)

Answer scale:  
 0: can never be justified  
 9: can always be justified

Cultural Zone:

- Protestant
- Catholic
- Orthodox
- Muslim
- Post-Communist



# Empirical Results

## Moral Justifiability of Different Actions: Multilevel Analyses

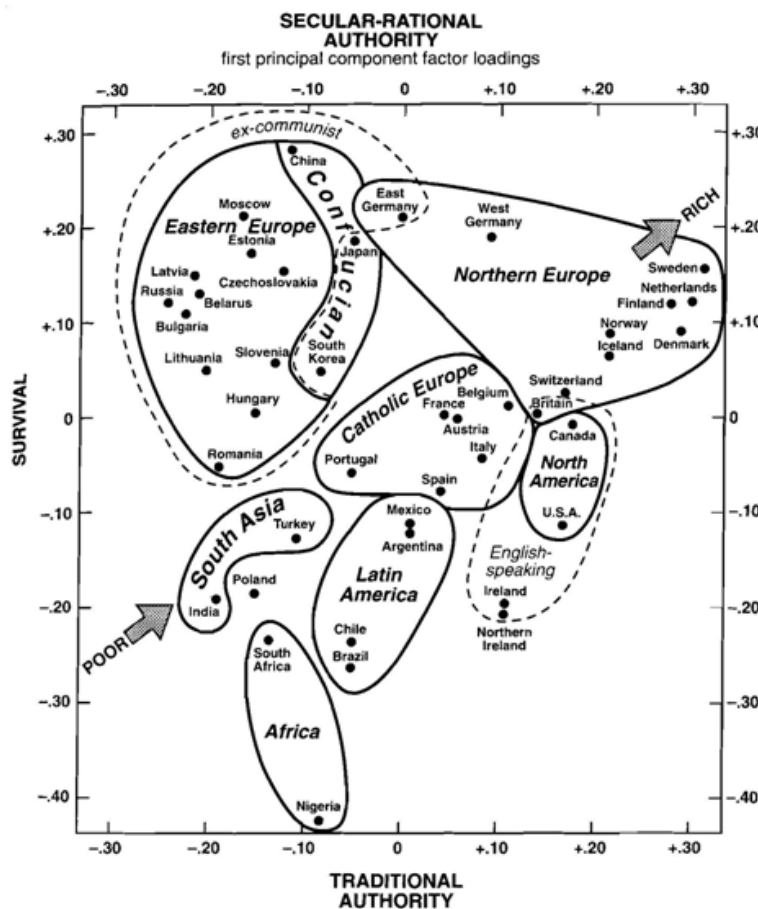
Is ... Justifiable?	Bribery	Tax Evasion	Abortion	Divorce	Homo- sexuality
	beta	beta	beta	beta	beta
Intercept					
HDI 2008	-.060	-.028	.093*	.204**	.190**
Catholic Culture	-	-.003	-.068	-.019	-.069
Protestant Culture	-.038	-.060	-	-	-
Orthodox Culture	-.039	-	-.039	-.002	-.166*
Muslim Culture	-.019	-.070*	-.073	-.051	-.162**
(Post-) Communism	-.001	.018	.001	-.039	-.066
Education (low)	-	-	-	-	-
Education (middle)	-.009	-.009	.079**	.084**	.075**
Education (high)	-.033**	-.025**	.116**	.120**	.140**
Born before 1946	-	-	-	-	-
Born 1946-65	.044**	.065**	.075**	.080**	.080**
Born 1966-93	.128**	.143**	.088**	.107**	.154**
Importance of Religion	-.052**	-.073**	-.212**	-.184**	-.124**
No Denomination	.027**	.021**	.059**	.045**	.035**
Gender (1 = Female)	-.044**	-.062**	.039**	.052**	.104**

Data: EVS 2008; \*  $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ ; (one-tailed test for hypotheses with assumed causal direction); countries:  $n = 48$ , respondents:  $n = 62.300$  (min.) – 64.646 (max.); Weighted data (all countries equally weighted without changing the total number of interviews); Restricted Maximum-Likelihood; Robust Standard Errors



# Cultural Zones Inglehart

Inglehart (1997: 93)



Inglehart/Welzel (2005: 63)

