

7-11-1997

Cleavages of Political Values among Generations in Brazil

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp>



Part of the [International Economics Commons](#), [Latin American Studies Commons](#), [Other Political Science Commons](#), and the [Other Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Editor, IBPP (1997) "Cleavages of Political Values among Generations in Brazil," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*. Vol. 2 : Iss. 11 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol2/iss11/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Bulletin of Political Psychology by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact commons@erau.edu.

Title: Cleavages of Political Values among Generations in Brazil

Author: Editor

Volume: 2

Issue: 11

Date: 1997-07-11

Keywords: Materialist, Postmaterialist

Abstract. This article was written by Professor of Psychology Fabián Echegaray, Professor of Sociology Paulo Krischke, and Director of Institutional Ethics Aluir Toso. All three researchers are at the Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina. They posit and provide supporting theory and data that values which are postmaterialist (emphasizing psychological well-being and self-actualization) as opposed to materialist (emphasizing materialistic goods) are more likely to be displayed by younger than older Brazilians and by those with higher than lower social class. Thus older, lower class Brazilians will be most materialist and younger, higher class Brazilians will be most postmaterialist. The paper was presented at the III Conference on Political Behavior in Brazil and Latin America, Florianopolis, June 11-13, 1997.

Theory Over two decades ago, Ronald Inglehart (The Silent Revolution, 1971) advanced a theory of value change as a function of generational replacement in society. At the core of his argument lies the notion that individuals hold a hierarchy of needs. Once basic needs of a physiological and economic nature are satisfied, other needs of a social and psychological nature come to take their place and motivate individuals' attitudes and behavior. Accordingly, individuals may display value priorities that put the emphasis on materialistic goods (so-called "materialist values"), such as physical and economic security, or on psychological well-being and self-actualization (so-called "postmaterialist values").

The process of value change derives from the dynamics of political socialization forces and economic influences. From the socialization perspective, individuals who have grown up in an environment of scarcity and economic insecurity will prioritize materialist values. On the other hand, if their context was one characterized by having their basic needs of shelter, food, and education satisfied, they will tend to pursue postmaterialist values. However, these generalizations are moderated by the presence of short-term forces such as the oscillations of the economy that may stimulate the upsurge of materialist values in times of high inflation, recession, or unemployment, and--conversely--may encourage a more vocal presence of postmaterial values in times of low inflation, growth, or job stability.

Hypotheses As Brazil has recently moved towards increasing economic stability--after the Real Economic Plan was launched in July 1994 (see <http://www.fazenda.gov.br/real.html>)--one expects to find evidence of a process of value differentiation across individuals from opposing age cohorts along the lines of materialist/postmaterialist values. Furthermore, as improvement on the basic conditions of living and on social mobility has been a visible feature of progress in the last two decades, these differences in the respective socialization environments of generations should translate into value cleavages.

According to our theoretical expectations, Brazilians of the younger age cohort (15-24 years old) will tend to display postmaterialist values in a more intensive manner than those at the older age cohort (60 years old and older). As individuals are not only influenced by generational factors or life-cycle experiences but also by social class, one should also expect to find a more intense postmaterialist value profile among upper-class youngsters, whereas the bulk of materialists should concentrate among the group of lower-class elders.

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Methodology To test our hypotheses, we proceeded to compare the attitudes of two populations towards a ranking of value priorities. Interviewees were asked to select two out of four alternatives towards which the government should give priority: (1) to maintain order, (2) to give more participation to people in important decisions taken by the government, (3) to fight price increases, and (4) to protect freedom of expression. Those interviewees selecting items (1) and (3) were classified as holding "materialist values." Those selecting items (2) and (4) were classified as holding "postmaterialist values." The remaining combinations were understood as representing "mixed values."

We compared two samples, one drawn from the urban population of the four largest capital cities of the country (São Paulo, Rio, Rio, and Salvador) and the other from the city of Curitiba. The first study was conducted upon a multistage, random sampling design in June 1996 for a total number of 1080 interviewees. The second study was performed on the basis of a proportional quota design in Curitiba in July 1996 for a total of 440 interviewees. In view of the socioeconomic characteristics of these cities and their different crime records, this research design provided the opportunity of contrasting two environments that illustrate important socialization differences at the aggregate level. The urban areas that are marked by higher social inequalities and higher crime rates were compared with Curitiba.

Results (Data tables are available from Professor Echegaray at market@portadig.com.br)

1. How do Brazilians prioritize different values? Interestingly, most Brazilians display "mixed" values, revealing a psychological situation of transition in their value matrix. This seems consistent with the new set of stimuli at the macro level, as the combined experience of economic stabilization and democratic deepening has stimulated a greater feeling of material security and a highlighted the efficacy of political voicing.

Consistent with theoretical expectations, value variations between samples reproduce differences in the socialization environment. Specifically, a city like Curitiba, which stands out for its relative stability and equality compared to most other cities in Brazil, proves to be a context more favorable for nurturing postmaterialist beliefs. In contrast, the top three Brazilian capitals, long ago characterized by high crime rates, unequal distribution of wealth, and higher exposure to economic cycles of unemployment and price hikes, represent a context where materialist values are more likely to be present.

2. How do value distribution relates to different age cohorts?

Also meeting expectations, we found a strong contrast in values upheld by different age cohorts. Thus, respondents sixty years old or older systematically display more concern with materialist issues than those in the fifteen to twenty-four-years-old cohort. Conversely, the latter group shows a more intensive pattern of postmaterialist values.

This match with theory also occurs across contexts in relation to the argument of differential socialization stimuli. Namely, youngsters in Curitiba are more keen to reveal postmaterialist values than their peers in the 3 top capital samples. Likewise, older people in Curitiba embrace postmaterialist values more than their peers residing in the São Paulo, Rio and Salvador areas.

Concluding Remarks

This first attempt at replicating Inglehart's value change theory in Brazil reveals that the distinction between materialist/postmaterialist values may exist and is useful in capturing differences in beliefs.

Furthermore, this attempt supports the argument that generational cleavages lie behind those value differences. Finally, it shows that environmental conditions are key in shaping value priorities, as they embody different socialization experiences in terms of economic-physical security.

Yet, we need to know more about this subject. For example, how independent is this difference in sociopolitical values from different levels of schooling and income? Do youngsters of different social classes uphold value priorities in a more similar fashion than older people--as the generational argument would suggest--or do people in the same income level have closer beliefs regardless of their age?

In the future, our research will focus on these questions, as well as on the issue of how consequential these differences in values are and what kind of political consequences they have. (Editor's Note: IBPP readers might want to compare this article with that of Sangster & Reynolds (see below) to facilitate guidelines for future research in this area.) (See Inglehart, R. (1971.) *The silent revolution*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Inglehart, R. (1990.) *Culture shift*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Sangster, R.L., & Reynolds, R.W. (1996.) A test of Inglehart's socialization hypothesis for the acquisition of materialist/postmaterialist values: The influence of childhood poverty on adult values. *Political Psychology*, 17, 253-269.) (Keywords: Materialist, Postmaterialist.)