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**Individual Tolerance: The contrary effects of the social context.**


The sources of individual tolerance towards different social groups have been subject of many empirical studies. But, these analyses have been considering two levels at best, for example by considering individual attitudes and the affiliation to a country. Here, this paper goes a step further and applies a three levels approach. Database is the World Value Survey of 1999; the sub sample comprises about 18,000 respondents from 16 European countries and 147 European regions. Dependent variable is an index constructed from the attitudes toward such different social groups as immigrants, communists, right-wing extremists, and others.

It is shown that there work contrary processes at the regional and the national level: As expected, national prosperity raises the individual tolerance. But, regional prosperity lowers it. Possible explanations are that regions with a high average occupational status attract social minorities and that this in-flow results in higher competition in terms of group threat. Another explanation can be that these regions are highly competitive in terms of internal rivalry and that this pressure results in a lower level of tolerance independently of the presence of social minorities.

Keywords: Intolerance, tolerance, social context, multilevel
1. Introduction

Individual tolerance towards different social groups and its sources have been subject of many empirical studies (Stouffer, 1955; Rohrschneider, 1999; Persell et al., 2001, Sotelo, 2002; Mondak and Sanders, 2003). This research has pointed out various likely sources of social tolerance: At the individual level personality traits, socio demographic characteristics, and self interests are considered frequently. In addition, group level influences such as the feeling of treats or economical turbulences are taken into account as well. Very advanced approaches also combine both levels (Quillian 1995, 1996; Peffley and Rohrschneider, 2003). These studies pointed out that both the regional and the national level influence the individual attitudes. Thus, time is ripe for a three level approach. This paper, therefore, sets out to show that the consideration of the individual, the regional and the national level is superior to two level approaches and results in new insights.

This paper is organized as follows. Theoretical approaches and considerations about the sources of individual tolerance will be brought forward in part two. In section three the data set and the regional classification and characteristics are described. Part four shows the results of different multilevel models. This section is followed by a discussion in part five and conclusions in part six.
2. The sources of tolerance

In this section different considerations about the sources of individual tolerance are discussed. In doing so, theories at the individual level are presented initially. Afterwards approaches referring to the group level and the social context are presented.

Individual level

Theories mentioned in this regard are the self-interest approach, social psychological assumptions, and approaches with a focus on correlations between social characteristics and individual tolerance (Quillian, 1995, 1996; Sotelo, 2002). In addition to these approaches we will also discuss the exposure to different institutions and other circumstances that aid the development of tolerant views.

The self-interest approach emphasis that individuals develop prejudices towards groups and individuals they compete with (Quillian, 1995). This simple assumption can be applied in many regards and is closely related to the group threat theory that will be explicated later on. Anyway, Quillian (1995) points out that people who are less qualified in terms of education or occupational position compete stronger with other social groups such as immigrants and, thus, are less tolerant. But, interests also depend on the social framework. We have, thus, to bear in mind that self-interests vary with exposure to different frames and social contexts (Dobbin, 2004). Finally, it has to be mentioned that this approach has difficulties to explain why individuals who are not threatened also display intolerant views.
THESIS: Competition with other social groups results in less tolerant views. Those people who are less qualified will be less tolerant, especially in highly competitive contexts.

Social psychological approaches mention individual cognitive processes and emotions that are more or less subconscious (Quillian, 1995; Sotelo, 2002). Here, rich literature can be found. A well-known approach is the theory of Adorno et al. (1950). It asserts that views held by adults are a result of their personality orientations developed during childhood. Characteristics of an authoritarian personality are for example uncritical attitudes toward idealized moral authorities of the in-group, a tendency to be on the lookout for people who violate conventional values, identification with power figures, or an exaggerated assertion of strength and toughness. In addition to these personality traits, religious beliefs have to be mentioned as well. Research has shown that people with strong religious beliefs are less tolerant than those with weaker beliefs (Golebiowska, 1999; Sotelo, 2002). Another approach referring to individual attitudes is the materialism–postmaterialism dimension of Ronald Inglehart (1998, 1999). In a nutshell, Inglehart assumes that individuals who have a better material endowment need not worry about their existence and, thus, are able to develop postmaterialist attitudes such as environmentalism, support for human rights, tolerance towards different social groups and so forth. It, thus, is asserted that post materialist attitudes can develop within highly developed countries and environments more easily.
THESIS: People with authoritarian, strong religious and materialist beliefs will be less tolerant.

We also want to put strong emphasis on the exposure to universalistic, tolerance aiding principles and processes. For example, Quillian (1996) argues that Americans became less racist once social science and human principles were taught in school. In fact, there are findings that education is important just for those cohorts that attended school after the implementation of these courses. Peffley and Rohrschneider (2003) have developed a model of democratic learning and shown that the exposure to democratic processes strengthens the individual tolerance. In this regard Homans (1974) already mentioned that in the long run and with some lag people tend to adjust their attitudes and behaviors to the factual conditions. In short, the embedding in an environment that puts emphasis on democratic forms, human rights and the like will result in more tolerant views (see later paragraphs on contextual factors). Beside an exposure to permissive environments, the use of political rights, the involvement in political actions as well as strong democratic attitudes and political interest were mentioned by many researchers as tolerance aiding factors (Verba et al., 1997; Golebiowska, 1999; Sotelo, 2002; Guerin et al. 2004). In general it is assumed that a higher involvement and political interest result in more tolerant views. Talking about exposure, the varying strength of movements has to be considered too. For example, the civil rights movements had its peak in the 1960ies (Quillian, 1996). Thus, the influence and impact of movements can be restricted to particular time period and to a particular cohort.
THESIS: People with strong democratic views and those who attend tolerance-fostering institutions such as higher education will be more tolerant.

Some of these theories are difficult to proof empirically in a direct way since we are restricted to existing data sources. We, thus, often have to use socio demographic variables as approximations and control whether or not their effects are in line with our assumptions. The most frequently used variables are age, gender, education, income, and occupational status. Considering the arguments of group threat and competition for jobs, the threat for low qualified jobs is larger than for high qualified. Thus, we can expect that people with a higher status will be more tolerant than individuals with lower occupations, unless there is strong competition among the professionals, too. Similar arguments apply to the educational level and the income. Fewer struggles for existence ease the development of more tolerant views and post-materialist values. With regard to the gender it has been shown that women show less political tolerance than men (Stouffer, 1955; Verba et al., 1997; Golebiowska, 1999).

Contextual effects

A substantial source of individual prejudices is the feeling of a group threat (Blumer, 1958; Quillian, 1995, 1996). The core argument of this group threat theory is that social groups compete for scarce goods such as jobs and that stronger competition results in stronger prejudices. One important factor is the size of the rivaling group. The larger it is, the stronger the alleged threat. Additionally to the size of the group, economic circumstances contribute essentially to the amount of perceived threat. During periods of
economic decline, the competition for scarce goods such as jobs and the like increases. Thus, other people are more likely perceived as a threat (Bellah and Sullivan, 1981; Persell et al. 2001).

**THESIS:** Inhabitants of countries and regions with a competitive environment such as high unemployment rate will be less tolerant.

Another important contextual factor is institutions, as pointed out by the new institutionalism (Meyer et al., 1997; Drori et al., 2003; Ramirez, 2006). Human rights and their spreading around the world are of particular importance in our regard. It is shown that human rights and related institutions were implemented in many nations all around world (Tsutsui and Wotipka, 2004). Since Quillian (1996) has argued that the implementation of social science in the curricula of schools in the US had an effect on the attitudes of the students, we can also expect that the presence of institutions dealing with human rights and the like will influence the respondents. The presence of NGOs and IGOs dealing with human rights can be expected to propel more tolerant views. The political regime can be important as well. Peffley and Rohrschneider (2003) propose a model of democratic learning that emphasizes a relationship between the presence of a democracy and the level of individual tolerance. Furthermore, the level of autocracy and other repressive forms of politics won’t foster tolerant views. Previous research has pointed out that the inhabitants of post communist countries are less tolerant than those of western countries. This can be an aftermath of the communist system, since a lag between the factual conditions and the individual views can be expected (Homans, 1974). On the
other hand their intolerant views also can be an expression of worries about the vulnerability of the new democratic institutions (Bahri & Burnett, 1997). Of course, the degree of exposure is different for different social groups. Here we can draw on literature on new-institutionalism. According to this approach, highly educated people, professionals, and urbanites are more exposed to such scripts. Furthermore, as Schofer and Hironaka (2005) point out, the possibility of a diffusion of institutional characteristics is much more likely when institutions are highly structured, the actors are influenced at different levels of the social structure, and when the institutional setting is persistent over time.

**THESIS:** People become more tolerant if there are many institutions (NGOs, IGOs) dealing with human rights present. Furthermore, the political system and its history shape individual attitudes. Thus, inhabitants of more democratic systems will be more tolerant than those of (former) authoritarian and communist systems.

On the basis of these theoretical considerations it becomes clear that a two level model is not appropriate by large. Some arguments can be applied just for the entire country – for example, being a former communist country. Socioeconomic arguments on the other hand can be applied to various levels at the same time. National prosperity, regional competition, and local circumstances can have an independent effect. We, thus, have to balance between these theoretical considerations and the limitations that arise from our data. Here, we apply a three level approach, considering the individual characteristics as well as the regional and the national context in detail. The local level is represented by
the size of hometown. More detailed analyses are not possible due to the limitation that arises from data.

3. Data and Coding

The empirical analyses of this paper are based on the World Value Survey of 1999/2000. For the multilevel analyses only such European countries were considered for which regional data was available. Level three are 16 European countries. These countries were divided into regions and, thus, result in 147 level two units. Level one comprises 17,726 individuals.

The analysis was done with the program MLwiN (www.mlwin.com). Dependent variable is the individual tolerance. Therefore an index was computed from an item battery asking whether or not people would mind having a member of different social groups as a neighbor. We restricted our analysis to the following groups: people with a criminal record, of different race, heavy drinkers, emotionally unstable people, immigrants or foreign workers, people who have AIDS, drug addicts, homosexuals, Jews, Muslims, gypsies, left wing extremists, right wing extremists, people with large families, and Hindus. In a next step the answers were summed up and divided by the number of valid replies. The index, thus, goes from 0 to 1 with 0 standing for tolerance and 1 for intolerance. It was multiplied by -1000 for the sake of a better readability. Hence, a higher value stands for a more tolerant view.

The following independent variables were included from the World Value Survey. Age, gender, education, occupational status, income, and size of hometown were used as exogenous variables. Age was entered in years, gender as dummy, and education
as an eight-point scale with one standing for an incomplete primary education and eight for a university degree. The size of the hometown was also measured by an eight point scale with 1 standing for a small village with 2000 or less inhabitants and eight for a town with 500,000 or more inhabitants. The occupational status was measured by the ISEI prestige score (Ganzeboom and Treiman, 1996). The ISEI score was computed from the ISCO Code, whereas for economically non-active individuals the ISEI score of the main breadwinner was ascribed\(^3\). The household income is the only available income indicator. It was measured in a standardized form, going from 1 (low income in terms of the national level) to 10 (high income in terms of the national level).

Furthermore, some regional and national characteristics are considered as well. Regional and national socio-economics characteristics were drawn out from the regional statistics of Eurostat (europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/). Here, the national prosperity was measured by GDP per capita in PPP in Euro. The regional prosperity gap was entered as the difference of national and regional prosperity (country level - regional level). Furthermore the national and regional unemployment rates as well as their ratio (national / regional unemployment rate) were considered too. Political characteristics were drawn out from the Polity Data Set IV which is available at the University of Maryland (www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/polity). Here, the following characteristics were considered: The duration of democracy, measured by the year from which on the democratic elements of a system were stronger than the autocratic elements. The highest strength of autocracy since 1945; here the 10 point scale from the Polity Project was used and the highest value of autocracy since 1945 was taken (0 stands for no autocracy and 10 for an extremely strong autocracy). A similar characteristic was used for the strength of democracy with 0
standing for no democratic elements and 10 for a highly developed democracy. Additionally a dummy variable was considered for countries with a communist history. The exposure to international scripts was measured by the presence of NGOs and IGOs. The total number of these institutions within each country was taken from the Yearbook of International Organizations (Union of International Associations, 1999) and standardized by the population size.

4. Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Tolerance</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Tolerance</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>935</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>1510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>1742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>962</td>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>1598</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>1928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>2367</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>1846</td>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>1886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>984</td>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>1324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>1090</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 0 … very tolerant, 1 … very intolerant; average = 0.28

Consider the different tolerance levels in our sixteen countries (Table 1). The average tolerance level is about 0.28 – or, in other words, about 30% of the named social groups are disliked neighbors. It is striking that higher levels of intolerance can be found particularly in the former communist countries Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Latvia. The Western European countries show less hostile attitudes, especially for Denmark and Sweden very high levels of tolerance can be reported.
This overview at the national level obscures possible differences within countries. We, thus, also have to consider the regional and the individual level. For this purpose, multilevel analyses are applied. In doing so, the first step is to test whether or not there is significant variation at all considered levels. The empty model (Table 2) shows that the variance at the national level is about 3200. The value for the regional level is about 1100 and for the individual level about 44,000. Thus, the main differences exist at the individual level. But, as all three values are significant we can conclude that there are substantial differences between regions and nations in terms of individual tolerance, too.

**Table 2: Amount of variance at the three levels**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{TOL-1000}_{\gamma k} & \sim N(\gamma \varepsilon, \Omega) \\
\text{TOL-1000}_{\gamma k} & = \rho_{\gamma k} \text{CONST} \\
\rho_{\gamma k} & = 274.234(14.599) + \gamma_{0k} + \gamma_{0k} + \epsilon_{0k} \\
\begin{bmatrix} \gamma_{0k} \\ \mu_{0k} \\ \epsilon_{0k} \end{bmatrix} & \sim N(0, \Omega_0) : \Omega_0 = \begin{bmatrix} 3209.308(1205.135) \\ 1083.815(190.832) \\ 44299300(459.294) \end{bmatrix} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[-2*\text{loglikelihood(IGLS Deviance)} = 254007.000(18747 of 18747 cases in use)\]

In the course of the multilevel analysis, the individual level model was specified initially. Afterwards different macro level factors were entered. Due to the small number of level three units we have to be aware that we can use only few indicators. Otherwise the model would be easily over-determined. For this reason, all macro level factors are entered one by one additionally to the micro level model. Table 3 shows their effects. Here, it has to be mentioned that regional characteristics were also computed from the data set. In
particular the mean education, the mean occupational status and the mean age were computed in order to grasp further contextual characteristics.

Table 3: The effect of different macro level factors when entered separately as single macro factor additionally to the micro level model*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>National Variance</th>
<th>Regional Variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fitted micro level model</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2620</td>
<td>1047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-communism</td>
<td>-88.76</td>
<td>20.91</td>
<td>1119</td>
<td>1053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of Autocracy (weak-strong)</td>
<td>-3.79</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>2431</td>
<td>1049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of Democracy (long-short)</td>
<td>-0.44</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>2149</td>
<td>1048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of current Democracy (weak-strong)</td>
<td>20.01</td>
<td>23.37</td>
<td>2499</td>
<td>1048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National GDP*1000</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1621</td>
<td>1053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Unemployment rate</td>
<td>-7.12</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>1859</td>
<td>1049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of IGOs</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>2530</td>
<td>1048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of NGOs</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>2308</td>
<td>1048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional GDP*1000</td>
<td>-0.94</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>2999</td>
<td>1010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional GDP Gap (high-low)</td>
<td>-29.52</td>
<td>12.68</td>
<td>2666</td>
<td>988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Unemployment rate</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>2921</td>
<td>992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Unemployment Gap (high-low)</td>
<td>-24.45</td>
<td>7.42</td>
<td>2551</td>
<td>933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional mean age</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>2572</td>
<td>1014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional mean education</td>
<td>-14.26</td>
<td>7.79</td>
<td>2569</td>
<td>1018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional mean occup. status (low-high)</td>
<td>-4.52</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>3016</td>
<td>896</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Italic: significant effects

At first sight, a communism history, the national prosperity, the national unemployment rate, the regional structural gaps in terms of unemployment and prosperity as well as the regional mean occupational status have a significant impact. At the national level all indicators point in the expected direction: The wealthier a nation is and the lower the unemployment rate is the more tolerant are the inhabitants. However, at the regional level the effects are quite the opposite. The higher the unemployment rate and the lower the average occupational status are the more tolerant people become. The embedding in
international structures and the presence of NGOs does not have an effect when considered as single macro level factor. After this separate consideration of all macro level factors it was tried to develop models with different sets of macro level factors. Here, only the model with the best fit in terms of a small remaining variance is presented and discussed in detail (see Table 4).

Table 4: Model with the best fit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>t-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOL-1000y = ( \beta_0 ) CONST + ( \beta_1 ) AGE + ( \beta_2 ) EDUC + 3.627(0.947)EDUC + ( \beta_3 ) ( \text{SEX} ) + ( \beta_4 ) ( \text{POL} ) + ( \beta_5 ) ( \text{DEM} ) + 6.890(1.400)LDR + ( \beta_6 ) Confess not asked + 33.86(9.756)Confess other + ( \beta_7 ) Confess Muslim + 61.268(14.888)Confess Orthodox + 14.64(7.1)Confess Protestant + 58.626(16.773)Confess non Member + 9.426(2.174)AUT + 30.702(7.434)Ant- + 4.361(1.345)INC_POP + -18.063(7.339)UNEM + -111.672(17.346)POST + -3.976(1.26) + 15.329(7.734) + -23.909(3.989) + 41.65(4.541) + -0.765(0.771) + -2.637(5.786) + -0.601(0.754) +</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \epsilon_{\theta} ) ~ N(0, ( \Omega_{\theta} )) : ( \epsilon_{\theta} = 648.218(285.164) )</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \epsilon_{\phi} ) ~ N(0, ( \Omega_{\phi} )) : ( \epsilon_{\phi} = 837.159(155.602) )</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \epsilon_{\alpha} ) ~ N(0, ( \Omega_{\alpha} )) : ( \epsilon_{\alpha} = 42018.820(435.635) )</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(-2\text{loglikelihood}(ECLS Deviance) = 252976.106(18747 \text{ cases in use})\)

Consider the effects of socio demographic characteristics. Age has a negative effect on the tolerance, thus the older people are the less tolerant they become. Education is positively correlated with tolerance – higher educated individuals are more tolerant than those with a poorer education. Regarding the gender, it turns out that women are more tolerant than men. The occupational status and the income do not have a significant impact. The same is true for the size of the hometown.
Political attitudes are another factor. Here we can see that the less important politics is for a respondent, the worse a democratic system is evaluated, and the better a strong leader is considered the less tolerant individuals become. The attitudes toward authorities in general also have an impact: The more important obedience is considered the less tolerant people become. On the other hand, post-materialism attitudes have a positive effect on tolerance. With a view on the religious confession it can be said that those people with an affiliation to the Roman Catholic Church are the less tolerant than those with an affiliation to another church. Furthermore, the importance of religion has a positive effect: The more important religion is the more tolerant people become.

The effects of the context are partly puzzling. The best fit at the regional level was obtained by considering the regional employment gap and the mean occupational status within a region. Interestingly, the effects of these factors work the opposite way than those at the national level. The tolerance increases the higher the regional unemployment rate is. A similar finding can be reported in terms of the mean occupational status: The higher it is the less tolerant people become. At the national level, the difference between former communist countries and western countries is the most substantial factor. The overall tolerance level is much smaller in post communist countries. However, we can also observe an effect of international governmental organizations. The more organizations exist the more tolerant people become.

In terms of model fit, we were able to reduce the contextual variation at the national and the regional level by a substantial amount. The national variance was reduced from 3209 in the empty model to 648 in the fitted model. Thus, we were able to explain about 80 percent at this level. The national variance has also to be considered
when calculating the degree of explain at the regional level. One has to sum up the variances of both levels. Thus, the degree of explanation at the regional level is 65 percent (equal to 1 - (648+837) / (1083+3209) ). All three variances have to be taken into account for the individual level. Here, the explained variance is 11 percent.

5. Discussion

The results presented in the previous section corroborate previous findings, but also dash cold water on assumptions about the group threat and the effects of competition at the regional level.

First, consider the expected findings. The social psychological assumption that people who hold authoritarian views are also less tolerant is clearly confirmed. Individuals who favor a strong political leader or think that more obedience is needed also are more hostile. In this regard the assumptions of Adorno et al. (1950) are confirmed once more. However, with a view on the religious beliefs more ambiguous findings occur. Previous research has shown that religious people, especially those with a strong affiliation to a catholic church are less tolerant and show more prejudices (Golebiowska, 1999; Sotelo, 2002). In fact, Catholics are the most intolerant, but, on the other hand, being religious in the sense of the importance religion has for ones life, has a tolerance aiding effect. As Sotelo (2002) has pointed out, the intrinsic elements of religiosity should foster tolerance while external elements can also result in less tolerant views. We, thus, can assume that different dimensions of religiosity are working in our case, too.
Previous results in terms of being political engaged or holding strong democratic views are also confirmed at the individual level. Democratic orientated people are more tolerant. However, the results of Peffley and Rohrschneider (2003) about political tolerance and the exposure to macro-level democratic processes can’t be confirmed fully. The effect of the duration of democracy pointed in the right direction but was not significant. Of course, this could be a country selection issue as Peffley and Rohrschneider also considered non-European countries. Anyway, in terms of individual political attitudes, previous findings were confirmed once more. This is also true for the postmaterialism dimension. Materialists are less tolerant than postmaterialists.

The findings with regard to the individual socio-demographic variables can be discussed by considering different theories. Most important, the occupational status of the main breadwinner and the household income do not have an effect. Thus, all interpretations considering these factors are on shaky ground. The positive effect of education can be seen as an effect of less competition or as an exposure to a permissive background. Considering age the exposure argument also applies. Human rights movements and other similar institutions have gained importance throughout the last decades. Thus, an increasing exposure is a possible way of influence. However, the prosperity has also increased and, thus, can also be responsible for these changes.

The most interesting findings emerge with regard to the contextual effects. Considering the national level it became clear that the institutional settings are more important than the level of prosperity. Here, the aftermath of the communism system is striking. The argument that these countries are also less prosperous need not be applicable. Spain and Portugal also have a rather low level of prosperity but their
inhabitants are much more tolerant than those of the Eastern European countries. Anyhow, it can be expected that this gap will become smaller in the future, since these countries had to adopt civil rights and human rights in order to get member of the European Union (Tesser 2003). The importance of institutions is also highlighted by the effect of the international governmental organizations. This is a key indicator for the link between a nation-state and the world society. Here, it can be said that the stronger this embedding is, the more tolerant become the inhabitants. The level of prosperity, on the other hand, was significant as well but less important than these institutional characteristics. Anyway, ignoring this fact it we can also conclude that a higher prosperity results in higher tolerance. However, the effect of prosperity is rather ambiguous when considering the regional level as well.

Group threat, the competition with people and economic turmoil are said to be bad for individual tolerance (Quillian, 1995, 1996). In this regard, we can observe the opposite at the regional level. The higher the regional unemployment or the less prosperous a region is the more tolerant people become. In order to see the full picture, we also have to take into account the national level. Considering both levels, we can state that the most tolerant people can be found within poor regions in highly developed countries, while the most hostile people can be found in prosperous regions in poor countries. Perhaps they are also worried about their in comparison to other countries low – but in comparison to poorer regions of their own country relatively high – prosperity.

6. Conclusions
The aim of this paper was to analyze individual tolerance by considering extensively the effects of the social context. For this purpose data from the World Value Survey 1999/2000 was analyzed by using a three level hierarchical regression. Our sub sample comprises about 18000 respondents from 16 European countries and 147 European regions.

Different theories and their assumptions about sources of tolerance were considered. Institutional theory places emphasis on the existence of particular institutions such as treaties or NGOs and their effects on the individual. Group threat theory, on the other hand, places emphasis on the economic circumstances and proposes that the level of tolerance decreases while economic turmoil. With regard to the individual level, self-interest based explanations, social psychological approaches and socio demographic characteristics were taken into account.

Regarding the institutional approach, there are clear indications that institutions are important at the national level. In particular the presence of international governmental institutions dealing with human rights and a communism history turned out to be very substantial. Drawing upon group threat theory, economic disadvantages should foster intolerant views. Here, it turned out that this assumption is confirmed at the national level but refuted at the regional level. Even more, at the regional level an economic advantage even fosters intolerant views. At the current stage, we can just guess that there work some complex interactions between the social context and socio-demographic characteristics: Regions with a high average occupational status can attract social minorities and that this process results in a higher competition in terms of group threat. Another explanation can be that these higher status groups are characterized by a
higher internal competition and that this conflict results in a lower level of tolerance.

Anyway, this finding needs further analyses.

7. Bibliography


