

THE CULTURAL ROOTS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

A cross-national macro-analysis of 22 European countries

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BULK OF STUDIES ON ‘CIVIC DELINE’ ARE AMERICAN

BUT: Can US malaise hypothesis be generalized to all Western societies? OR: Does phenomenon cut across national cultural / political boundaries?

EUROPEAN VALUES STUDY (EVS)

Representative population surveys in many European countries

Focused on value orientations in a wide set of domains

Three waves 1981; 1990; 1999/2000

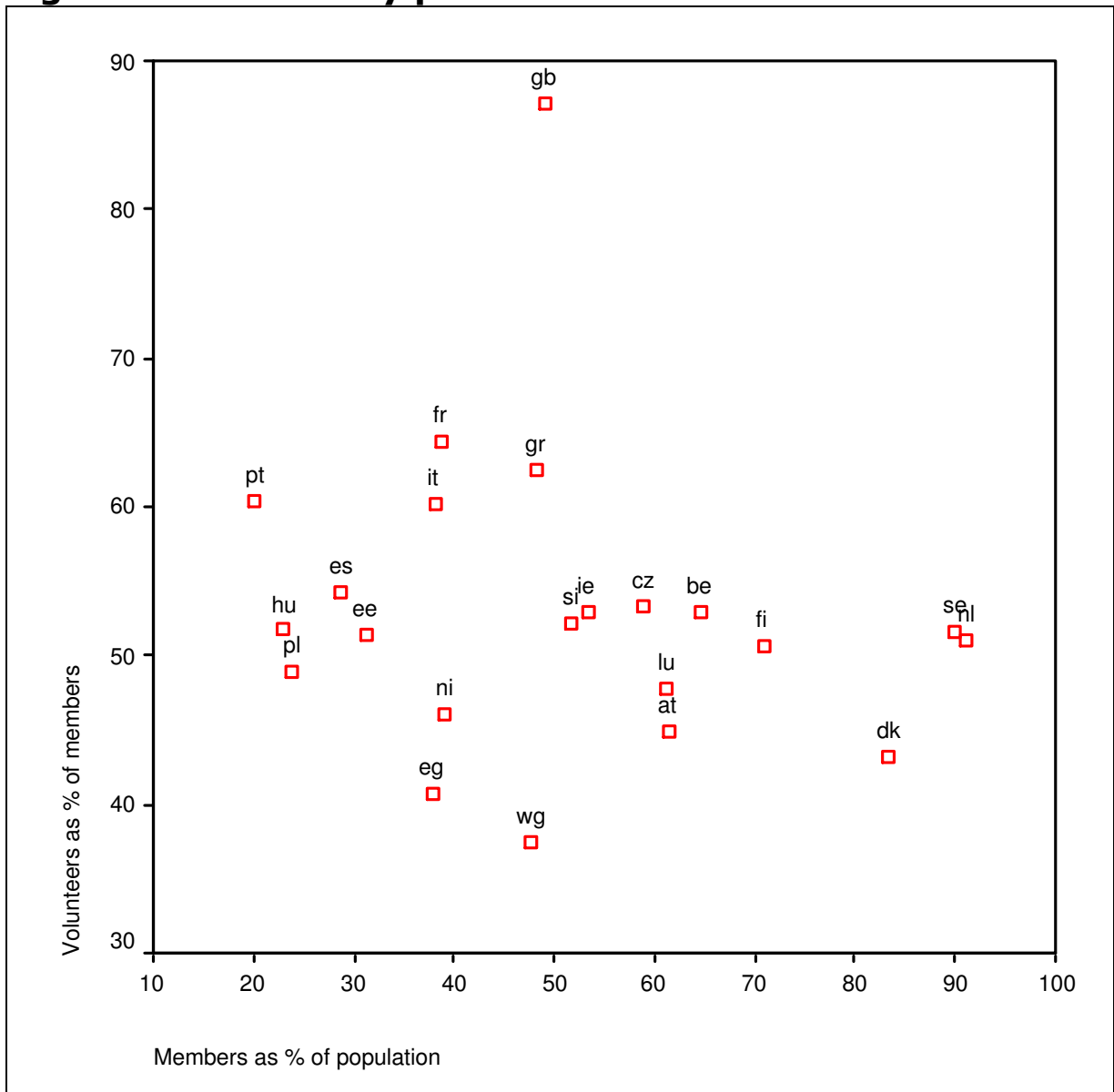
The 1999/2000 wave include many former communist countries

DEFINITIONS

**Civil Society: Non-state, -market, -private domain of voluntary
association of citizens**

**EVS: 'Belonging to' and 'doing unpaid work for' voluntary
associations (Figure 1)**

Figure 1 Civil society patterns^a



^a **Members= belonging to at least of a list of 14 organizations except religious organizations. Volunteers= doing voluntary work for at least one of these organizations (all volunteers are supposed to be members).**

‘PATTERN’	Membership modest	Membership high
Volunteering modest	Other European, including former communist countries	Scandinavia / Netherlands (Broad)
Volunteering high	Southern Europe (Elitist)	e.g. USA

FOCUS NON-POLITICAL, FACE-TO-FACE ORGANIZATIONS

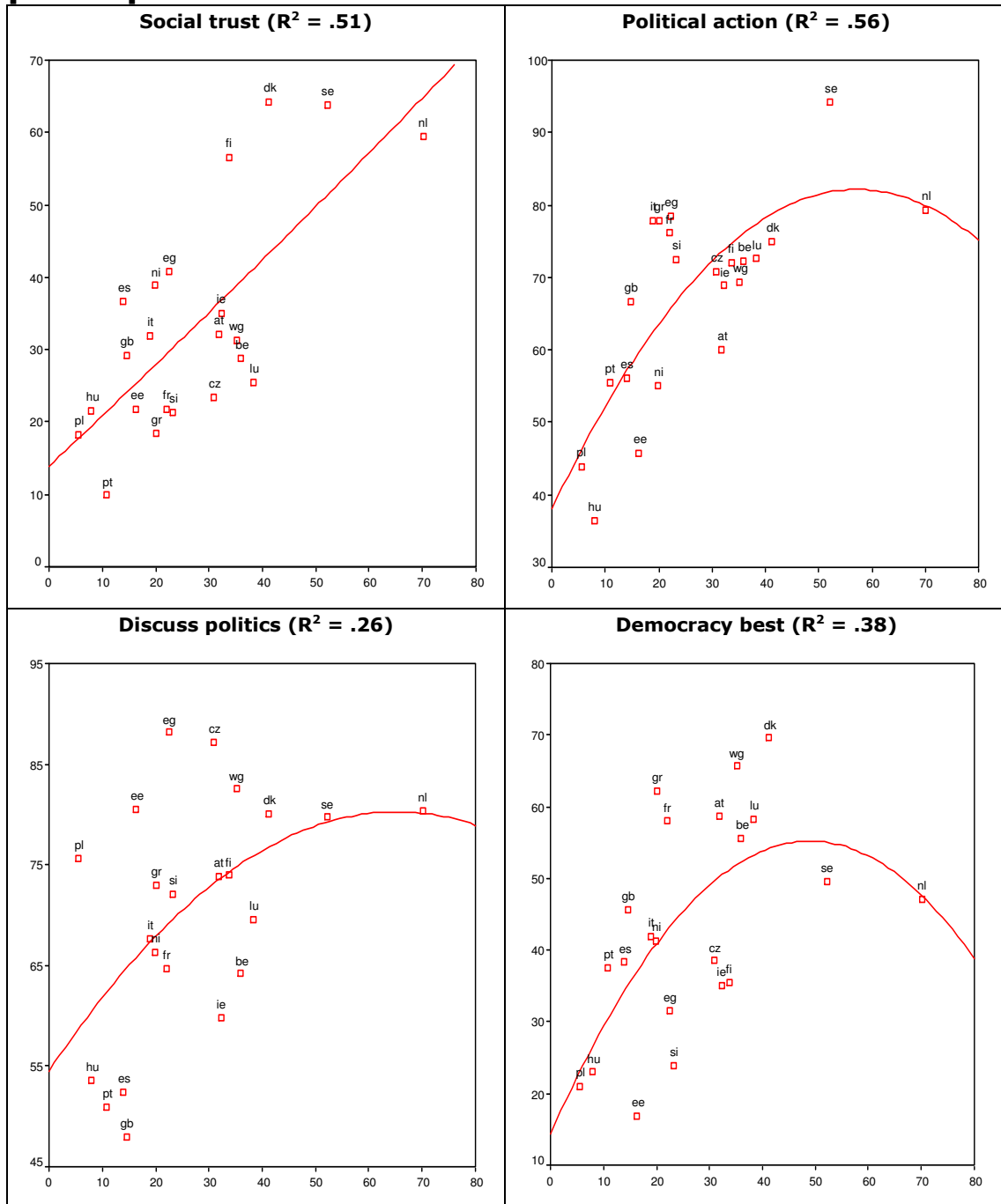
Leisure participation: belonging/volunteering for organizations of 'education, arts, and music and cultural activities' and/or 'sport or recreation'

Trust: 'Generalized social trust': most people can be trusted

Political involvement: Discussing politics with friends ; Action: joining boycotts, attending lawful demonstrations ; Democracy best ; Political interest

There are positive relationships with participation (Figure 2)

Figure 2 Relationships between leisure participation (horizontal axis) and the alleged benefits of participation



CULTURAL FACTORS EXPLAIN COUNTY-DIFFERENCES ?

**Trust / democratic engagement and e.g. ‘power distance’ (Hofstede),
‘secular-rational authority values’ (Inglehart), ‘hierarchy beliefs’
(Schwartz) ?**

**Do cultural variables stand out between economic (GNP e.g.), political
(political rights), religious variables (catholic vs. protestant history),
and participatory variables (leisure participation) ?**

**Analyses : multiple regressions at country-level ; first to select relevant
variables per domain (culture, economy etc.) and next all in overall
analysis with trust, political involvement, views on democracy, political
interest dependent (multi-collinearity checked)**

FINDINGS

1. Trust and informal political debate have fundamentally cultural roots: Well-being values and Protestantism affect trust positively, and Harmony values affect political discussion negatively

2. Political action and political interest are rooted in civil society: leisure participation

3. Political action and views on democracy have basis in political history: communist history negatively affects both

CUMULATIVE STRUCTURE ?

Steps needed for civic engagement:

- 1. Cultural tradition to develop trust and to experiment with peer group**
- 2. Voluntary social involvement to boost political interest and active political engagement**
- 3. Political system to promote political action and democratic beliefs**

FUTURE

Engagement a matter of cultural tradition, social connectedness, and political history. Political history, a period effect ? With EU enlargement convergence political systems and thus rising importance cultural and social factors ?