

Modernization, Culture, and Moral Change in Europe

From Universalism to Contextualism

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Aim of this Contribution

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

What are the determinants of moral judgment behaviour in Europe?

- Are **younger cohorts** grown up in the highly secure environment of modern welfare states morally more *tolerant* than older cohorts?
- Are **highly educated** people also morally more tolerant than less well educated people?
Or are highly educated people better able to distinguish under what conditions moral rule obedience is required and under what conditions an exception might be morally justifiable?
- What is the impact of **modernization** and **culture** on moral judgment behaviour?



Overview

Theoretical Considerations and Hypotheses:

- How does **modernisation** shape moral judgment behaviour?
- What impact have **respondent characteristics** on moral judgement behaviour?

Empirical Part:

- Data and Operationalisations
- Empirical Results

Conclusions



Society and Morality

Traditional, Preindustrial Societies: Moral Absolutism/Universalism

Moral rules as those to be found in the 10 Commandments of the Old Testament

(Thou shalt not kill, not commit adultery, not steal, not bear false witness against your neighbour, ...),
exist in virtually every society.

In traditional societies such rules

- are seen as the will of a benevolent omnipotent deity/metaphysical power.
- 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 for security (coping with high stress, cf. Inglehart 1997)

Society and Morality

First Phase of Modernisation (Industrialisation): 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 (1785) 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 practical reason

Categorical Imperative (Kant 1785/2007: 421/31):

“Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it becomes a universal law.”



Society and Morality

First Phase of Modernisation (Industrialisation): 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, steal, lie“
 - **positive** duties are obligations to act like “Do your duty“ (caretaking duties) or “Keep your promise“
 - negative duties
 - are duties of omission (not resource-bound) and for that reason cannot collide
 - have strict priority over positive duties (Tugendhat 1993, Nunner-Winkler 1996).
- Thus, negative duties can be kept by everyone under all circumstances.

Society and Morality

First Phase of Modernisation (Industrialisation): 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

First Phase of Modernisation (Industrialisation): Eroding Moral Absolutism/Universalism

Negative duties:

- are **unconditional** valid:

Lying to a murderer is not permissible even if it is done with the aim of saving a victim's life (Kant 1997)

- 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)

This position was classified by Weber (1919) as **ethic of conviction**.

In a more and more **secularising world** ...

it becomes increasingly impossible to burden the responsibility for the consequences of right actions to God or other supernatural powers.



Society and Morality

Second Phase of Modernisation (Post-Industrialisation): 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/Welzel 2005):

- 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
- 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 (Inglehart/Welzel 2005)

Society and Morality

Second Phase of Modernisation (Post-Industrialisation): 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

Second Phase of Modernisation (Post-Industrialisation): 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)

This position was classified by Weber (1919) as **ethic of responsibility**.

Society and Morality

Second Phase of Modernisation (Post-Industrialisation): Moral Contextualism/Restricted Universalism

Distinction between

Discourses of Justification and

Discourses of Application (Habermas 1991/1993):

a) ***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

Second Phase of Modernisation (Post-Industrialisation): Moral Contextualism/Restricted Universalism

Minimal Principles of a rationally justifiable, inner-worldly morality

(Nunner-Winkler 1996, 1997):

- **Impartiality** and **Equality** (by *process-oriented theories* already assumed)
 - inequality has to be justified
- **Harm Avoidance** (*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

From these minimal moral principles, a number of universally valid rules can be derived:

- *universal negative duties* that directly forbid harming others,
- *strict positive duties* (“keep your promise”) that protect others from being indirectly harmed by unfulfilled, legitimately existing expectations

Society and Morality

Second Phase of Modernisation (Post-Industrialisation): Moral Contextualism/Restricted Universalism

b) *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?
- How certain is the occurrence of the anticipated consequences?

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

Second Phase of Modernisation (Post-Industrialisation): 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 or between duties and negative consequences of fulfilling duties
 - insufficient knowledge coupled with uncertainties in the predictability of expected consequences/disagreement about evaluation of consequences)
- 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 at the expense of others*** is and remains morally wrong



Society and Morality

Second Phase of Modernisation (Post-Industrialisation) Moral Contextualism/Retricted Universalism

Modernisation is not the only contextual force that shapes moral judgment behaviour:

Although **socio-economic development** brings major predictable changes in society and culture, **cultural traditions** continue to leave a lasting imprint on a society's worldview (Inglehart/Welzel 2005)

General Expectations:

- High potential for *Cultural Differences* can be expected in situations
 - where modernisation has *eroded the functional basis* of traditional rules that existed in virtually every pre-industrial society and,
 - where existing universally valid prima facie rules *conflict* with the evaluation of the reasonableness of possible consequences
- Situations where an existing universally valid prima facie rule would be violated out of *pure self-interest, at the expense of others*, should not be affected by cultural differences.



Determinants of Moral Judgment Behaviour

Level Hypotheses: Modernisation and Culture

Acting out of pure **self-interest at the expense of others** is assumed to be seen by virtually every society as **morally unjustifiable**.

This is expected to be independent of ...

H1a: the degree of *modernisation*

H2a: *culture*

If universally valid prima facie rules **conflict** with the reasonability of potential negative consequences, then ...

H1b: *modernisation* is expected to cause considerable *differences* between societies

H2b: *culture* might also cause considerable *differences* between societies.

Determinants of Moral Judgment Behaviour

Impact Hypothesis: Modernisation

If modernisation fosters an understanding of existing moral guidelines as prima facie rules, then ...

H3: *modernisation* should have ...

- a significant **positive impact** on the justifiability of behaviour under conditions where a moral rule **conflicts** with the reasonability of potential negative consequences.
- no significant impact on the justifiability of behaviour under conditions where rules are **violated for pure self-interest at the expense of others**.



Determinants of Moral Judgment Behaviour

Hypotheses: Respondent Level

Education:

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 (Kohlberg, Nunner-Winkler).

H4: The higher the level of education,

- the more an individual is assumed to take into account potential **negative consequences** of strict rule obedience.
- If others would be harmed by **pure self-interest at the expense of others**, no or even a negative impact of education on the moral justifiability of such behaviour is expected.

Determinants of Moral Judgment Behaviour

Hypotheses: Respondent Level

Cohorts:

Since **reduced formative constraints** have changed the conditions under which younger cohorts grew up, the need for strict rule obedience is declining, which allows younger cohorts to become more **tolerant** than older ones (Inglehart/Welzel 2005)

H5: The younger a cohort a respondent belongs to,

- the more he/she is willing to **tolerate** a deviation from a universal moral prima facie rule.

Since **adapting** to a more tolerant environment and **understanding** moral rules is not the same,

- younger cohorts are also assumed to be **more tolerant** regarding violating a universally valid moral rule under conditions where it does **not contribute to harm avoidance**.

Determinants of Moral Judgment Behaviour

Hypotheses: Respondent Level

Denomination and Importance of Religion:

Religious needs are according to Inglehart/Welzel (2005) **psychological 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*).

- H6/H7: Members of religious denominations (H6) and people to whom religion is important (H7),
- are expected to be comparably more likely to insist on **strict rule obedience**. This should apply independent of whether
 - a moral rule is violated out of **pure self-interest at the expense of others** or if it is done for reasons of **harm avoidance with respect to potential negative consequences**.



Data and Operationalisations

Operationalisations for the Country Level

Data: European Values Study 2010 (47 societies)

Degree of Modernisation of a Society:

Human Development Index (average 2005 to 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:

0.614 (Moldova)

0.935 (Norway)

Data and Operationalizations

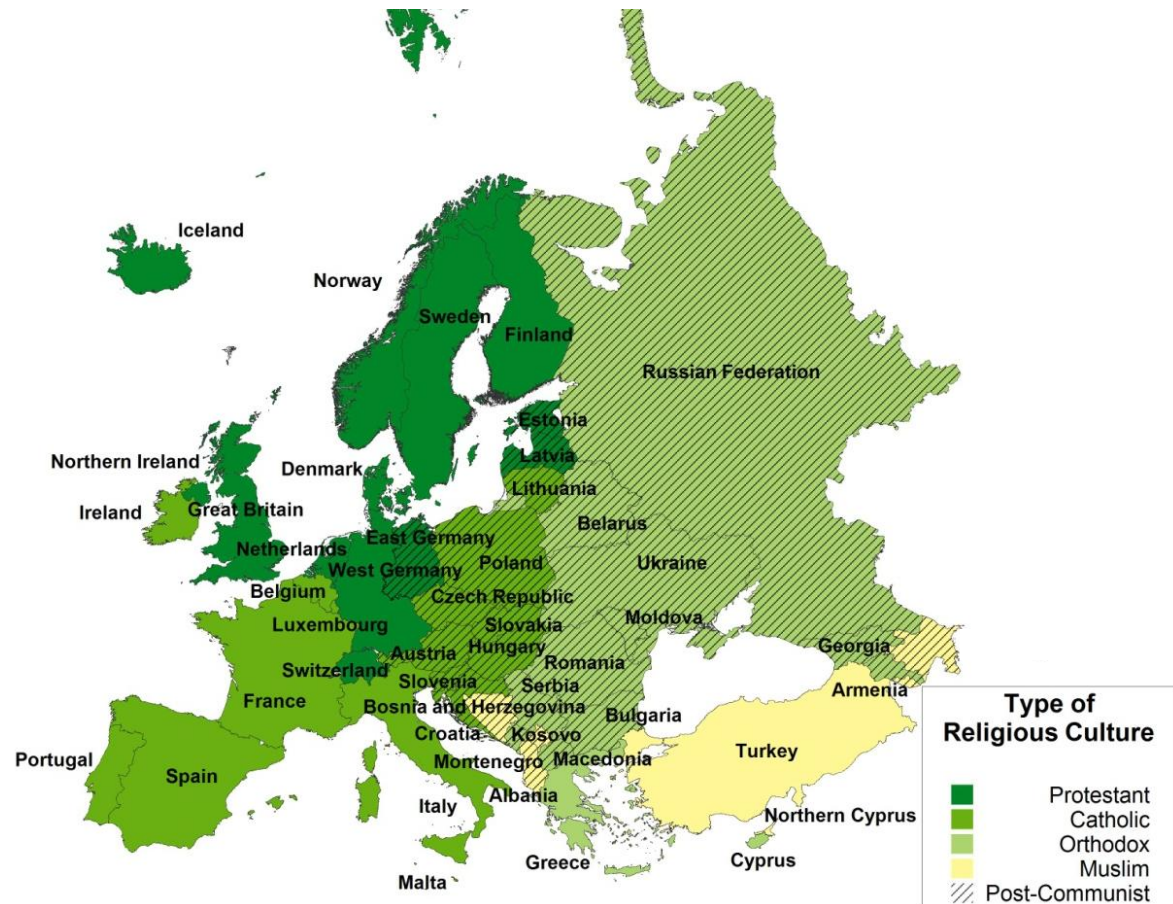
Operationalisations for the Country Level

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: 30 %)
- middle: secondary education (47 %)
- high: tertiary education (23 %)

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

Moral Judgment: Justifiability of Different Actions (ML ANOVA)

Is ... Justifiable?		Bribery	Tax Evasion	Lying (in own interest)	Abortion	Divorce
Country Level:	n	47	47	47	47	47
Respondent Level:	n	63,161	62,840	63,122	61,729	62,236
Grand Mean (γ_{00})		.731	1.214	1.544	3.232	4.374
Variance Decomposition:						
Country Level (τ_{00})		.173	.265	.328	1.856	1.548
Respondent Level (σ^2)		2.418	4.106	4.123	7.388	7.491
Proportion of Country Level Variance in the Total Variance (ICC)		.067	.061	.074	.201	.171

Data: EVS 2008;

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

Empirical Results

Moral Judgment: Justifiability of Different Actions (ML Analyses)

Is ... Justifiable?		Bribery	Tax Evasion	Lying (in own interest)	Abortion	Divorce
Country Level	R ²	21.86 %	31.44 %	29.01 %	61.97 %	73.46 %
Respondent Level	R ²	3.44 %	4.66 %	6.34 %	20.15 %	19.04 %
		b	b	b	b	b
Intercept		1.976	2.235**	2.364**	.102	-2.721
HDI 2005-2008		-1.426	-.967	-.821	4.114*	8.741**
Catholic Culture		-	-.044	-.139	-.406	-.090
Protestant Culture		-.130	-.293*	-.434**	-	-
Orthodox Culture		-.149	-	-	-.222	-.042
Muslim Culture		-.101	-.571**	-.297*	-.560	-.584
(Post-) Communism		-.008	.036	.005	.032	-.262
Education (low)		-	-	-	-	-
Education (middle)		-.034	-.045	.045	.492**	.516**
Education (high)		-.139**	-.136**	.024	.840**	.847**
Born before 1946		-	-	-	-	-
Born 1946-65		.152**	.290**	.300**	.479**	.517**
Born 1966-93		.425**	.612**	.746**	.548**	.672**
Importance of Religion		-.074**	-.154**	-.205**	-.628**	-.530**
No Denomination		.099**	.101*	.123**	.417**	.293**
Gender (1 = Female)		-.150**	-.270**	.196**	.235**	.321**

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

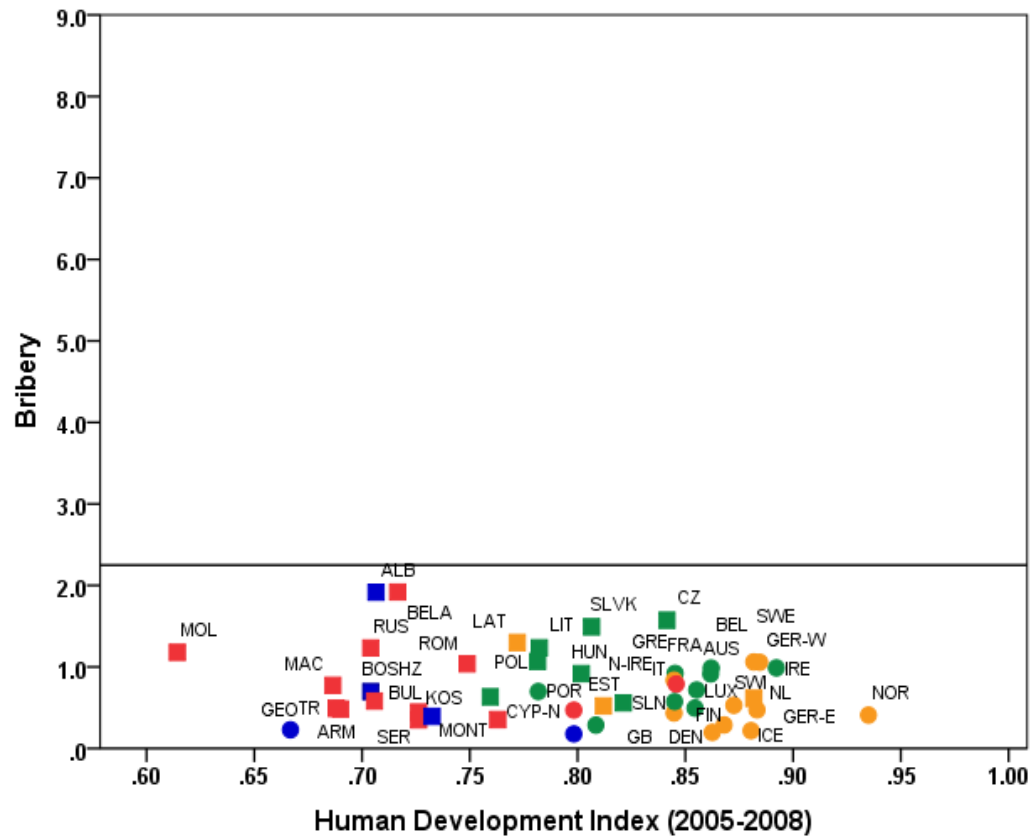
Empirical Results

Modernisation and Moral Judgment: Justifiability of Bribery

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

Cultural Zone:

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



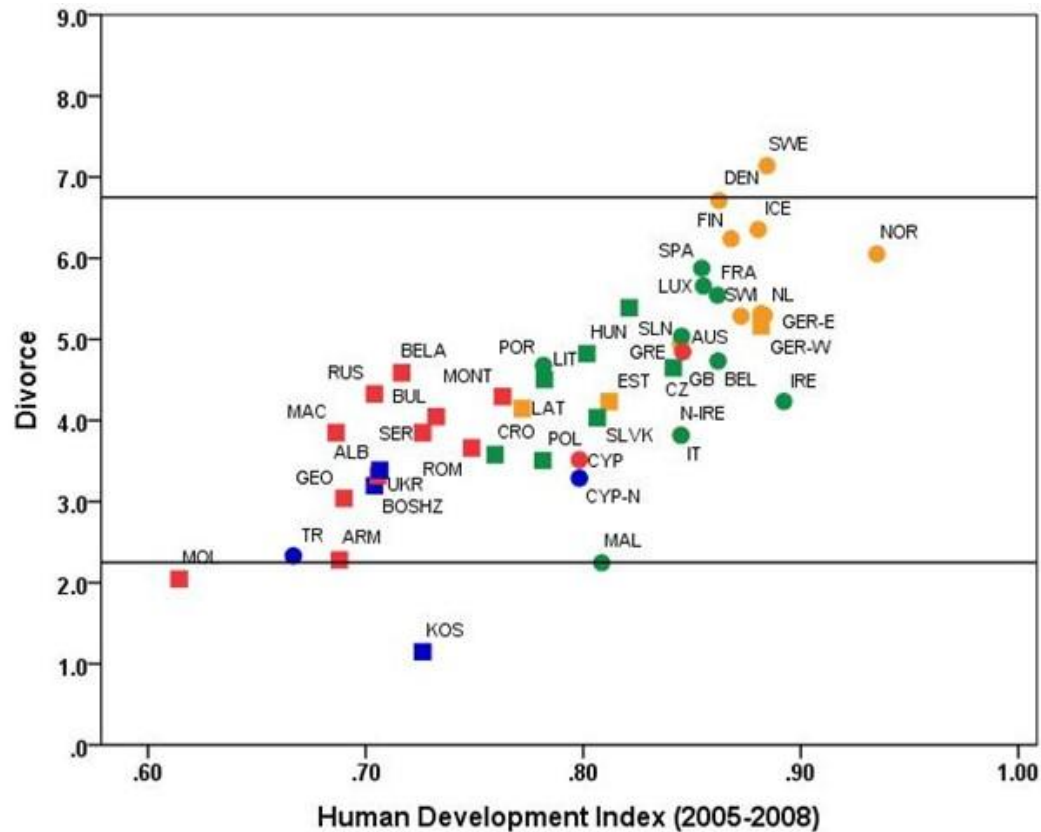
Empirical Results

Modernisation and Moral Judgment: Justifiability of Divorce

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

Cultural Zone:

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



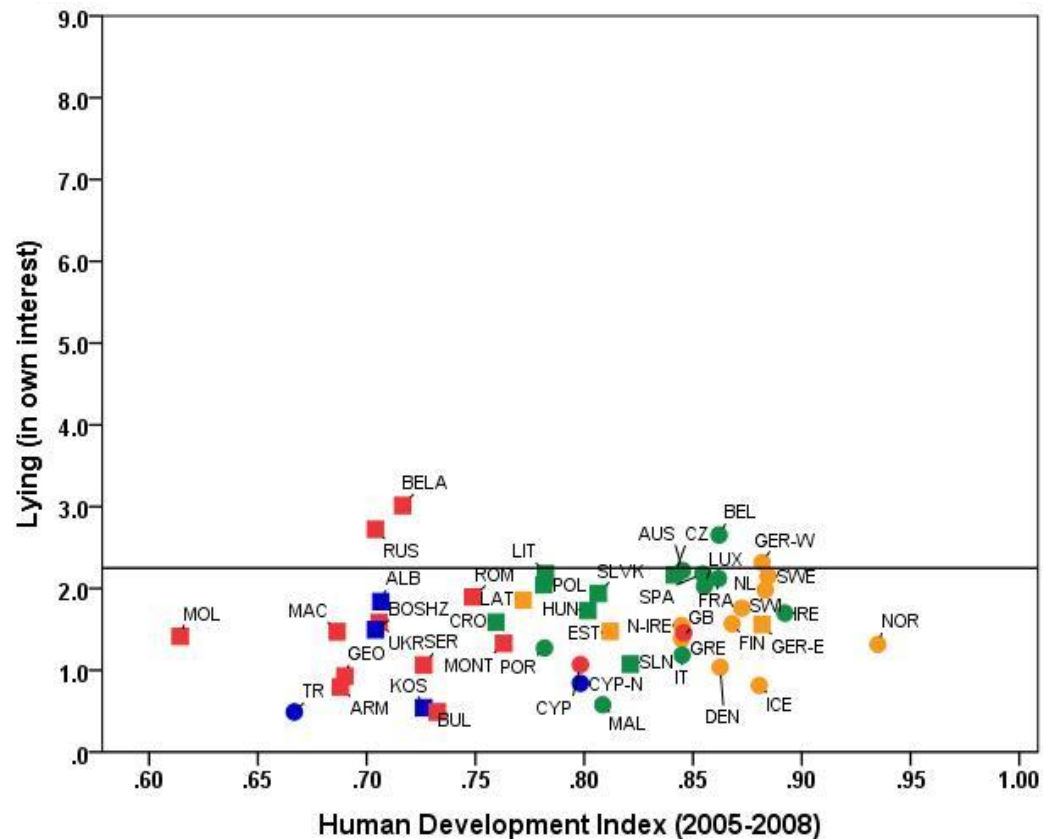
Empirical Results

Modernisation and Moral Judgment: Justifiability of Lying in Own Interest

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

Cultural Zone:

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



Empirical Results

Lying in own interest:

Lying in own interest was probably originally intended to measure
- **lying in own interest at the expense of others**

Such behaviour is – according to the minimal principles of morality – not justifiable.

However:

From **psychology** we know that **lying in own interest** has also a **social function**:
Pro-social lies (“*white lies*”):

Asked by a good befriended couple, nobody would probably say

- that their newborn baby is pretty ugly
- that the meal they prepared for a common festivity was terrible.

Hence, the question of the EVS leaves room for (unintended) ambiguity

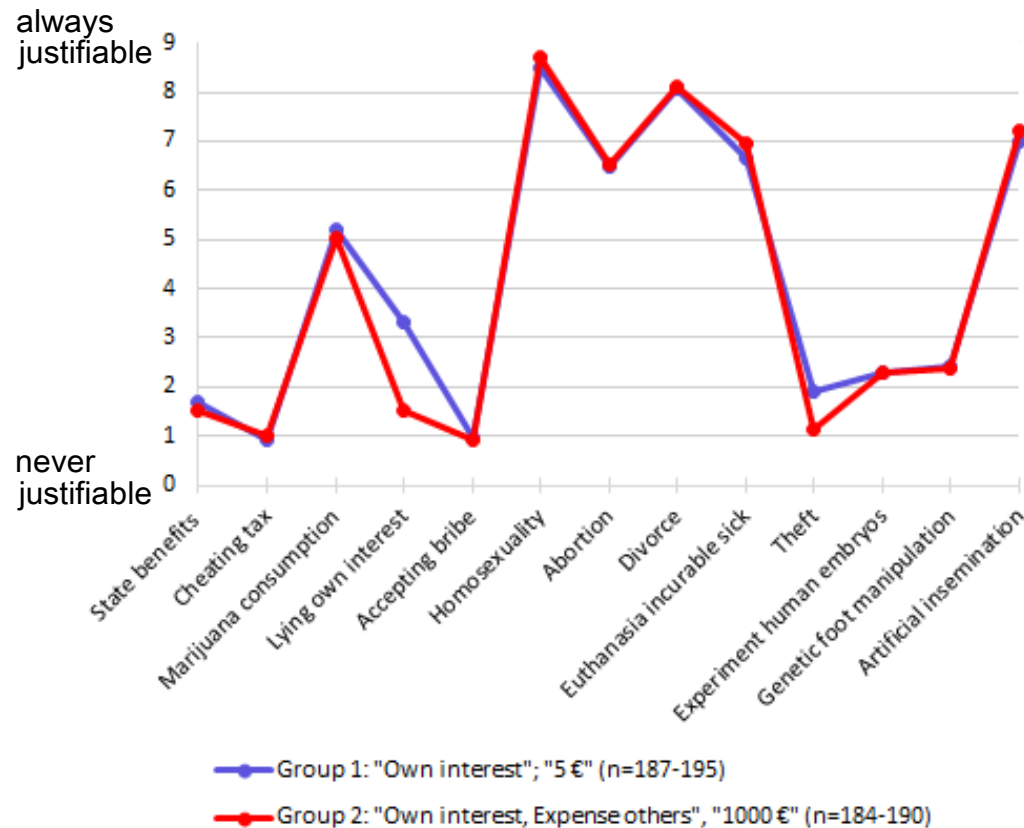
Empirical Results

Empirical Test: Lying in Own Interest vs. Lying in Own Interest at the Expense of Others:

Results of an Own Split-half Experiment with Students of a Methods Lecture (University of Cologne, Autumn 2014):

Difference Lying:
1.89 scale points

Difference Theft:
0.76 scale points
(the amount of harm counts also: $p < 0.01$)



Conclusions

Confirmed Hypotheses:

H1: Modernisation

Modernisation fosters ***moral change from universalism to contextualism***

- universal moral rules retain their validity (H1a, H3),
- but as prima facie rules they have to be weighted against foreseeable potential negative consequences (H1b, H3).

H2: Culture

- There exist ***significant differences*** in the moral judgement of people from different cultural zones (these might be traced back to *ambiguous questions like “lying in own interest”*),
- The empirical differences, however, are ***much too small to question the validity of existing universal moral rules*** (H2a).

Harming others for pure self-interest at the expense of others is - independent of the degree of modernisation and culture – **morally wrong** (scale values below 2.25).

Conclusions

Confirmed Hypotheses:

H4: Education (Kohlberg/Nunner-Winkler)

Education fosters

- a **deeper understanding** of moral rules which allows the individual to take into account foreseeable possible negative consequences of rule obedience,
- a **context sensitive** application of universally valid moral prima facie rules (Contextualism).

H5: Cohorts

Younger cohorts

- are morally **more tolerant** than older cohorts (Inglehart/Welzel),
- **distinguish less well** between conditions where others would be harmed by violating universally valid moral prima facie rules and conditions where this is not the case

H6/H7: Membership in Religious Denomination and Importance of Religion

(Inglehart/Nunner-Winkler)

Members of religious denominations and people to whom religion is important

- have a more **traditional understanding** of morality (insisting on strict rule obedience),
- apply universally valid moral rules **less context sensitive** (Moral Universalism/Absolutism)



**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)