

How Social Values Affect Welfare Attitudes? A Cross-National Comparison

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ABSTRACT

This preliminary study examines how social values explain the cross-national differences in welfare attitudes, grounded in Inglehart and Baker's (2000) social value theory. By employing secondary data collected by World Values Survey [WVS], this preliminary study empirically tested two hypotheses: (H1) Nations that emphasize the secular-rational values have more pro-welfare attitudes than the nations encouraging the traditional values; and (H2) Nations that promote the values of self-expression have more pro-welfare attitudes than nations that foster survival values. Results of the study demonstrated social values significantly affects public's welfare attitude, controlling economic and ideological factors. People in societies which promote the value of self-expression, such as respect for diversity and political participation, are more likely to support more expansive social welfare policies.

Keywords: Social values, Welfare attitudes, Comparative analysis, World Values Survey

INTRODUCTION

Social welfare policies are the products of interaction of the economy, politics, and public opinions (Blau & Abramovitz, 2014). As public opinions toward welfare have played a role in influencing development of social policies and welfare programs in a country, it is important to understand the dynamics of welfare attitudes at the country level. Citizens in some countries tend to support government roles in welfare provision, while the public in other countries have had relatively reluctant attitudes toward welfare. The differences in public attitudes toward welfare might be explained by the individual factors, including socio-economic characteristics (income, employment status, education, and perceived social class) and demographic features (gender, ethnicity, and age) (Andress & Heien, 2001; Kaltenthaler & Stephen, 2008; Svallfors, 1997; Wong, Wan, & Law, 2009). In addition to the individual characteristics, countries' contextual factors such as economic and institutional structures might explain the cross-national variations in welfare attitudes. Overtime, the national economy seemed to have lost its explanatory powers to understand the cross-national differences in welfare attitudes in Western developed countries (Inglehart, 1987).

As a result, research has focused on the regime theory to examine the national differences in welfare attitudes. (Arts & Gelissen, 2001; Dallinger, 2010; Edlund, 1999; Jaeger, 2006; Jakobsen, 2011; Larsen, 2008). However, different types of regimes also seem not to explain the significant differences in welfare attitudes at the country level. (Edlund, 1999; Jaeger, 2006;

Jakobsen, 2011). To understand contextual factors affecting welfare attitudes, recent research has turned their attention to the role of social values in cross-national comparison (Dion & Birchfield, 2010; Jo, 2011; Arikan & Bloom, 2015). This preliminary study empirically examines how social values explain the cross-national differences in welfare attitudes, grounded in Inglehart and Baker's (2000) social value theory.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Considering the levels of decommodification, social stratification, and employment, Esping-Andersen (1990) categorized Western welfare states into three regime types: Social democratic, liberal, and conservative regimes. Based on this theory, researchers surmised that people living in different regime types might have different public perceptions toward social welfare policies. In line with this argument, several studies have hypothesized that people in social democratic countries, which provide highly redistributive policies and universal entitlements, would have relatively pro-welfare attitudes compared to people in liberal countries, which offer mainly mean-tested welfare programs, and that public attitudes toward welfare in conservative welfare states would be somewhere in the middle of the two other regimes (Edlund, 1999; Jaeger, 2006; Jakobsen, 2011).

However, the empirical studies based on the regime theory have shown inconsistent results. Edlund (1999) found that citizens living in liberal welfare states were more likely to have reluctant attitudes toward welfare than individuals in social democratic regimes. On the other hand, in Jakobsen's (2011) study, people in conservative regimes tend to have more pro-welfare attitudes compared to the public in social democratic or liberal welfare states. Jaeger (2006) even found that there would be no direct relationships between regime types and public welfare attitudes.

To fill the gap of the regime approach, recent research has focused on the new concept, the value system of a country. Researchers, who paid attention to social and cultural features, argued that people living in societies, which emphasize notions of social justice, would have more pro-welfare attitudes (Arikan & Bloom, 2015; Art & Gelissen, 2001). On the basis of Shalom Schwartz's (2004) social value theory, which focuses on several social values such as collectivity, egalitarianism, and harmony-mastery, Arikan and Bloom (2015) found that the countries that promote social justice and collective responsibility tend to have more pro-welfare public attitudes. Conversely, Art and Gelissen (2001) showed that individuals in welfare states, which foster social justice, were less likely to have attitudes supporting welfare and equality compared to people in non-welfare states. However, most previous studies examined the cross-national differences in welfare attitudes among only European industrialized countries.

While previous social value theory employed unidimensional conceptualization, Inglehart and Baker (2000) suggested comprehensive four dimensions of social values: tradition vs. secular-rational values and survival vs. self-expression values, in order to understand social and cultural features in a given society. Whereas traditional values emphasize the importance of religion, parent-child ties, deference to authority, secular-rational values have the opposite preferences to the traditional values. While survival values emphasize economic security, self-expression values give high priority to well-being and quality of life. They argued that individuals in societies fostering secular-rational values would support for abortion

justifiability compared to people in societies emphasizing the traditional values such as God, religion, obedience, national pride, and authority. They also stated that people in societies stressing self-expression values were more likely to have higher levels of happiness and trust than individuals in societies encouraging survival values.

Inglehart and Welzel (2005) developed a revised social value theory by applying the four social values. According to the revised theory, there are two phases of modernization in a society: Industrial and Postindustrial stages. In the process of industrialization, economic development and bureaucracy play a role in changing a preindustrial society to an industrial society. In an industrialized society, social values shift from traditional values to secular-rational values. When secular-rational values weaken in an industrialized society, the postindustrial phase starts. In other words, people place more emphasis on the values of self-expression, including autonomy, trust, and emancipation from authority, in the process of post-industrialization.

According to the revised social value theory, social values in each phase of modernization may have a predictive power to understand public attitudes toward welfare (Inglehart, 1987). Therefore, public welfare attitudes in pre-industrial societies might be different from ones in industrial and post-industrialized societies. Norris and Inglehart (2002) argued that people in the industrial societies, which promote secular-rational values, might have an interest in economic performance but might not respect diversity. They also argued that people in postindustrial societies, which foster self-expression values, could have respect for individual diversity and come up to the higher level of equality. Therefore, Norris and Inglehart's theory (2002) suggests that people in post-industrial societies might have stronger pro-welfare attitudes than individuals in industrial societies.

RESEARCH METHODS

Based on the theoretical background, this preliminary study developed two hypotheses: (H1) Nations that emphasize the secular-rational values have more pro-welfare attitudes than the nations encouraging the traditional values; (H2) Nations that promote the values of self-expression have more pro-welfare attitudes than nations that foster survival values. To empirically test these two hypotheses, this study used secondary data from the two waves of World Value Survey (WVS), the wave 5 from 2005 to 2009 and the wave 6 from 2010 to 2014. The unit of analysis is country-level and the sample size is 70 nations that include developed countries and developing countries. To include more countries in the study, 54 countries were derived from the wave 6, and 16 countries, which were not conducted in the wave 6, were derived from the wave 5 (Appendix 1).

The dependent variable is public attitudes toward welfare. Welfare attitudes were measured by the item that the wave 5 and 6 include commonly. Respondents in each country were asked to answer their level of agreement with the sentence: *"Government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for"* that ranges from one to ten in the scales. The highest score (10) means the most positive attitudes toward welfare.

Following Inglehart and Baker's (2000) operationalization, two independent variables were constructed based on the four social values. The first independent variable was the level of secular-rational values at the country level, which was measured by the five items in the WVS: (1) *importance of God*, (2) *importance of obedience and faith among children*, (3) *abortion*

justifiability, (4) *national pride*, and (5) *respect for authority*. Higher scores mean higher level of secular-rational values, while lower scores mean higher traditional values. The second independent variable was the level of self-expression-values at the country level, which was measured by the five items: (1) *materialist values*, (2) *happiness*, (3) *signing a petition*, (4) *homosexuality justifiability*, and (5) *trust for people*. Higher scores mean higher level of self-expression values, while lower scores mean higher survival values. Each independent variable was measured by the averaging scores of each item at the country level. As each item includes the different scales, which range from two to ten, there may be statistical size effects related to the different scales. To alleviate the size effects, the standardized score of means, Z-score, was used to measure the secular-rational values and the self-expression values.

In order to control for the economic and ideological factors, Per Capita Gross Domestic Product [GDP] and political ideology were included as control variables. Per Capita GDP data was derived from Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] dataset (2017), and political ideology was measured by the item in the WVS, which asks respondents: “*In political matters, people talk of the left and the right. How would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking?*” on the ten-point scale. To examine how four types of social values (secular-rational vs. traditional values, self-expression vs. survival values) would predict welfare attitudes at the country level, correlation and linear multiple regression analysis were employed in the SPSS program. Statistical significance was measured using a 95% confidence level ($p < .05$).

RESULTS

As a descriptive analysis, a Pearson’s correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the items measuring the social values and public welfare attitudes. As shown in the Table 1, among the five items that measured the secular-rational values, only one item, “*Less importance of obedience and faith among children*”, had a statistically positive correlation with public welfare attitudes ($r = .314$, $p^{**} = .008$).

Table 1: Correlations between welfare attitudes and social values, per capita GDP, and political ideology

Predictors	Welfare Attitudes (Pearson Correlation)
Secular-Rational Values (H1)	.179
Less importance of God	.211
Less importance of obedience and faith among children	.314**
Importance of abortion justifiability	.232
Less importance of national pride	-.063
Less importance of respect for authority	.023
Self-Expression Values (H2)	.524***
Less importance of materialist values	.208
Happiness	.466***
Signing a petition	.421***
Homosexuality justifiability	.421***
Trust for people	.289*
Per Capita GDP	.409**
Political Ideology	.265*

$p^* < 0.05$, $p^{**} < 0.01$, $p^{***} < 0.001$

On the other hand, except one item in the self-expression values, “*Less importance of material values*”, there were statistically significant-positive relationships between public welfare attitudes and the four items measuring the self-expression values: *Happiness* ($r=.466$, $p^{***}=.000$); *Signing a petition* ($r=.421$, $p^{***}=.000$); *Homosexuality justifiability* ($r=.384$, $p^{**}=.001$); and *Trust for people* ($r=.289$, $p^{*}=.015$). The results also show significant relationship between welfare attitudes and two control variables, Per Capita GDP and political ideology.

Multiple linear regression was employed to investigate the capability of the two independent variables to predict welfare attitudes at the country level, after controlling for the economic and ideological effects. Model I (null model) in Table 2 shows that the two control variables, per capita GDP and political ideology, explain 33.2 percent of variance in public welfare attitudes ($r^2 = .332$). Model II includes the secular-rational values as an independent variable. The results indicate that while two control variables significantly affect welfare attitudes, secular-rational values are not statistically significant, rejecting H1. Model III includes self-expression values as an independent variable. The results show self-expression values significantly affect welfare attitudes with regression coefficient = .706, accepting H2. The findings indicate that higher self-expression values significantly increase positive public welfare attitudes, even controlling for per capita GDP and political ideology.

Table 2: The values of unstandardized beta coefficient of welfare attitudes and r^2 in each model

Predictors	Model I: Control	Model II: Secular-Rational	Model III: Self-expression
Secular-rational	-	-.197	-
Self-expression	-	-	.706**
Secular-rational-Self-expression	-	-	-
Per Capita GDP	.000***	.000***	.000
Political Ideology	.606***	.585***	.588***
r^2	.332	.343	.429

$p^{*} < 0.05$, $p^{**} < 0.01$, $p^{***} < 0.001$

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

A positive attitude towards welfare is important for creating a more just and equitable society that benefits everyone. When citizens support the welfare of their countries, it leads to a sense of social cohesion and solidarity. This helps to foster a more inclusive society where everyone's needs are taken into consideration. Moreover, a society that emphasizes the public's welfare is more likely to have a government that is responsive to the needs of its citizens. This can also lead to more effective social policies and better welfare programs. Social values can have a crucial influence on welfare attitudes, as social values are the belief system that people hold about what is important and desirable in their society. Empirical findings of this preliminary study reveal that whereas public welfare attitudes might not be directly associated with the secular-rational values, the self-expression values might explain the differences in public welfare attitudes.

These findings imply that the public in the countries emphasizing the self-expression values are more likely to have pro-welfare attitudes. On the other hand, the secular-rational values would not explain the significant differences in public welfare attitudes. These findings arguably

explain why people in several industrial countries, which emphasize secular-rational values, have relatively low support for welfare. In the industrial phase, economic and political ideology rather than social values play an important role on deciding welfare attitudes. However, in the post-industrial phase where people might raise their voices, actively participate in politics, and acknowledge equality based on diversity, self-expression values can enhance publics' welfare attitudes.

This preliminary study empirically examined the association between social values and welfare attitudes through cross-country comparison. One distinction of this study is its scope of analysis. While prior research focused mainly on developed countries, this study includes developing or under-developed countries as well as developed countries. The findings of this preliminary study have implications for debates on the role of social values on welfare attitudes globally. The limitation of this study includes its cross-sectional nature of measurement. Whereas this study examined between-country differences, it ignored within-country differences. Welfare attitudes and social values in a society can change over time. Therefore, future research needs to pay special attention to the dynamic of welfare attitudes and social values through longitudinal approach.

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Appendix 1: Country lists in World Values Survey Data

N	Country	Wave		N	Country	Wave
1	Algeria	6		36	Libya	6
2	Andorra	5		37	Malaysia	6
3	Argentina	6		38	Mali	5
4	Armenia	6		39	Mexico	6
5	Australia	6		40	Moldova	5
6	Azerbaijan	6		41	Morocco	6
7	Bahrain	6		42	Netherlands	6
8	Brazil	6		43	New Zealand	6
9	Bulgaria	5		44	Nigeria	6
10	Burkina Faso	5		45	Norway	5
11	Canada	5		46	Pakistan	6
12	Chile	6		47	Palestine	6
13	China	6		48	Peru	6
14	Colombia	6		49	Philippines	6
15	Cyprus	6		50	Poland	6
16	Ecuador	6		51	Romania	6
17	Estonia	6		52	Russia	6
18	Ethiopia	5		53	Rwanda	6
19	Finland	5		54	Serbia and Montenegro	5
20	France	5		55	Slovenia	6
21	Georgia	6		56	South Africa	6
22	Germany	6		57	South Korea	6
23	Ghana	6		58	Spain	6
24	Great Britain	5		59	Sweden	6
25	Hong Kong	6		60	Taiwan	6
26	Hungary	5		61	Thailand	6
27	India	6		62	Trinidad and Tobago	6
28	Indonesia	5		63	Tunisia	6
29	Iraq	6		64	Turkey	6
30	Italy	5		65	Ukraine	6
31	Japan	6		66	United States	6
32	Jordan	6		67	Uruguay	6
33	Kazakhstan	6		68	Viet Nam	5
34	Kyrgyzstan	6		69	Yemen	6
35	Lebanon	6		70	Zimbabwe	6