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Measuring solidarity values: not that easy

EVS Meeting of Bilbao - University of Deusto - 10 October 2014

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A large amount of literature has been devoted to the individualism since the founding fathers of sociology. It is possible to quote Tocqueville (1840) who foresaw a development of individualism as democracies are developing and the conditions becoming more equal. Conclusion was rather pessimistic: egoism will be growing, threatening the cohesion of modern societies. Conversely to what it is often said, Durkheim was less alarmist (at least in certain texts, or example written in 1898). He was not a partisan of social conservatism. For him, the modernization of society was a good thing. He is a defender of the individual liberties, in particular in the context of the Dreyfus Affair. He distinguishes two kind of individualism, one defined as egoism and utilitarian, the other which considers the individual rights as sacred. This second form of individualism is in fact a humanism and a religion of humanity. Those who defend the liberties of individuals will also be in favour of altruism and solidarity. In fact, for these thinkers, the two dimensions are linked, Tocqueville being pessimistic and Durkheim rather optimistic. It is possible that, in fact, the two dimensions may be not correlated...

Several sociologists or political scientists have tried since the 90's to evaluate with survey data the level and forms of individualism, in particular Loek Halman with the EVS data of the second wave (Halman, 1996 and 2001). He did not find strong relations between the different indices or indicators of individualism (both utilitarian and expressive) and concluded that a general individualist ethos does not exist.

We would like to suggest that perhaps two general dimensions exist, one expressing the individualization dimension (always choosing to do what I want), another the individualist dimension (e. g. always following his own individual interest). The opposite of an individualization's attitude is an attachment to traditional principles while the contrary of individualism is solidarity. Based on the data of the 2008 EVS wave, we have tried to

operationalize these two dimensions for France (Bréchon, Galland, 2010) and for all Europe (Bréchon, 2014). The result seems to be efficient but nevertheless the dimension of individualism might be probably more precisely measured, with some other questions. It is what I would like to show, beginning by a descriptive overview of the main available indicators tapping attitudes toward solidarity.

The available indicators of the solidarity vs individualism dimension

The most developed battery of questions about this attitude is present in the two last waves, measuring two kinds of altruism, an identity altruism and a social one (showing compassion for underprivileged others). Tables below present results for all EVS countries. If almost everybody feels concerned by his family, it is not the case for the other identity categories. And the interrelations between the indicators are a little weaker for family. So it is possible to eliminate it from an attitudinal scale of identity altruism. Without it, the Cronbach's alpha = 0.88.

The second table deals with the social altruism, which is higher than the identity dimension of altruism. The level of altruism is weak for immigrants but high for elders, sick and disabled, children, a little less for unemployed. Here also, the homogeneity of the scale is high: alpha = 0.85.

To what extent do you feel concerned about the living conditions of:

	Very much	Much	To a certain extent	Not so much	No at all	DK/NA
Your immediate family	64	22	7	3	3	1
People in your neighborhood	12	25	36	18	9	1
The people of the region you live in	8	20	41	21	9	1
Your fellow countrymen	9	22	42	19	8	1
Europeans	4	11	34	31	18	2
All humans all over the world	10	18	37	21	12	2

To what extent do you feel concerned about the living conditions of:

	Very much	Much	To a certain extent	Not so much	No at all	DK/NA
Elderly people in your country	31	35	25	5	2	1
Unemployed people in your country	18	28	35	13	4	1
Immigrants in your country	8	15	34	26	15	2
Sick and disabled people in your country	25	36	28	7	2	1
Children in poor families	30	36	25	6	2	1

The two dimensions of altruism are tightly linked: when each scale is recoded in quartiles, the link between them is Cramer's $V= 0.32$.

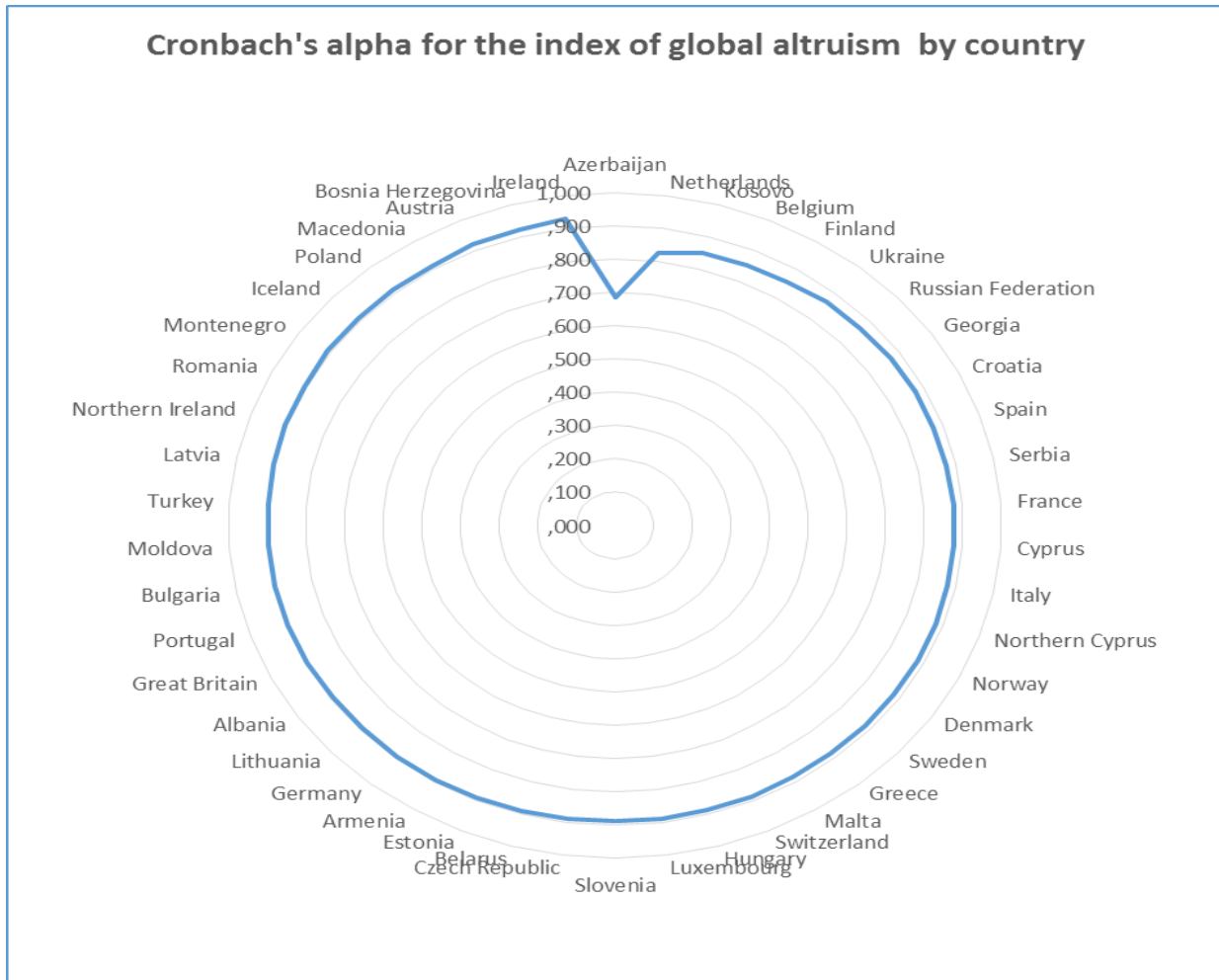
When we compare the 1999 and 2008 EVS data about altruism, we find a same level for the European Union¹. So it seems that the solidarity is not declining and individualism rising, contrary to the commonplace that many observers repeat.

Level of altruism/solidarity in 1999 and 2008 for the UE.

	1999	2008
Very strong (9-21)	21.1	23.3
Rather strong (22-25)	23.4	22.8
Rather weak (26-29)	25.2	23.6
Very weak (30-45)	25.6	25.0
No answer	4.6	5.2

The graph below shows that the alpha of Cronbach is high in all countries, except for ... Azerbaïdjan. We can conclude that this index is rather homogeneous and convincing but it only measures a specific dimension of solidarity, the attention to others. We now would like to discuss if other questions can be used as complementary dimensions of solidarity.

¹ In 1999, the item « Children in poor families » was not included. The have created a same scale to can compare for the same countries of the European Union.



Two questions are devoted to measure if, in the intergenerational family relationships, people should be solidary from the following and/or previous generation.

Which of the following statements best describes your views about parents' responsibilities to their children?

- Parents' duty is to do their best for their children even at the expense of their own well-being
- Parents have a life of their own and should not be asked to sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of their children
- Neither

Which of the following statements best describes your views about responsibilities of adult children towards their parents when their parents are in need of long-term care?

- Adult children have the duty to provide long-term care for their parents even at the expense of their own well-being
- Adult children have a life of their own and should not be asked to sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of their parents
- Neither

The first question (parents' responsibilities to their children) was present in the survey since 1981. We show below figures for nine comparable Western European countries:

	1981	1990	1999	2008
Parents' duty: to do their best for their children	64	69	68	75
Parents have not to sacrifice for the sake of their children	22	20	19	18
Neither	7	8	10	5
DK/No answer	7	4	3	2

Solidarity to children is rather slightly growing since 1981. There is no family individualism but rather a large amount of mutual aids as many family sociologists showed it with more objective data.

The two questions are strongly correlated (Cramer's $V=0.41$) allowing us to do an index with four positions, as table shows it for all the surveyed countries.

	2008
Duty for the two other generations	48.7
Sacrifice only for one generation	23.1
No sacrifice at all	11.7
Indecisiveness	11.7
No answer	5.0

The links between general altruism and intergenerational solidarity are very weak ($V=0.06$). The intergenerational relations are made of a large amount of solidarity but his kind of attitude says nothing about solidarity to others.

In the battery about qualities to encourage to learn at home, unselfishness is measured since 1981. Results for Western European countries show that strong generosity (till self-sacrifice) is not a quality highly encouraged in the education, compared with the three main quoted qualities: tolerance and respect for other people, the feeling of responsibility, good manners. The difference between 1981 and other waves is probably due to the manner of noting down the answers (with only choices till five qualities in 1981, with having to answer yes or no to each quality proposed without being allowed to exceed 5 qualities since then). From 1990 to 2008, there is no marked evolution. And valuing unselfishness is not genuinely correlated with general altruism and intergenerational family solidarity (in the two cases, $V=0.05$).

	1981	1990	1999	2008
Tolerance and respect for other people	50	75	80	77
Feeling of responsibility	47	74	77	75
Good manners	48	73	75	80
Unselfishness	15	31	30	27

A general indicator present in the survey since 1999 might reveal the level of utilitarian individualism and be the reverse of a solidarity attitude. Shown results are for European Union. Relations with the previous indexes are always weak ($V=0.06$, 0.05 and 0.06).

“People should stick to their own affairs and not show too much interest in what others say or do”	1999	2008
Agree strongly	17	18
Agree	28	31
Neither agree nor disagree	23	23
Disagree	23	21
Disagree strongly	6	6
DK/NA	3	2

We can test the links between altruism and other dimensions of values to see if they can be interpreted as showing aspects of individualism, under a certain point of view. First, are there links between altruism and the level of politicization²? Politicized people would be more open to others while if somebody is not concerned by others, he may be very often not interested by politics and policies. This link is verified with a medium intensity ($V=0.11$ with 4 categories and 0.16 with 2 as below): the more people are politicized, the more they feel themselves concerned by others.

Altruism	Very strong	Rather strong	Rather weak	Very weak	Mean
Weak politicization (0 or 1)	41	47	52	63	51
High politicization (2 and 3)	59	53	48	37	49

It is also possible to imagine that people who are active citizens and are willingly involved in political causes might more value solidarity. The links between altruism and an attitudinal scale of political protest participation³ does not confirm this hypothesis ($V=0.05$). People valuing solidarity seem not really more prone to involve and commit in protest actions.

² Politicization is measured by three indicators which are in the questionnaire since 1990: the importance of politics in your life, discussing political matters with friends (frequently, occasionally or never), being interested in politics (four modalities of answers). The three indicators are strongly correlated and constitute a solid index.

³ In a question appearing in the EVS survey since the first wave, interviewees have to declare for five kinds of protest action (signing a petition, joining in boycotts, attending lawful demonstrations, joining unofficial strikes, occupying buildings of factories) if they have done it, might do it or would never, under any circumstances, do it. A scale may be built, going from 3 to 15, recoded in four almost equal categories.

We arrive to the same conclusion for links between solidarity and trust to others⁴. Doing spontaneously trust in others does not really lead to be more concerned by others ($V=0.05$).

We also consider a scale about the legitimacy of uncivil and illegal behaviours. It is possible to hypothesis that people who find justified illegal and uncivil behaviours⁵ when they have a personal interest and benefit to do them are more individualist and thus less fond of solidarity with others. The hypothesis is rather verified ($V=0.20$):

Altruism	Very strong	Rather strong	Rather weak	Very weak	Mean
Weak civic permissiveness (7 to 14)	64	49	41	38	48
Strong civic permissiveness (15 to 70)	36	51	59	62	52

Finally, we hypothesis that what people think about economy may be linked with solidary or individualist attitudes. Solidary people also would be in favour of a social and redistributive economic system while individualist would be very liberal. In fact, the correlation is very weak and dubious. People who are solidary of others in their daily life are not obviously en favour of a social and solidary economy.

We can now try to summarize what we have shown till now with a table displaying main relationships between the index of general altruism (also distinguishing identity and social altruism) and other dimensions that might be correlated with it. In fact, many links are dubious and weak. So the conclusion might be that the different aspects of solidarity vs individualism in the different domains of life are not congruent. Being individualist in a domain would not suggest a same attitude in other dimensions. It was already the conclusion of Loek Halman on the data of 1990.

⁴ Measured by the dichotomous classical question opposing two statements :

- "Most people can be trusted",
- "You can't be too careful in dealing with others".

⁵ In the very long battery about 20 behaviors for which interviewees have to say on a scale going from 1 to 10 if they find them never (1) or always (10) justified, we select those which correspond to illegal and uncivil practices but also very often allow people to obtain a personal advantage: "Claiming state benefits which you are not entitled to", "Cheating on tax if you have the chance", "Lying in your own interest", "Someone accepting a bribe in the course of their duties" "Paying cash for services to avoid taxes", "Taking and driving away a car belonging to someone else (joyriding)" "Avoiding a fare on public transport". These seven answers are strongly correlated between them ($\alpha=0.78$). The built additive scale goes from 7 to 70 and is after recoded in quartiles, then also in two categories. But we have to remind that the legitimation of uncivil behaviors is rather rare. On the scale, 48 % correspond to the notes 7 to 14 (weak permissiveness) and 52 % to the notes 15 to 70 (strong permissiveness). Permissiveness concerning privacy (in particular sexuality, euthanasia, suicide) is quickly rising, in particular in Western Europe, while permissiveness about all collective questions and living together are stable since 30 years.

Table – Altruism: correlations with other close dimensions (Cramer's V)

	General altruism	Identity altruism	Social altruism
Civic permissiveness (4 cat.)	0.14	0.10	0.14
Politicization (4 cat.)	0.11	0.11	0.09
Protest participation	0.05	0.05	0.05
Encourage unselfishness among children	0.05	0.03	0.06
Stick to own affairs, no interest for others	0.06	0.06	0.07
Intergenerational solidarity	0.06	0.05	0.06
Trust in others/careful with others	0.05	0.07	0.02
Social or liberal in economy	0.05	0.02	0.07

But perhaps this initial conclusion might be to nuance and revise if we change of methodology. We carry out a principal component analysis with the main dimensions taken into account till now⁶. In fact we try many different analysis with more or less indexes taken into account. In our first attempt, with all the previous dimensions, we discover that politicization is in fact not correlated with the two first axis released. We can probably conclude that being politicized does not imply to be more solidary. It is in fact coherent with the common wisdom: among people interested and competent in politics, a part are in favour of solidarity policies while others are in favour of more liberal ones.

Having eliminated politicization, we obtain for the eight variables taken into account three components which would be different latent aspects of the solidarity/individualist dimension. When we look at each component, the first one (18 % of explained variance) seems express a more collective and active conception of solidarity while the second (15 %) would be more traditional (compassion for others, family solidarities). The third component (13 %) is specific for the social/liberal economic positions

Matrix of components after rotation ^a			
	Composante		
	1	2	3
Trust others/careful	,662	,040	,157
Interest for others / own affairs	,594	,047	,075
Potential of active participation	,588	-,105	-,234
General altruism	,194	,709	-,192
Civic permissiveness	-,188	,679	,270
Solidarity between generations	-,322	,451	-,014
Learn unselfishness to children	,207	,285	-,067

⁶ For methodological reasons, we work without weighting, using varimax rotations.

Social/liberal economy	,092	-,063	,912
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If we had stopped here our presentation, we could conclude that, even if the different aspects of solidarity are rather specific, there are nevertheless latent dimensions of solidarity/individualism which would be shared by many individuals.

We intend to show that our questionnaire does not account well for some crucial aspects of solidarity.

existing indicators are too limited to provide strong evidence of declining or increasing solidarity.

Possible questions for 2017:

Adapted from ESS6 – D37. To what extent do you provide help and support to people you are close to when they need it? 0 is not at all and 6 is completely. DK 88

To what extent do you provide help and support to remote and distant people when they need it? 0 is not at all and 6 is completely. DK 88

Adapted From world bank (projects for communities).

2.1 In the past 12 months, have you worked with others to do something for the benefit of the community?

1 Yes

2 No → skip to question 3.4

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