

# European attitudes and values: The perspective of gender in a transverse analysis

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## Abstract

*Although it is known that the differences within sexes are much more significant than the differences between sexes, the tendency is to overstress the later ones. In this article we analyze, in a transversal perspective centred on gender, all the answers of the ESS questionnaire, addressing some of the main issues of the survey like the exposition to media, politics, the subjective perception of well-being and security and human values and trying to evaluate differences and similarities between men and women. Concluding that, as expected, there is a vast domain of convergence between the sexes in attitudes and opinions, though contesting essentialist positions, it is nevertheless interesting to stress also where some of the differences are concentrated and trying to access and explain them. Among other issues the passage from a traditional gender gap to a modern gender gap is one of the topics of discussion.*

## Keywords

gender  
values and attitudes  
gender gap  
gender politics  
gender differences  
political choices

## Introduction

Men and women in Europe exhibit behaviours, attitudes, opinions and values that resemble each other far more than possibly would be expected. On the basis of the results of the European Social Survey (ESS) in a transverse analysis centred on gender, this is what this article shows. We attempt to assess the similarities and differences in men and women's positions, examining the principal topics in the questionnaire: such as exposure to the media, social confidence, politics, the subjective perception of well-being and security and human values.<sup>1</sup> The results are always analyzed according to sex (along with other variables). The data refers to the first round of surveys, applied in 2002–2003, in which 22 countries (Austria, Denmark, Belgium, Italy, Germany, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Spain, France, Finland, Greece, Netherlands, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Norway, Poland, Portugal, United Kingdom, Czech Republic, Sweden and Switzerland) and a total of 42,359 respondents participated.<sup>2</sup>

Although research has already shown that the differences within the sexes are much more important than those between them, the truth is

- 1 A distinction must be made between 'sex' (an observable variable), and 'gender' (a concept). The latter refers to the differentiation of the social categories 'masculine' and 'feminine': a social differentiation that starts with biological differences and which is constituted as an ideology or cultural construction that defines 'appropriate' behaviour and attitudes in a given specific social context (Torres 2001).
- 2 This paper analyses data from the 21

that the latter are frequently inflated in a manner that tends to essentialize the biological differences between women and men (Amâncio 1994; Kimmel 2000). In fact, in contrast to the common view and the image portrayed in airport best-sellers, which constantly tell us that women and men come from different planets, close study of the differences between the two allows us to conclude – with some surprise – that ‘the main finding, from about 80 years of research, is a massive psychological similarity between women and men in the population studied by psychologists. Clear-cut block differences are few, and confined to restricted topics’ (Connell 1987: 170). Even in an analysis of such characteristics as the distribution of attributes connected with masculinity and femininity, it can be seen that, despite the differences in averages, the overlapping of characteristics is much greater than the distance and difference between them. As Kimmel also shows ‘In fact, in virtually all the research that has been done on the attributes associated with masculinity or femininity, the differences among women and men are far greater than the mean differences between women and men’ (Kimmel 2000: 15).

At the level of values and attitudes, the question of the differences between men and women has also been addressed by authors such as Prince-Gibson and Schwartz (1998). On the basis of a values grid proposed by Schwartz, which was also used in the ESS, and research carried out in Israel, they concluded that there are no significant gender differences in values either in relation to structure or priorities (Prince-Gibson and Schwartz 1998: 62). In other words, men and women attributed the same meaning, ranking and importance to the same values. Prince-Gibson and Schwartz discuss results and theoretical suggestions from other empirical research on values and gender and show how the conclusions of their research tend to undermine the theories indicating ‘stable gender differences’. They point, rather, towards constructivist and interactionist perspectives according to which attitudes, values and behaviour attributable to gender depend more on specific contexts.

What the ESS results show once again is that variables such as education, class, generation, or even those related to the social and cultural conditions in the individual countries, tend to provide a better explanation for the difference in the positions of Europeans amongst themselves than the differences between the sexes. At the level of values and attitudes, there is greater disparity between a young woman graduate, for example, and an older woman with little schooling than there is between that young graduate and a man of the same age with a similar education.

Generally speaking, research points in the same direction when attitudes and values on gender equality and cultural changes in the world are analyzed, as by Inglehart and Norris (2003) in their comparison of the changes in different types of contemporary society: ‘Nevertheless, the gap that has emerged between traditional agrarian societies and post industrial societies is far greater than the gap between women and men within each type of society’ (Inglehart and Norris 2003: 160).

This convergence does not eliminate all of the differences in values, attitudes and behaviour between men and women as a whole. In fact, between European men and women there were certain differences of position that could be seen regularly and steadily in the 21 countries analyzed: thus demonstrating real social regularities. Furthermore, for certain topics it was also noted that the differences between countries were greater than those between men and women within each country, as Inglehart and Norris (2003) noted for the differences between societies.

The exercise proposed in this article is to identify the similarities and explain the differences encountered. On some occasions, explanations were suggested for the absence of differences or for those that were found on the basis of theoretical proposals or other research results. In other cases, analysis was limited to the suggestion of explanatory hypotheses: since the authors' knowledge of the subject areas being dealt with was not so firm. In yet other cases, the positions of different countries or groups of countries were stated or considered quite simply, since only specific analysis of the local internal dynamics could clarify the similarities and differences. These are methodological problems that always arise in comparative work between countries and societies, given the 'imperfection of comparisons' (Oyen 1990: 16).

The results obtained allow us to paint an interesting picture of Europe. By and large, the intention was to deal with the data for the 21 countries; but, for operative reasons in the analysis, the countries were also given a certain grouping. Although always somewhat arbitrary, it captures differences that are considered to be generally consistent: as is the case for the difference between northern and southern Europe. It was also thought sensible to distinguish the Scandinavian countries within the 'north' and then group the others into the north and center, followed by the countries of the enlargement (Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia) and, finally, southern Europe.

Apart from values and attitudes, it was also possible, using socio-demographic data, to identify other similarities and differences between European men and women. Thus, data on educational levels and religious positions is also analyzed in an attempt to ascertain possible differences of generation, besides those of gender. At this level, it is confirmed that in most European countries younger women are overtaking men from the educational standpoint. This situation, which is also associated with the growing trend for women to join the labour market, may help explain the greater convergence in women's and men's positions on a wide range of matters.

Indeed, it is important to stress the great transformation represented by women's attainment of their present educational levels. In diachronic terms, European women entered the twentieth-century with very low schooling levels, and left it in a more advantageous position than men. This expansion reveals that women have shown, with what they have achieved over time, that biological differences are not directly reflected in

different intellectual or performance capacities. In fact, we can also conclude, as some authors do, 'that the most important change in recent decades has been the revolution in gender roles that has changed the lives of most people in advanced industrial societies' (Inglehart 2003: 104). As the same author points out, this great change in practices and values has not always been considered to be important, nor has it been adequately analyzed.

These changes, and the considerable advances in the equal rights area in Western societies, or the great convergence in positions that we have mentioned, mean that the real inequalities between men and women, which are clear from a series of other indicators, are all the more absurd – even if they are sociologically explicable. In general, women earn less than men; have fewer employment opportunities; do not occupy managerial positions even where they are in the majority; and are clearly under-represented in decision-making political posts in governments and in parliaments. When they work outside the home – which is the case for most European women – they combine this work with the responsibility for carrying out a range of tasks like looking after the children and doing the household chores (Torres et al. 2004a). All the surveys on the use of time demonstrate the work overload that women have to cope with, which leaves them with little time for other activities. Among other factors, the exclusion of women from the spheres of political decision-making and power can also be attributed to these objective limitations which, ultimately, have the function of reproducing male domination (Bourdieu 1999). Moreover, if women are far less represented in the political sphere, the day-to-day problems that affect their lives and which restrict them become less visible in that public forum (Viegas and Faria 2001).

All this makes it clear that women's progress in education and labour market participation can help to explain experience that is partly similar – which, in turn, may explain the fact that the ESS responses did not differ greatly in the variable of sex – although at the same time this progress makes the exclusion of women from politics all the more shocking.

While it is not the purpose of this text to analyze such inequalities, contradictions and paradoxes, it seemed important to us to develop a transverse analysis in order to identify similarities and differences, since it was known from the outset that the former far outweighs the latter. This recognition may help to reveal the errors to which essentialist positions may lead.

In fact, it is easier, though illusory, to attribute the inequalities of sex and gender to the different 'nature' or biological predispositions of men and women. It will be more useful and productive to identify gender inequalities in the form that the positions of power in the social structures are distributed and the way that they are reflected both in women and men's lives and on a symbolic level. This approach helps to explain why, in values and attitudes, there are notable convergences between the two sexes and, if there are differences, what their occurrence and distribution may involve.

## Exposure to the media

The debate on the benefits/evils of the communication society is very much alive. Lined up on one side are the critics, calling attention to the 'corruption of values' and arguing for a return to a 'virtuous' past of obedience and duty. On the other are the apologists of increased rationality, made possible by an expansion of the 'public space' that communication allows (Habermas 1987a). As Luhmann states:

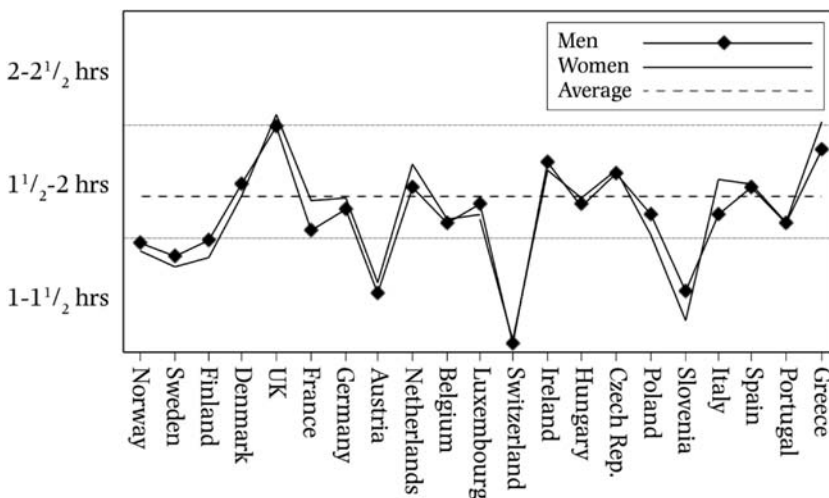
The considerations around the repercussions of the new mass media show that the problems are defined in a very limited way. They are centred on the concept of the 'masses' and move on to the effects that the media have on individual behaviour. From this standpoint, the social consequences are explained by individual behaviour that is deformed by the press, cinema and radio.

(1992: 50)

It is to be believed, however, that the exercise of citizenship and, by extension, the quality of democracy and the development of societies are directly tied to information and, consequently, the freedom of information. As is known, the possession of information may be transformed into power, although it is also known that being mobilized to obtain information and then knowing how to interpret it is more important than having access to it (Cabral 2005).

Looking at the daily exposure to television (Figure 1) we can see that the differences between men and women, which are smaller than those between countries, are of little or no consequence in the huge majority of countries.<sup>3</sup> These results contradict the idea that women are greater

3 The *Etas*<sup>2</sup> reflect the percentage of variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variable, that is, in this case, the percentage of variance in the exposure to television and newspapers that is explained by sex and country.

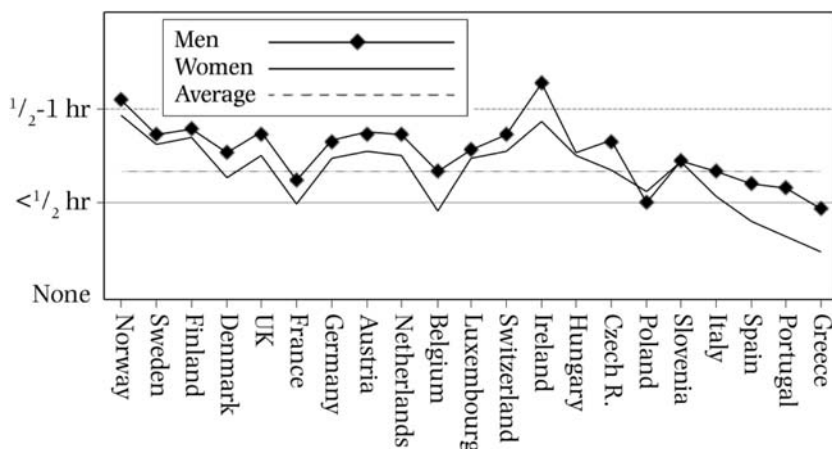


Note: Question: 'On a average weekday, how much time in total do you spend watching television?' The scale of responses runs from 0 (none) to 7 (over 3 hours), on the basis of 30-minute intervals.

Figure 1: Daily exposure to television (averages).

consumers of television than men. But gender differences are slightly greater for the time spent reading newspapers: men in all countries read more newspaper than women (Figure 2).

Men and women also do not differ in their profile of exposure to the three media forms from the point of view of time given to politics, current affairs and the news. Most state that they devote up to an hour each day to the television and less than half-an-hour to the radio and newspapers, as Table 1 shows. The most significant conclusion to be drawn is that European men spend less time reading newspapers and listening to the radio (59 and 41 per cent, respectively, do so for less than half an hour) than they do watching television (40 percent devote between half-an-hour and an hour to political topics and current affairs). Here too, however, it



Note: Question: 'On an average weekday, how much time, in total, do you spend reading the newspapers?' The scale of responses runs from 0 (none) to 7 (over 3 hours), on the basis of 30-minute intervals.

Figure 2: Daily exposure to newspapers (daily average).

	None	Less than half an hour	Between half an hour and an hour	Over an hour	Total
Men	4.6	27.8	41.3	26.4	100.0
TV	18.2	41.6	22.8	17.4	100.0
Radio	12.5	59.5	21.3	6.7	100.0
Newspapers					
Women	6.3	30.9	39.8	23.0	100.0
TV	22.1	41.5	20.8	15.7	100.0
Radio	18.0	62.1	15.8	4.1	100.0
Newspapers					

Table 1: Exposure to the media (%). On an average weekday, how much of your time do you spend watching television, listening to the radio or reading newspapers on politics and current affairs?

can be seen that there are no differences between the sexes and, in contrast to what is probably believed, it is not just men who devote time to political matters, current affairs or the news (Table 1).

A closer analysis that associates sex, age group, educational level and hours of exposure to the media, allows us to identify specific profiles. According to this, women over the age of 59 with the least schooling spend most time watching television and listening to the radio. It is possible to suppose that many of the women who work in the home or who are retired will be included in this group. In the youngest groups there are no apparent differences between the sexes, with men aged 30–59 years reflecting the average exposure profile for the three media forms analyzed. For newspapers, men over 59 form the group that comes closest to the greatest exposure, with an average of over an hour a day. Is this a sign of the times, demonstrating the trend among the younger people to use different information sources, while newspapers are the source to which the older people are most loyal? Later, with the aid of cluster analysis, we shall have a better picture of the relationship to be established between reading newspapers and using other media such as the internet.

The internet, which may be considered an instrument that makes access to information more democratic, has been at the root of reflections on alterations in media exposure patterns. It has been assuming an ever more important role. The data available shows that regular internet use for personal purposes is lowest in the enlargement countries, with the exception of Slovenia, and southern Europe, groups of countries that also present the highest percentages of individuals without access.<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that Portugal is the only country in which women exceed men (although only just) in regular internet use. We accept that this may be due to the high rate of employment of Portuguese women in the service sector where, possibly, they are more able to use their employer's internet for personal purposes. Nevertheless, according to research carried out by INE (National Institute of Statistics), general internet and computer use in Portugal is greater among men (32 per cent) than it is among women (27 per cent) (INE 2004).

With the aid of the two step cluster/SPSS method of analysis to find the best combinations between media exposure (television and newspapers), personal use of and access to the internet/email and age and education, we identified the following three groups (see Figure 3):

- *Cluster 1*: younger; better educated; less exposed to television; up to one-hour each day reading newspaper; and greater personal use of the internet/email.
- *Cluster 2*: 50-years old on average; average education (11–12 years); greater exposure to television; greater newspaper reading; little personal use of the internet/email.
- *Cluster 3*: older; less schooling; greater exposure to television; majority do not read the newspapers; no internet access.

4 The form of the question is as follows: *How often do you use the internet or email for personal purposes, whether at home or at work?* For the responses, the scale runs from 0 (no access) to 7 (every day).

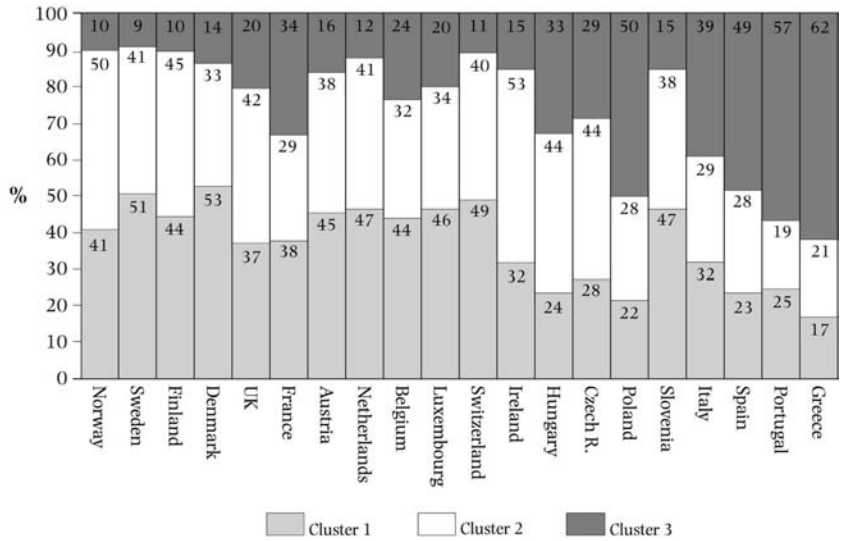


Figure 3: Television viewing, newspaper reading and internet use, by age and education (percent).

The characterization provided by these three clusters shows clearly the influence of education and age on personal internet/e-mail use. With regard to the percentage distribution of the clusters by country; the low representation of the Scandinavian countries, Austria, Netherlands, Switzerland, Ireland and Slovenia, and the high representation in Poland and southern Europe of Cluster 3 should be noted.

With reference to the difference between women and men it can be seen that the women have a distinctly greater representation than the men in Cluster 3. The distribution by sex in the other two clusters is more balanced.

In summary, we may conclude that while the time and type of media exposure and personal internet/e-mail use and access do not differ greatly among Europeans, the differences between countries are greater

than those between men and women. We have also ascertained that variables, such as age and education, need to be taken into account when finding and reaching a better understanding of differences in positions.

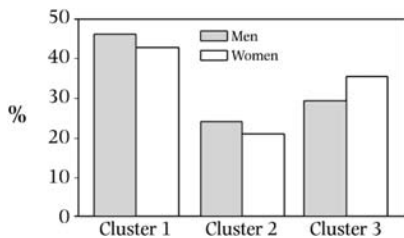


Figure 4: Television viewing, newspaper reading and internet use, by age and education (clusters by sex) (percent).

### Social and political trust

As various authors have stressed, social trust is closely connected with 'social capital' and is related with interests and social questions



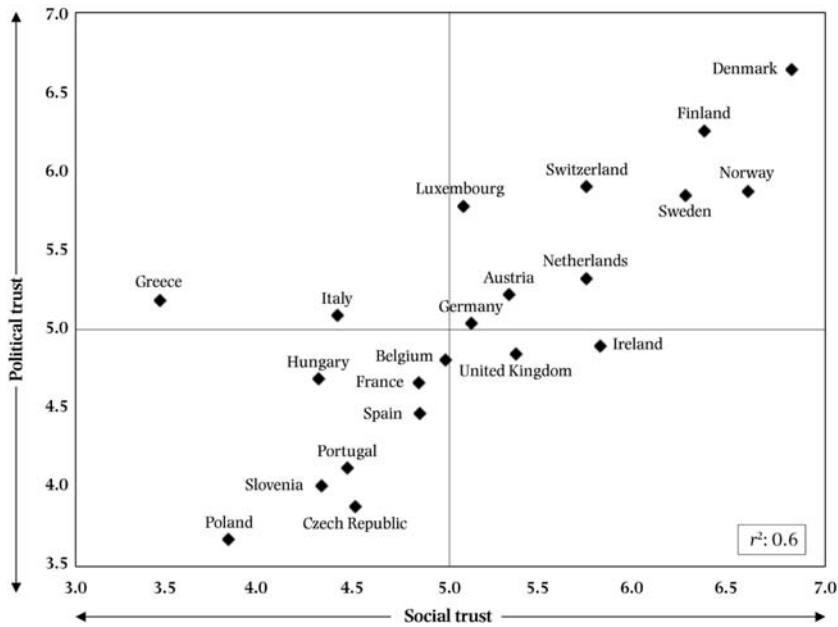


Figure 5: The relationship between social trust and political trust, by country.

that, as Newton (2004: 61) notes, extend ‘from the payment of taxes, educational success and economic growth to contentment with life, length of life, community involvement and the exercise of the vote’. For that author, ‘the less people trust, work with and cooperate with their fellow citizens and the more they disconnect themselves from the collective and voluntary life of their communities, the weaker and less efficient the social institutions of civil society will be. The less trust that citizens have in their political leaders and government institutions, the less efficient the government will be and the greater the probability of citizens seeing little credibility in their political system’.

As, from this perspective, our interest lies in understanding the relationship between social and political trust, we constructed two synthetic indices:<sup>5</sup> an index of social trust and another of political trust.<sup>6</sup> As would be expected, they both have a strong positive correlation ( $r(20) = 0.775$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). Figure 5 shows how the Scandinavian countries have the greatest trust, whereas France, Portugal and the enlargement countries are positioned at the other extreme.

Newton (2004: 71–72) calls attention to the fact that ‘the more democratic a country is, the more there will tend to be trust among its population. . . democratic and efficient government, along with the proper functioning of public institutions, helps to create circumstances in which trustworthy behaviour is unproblematic and highly valued’. For this reason, internal mechanisms that can strengthen social and political trust may prove to be valuable allies in consolidating and improving the quality of democracy.

5 Inspired by Halman (2003), the construction of the synthetic indices in this chapter results from Principal Components Analysis. The individuals’ scores are formed from the respective factorial scores, with a subsequent algebraic transformation to make them easier to read, as Vauss (2004) suggests: ‘the rounded up minimum value is made to coincide with zero, and the maximum with the maximum value on the original scale of the constituent indicators’.

6 The first, the social trust index (explained variance: 53.2%; Cronbach’s alpha: 0.77), includes three indicators that are regularly used in attitude and value questionnaires: interpersonal trust, honesty and altruism. The second, the political trust index (explained variance: 65.3%; Cronbach’s alpha: 0.82) includes four indicators: trust in parliament, the legal system, the police and politicians.

- 7 For social trust the differences are not statistically significant and for political trust they are minimal ( $Eta^2 = 0.000$ ).
- 8 The three indicators were re-codified in three levels of trust: low (0–3), moderate (4–6) and high (7–10).

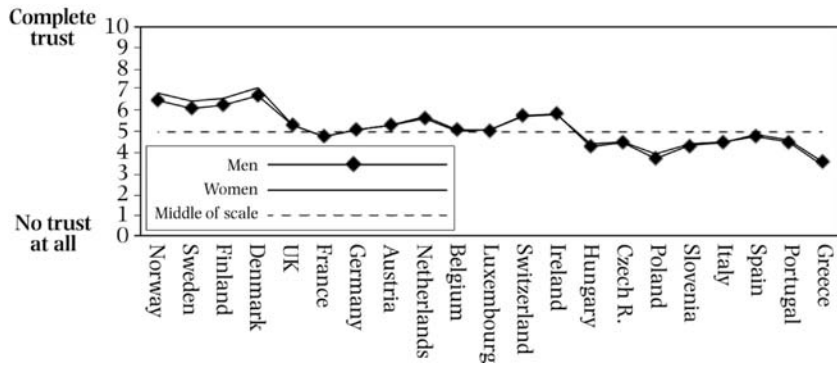


Figure 6: Social trust (averages).

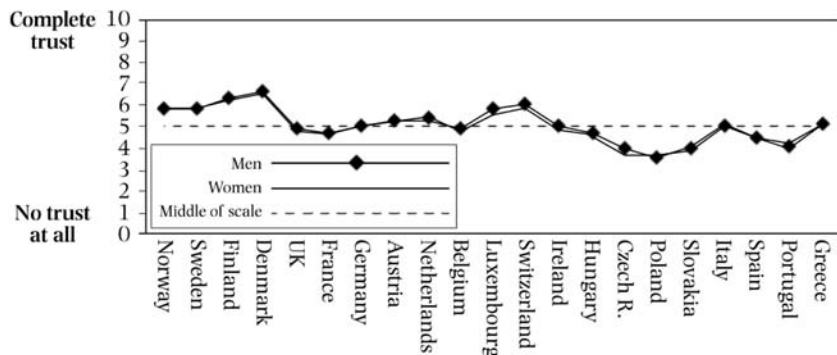


Figure 7: Political trust (averages).

As can be seen in Figures 6 and 7, men and women in the 21 countries register a very similar pattern for both social and political trust.<sup>7</sup> With regard to the latter, it should be noted that the enlargement and the southern countries, with the exception of Italy, register the lowest values, which may certainly be explained by the fairly recent democratic processes, on the one hand, and the relative ‘disenchantment’ with politicians, on the other, since it is in these countries that less trust in politicians can be seen. In the 21 countries as a whole, the police merits the greatest trust and politicians merit the least: they never break through the middle of the scale.

More careful analysis of the social trust indicators shows that, irrespective of sex, the under-30 and 30–50 age groups record moderate trust values, whereas the oldest group (men and women) are relatively equidistant from the three social trust profiles: low, moderate and high. It is also worth noting that a low educational level is more associated with low social trust, a high level with moderate trust and a middle level with high trust, as can be seen in Figure 8.<sup>8</sup>

As Kriesi states (2004: 191): ‘Trust is a kind of shortcut that allows us to escape the processing of a lot of information. . . . It is an emotional

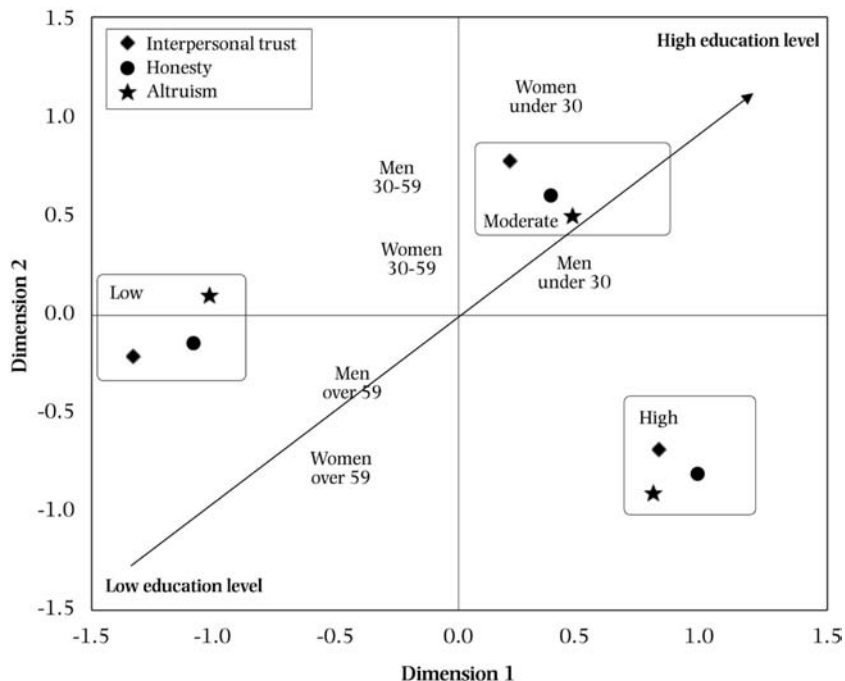


Figure 8: Social trust by sex, age and education.

element that can be equated with cognitive schemes, usefully simplifying the world. Although we know little about how trust in political decision-making works, we assume that those who trust in the authorities will support them more easily than those who do not'. With reference to Portugal, which, along with Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Poland, has the lowest values in the two indices, attention has already been drawn to the low interpersonal trust levels recorded, though it is not easy to find variables that explain this situation (Halman 2003; Cabral 2005). We may consider, for example, the variable of religiousness, which is high in Portugal, as in other southern countries and some enlargement countries (e.g. Poland), where there are also low levels of social trust. But this variable is not positively correlated with the levels of social capital and trust, as Halman has shown well (2003: 257–292). In similar vein, even Fukuyama maintains that if there is any relationship between religion and trust, it should be negative: as can also be concluded from the ESS results. According to the author, '[r]eligion apparently has contradictory effects on trust; fundamentalists and church-goers tend to show a greater degree of distrust than the general average' (Fernandes 2003: 182).

With specific reference to political trust, people's perceptions of 'politicians' interests' are in line with the low levels of political trust recorded. Politicians' interests are considered here to reflect the responses to the two items: 'In general, politicians are interested in what people think' and 'Politicians are more interested in winning people's votes and are not so

- 9 It should be emphasized that the differences between countries are greater than those between the sexes ( $Eta^2 = 0.075$  and  $0.001$ , respectively).
- 10 The index is based on the following questions: *how interested would you say you are in politics*, with answers on a scale of 1 (very interested) to 4 (not at all interested); *how often does politics seem so complicated that you can't really understand what is going on*, with answers on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (frequently); *do you think that you could take an active role in a group involved with political issues*, with answers on a scale of 1 (definitely not) to 5 (definitely) and *how difficult or easy do you find it to make your mind up about political issues*, with answers on a scale of 1 (very difficult) to 5 (very easy). To allow the correct interpretation of the index, the indicators were standardized, with an inversion of the scales for the last two. Explained variance = 53.5 per cent;  $\alpha = 0.70$ .

interested in their opinions'. In essence, it is a matter of perceiving if politicians are more interested in the public good than their careers. It can be seen that women and men have a very close response profile in all countries in the 'synthetic index for the perception of politicians' interests' (explained variance = 80%;  $\alpha = 0.75$ ). They all register average values below the middle of the scale.

The Scandinavian countries record the highest scores and, thus, concur most with the idea that politicians are interested in what the citizens think. On the other hand, the southern European and enlargement countries, followed closely by the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Austria score the least. It is of interest to note that, though with very close values and, in most countries, without significant differences, women register higher political trust values than men in the first group of countries and lower ones in the second.<sup>9</sup>

### Detachment from politics

As we know, detachment from politics restricts the full exercise of citizenship, which means that it is important to understand if men and women have differences at this level. In fact, this is an area in which the differences are clearer. In all countries, men register greater 'interest in politics' and consider to a greater degree that they could 'take part in a group devoted to political issues'. On the contrary, women state more often than men that they consider 'politics complicated' and have 'difficulty in taking a position on political issues'.

According to the 'index of detachment from politics', which pools information from four instrumental indicators: 'interest in politics', 'politics seems complicated', 'availability to take part in politics' and 'difficulty in taking political positions', it can be concluded that the 21 countries show a very similar pattern, around the middle of the scale, with France and the southern European countries displaying the highest degree of detachment.<sup>10</sup>

Schweisguth (2004: 257) has already drawn attention to the fact that, in France, it is a fixed idea that politics is in a state of crisis. It raises so little interest that it is possible to talk of a trend towards de-politicization. The most commonly quoted cause is the 'behaviour of the political actors themselves', which refers in particular to the many scandals that have called their credibility into question. The voting in the recent European Constitution referendum seems to show that, even so, high patterns of detachment/distrust are not incompatible with a protest vote against the political mainstream.

In this context it is important to remember that 'there is no democracy without participation. . . . A political system can be free and democratic according to the law and its institutions and yet not be in its customs and social life. Similarly, it can be free and democratic in its customs and social life and not be in its law and institutions of power. A truly democratic society is one that is so in its law and institutions but, above all, in the individual's daily democratic practice' (Fernandes 2004: 36).

To return to the differences between the sexes – the most important point for the analysis being carried out here – it can be concluded that the women in all the countries, in a highly regular manner, are more detached from politics than men.

This difference regarding the universe in which ‘the political’ operates can be explained by a combination of different structural and cultural factors. On the one hand, the objective conditions of daily life for most of the women evaluated, particularly on the basis of a strict calculation of the hours spent on occupational activities and family responsibilities, mean that it is difficult for them to have any time available for any form of political participation, as happens so clearly in Portugal (Torres et al. 2004). It is also worth recalling that one of the most subtle forms of masculine domination is the form that is taken for granted on account of women’s self-assumption of the responsibility for family chores, even though, when they spend the same time at work as men, those chores should be also be divided on an equal basis.

But women’s more limited interest in politics or their more restricted availability to participate can also be explained by the existence of specific obstacles such as the way institutions and the political space themselves function (Viegas and Faria 2001). Their rhythms are difficult to combine with those of family responsibilities – from which men seem to be freed. From survey results in various countries it has also been persistently concluded that female ‘political activism’ always registers lower results than its masculine equivalent, though the differences are narrower in more developed countries. It can also be concluded from these surveys that women who are older, more religious, less well educated and not involved in the labour market are also more detached from politics (Inglehart and Norris 2003: 126). But among them all, as can be concluded from the ESS data, there remains a difference that is practically constant in all countries (see Figure 9). It may therefore make sense, as suggested above, to take

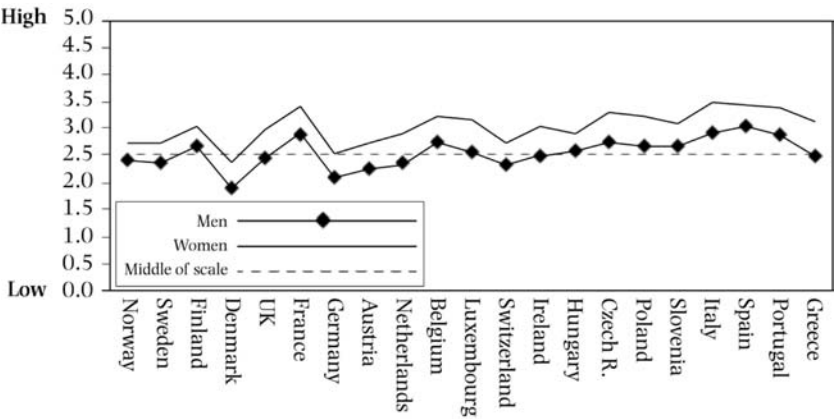


Figure 9: Synthetic index of detachment from politics (averages).

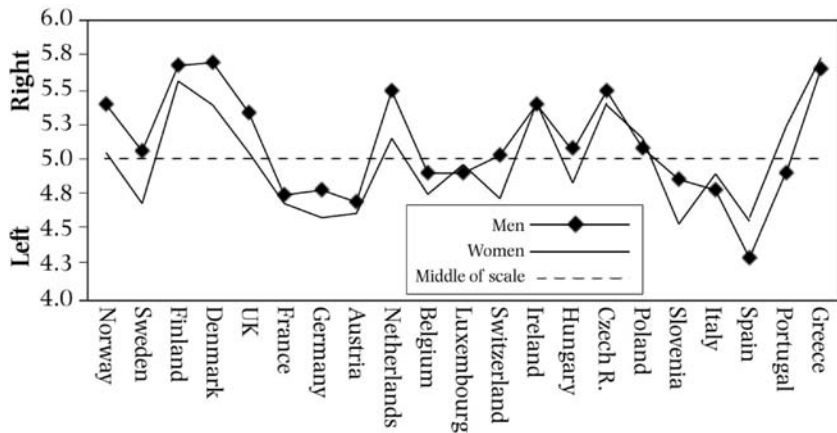
11 These results, however, should be interpreted with a certain amount of care since, as is well known, political self-positioning is inter-subjectively structured and thus, in international comparisons, account must be taken of the fact that the left/right classification does not carry the same meaning in all countries. Put differently, to be left-wing or right-wing is not the same thing in an established democracy or more recent democracies.

daily life and institutional and cultural constraints into account as factors that condition women’s interest and participation in politics.

### Political self-positioning

Most people avoid placing themselves on the left or the right, rather choosing the centre. We are clearly speaking of large groups (countries, men/women, etc.) and we know how the ‘central limit theory’, taken from statistics, has a homogenizing effect that masks individual differences and those of small groups. As is known, speaking in average terms is equal to speaking about what does not exist. Accordingly, we should read the data with prudence, stressing the fact that it only refers to small variations from the average in the left/right dichotomy. Some will say, however, that it is a matter of small details that are important and indicate clear regularities. The difference between the sexes may be taken as an example: in almost all the countries, women always position themselves slightly to the left of the men, except in Luxembourg, Poland and southern Europe, where they are slightly to the right of men.<sup>11</sup>

These findings are consistent with the results of the surveys on political self-positioning, and even voting, carried out since the eighties in the United States and most European Union countries. In effect, women systematically place themselves further to the left than men, even when voting (Inglehart and Norris 2003: 75–100). This trend has been termed the passage from a traditional gender gap to a modern gender gap. Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s it seemed an established fact that women always put themselves to the right of men, since the eighties it has been seen that, most systematically in the most developed countries, women tend to place themselves to the left of men.



Note: The form of the question was as follows: ‘In politics it is usual to talk of the left and the right. How would you position yourself on this scale, where 0 is the most left-wing position and 10 the most right-wing?’

Figure 10: Political self-positioning (averages).

Religion	Political self-positioning <sup>a</sup>			
	Catholic/Orthodox (>75%)*	Catholic (45–65%)**	Protestant majority***	Mainly without a religion****
Men	4.8	4.9	5.6	5.0
Women	5.0	4.7	5.4	4.8

<sup>a</sup>Scale: 0 = Left; 10 = Right

\*Ireland, Poland, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece.  $F(1,10595) = 11.187$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ;

$Eta^2 = 0.001$

\*\* Austria, Luxembourg and Hungary.  $F(1,1223) = 1.770$ ;  $p = n.s.$

\*\*\* Norway, Finland and Denmark.  $F(1,1141) = 1.770$ ;  $p = n.s.$

\*\*\*\* Sweden, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Czech Republic and Slovenia.  $F(1,19350) = 52.270$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ;  $Eta^2 = 0.003$

Table 2: Predominant declared religion according to political self-positioning.

12 It should be noted, however, that the differences are minimal and, except in Spain, are not statistically significant.

To explain this trend, which began to appear in the eighties in the United States when the female vote started to swing towards the democratic party, it has been suggested that left-wing parties tend to be more committed to the welfare state and public support services for children and the family and show more concern about ecology, education and reproductive rights, all of which are positions on which, as various opinion surveys show, women are particularly sensitive (Inglehart and Norris 2003: 90). On gender equality issues, the greater participation and affirmation of women in public life and politics (e.g. the question of quotas) and the fight to assert their rights and oppose discrimination are also topics that are generally tilted to the left. Initially, it may have been thought that the fact that women were progressively getting closer to men in their political choices, abandoning their former positions further to the right, may also be explained as the effect of expanded female education and participation in the labour market. In actual fact, however, many studies that also test these variables show the persistence of the difference between the sexes, this time with women always positioning themselves to the left of men (Inglehart and Norris 2003: 75–100).

In their positions on the roles of the state and the market in the economy these distinctions are maintained. It seems, then, that this is indeed a consistent option, notably among the younger generations.

But how can the systematic difference in southern countries be explained, where women's positions remain further to the right, in contrast to other European women?<sup>12</sup> The attempt to explain this difference revealed that there was no relationship between political self-positioning and variables such as age, schooling or the rate of female employment. However, as Table 2 shows, and Lipset has already shown (Inglehart and Norris 2003: 89), there are small variations related to the strong predominance of Catholicism. It can be seen that precisely in the countries where declared Catholicism/Orthodoxy is highly predominant (greater than

13 It is necessary to add that people in the southern countries hold different positions. Spain is the most left-wing (although Spanish women are to the right of their men, they are further to the left than all the other women in the south). Greece is the most right-wing country of all in southern Europe, followed by Portugal and Italy.

75%), as is the case in the four southern European countries, women self-position themselves politically to the right of men.

It may also be acknowledged that the set of characteristics that lead women to position themselves to the left in other European countries exists to a lesser degree in southern countries.<sup>13</sup> What may contribute to more right-wing self-positioning is the fact that the welfare state in the latter countries is inadequate and less active in promoting measures to protect the more sensitive interests of women or that more traditional thinking on family roles persists, given that in southern countries (with the exception of Portugal) female employment rates are lower and the weight of religion is higher. Similarly, the feminist movements in these countries are undoubtedly weaker: and these movements usually have a left-wing connotation.

Let us now see how left/right positions vary with generation in the different large groups of European countries. Figure 9 shows that, from the oldest to the youngest, there is a swing from positions more to the right to

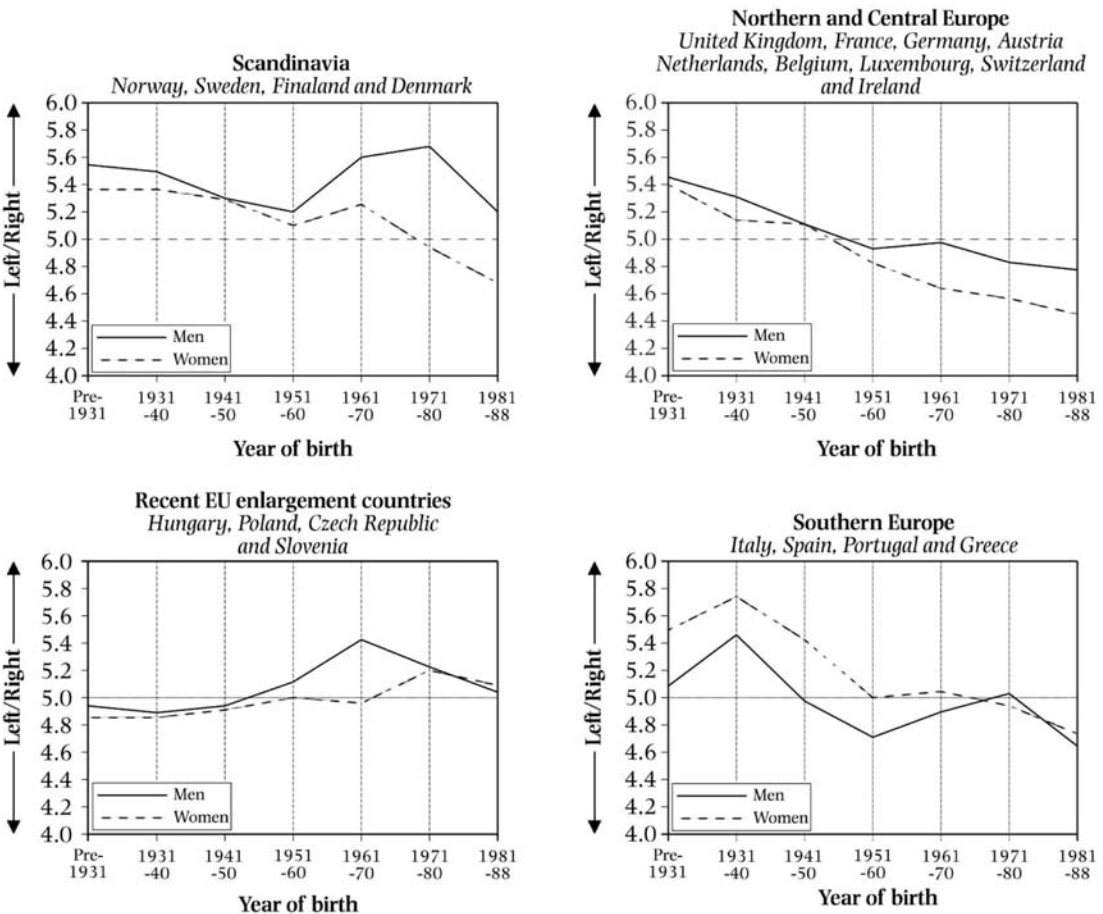


Figure 11: Political self-positioning by age group (averages).



positions more to the left in all the large blocs, except in the enlargement countries, where the movement is in the opposite direction, from left to right.

In Scandinavia, women are situated systematically to the left of men, regardless of age, with the exception of those born in and just after the Second World War (1941–1950), in which case their self-positioning coincides with that of men. In northern and central Europe, regardless of age, women are positioned systematically to the left of men, with the exception, identical to that in the Scandinavian countries, of those born in the forties, whose self-positioning coincides with that of men. There is also a systematic swing to the left, with the single exception of women born in the 40s, who stabilize their position. Women in the enlargement countries stand to the left of men, irrespective of age, though as a whole, and in contrast to all other countries, they swing from the left to the right. As already mentioned, in southern Europe the situation is completely different, as the women place themselves systematically to the right of the men, irrespective of age, with a minor exception for those born in the 1970s.

### Regulations in economic matters

With regard to the differences in the standpoint of the sexes, the results below shadow the analysis that we have been making of left/right positioning. In effect, it is also the women who give more support to state intervention in the economy and the need to intervene to re-balance income differences. Even more than the men, they believe that workers need strong trade unions to defend them, as can be seen in Table 3. In different words, on this front, too, they are more left-wing than men.

	Men	Women	Total	$\chi^2$
The less that government intervenes in the economy, the better is for the country*				
Agree	34.3	29.4	31.8	(2) = 152.815; $p = 0.000$
Neither agree nor disagree	26.0	31.3	28.7	
Disagree	39.7	39.3	39.5	
The government should take measures to reduce differences in income level				
Agree	67.5	73.5	70.6	(2) = 290.125; $p = 0.000$
Neither agree nor disagree	12.7	13.3	13.0	
Disagree	19.8	13.1	16.3	
Employees need strong trade unions to protect their working conditions and wages				
Agree	71.1	74.5	72.9	(2) = 93.677; $p = 0.000$
Neither agree nor disagree	14.8	14.7	14.8	
Disagree	14.1	10.8	12.4	

\*The formulation of this question contains a double negative which may have led to certain interpretation difficulties that did not arise in the other two questions, in which responses with very clear choices were obtained. We accept that this may also be one of the reasons that explains the greater choice of the response 'neither agree nor disagree'.

Table 3: Government intervention in the economic sphere (%).

14 'Private ownership of business and industry should be increased' (10)/'Government ownership of business and industry should be increased' (1) and 'The government should take more responsibility to ensure that everybody is provided for' (1) / 'People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves' (10).

Very similar results were obtained from the World Values Survey and the European Values Survey 1999/2000 (Inglehart and Norris 2003: 81) in the responses to two items directly related to the role of the state in the economy.<sup>14</sup> This shows once again that very generally, in most countries of the world, women are more favourable than men to state economic intervention.

Overall, once again analyzing the ESS results for the 21 countries, we find that the majority favour this intervention, since they are few ageing with the statement 'the less the government intervenes in the economy, the better for the country', registering average values under the middle of the scale: with the exception of Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Slovenia. That is, irrespective of the political banner of the different governments, most Europeans believe in state intervention in the economy and a reduction in social inequalities and, also, consider strong trade unions to be important.

If we now analyze the differences in the positions of Europeans as a whole with regard to the state's role in the economy, taking age and sex into account, we can observe interesting trends, as Figure 10 and Table 3 shows. On the one hand, the fewest differences in position by age group or sex are related to state intervention in the economy. With regard to the need for strong trade unions and intervention to reduce income inequalities, it is the youngest and, among these, the women, who are most in favour. Young Europeans therefore seem to have clear social concerns, supporting the regulatory function of the state and collective action on labour law. Could this be a 'protest' reaction to situations of precarious labour and social deregulation?

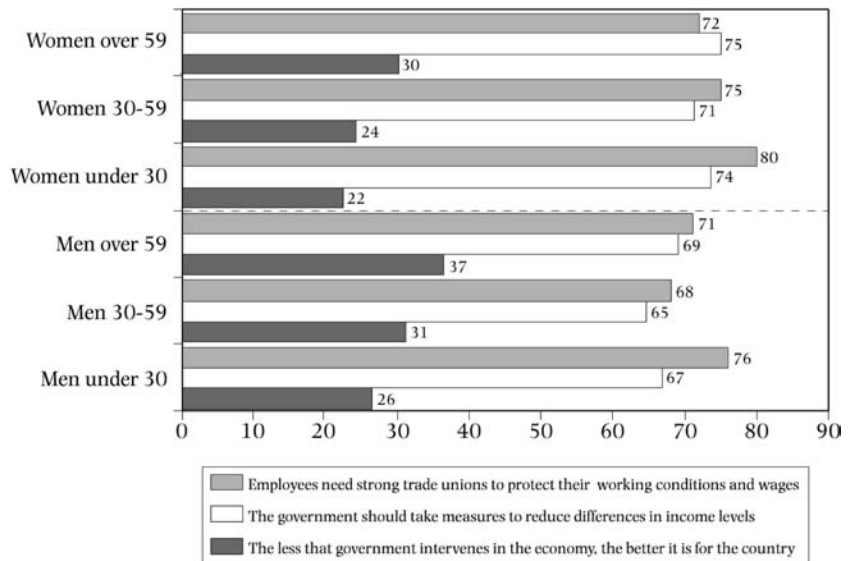


Figure 12: Regulation in the economic sphere by sex and age group (percentages).

## Political satisfaction and subjective well-being

The economy, the government, the state of the democracy, the state of education and the health services represent special dimensions in the area of political satisfaction.<sup>15</sup> Portugal and Poland are the only countries whose values are below the middle of the scale on all counts. Overall, satisfaction with the economy and the government are the aspects that record the lowest levels of satisfaction. In the case of Portugal, it is also to be noted that of all the ESS countries it was the one the most dissatisfied, in 2002, with two systems: education and health.

Another of the findings is that men and women present identical satisfaction/dissatisfaction profiles in all indicators, with the women being slightly more dissatisfied. An exception to this is the government, on which they coincide in dissatisfaction (see Figure 13).

The 'political satisfaction index' (explained variance = 55.6%;  $\alpha = 0.80$ ), which reflects the combined response for the five dimensions, allows us to see that the differences between men and women are not statistically significant in most countries and the differences between countries are greater than those between the sexes. Finland, Denmark and Luxembourg register the highest levels of political satisfaction, whereas Germany, Poland and Portugal present the lowest, as can be seen in Figure 14.

Both European men and women's perception of subjective well-being is positive, as is reflected in the respondents' combined answer to three questions relating to: 'satisfaction with life in general', 'the degree of happiness felt' and 'a health assessment'. This subjective well-being records its maximum in Denmark and minimum in Hungary, though it is still positive, as Figure 13 demonstrates. From the north to the south, a decrease in satisfaction is to be noted. Of the 21 countries, only the women in Italy,

15 Responses on a scale from 0 (extremely dissatisfied/bad) to 10 (extremely satisfied/good).

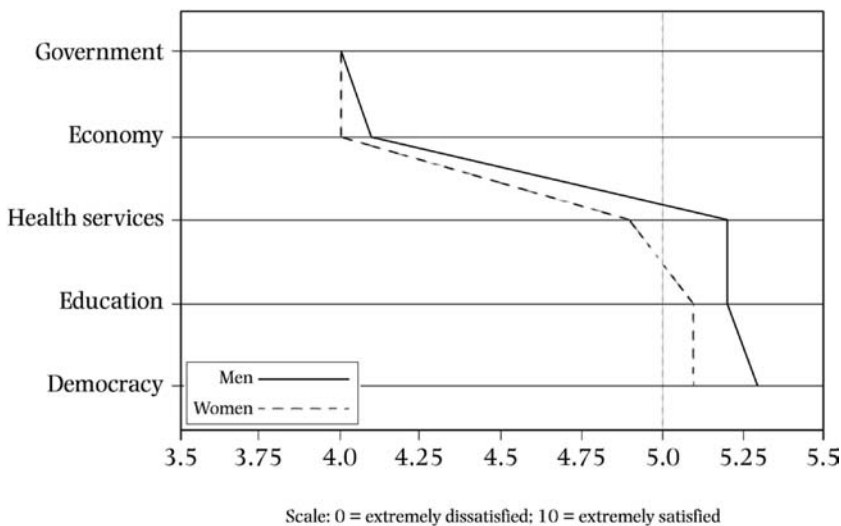


Figure 13: Satisfaction with the government, the economy, the health services, education and the democracy (averages).

16 Measured on the basis of an index formed from the three indicators mentioned. Explained variance = 63.4 per cent;  $\alpha = 0.70$ .

Portugal and Greece differ from the men ( $p < 0.05$ ), though the difference is very slight.

Political satisfaction seems to be a good predictor of the perception of subjective well-being ( $r^2 = 0.6961$ ).<sup>16</sup> It can be seen that the two are directly proportional to each other. Portugal and Poland are situated at the lower extreme of this relationship, whereas Denmark, Finland and Luxembourg are at the upper extreme, as Figure 15 shows.

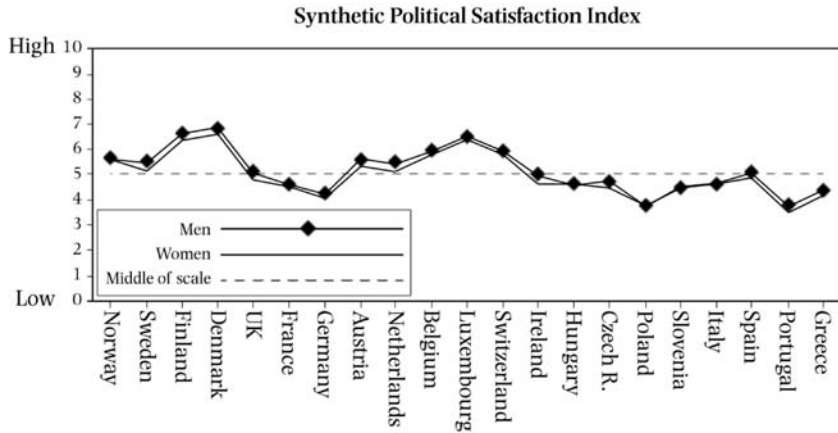


Figure 14: Satisfaction with the government, the economy, the health services, education and the democracy (averages).

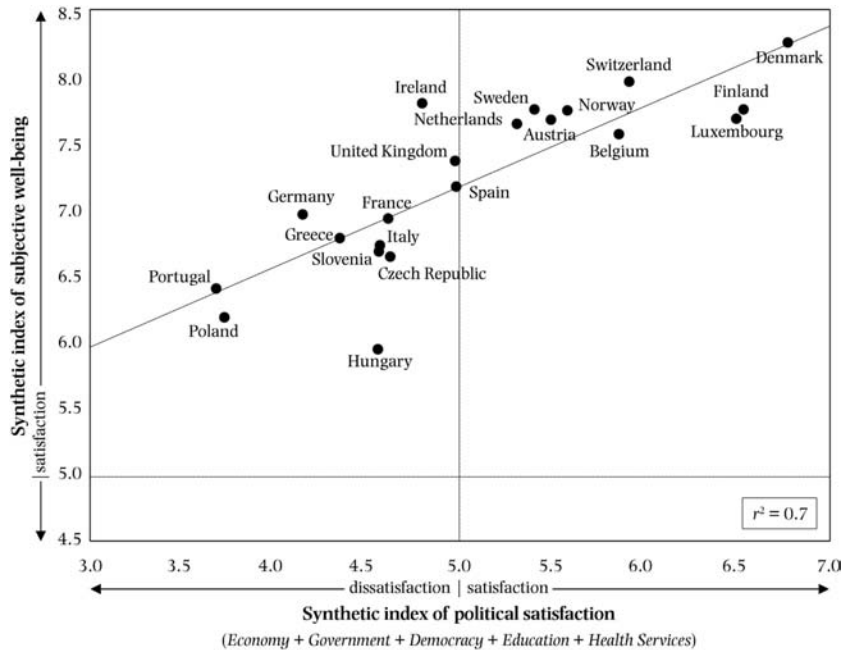


Figure 15: Political satisfaction according to subjective well-being (averages).

What this may indicate is that a set of aspects concerning the functioning of the government, the economy, the health systems, education or even democracy have effects on people's daily lives that condition their perception of subjective well-being. This is another way of saying that political options and the operation of institutions may not only affect daily life but also our intimate 'environment', as Giddens (1991) maintains when he refers to the close relationship between modernity and personal identity. Moreover, we saw above how a close correlation can be established between social trust (the way that others are envisaged in the context of social relationships) and political trust or trust in institutions.

It should be recalled that the greater the trust in the proper functioning of institutions and politics, the greater, too, the trust in others and in the networks of social relationships, as happens in Scandinavian countries. All of this thus leads us to believe that if institutions, which have so much to do with our daily lives, operate for the purposes they should and if they correspond to people's expectations, this translates into greater political trust and greater trust in others, on a much broader scale, and even influences feelings about personal life and private well-being. If it is true that many other aspects, from the interior to the exterior, contribute to our ability to feel better about ourselves, it is still important to stress the effects of the 'macro-environment' on the micro-scale of an individual's life, as can be noted in these ESS results.

### **The importance of the family, work, friends, leisure, politics, religion and voluntary work**

In the 21 countries under analysis, the aspects associated with feelings and affections, that is, the family, friends and leisure time, in that order, are considered most important in the life of an individual. Work appears in fourth place for both men and women and so it can be seen that these four values make up the hard core. As far as religion, voluntary work and politics are concerned, with average values below the middle of the scale, it is worth noting that religion registers average overall values above the middle line in Ireland, Poland, Italy and Portugal and voluntary work does the same in Luxembourg, Italy, Spain and Portugal. With average values slightly above the middle of the scale in Germany alone, politics is the aspect considered least important.

In showing the importance and priority that people give to the family, these results may be the cause of some surprise to the wider public, though not to the sociologists in the field. Persistent echoes of the idea of crisis in the family seem, at least superficially, to contradict this hierarchy of values, which has remained extremely consistent over the last two decades, as various surveys show. The choice of friends and leisure time for the second and third place may, however, represent some novelty, while it relativizes and reduces the importance of religion, voluntary work and politics.

On the level of values, the choices indicated confirm recent trends that various researchers recognize in the transformations and personal

attitudes relating to the family: individualization, secularization and emotionalization. In different words, it is an assertion of individual rights for example male/female equality and, within the family, greater respect and consideration for children's independence. It is a defence, on the level of values, though also of practices, of the idea that personal, matrimonial and family life are governed by secular principles and not religious or sacred rules. Finally, it is an enhancement of the value of feelings, the affections, leisure and chosen affinities, transferring emotional well-being and the quality of relationships to the centre of personal and family life, in opposition to traditional ways that lay importance on preserving pre-established roles, even against the will and the wishes of the people involved or at the price of their individual sacrifice. In brief, it is an arrangement of values displaying modern, not traditional, choices.

It is also important to add the reservation that, on the basis of the same average values, it is possible to uphold rather different interpretations or subjective significations that point in one or another direction. For example, following stereotyped thinking, it may be thought that southern countries tend to give more importance to the family than those in the north, which effectively is not the case. But, as there are slight differences between the north and south, closer analysis, taking the second, third and fourth places into account, could give us a better understanding of these questions.

In the set of seven aspects considered it can also be seen that there are more similarities than differences between women and men. The order of importance for both is the same as far as the fourth place, after which there is a lack of consensus on religion, last for men and fifth for women, and on politics, where the situation is reversed. There is a result here that also tends to go against the general opinion. It is commonly said that women attach more importance to the family and invest much less in their work than men do and, on the other hand, that men rank these aspects of life in exactly the opposite way: work first, then family. What in fact happens is that the ranking is exactly the same for both sexes. Male and female choices in their personal ranking of friends, leisure and work practically coincide with each other, as Table 4 and Figure 16 illustrate.

If we concentrate on the values traditionally considered as societal pillars (family, work and religion) we can see that the differences between countries are greater than the difference between men and women. As far as religion is concerned, the differences are considerably more important, with the women in all these countries assigning significantly more importance to it than the men. But what seems probably unexpected is that the choices of men and women are practically overlapping regarding the value attributed to work.

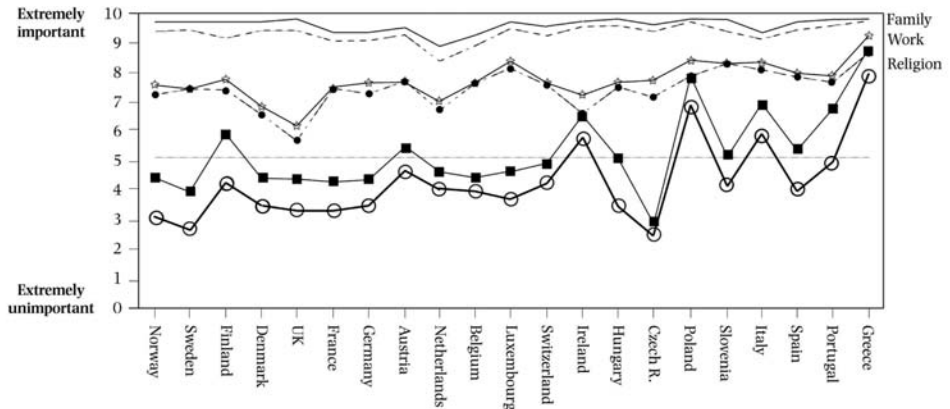
We also studied the 'age effect'. With few exceptions, it was not found to go against the ranking in the seven areas analyzed. In effect, whatever the age group, women and men put family in first place and friends in second, that is, the feelings and affections are central for both. Leisure

	Men			Women			Sig.	Eta <sup>2</sup>
	Average	Standard deviation	Order	Average	Standard deviation	Order		
Family	9.2	1.5	1	9.5	1.2	1	0.000	0.010
Friends	8.2	1.8	2	8.3	1.8	2	0.000	0.003
Leisure time	7.7	2.0	3	7.6	2.0	3	0.000	0.001
Work	7.5	2.7	4	7.3	2.8	4	0.000	0.001
Religion	4.2	3.3	7	5.3	3.3	5	0.000	0.026
Politics	4.5	2.6	5	4.0	2.6	7	0.000	0.010
Voluntary work	4.5	2.9	5	4.6	3.0	6	0.037	0.000

Scale: 0 = Extremely unimportant; 10 = Extremely important

Note: The question is asked in the following terms: 'how important is each of these things in your life', with responses on a scale of 0 (extremely unimportant) to 10 (extremely important).

Table 4: The importance to people's lives (averages).



	Explained variance		by country		by gender	
	Men	Women				
Family	—	----	F(20,36954)=65,308; p=0.000; Eta <sup>2</sup> =0.034	F(1,36954)=355,855; p=0.000; Eta <sup>2</sup> =0.010		
Work	—☆	—◆	F(20,36373)=142,787; p=0.000; Eta <sup>2</sup> =0.073	F(1,36373)=36,36; p=0.000; Eta <sup>2</sup> =0.001		
Religion	—■	—○	F(20,36849)=352,583; p=0.000; Eta <sup>2</sup> =0.161	F(1,36850)=997,714; p=0.000; Eta <sup>2</sup> =0.025		

Figure 16: The importance to people's lives (averages).

time takes third place and work fourth among the youngest and the oldest, irrespective of sex. In the 30–59 age bracket, work takes third place, with men putting it on the same level as friends, and women as leisure time.<sup>17</sup> In all age brackets, women assigned greater importance to religion than men, though only the oldest present values above mid-scale. Voluntary work and politics are given less attention by all ages. At the same time education, which is known to be assuming growing importance in the changes in values, correlates negatively with religion ( $r(36135) = (0.188, p = 0.000)$ ) and positively with friends ( $r(36172) = 0.124, p = 0.000$ ), leisure time ( $r(36040) = 0.103, p = 0.000$ ) and politics ( $r(36090) = 0.200, p = 0.000$ ). This is the same as saying that the higher the level of

17 That is, the men in this age group seem to attach more importance to sociability and the women to relaxing. Could this be a sign of the unequal division of household chores, which means that women have a heavier load in the household and therefore attach importance to leisure

time as time in which they are not working?

18 See Ramos (2006) for the method used to measure the indicators and an analysis of their structure

education, the lower the importance attributed to religion, on the one hand, and the higher the importance attributed to friends, leisure time and politics, on the other.

### Human values

As Vala points out, values ‘refer to abstract principles that guide and justify attitudes, opinions and behaviour. They make certain ways of thinking, feeling and acting desirable and other alternative situations less desirable or even undesirable’ (Vala et al. 2003: 29). Other authors try to establish a relationship between social roots and these ‘abstract guiding principles’. In his book on social values and representations, Almeida (1990) defines values as ‘the expression of long-lasting and organized systems of preference’ that can be analyzed and encountered on a social or individual plane as systems of incorporated dispositions. In addition to the conceptual and theoretical debate on the issue, this book presents a value matrix and framework based on two analytical axes: a partnership/self-centredness axis and a daily life/project axis. These generate four main value orientations, which themselves constitute indicators of different practices and behaviours. This proposal is supported by research which explores, in particular, the relationship between class, age and values.

In his highly detailed and exhaustive work Schwartz (1992) conceptualizes and proposes an ‘inventory of human values’, based on 21 constituent indicators of ten types of motivational values,<sup>18</sup> which are differentiated from each other by the goals and interests pursued. The

Motivational types	Aims	Interests
Hedonism	Pleasure and sensual gratification for oneself	Individual
Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence that is socially recognized	
Power	Social status and prestige, control over people and resources	
Self-direction	Independence of thought, action and choice	
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty and challenges	
Conformity	Control of impulses and actions likely to violate social norms or harm others	Collective
Tradition	Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas of traditional culture and religion	
Benevolence	Promotion of the welfare of our fellow men and women	
Security	Security, harmony, and stability of society, relationships and one’s self	Mixed
Universalism	Tolerance, understanding and promotion of the welfare of all people and of nature	

Table 5: Schwartz’s typology of human values.



results of this rich typology, which was adapted and applied in the ESS, will now be analyzed.<sup>19</sup>

On the basis of the association of ten types of motivational values it is possible to create four scores reflecting four macro-values, which the author states are of a higher order. Let us see how the 19 countries, and the men and women in them, are positioned in relation to these motivational types (Figure 17).

People in all the countries consider themselves ‘self-transcending’ (benevolence + universalism; Cronbach’s alpha = 0.71) – the women more so than the men – with a slight decrease as the scores move from Scandinavian and northern and central European countries to those of the enlargement and southern Europe. With regard to ‘self-enhancement’ (power + achievement; Cronbach’s alpha = 0.73), people in none of the countries identify positively with this type of value – the women even less than the men – with a slight increase as the scores move from Scandinavia and central and northern Europe to the enlargement and southern European countries.

As far as ‘conservation’ is concerned (conformity + security + tradition; Cronbach’s alpha = 0.74), in most countries the choices fall in the middle of the scale and only record positive values in the enlargement countries – with Poland and the Czech Republic gaining the highest scores – and in southern Europe. In most countries the differences between women and men are practically imperceptible: they register the biggest gap in the enlargement and southern countries, where it can be seen that

19 Schwartz’s value types have already been used in Portugal in different contexts. João Ferreira de Almeida used them in connection with the same ESS data that we have been analyzing, to explore the relationship between values, classes and political choices. See [www.aps.pt](http://www.aps.pt).

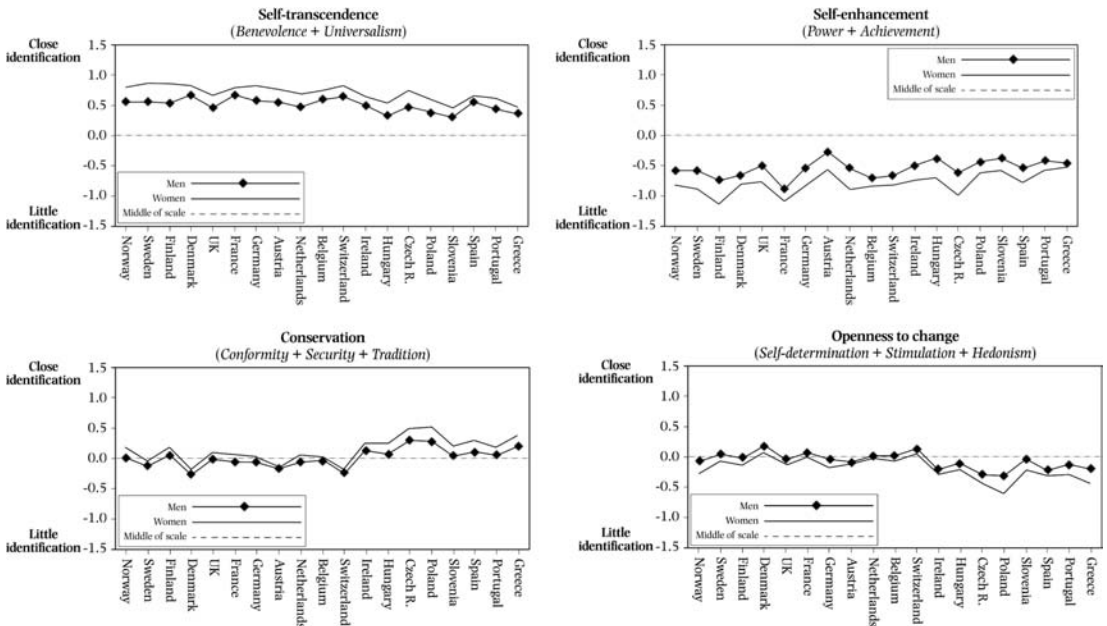


Figure 17: Higher-order motivational types.

20 The structural space configuration of the four values (analysed with the SPSS *multidimensional scaling/PROXCAL* procedure) is identical for men and women.

women are more conservative than men. With regard to the values relating to 'openness to change' (self-direction + stimulation + hedonism; Cronbach's alpha = 0.76), it can be seen that, as with 'conservation', people remain close to the middle of the scale in most countries, with Ireland and the enlargement and southern European countries even revealing a negative identification. Poland shows itself to be the 'least open' and Denmark and Switzerland as the 'most open'. In all countries, men are more open to change than women.

On first approach, the overall picture of male and female values in most European countries seems clear. Europeans see themselves as supporters of values that stress help for others and loyalty to friends (benevolence) and they attach importance to equal opportunities, respect for differences and the protection of nature (universalism). On the other hand, most of them have an image of themselves that portrays them as individuals who give less importance to wealth and control over others (power) or to success and great admiration and recognition from others (achievement).

As Figure 17 illustrates, endorsement of 'self-transcendence' and rejection of 'self-enhancement' are the clear choices of the majority in all countries. As far as 'conservation' or 'openness to change' are concerned, the positions are much closer to the middle of the scale, as if on this point they hesitate to give an extreme image of themselves. In most countries they neither clearly support nor vigorously reject the values of obedience and compliance with rules (conformity), or those of modesty, humility and tradition (tradition) or again those of personal and political security (security). Similarly, the majority do not categorically reject or endorse values and attitudes that underscore immediate pleasure (hedonism), creativity and independence (self-direction) or novelty, risk, adventure and challenge (stimulation).

With regard to 'conservation' and 'openness to change', it is worth mentioning that, although in most countries the choices are very close to the middle of the scale, the positions are clearer in Ireland and the southern and enlargement countries. The latter are more conservative and so, logically, less open to change, as Figure 17 illustrates. These small variations, which are consistent among themselves and in relation to other ESS data on these countries already analyzed, confirm the credibility of these results.

With reference to the differences between women and men it is interesting to see that, while there are no frontal disparities, the relative differences conform to predictable expectations.<sup>20</sup> Women tend to state more than men, that they are concerned about others and are supporters of universal human rights while, at the same time, they are less definite in their affirmations about success and power. This undoubtedly reflects their daily lives and the reality of the lives of many women who are deployed precisely in the care of others, through family responsibilities, or in occupational activities. It may be said, then, that these assertions of

greater benevolence, greater universalism and greater distance from concerns about power do in fact correspond to the stereotypes. But what can be said about the regular and clear-cut overall affirmation in all countries – by men and women – of such a distinctly positive agreement with ‘self-transcendent’ values and a clear detachment from those associated with power and achievement, or the ‘self-enhancement’ values?

Are Europeans closer to female than male stereotypes in their values? A more cynical view would explain this trend as the right response in terms of social desirability. But if this is so, is it a matter of indifference that ‘self-transcendent’ values are defined as desirable in all countries? Could such a dominant affirmation of interest in others and in equal opportunities have a compensatory function? And why, once again, is social desirability the same for men and women, in spite of the relative distances?

To answer these questions an analysis in greater depth is necessary, in another context. But it is still important to emphasize that there is great convergence in the personal choices between these results and those that were analyzed above in relation to the ranking of what is important in the individual’s life. When, in an order that coincides perfectly, men and women in most countries choose first the family and then friends and leisure time, followed by work, they show that they attach great importance to feelings and affections, or social and relational values. In other words, to a form of ‘self-transcendence’.

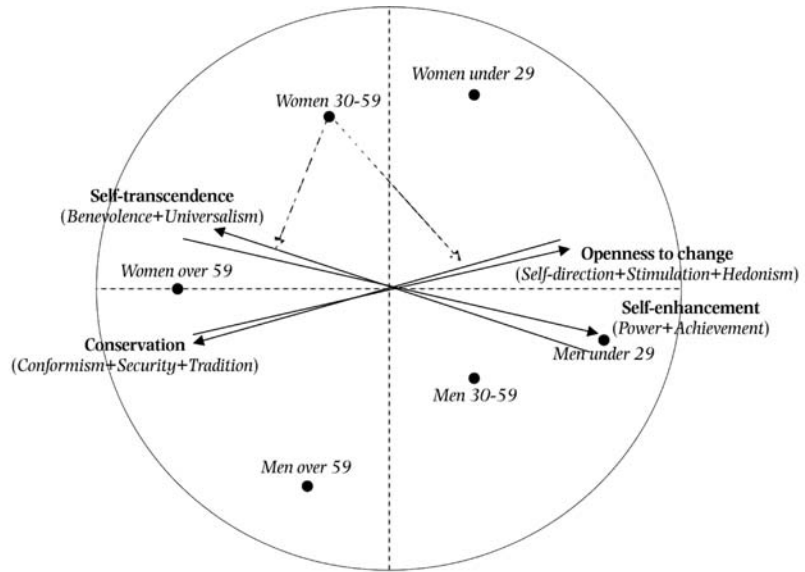
Once again, we can see the need to eschew those visions of a dichotomy that insist on making gender differences an essential factor. In Figure 18, which introduces age groups into the analysis, it is to be noted that the differences within the sexes are more important than those between them, as has already been stressed. This is evidence that an analysis solely centred on male-female differences conceals alterations in the value structure, alterations to which it is appropriate to be attentive.

In fact, women seem less close than men to values such as ‘openness to change’, as Figure 17 shows. But these values now seem to be associated with a specific group of younger women (under 30), whereas conservation, to which women proved to be closer overall, now emerges as being more closely associated with older men (over 59), as Figure 18 shows.

In turn, ‘self-transcendence’, which had more female support overall, also emerges with male associations, while the reverse takes place with ‘self-promotion’. In the first case, the value is associated with women aged 30-59, and in the second with men of the same age group.

An exploration of the effect of other variables led to the conclusion that education presents significant correlations ( $p = 0.000$ ), though they are very weak with ‘self-transcendence’ ( $r = 0.078$ ) and ‘self-promotion’ ( $r = 0.048$ ), and weak with ‘openness to change’ ( $r = 0.235$ ) and ‘conservation’ ( $r = 0.316$ ). The latter is the only negative correlation, associating conservation with a low educational level.

21 'Regardless of whether you belong to a particular religion, how religious would you say you are? On a scale of 0 (not at all religious) to 10 (very religious)'.



**Legend:**

The position of the categories in relation to values, is obtained by drawing a line perpendicular to each vector, imagining the position of the category in the respective intersection area. See, for example, that women aged between 30 and 59 are close to **Self-transcendence** and distant from **Conservation**. The closer to the arrow the greater is the agreement with the value.

\*SPSS/CatPCA. Cronbach Alpha = 0.999; Explained variance = 99.56%

Figure 18: Human values by sex and age.

**Religion**

It is worth giving a very succinct account of some of the results relating to religion. Figure 19 reports the answers in the different countries to the question on whether the respondent has a religion or not. Among the 21 countries analyzed, it was found that the majority in six declared that they had no religion: Sweden, the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and the Czech Republic, which represent around 36 percent of the Europeans surveyed, in population terms. This data illustrates what has been entitled the secularization of Europe, a fact to be seen in this reduced sense of affiliation and the progressive decrease in the practice of religion. There is still, however, a hard core of countries with a notably constant sense of belonging to a religion, that is, Poland, Ireland and the southern countries.

The ESS data also shows that women profess membership of a religion far more than men: 67.9 per cent and 59.3 per cent, respectively ( $\chi^2(1) = 296.492$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). In another question measuring religious sentiments, irrespective of whether an individual belonged to a religion or not,<sup>21</sup> the responses show that in all age groups women are on average more religious than men.

On a scale of 0–10, in the three age groups considered (under 30 years, 30–59 years and over 59 years) the women recorded values of

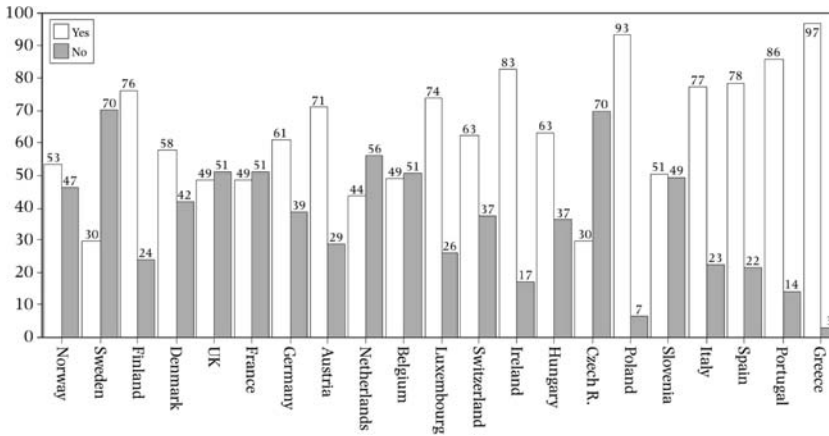


Figure 19: Religious affiliation by country (percentages).

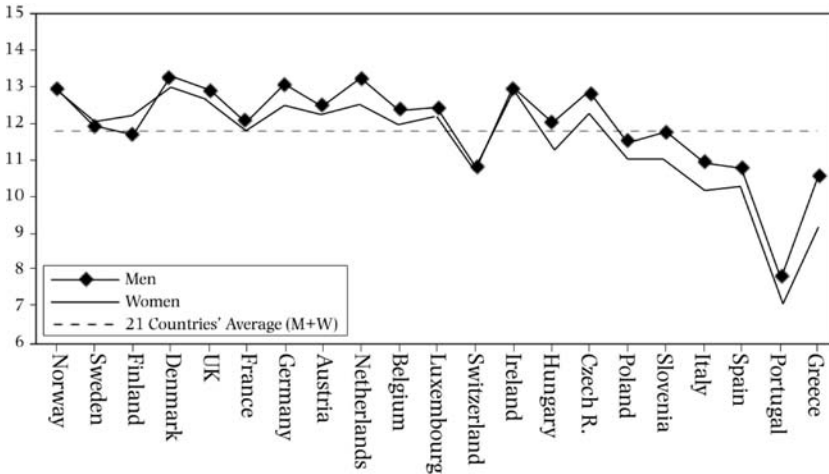


Figure 20: Years of education (averages).

4.6, 5.0 and 5.8 and the men 3.8, 4.1 and 4.7, respectively. In other words, only the oldest men and youngest women are close to each other (a difference of 0.1). At the same time, it can be stated that religious sentiment increases with age in both sexes.

## Education

The ESS results in this chapter are not good for Portugal. In spite of the fact that education has been a declared national necessity for the last 30 years, during which we have witnessed exponential growth in the population in education – in particular higher studies: the overall picture is not very bright. It is only necessary to take a look at Figure 20.

Only Switzerland, Poland and the south of Europe, plus Hungarian and Slovenian women, fall below the European average (11.8 years), with

Age group	21 countries		Portugal		Difference between Portugal and the 21-country average	
	(M+W)	(M+W)	Men	Women	Men	Women
60+	10,7	5,2	5,9	4,6	-4,8	-6,1
30-59	12,9	8,7	8,8	8,6	-4,1	-4,3
15-29	12,7	10,5	10	11	-2,7	-1,7
Total	11,8	7,4	7,7	7,1	-4,1	4,7

*Table 6: Education: average number of years in Portugal and Europe (averages, men and women)*

Portugal setting the sad record of 7.4 years. It is also to be noted that male-female differences are of very little importance though, with the exception of Norway, Sweden and Finland, women still record lower average overall values than men.

The Portuguese picture is not so bleak if we take age groups into account, in which case the differences are seen to narrow: from 5.5 years for the oldest Portuguese age group to 2.2 years for the youngest.

It is to be noted, however, that in this case it is the women who contribute most to Portugal's convergence with the European average. In the 30-59 years and over-60 years age groups the difference is in favour of the men but in the 15-29 years group it swings in favour of the women, with a value of (1.7 years as against (2.7 years for the men. Hence, we can draw a conclusion that has long ceased to be newsworthy: that of the increasing feminization of the upper educational levels.

But this feminization at the upper levels has not taken place in Portugal alone: the following figure shows that, in the youngest age group (15-29 years), women are being educated more than men in 15 of the 21 countries, and in particular in Portugal, as Figure 21 illustrates.

This leads to the conclusion that the feminization of the highest levels of education is not circumstantial but structural. The three situations in 21 where women have more education than men, among the whole population, increases to 15 in the youngest age group.

## Conclusions

From the analysis that we carried out on European attitudes and values it is not difficult to conclude that more similarities than differences were found between men and women. As a whole, the convergences are visible in most responses, especially with regard to what is considered important in life, the subjective perception of well-being, social and political trust, the values of citizenship, political self-positioning and exposure to the media. Although slight differences between the sexes were sometimes noted in each of these areas, they were never important.

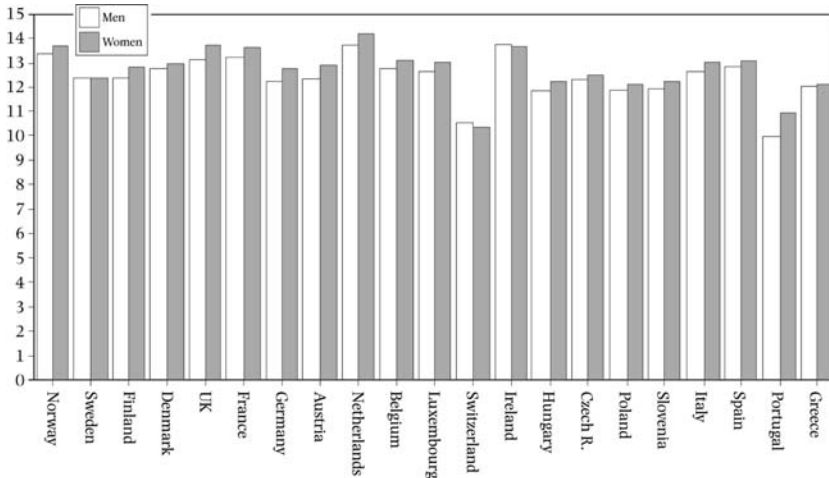


Figure 21: Years education in the 15–29 years age group (averages).

The difference acquired significance in only three areas: detachment from politics, the importance of religion and some of the areas connected with human values.

Generally speaking, European women register a greater detachment from politics and give more importance to the role of religion. On the level of trans-situational values there are also certain differences. Women tend to be more universalistic, benevolent and conformist than men. Put otherwise, according to Schwartz's types they place more importance on collective or mixed values and are more 'self-transcendent' and 'conservative' than men. Yet, even so, the differences do not mean that men and women are frontally opposed: they are reflected, rather, in variations of emphasis. Following this result, it will be very difficult to maintain that men are the sons of Mars and women the daughters of Venus.

Furthermore, what should be stressed in these conclusions as regards values – in total contradiction of the stereotypes – is that men, just like women, evaluate attitudes of universalism and benevolence positively and those of power, self-promotion and competition negatively. In other words, ultimately, in contrast to what male socialization in peer-groups and the family may be – which still emphasize the behavioural differences between the 'real' man and woman – when the two sexes are asked to give a completely anonymous opinion, they transmit the image that they tend to stress the same attitudes and value configurations as positive.

Although it is accepted that the effects of 'social desirability' always exist in these statements, the fact that men and women want to transmit an image of themselves that is identical must raise questions about more essentialist positions or ones that credit the biological differences with direct, unequivocal and lasting effects on perception and behaviour.

Furthermore, these close positions between the two sexes on attitudes and values have already been included in the conclusions of other research with more local observations (Prince-Gibson and Schwartz 1998).

Does this absence of a great distance between the sexes in values and attitudes mean that men and women tend to have similar experiences of life and that, in the end, it makes little sense to insist on the need for gender equality? Not at all. To give the best answer to such questions, it is worth returning to what was said about the points of greatest divergence that persist.

A dimension with a greater distance between women and men is the degree of detachment from politics, measured according to their overall interest and their availability to take part. There are two main reasons for this difference. On the one hand, we know that most European women have jobs and combine their occupation with family responsibilities, which are implicitly and explicitly assigned to them as their main responsibility, regardless of whether they work outside the home or not. Accordingly, they have little time for other activities, a fact that surveys on the use of time plainly demonstrate. The obvious conclusion is that objective conditions very scarcely favour female availability for politics, or even interest in it.

On the other hand, it is certain that the way the world of politics operates is also a reason, beginning with the fact that there are few women in this field and that the specific ways in which that world functions – irregular hours and implicit rules and regulations that favour those without other responsibilities such as family members – tend to produce effects that exclude women (Viegas and Faria, 2001). Thus we have the double effect of exclusion and self-exclusion. These are mechanisms that are generated in daily social life, with powerful symbolic effects, too. They make female participation difficult and impose the need for special measures – for example quotas – to combat what is being recognized as the serious democratic deficit of very limited female participation in politics.

However, it is of interest to underscore, as the ESS data shows well, that even if European women declare less availability for or interest in politics this does not prevent them, when called on to give their opinion, from registering specific choices that make their ideas clear. It is highly revealing, for example, that in most countries it is the political forces that are most concerned about gender equality or with policies that may directly affect women's day-to-day life, those that women support. In this respect, as has been seen, they occupy a position to the left of men in most European countries outside those in the south. A similar effect can be seen when women, especially the youngest, assert the importance of government action in combating social inequalities and government intervention in the economy, or when they clearly defend the need for strong trade unions. This trend for women in most countries to occupy positions usually more associated with left-wing parties was also one of the results identified by Inglehart and Norris (2003).



Greater detachment from politics does not, therefore, signify a lack of ability to judge or choose. What this confirms is that, if we seek a better understanding of the phenomena of female political participation, instead of seeking the essence of an aversion to politics in 'the nature of women', it makes more sense to analyze the social processes at the root of it. These processes are what promote exclusion, in the same way that they nourish and reproduce inequalities. Furthermore, an analysis of the conditions of the huge majority of women's lives and existence, along with their strategic place in the reproduction of the species, will certainly help to explain why they systematically attach more importance to religion than men. But this field demands specific in-depth analysis that is impossible here.

Returning to the more global ESS results, the difference between the sexes in educational levels attained should be noted. We can state here, too, as we concluded for political positions, that the traditional gender gap has become a modern gender gap. In effect, whereas women were less well educated than men in the past, nowadays it is clear that the youngest European women attend more years of education on average than their male counterparts.

To finalize this transverse view of the ESS data on gender differences, it is worth underlining that this exercise reveals the need to discard stereotyped positions. The most flagrant conclusion is the convergence of the two sexes on a vast range of attitudes, opinions and values: it challenges attempts to essentialize gender differences. But differences were also found that serve to combat the illusion of a similarity that does not otherwise correspond to any daily experience. The differences of position that were identified in a localized form can be related back, among other factors, to social processes, circumstances in life and the inequalities and real discrepancies that still persist between men and women.

It is also certain that very general positions and overall data are being dealt with here. For a better understanding of each of the positions and situations mentioned, finer analyzes and other methodologies are certainly required.

This exercise has functioned, however, as a way of deconstructing current views which are often interposed like an ideological curtain, complicating an understanding of the real situation. Moreover, the issues of equality and the difference between men and women tend to provoke paradoxical discourse nowadays. Ulrich Beck indicates what has changed in recent years while at the same time underlining the persistent inequalities. He calls attention to these paradoxes, asserting that it is precisely because there have been significant advances in male-female equality that continuing inequalities stand out even more clearly in our consciousness (Beck 1992).<sup>22</sup>

In truth, what the changes in the last 100 years and the protagonism of women have also shown is the successive destruction of conceptual barriers relating to the consequences of the real biological differences between women and men. This process still has a long course to run.

22 After indicating the great gains in equality between the sexes at the level of ideas, without omitting the deeply-rooted resistance to true change, he states '[t]his has seemingly the paradoxical effect that the increased equality brings the continuous and intensifying inequalities even more clearly into consciousness' (Beck 1992: 103). This topic is dealt with in much greater depth in a more recent book written with Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

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