

NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRANTS: EXPLAINING FACTORS IN GERMANY, SWITZERLAND, ENGLAND, AND DENMARK

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Abstract

A major focus of the IEA Civic Education Study concerned attitudes of adolescents towards different aspects of social life. One of these aspects deals with the attitudes towards immigrants. There are four countries – Germany, Switzerland, Denmark and England – in which more than 10 percent of the students are likely to disagree or strongly disagree to all statements regarding the rights of immigrants. By means of data from samples of the four different countries it is shown that attitudes towards immigrants can be related, apart from gender, to several characteristics such as patriotism, trust in government-related institutions, classroom climate, civic knowledge, understanding for people with different ideas, the ability to cooperate with other students, and attitudes towards women's rights. Data pertaining to more than 10,000 students have been analyzed using multilevel logistic regression approaches, demonstrating the differential impact of the predictors.

Having learned in school to understand people with different ideas and to cooperate with others, civic knowledge and the classroom climate, as well as trust in institutions, attitudes towards ones own nation and towards women's rights are factors which are very closely related to processes in school and education. The results of this analysis should, therefore, be of particular interest for all teachers, not only those in the named four countries.

INTRODUCTION

The IEA Civic Education Study (Torney-Purta et al., 2001) conducted in 1999 examined two different aspects of political achievement among students in 28 countries. On the one hand, civic knowledge at age fourteen was tested with multiple choice items; on the other hand, attitudes toward various aspects of democracy were also assessed. The information for the test instruments was mainly gathered through a qualitative research phase of case studies, which aimed to

understand the problems and research questions in the different countries and different curricula. Three main domains of research questions were then chosen for the test and survey (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Domain I was *Democracy*, domain II was *National Identity, Regional and International Relationships*, and *Social Cohesion and Diversity* was the third domain. One of the research questions which had to be analyzed during Phase I in the framework of domain III was the question related to student attitudes to the rights of immigrants. Problems of discrimination against and disenfranchisement of racial minorities, immigrants or foreigners were reported in nearly all country case studies (Torney-Purta et al., 1999).

Several empirical studies have been undertaken in different countries since the mid to late nineties to try to explain adolescents' attitudes towards immigrants. With the data from the Youth and History Study on historical consciousness and political attitudes among teenagers in 27 countries in Europe, Angvik and von Borries (1997) could show that in most participating countries support for educational opportunity was higher than support for voting rights of immigrants. National surveys on attitudes towards immigrants and immigration in Sweden point to changes in the public position regarding immigrants during the 1990s. Among Swedish citizens a growing dissatisfaction with the extent of immigration and especially with immigration policy has been noted (Westin 1995).

In a study analyzing the ideological and social structures of right-wing party member in Flemish Belgium, Billiet et al. (1995 and 2001) proved the relationship between that party and nationalism as well as a low educational level. A study of Pia Knigge (1998) traces the evolution of right-wing extremism, conceptualized as latent electoral support for extreme right-wing parties. According to this study rising levels of immigration and public dissatisfaction with the political regime significantly facilitate right-wing extremism.

Meredith Watts (1996) reported results from a study on political xenophobia in Germany where he found that perceptions of economic threat were important in influencing the attitudes of German youth. Another German study (Kracke, Oepke, Wild, and Noack, 1998) came to similar conclusions. Many studies have analyzed the perception that immigrants take jobs away from people born in the country (Klein-Allermann, Kracke, Noack and Hofer 1995; Pettigrew and Meertens 1995; Legge 1996).

In a study of the attitudes of people and politicians towards fundamental rights and freedoms and their implementation in Britain, Miller, Timpson, and Lessnoff (1996) found that community leaders were much more supportive of immigrants' maintaining their culture than was the average citizen. They also found a positive correlation between respect for women's rights and respect for immigrants' culture. According to different studies in Germany, females generally hold more positive attitudes than males towards the rights of groups such as immigrants (Adler 1996; Frindte, Funke and Waldzus 1996; Watts 1996).

With the data from the IEA Civic Education Study, it is possible for the first time to compare a large number of countries, each with a representative sample using a wide variety of background variables to identify or explain differences in attitudes towards immigrants between countries.

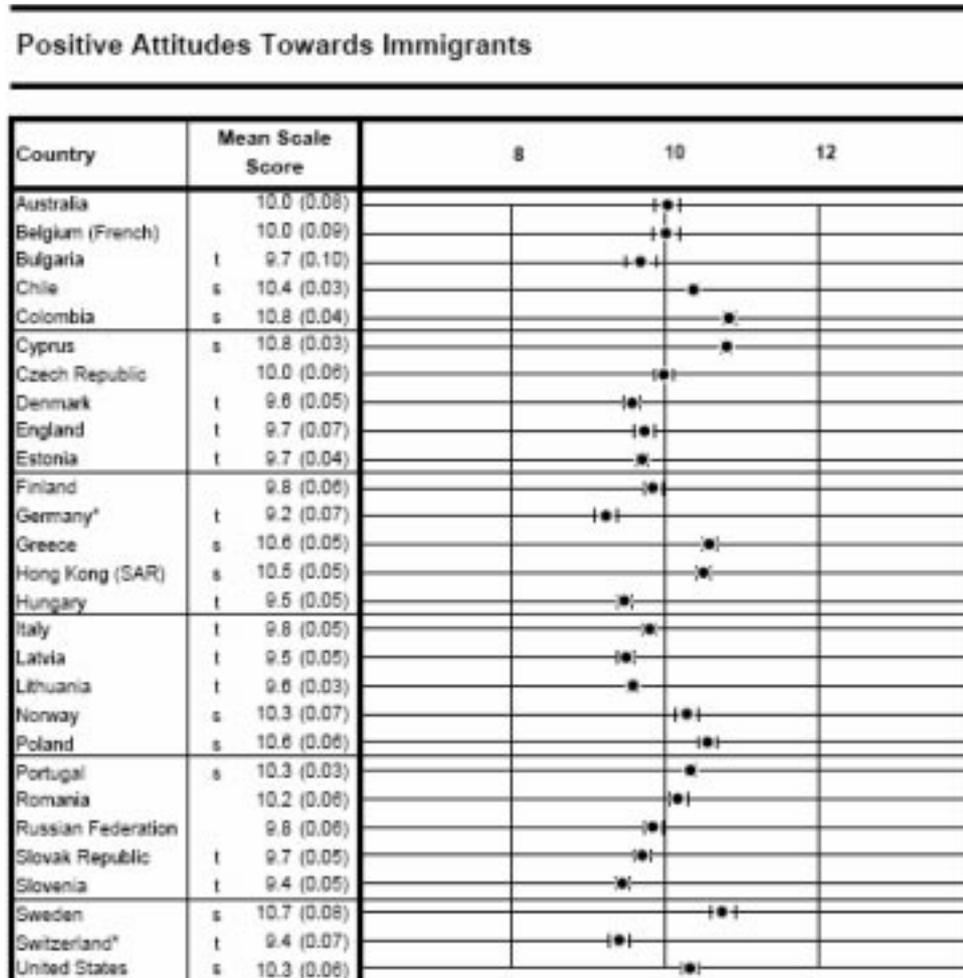
In order to measure attitudes towards immigrants, a scale of five items was constructed for the survey. Students were asked to read different statements about immigrants' rights and select an opinion which most closely corresponded to the way they felt about the statement. Possible categories were *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *agree*, *strongly agree* and *don't know*, which was set to missing. The statements on which students had to give their opinion were:

1. Immigrants should have the opportunity to keep their own language.
2. Immigrants' children should have the same opportunities for education that other children in the country have.
3. Immigrants who live in a country for several years should have the opportunity to vote in elections.
4. Immigrants should have the opportunity to keep their own customs and lifestyle.
5. Immigrants should have all the same rights that everyone else in a country has.

Methods based on Item Response Theory (IRT) made it possible to scale the data and to compare it over countries (international mean=10, standard deviation=2). The mean values resulting from this measurement turned out to be quite different across countries (see figure 1). But it remains difficult to interpret these differences and to understand the precise attitude in every country means. Does a mean value of 9.2 in Germany mean that on average German students have negative attitudes towards immigrants, or are their attitudes only less positive than the attitudes of students from other countries? The IRT scores can only be interpreted as relative to the international mean, and they do not reveal any substantial meaning regarding the item response categories. Therefore, it is not possible to determine from the scale scores to what extent students agreed or disagreed with the item used for the measurement of the latent dimension. The scale is arbitrarily gauged by linear scale transformations, and scale values have no meaning on their own. In order to interpret scale values with regard to the actual responses, the underlying dimension (i.e., the items and their categories) has to be considered. This is possible through calculating the expected item scores (Linden & Hambleton, 1997) which are at the basis of the so-called item-by-score-maps for the single scales in the IEA Civic Education Study (Schulz and Sibberns, 2004). For the scale of attitudes towards immigrants, this item-by-score-map is shown in figure 2.

Considering these expected item scores, the interpretation of the mean values becomes much more evident. In Germany, the country with the lowest scale score, average students are likely to agree to all of the five statements described below and therefore on average no negative attitudes towards immigrants can be proven. Regarding the expected item scores there is not even a big difference between countries. Only in few countries – Sweden, Poland, Greece, Cyprus, Colombia – are average students likely to strongly agree to the second statement while they would only agree to the remaining statements. Besides the comparison of mean scale scores, there are other important questions to consider. Are there students with extreme negative attitudes towards immigrants in some countries? Are there countries in which this group is considerably numerous? And if there are, what are the explaining factors causing negative attitudes? What are the educational implications?

Figure 1: Positive Attitudes Towards Immigrants



() Standard errors appear in parentheses.

• = Mean (± 2 SE).

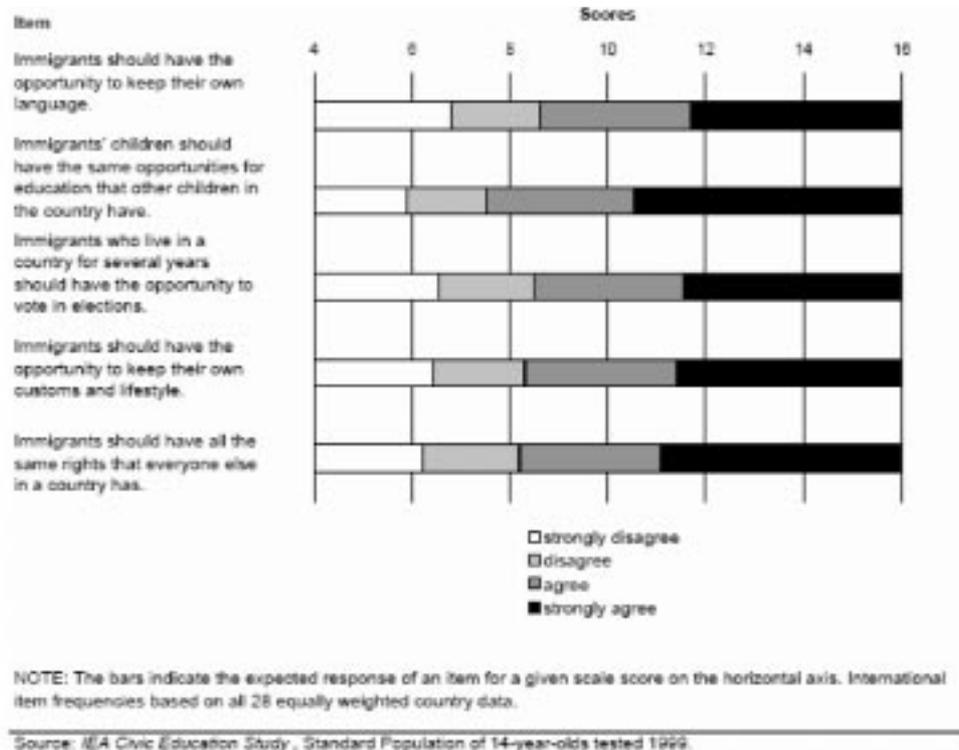
s Country mean significantly higher than international mean of 10.

t Country mean significantly lower than international mean of 10.

* In German the word "immigrants" was translated as "foreigners".

Source: IEA Civic Education Study, Standard Population of 14-year-olds tested in 1999.

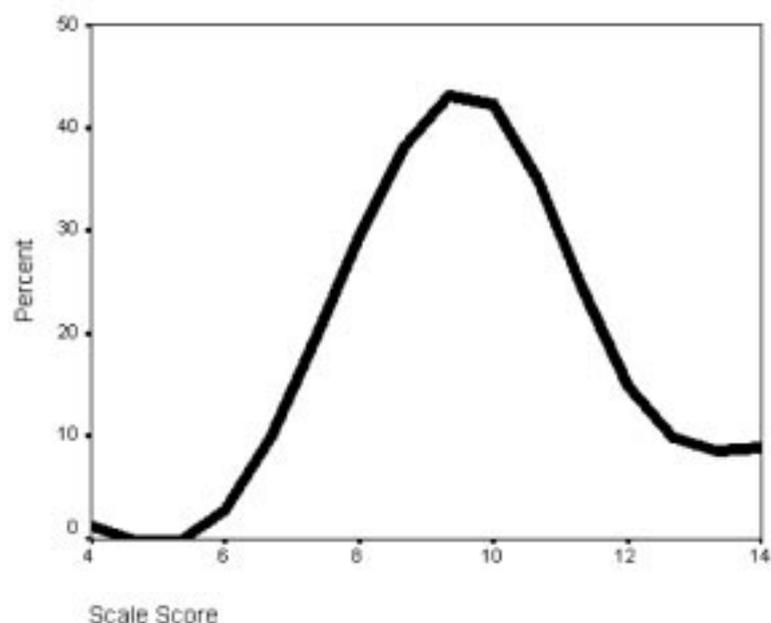
Figure 2: Item-By-Score Map for Positive Attitudes Toward Immigrants
(Torney-Purta et al., 2001, p.203)



The distribution of attitudes towards immigrants is described by a normal ogive curve as long as values around the international mean are considered (see figure 3). But at both ends of the curve larger extreme groups can be observed. Every country has its own distribution with more or less accentuated extreme groups.

To get an idea of the extreme negative group, who disagreed or strongly disagreed with all five statements, we can set a cut-off point at the scale value which corresponds to the expected answers "disagree" or "strongly disagree" for all items. This cut off point lies at the second threshold of the second item (see item-by-score-map in figure 2). A student who is likely to disagree with this item probably would also disagree with any other item from the scale. This leads to a cut-off point of 7.53. A student with a scale score below that value is likely to disagree with all statements included in the five items of the scale, and therefore can be considered as a rater with negative attitudes towards immigrants. As expected, this group is very small and reaches a significant percentage only in very few countries. But there are four countries in which this group represents over 10 percent of the whole sample: Germany (16.4%), Switzerland (15.6%), Denmark (12.4%) and England (12.3%).

Figure 3: Positive Attitudes Towards Immigrants: International Distribution



To understand more about origins and educational implications it is worth looking more closely at these four countries and at the way attitudes towards immigrants are developed there. Numerous research studies have found some evidence for the relation between various background variables and attitudes towards immigrants (e.g., right-wing extremism). With the data from the IEA Civic Education Study a comparison of the four selected countries becomes possible, each with a representative sample using a wide variety of background variables to identify or to explain differences in attitudes towards immigrants between countries. As we know from earlier studies, attitudes towards immigrants' rights can be related (apart from gender) to several characteristics, which are mainly due to satisfaction or dissatisfaction regarding economic, social and cultural circumstances and the level of education. The level of civic knowledge and civic skills, patriotism, nationalism, trust in government-related institutions, attitudes towards women's rights are the variables which have been included in the IEA Civic Education Study to assess students' views on society and society-related institutions. In addition to this and in addition to most earlier research studies, the IEA Civic Education Study provides information on communication in the classroom: classroom climate, understanding of people with different ideas, the ability to cooperate with other students, variables whose predicting power for attitudes towards immigrants is worth investigating.

Data pertaining to more than 10,000 students from the four selected countries' samples have been analyzed using multilevel logistic regression approaches, to demonstrate the differential impact of predictors. As a matter of previous reflection the following predictors were included in the model:

- Positive attitudes towards the nation (scale, based on four-category likert-items)¹,
- Positive attitudes towards women's political and economic rights (scale, based on four-category likert-items)²,
- Trust in government-related institutions (scale, based on four-category likert-items)³,
- Civic knowledge (test items),
- Having learned in school to understand people with different ideas (single item),
- Having learned in school to cooperate with other students (single item),
- Students' perception of an open classroom climate (scale, based on four-category likert-items)⁴ and
- Gender (female).

To make interpretation easier, all predictors expect civic knowledge to have been dichotomized. The response alternatives, disagree, strongly disagree, agree and strongly agree for the two single items were combined. For dichotomizing the latent variables the same procedure as described for the scale for attitudes towards immigrants was used. For every scale, this was done in such a way that one group of students, which according to the theory and previous research could have more negative attitudes towards immigrants, is clearly distinguished. For the scale of attitudes towards the nation this means that the cut-off point is chosen in such a way that a student who has a higher score value than that point is likely to choose the most or the second-most positive response alternative for every item on that scale. For the other scales this means that the cut-off point distinguishes between groups of students which are expected to choose the lowest two response alternatives for each item and students who choose a higher category, at least for one item.

All independent variables in this model were checked for multicollinearity. However, the highest correlation found between two independent variables was only $r = .27$, between the two single items. Cut-off points and percentages are shown in figure 4.

Figure 4: Cut-off Points and Percentages of Students by Country

	nation	women's rights	trust	know-ledge	under-stand	co-operate	classr. climate	male
cut-off	8.47	7.12	11.37				9.7	
	% positive attitudes	% negative attitudes	% low trust	% below intern. mean	% low response. alternative.	% low response. alternative	% not stimul. classr.-climate	males
Denmark	83	3	40.3	52.3	27.6	7.9	47.2	50.7
England	73.1	2.8	76.5	57.6	10.3	6.4	45	49.8
Germany	62.6	4.2	75.9	52	22.6	13.9	36.6	49
Switzerland	68.1	3.4	62.6	56.8	16.6	8.5	37.1	49.2

The stratified clustered design used in the sampling procedure of the IEA Civic Education Study makes it necessary to use either jackknife procedures in order to calculate reasonable standard errors or to use a multilevel approach. The analysis described here uses a two level (individual and school level) approach to logistic regression analysis.

For each of the four countries one model with the same eight predictors to explain negative attitudes towards immigrants was calculated. In Germany all of the factors mentioned above are significantly related to the negative attitudes towards immigrants and can explain more than 24 percent of the variance. In Denmark even more of the variance can be explained with less significant factors. Here the attitudes towards the nation, classroom climate, and having learned in school to cooperate with others are not significantly related to the negative attitudes towards immigrants. In Switzerland trust in institutions and classroom climate are set significant predictors, only 16 percent of the variance is explained by the model. Interestingly, in England only half of the predictors are significant. Attitudes towards the nation, classroom climate, civic knowledge, and gender have no explaining power and only seven percent of the variance is due to the variables in the described model. In England there seems to be a completely different structure to explain negative attitudes towards immigrants from that in the other three countries.

Figure 5: Relative Probabilities

	<i>nation (negative)</i>	<i>women's rights</i>	<i>trust</i>	<i>know- ledge</i>	<i>under- stand</i>	<i>co- operate</i>	<i>classr.- climate</i>	<i>female</i>	<i>Pseudo R² McKelvey</i>
Denmark	n.s.	0.27	0.65	0.54	0.46	n.s.	n.s.	0.39	0.24
England	n.s.	0.31	0.63	n.s.	0.57	0.38	n.s.	n.s.	0.07
Germany	0.41	0.32	0.61	0.56	0.43	0.70	0.61	0.64	0.24
Switzerland	0.40	0.39	n.s.	0.66	0.60	0.55	n.s.	0.43	0.16

A significant relation between the support of women's political rights and the support of immigrant's rights in all four countries confirms what was found by Miller, Timpson, and Lessnoff (1996) for Britain. Those students with more negative attitudes towards women's rights have more negative attitudes towards immigrants as well. This effect can be interpreted in several ways. Students may have generally lower attitudes towards immigrants if they have more traditional and restricted concepts of family and social life. The findings related to this question may also reflect a tendency for some students to discriminate against minorities or groups of persons they consider less powerful. This tendency may lead to negative attitudes against immigrants as well as against women.

Similar to the results from studies in Germany (Adler 1996; Frindte, Funke and Waldzus 1996; Watts 1996) females have more positive attitudes than males in Germany, Switzerland and Denmark, even taking into account the other predictors. To explain why males are less positive than females regarding the rights of

immigrants further research is needed. The case of England, where gender has no influence on that attitude, should be interesting to study in more detail.

Two predictors which are closely related to the student's view of social and economic politics in his or her country are attitudes towards the nation and trust in government-related institutions. Positive attitudes towards the nation correlates with negative attitudes to immigrants among students in Germany and Switzerland but not students from Denmark and England. Positive attitudes towards one's own nation are likely due to the history of the 20th century, which had different meanings in the European countries and therefore different consequences.

Trust in government-related institutions seems to prevent students from having negative attitudes towards immigrants. This result agrees with findings from other studies in which dissatisfaction with the political regime (Knigge, 1998) or perceptions of economic threat (Watts, 1996) were reported to facilitate right-wing extremism or xenophobia. Only in Switzerland was there no correlation between this factor and attitudes towards immigrants.

As reported by Billiet et al., (1995 and 2001) there was a relationship between voting for a right-wing party and a low educational level. It was to be expected that civic knowledge would have some impact on students' attitudes towards immigrants, so it was somewhat surprising that civic knowledge had no significant influence in England. In all other countries this influence is substantial. The number of books at home, which may be considered as a proxy for the family educational background, could not be correlated to attitudes in any country even though this variable is one of the best predictors for civic knowledge (see Torney-Purta et al., 2001, p.150; Amadeo et al., 2002, p.148).

The three factors regarding the more school-related circumstances also show differences between countries. Having learned in school to understand people with different ideas and to cooperate with others supports a more positive attitude towards immigrants in most countries. In Denmark however, this factor had no impact on attitude. A good classroom climate, in contrast, is a significant predictor only in Germany. Whether or not this can be explained by Germany's school system with an early merit-based selection would be an interesting point to investigate. In any case, in a country with the highest rate of students with negative attitudes towards immigrants, it seems that school based efforts may help strengthen tolerance and understanding for people from other countries.

To see the degree to which the discussed predictors influence students' attitudes in the individual countries, we must consider relative probabilities. For a male student - with *positive attitudes towards the nation, negative attitudes towards women's rights*, with *low trust in institutions*, with an *average civic knowledge*, who has learned neither to *cooperate* nor to understand people with different ideas in a poorly stimulating *classroom climate* - the probability for negative attitudes towards immigrants is not lower than 0.73 in Germany, 0.68 in Switzerland, 0.62 in Denmark and 0.55 in England. These extreme circumstances are the basis for the interpretation of the relative probabilities which are shown in figure 5.

The support of women's political rights has the strongest relationship in all countries. Supporting women's rights, and keeping all other variables constant, the probability for negative attitudes towards immigrants decreases to only around one-third. The effect is highest in Denmark and lowest in Switzerland. Being female also reduces the probability for negative attitudes towards immigrants to less than half in Switzerland and Denmark and to less than two-thirds in Germany. Although the effect of attitudes towards one's own nation is not significant in two countries, it has a very powerful influence in Germany and Switzerland, where not having extreme positive attitudes towards the nation reduces the probability for negative attitudes to less than a half. Similarly high effects can be observed for the items *having learned in school to understand people with different ideas* in Germany and Denmark, and *having learned to cooperate with others* in England.

It can be assumed that the majority of students in the four countries, Denmark, England, Germany and Switzerland, have positive attitudes towards immigrants. But like Nevitt Sanford has argued, "When we see trends there are still significant numbers of people who do not go along with the majority" (1986, p.213).

Even in these four countries there is a small but considerable group of students with negative attitudes towards immigrants. The background of these attitudes is worth analyzing because even small groups of persons can have a very negative influence if they carry their attitudes into action.

The influence of gender and attitudes towards women's rights is very high and further research should be undertaken to explain why females are more supportive of immigrants rights, and why and in which direction attitudes towards immigrants and women's rights affect each other.

The students' view on social and economic politics expressed by attitudes towards the nation and by trust in government-related institutions is - especially because it influences students' attitudes towards immigrants - a focus for further research.

Having learned in school to understand people with different ideas and to cooperate with others, civic knowledge and the classroom climate are factors which are very closely related to processes in school and education. Therefore they offer the possibility to intervene in order to minimize the group of students with extreme negative attitudes towards immigrants' rights. The results of the described analysis should therefore be of particular interest for teachers worldwide, not only in the four countries.

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NOTES

1. Items of this scale are: The flag of this country is important to me; I have great love for this country; This country should be proud of what it has achieved; I would prefer to live permanently in another country (negative).
2. Items of this scale are: Women should run for public office and take part in the government just as men do; Women should have the same rights as men in every way; Women should stay out of politics (negative); When jobs are scarce, men have more right to a job than women (negative); Men and women should get equal pay when they are in the same jobs; Men are better qualified to be political leaders than women (negative).
3. Items of this scale are: How much of the time can you trust each of the following institutions? The national government; The local council or government of town or city; Courts; The police; Political parties; National parliament.
4. Items of this scale are: Students feel free to disagree openly with their teachers about political and social issues during class; Students are encouraged to make up their own minds about issues; Teachers respect our opinions and encourage us to express them during class; Students feel free to express opinions in class even when their opinions are different from most of the other students; Teachers encourage us to discuss political or social issues about which people have different opinions; Teachers present several sides of an issue when explaining it in class.

Students' perception of an open classroom climate reflects the individual's perception of the atmosphere in class. As such, perceptions may vary within a class. However, in this area, an individual's view of whether it is a good idea to express an opinion is one factor that is important in determining whether he or she will become involved in class discussion.