



# Contextual influences on environmental concerns cross-nationally: A multilevel investigation

Sandra T. Marquart-Pyatt \*

Department of Sociology, Michigan State University, 316 Berkey Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824-1111, United States

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 24 January 2011

Revised 27 March 2012

Accepted 2 April 2012

Available online 17 April 2012

### Keywords:

Attitudes

Environmental concern

Cross-national

Multilevel model

Measurement

## ABSTRACT

Environmental issues continue to grow in international prominence, as environmental conditions are recognized as some of the most important problems facing the world. Research examining this globalization of environmental concern shown in public opinion surveys emphasizes the importance of context yet is currently underspecified. To address this gap, this research uses a multi-level, cross-national study to examine individual-level and country-level influences on three measures of environmental concern: environmental threat awareness, environmental efficacy, and willingness to pay. At the individual level, education, age, and gender affect environmental concerns. At the national level, economic, political, and environmental factors affect environmental concerns. Importantly, contextual factors differ in their effects depending on the dimension of environmental concern measured. Results from cross-level interactions for education confirm these complexities across these measures, supporting a dimensionality argument. The importance of the measurement of environmental concern shown in this research is emphasized for future cross-national scholarship.

© 2012 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Explaining the emergence and salience of environmental concerns cross-nationally is the topic of considerable social science research. Environmental issues factor prominently in global initiatives related to climate change and continue to grow in international prominence, as environmental conditions like pollution and access to clean water are recognized as some of the most important problems facing the world (UNDP, 2010; World Bank, 2010). Researchers argue that environmental concerns expressed by citizens world-wide are complex, multifaceted and varied, from beliefs about locally based air and water pollution, for instance, to those regarding global climate change, to opinions about prioritizing environmental issues compared with economic ones. Whereas assertions about the importance of context abound, comparatively less is known about how contextual factors affect the expression of environmental concerns.

Context could shape environmental concerns in at least two ways: through an individual's socio-economic context and through country-level contextual forces. A growing literature seeks to uncover the factors influencing the expression of environmental concerns across nations. Cross-nationally, research has examined individual characteristics like age, gender, education, income, and knowledge with mixed results. Age and education have been demonstrated to affect environmental attitudes at the individual-level across samples ranging in size from 2 to 22 countries (Kemmelmeyer et al., 2002; Marquart-Pyatt, 2007, 2008; Xiao and Dunlap, 2007). At the national level, environmental concern is believed to be related to national wealth, economic development, and environmental conditions. Whereas some research suggested that citizens in wealthier or industrialized countries tended to express greater levels of environmental concern based on national material

\* Fax: +1 5174322856.

E-mail address: [marqua41@msu.edu](mailto:marqua41@msu.edu)

conditions or experiencing a baseline of material security (Inglehart, 1995; Kidd and Lee, 1997; Diekmann and Franzen, 1999; Franzen, 2003), another body of scholarship argued instead for the globalization of environmental concern (Brechin, 1999; Dunlap et al., 1993; Dunlap and Mertig, 1995, 1997; Dunlap and York, 2008).

Recent work combines these research streams and investigates individual level and aggregate level characteristics as influences on environmental concerns (Franzen and Meyer, 2010; Gelissen, 2007; Haller and Hadler, 2008). This line of inquiry shows that national wealth, political factors, and environmental conditions exhibit mixed relations with concern for the environment, presenting inconclusive findings that inform this research. None of these studies simultaneously integrate all three sets of explanatory factors and a measurement emphasis regarding the dimensionality of environmental concern, however. To address this gap in the literature, this research examines individual and contextual factors affecting three measures of environmental concern to emphasize how this dimensionality informs our knowledge about the role context plays in shaping concern for the environment across nations. Particular emphasis is placed on the link between education and environmental concerns across the three measures conceptually and given its consistent effect in prior studies.

This research examines concern for the environment using a multi-level, cross-national study. The paper begins by reviewing cross-national research on environmental concern, articulating the importance of individual-level and contextual-level factors. The International Social Survey Program (ISSP) Environment (2000) dataset, which provides information from over 30,000 individuals in 27 countries, is used to examine a multi-level model including individual-level and country-level variables to predict three distinct dimensions of environmental concerns: environmental threat awareness, environmental efficacy, and willingness to pay. A series of cross-level interactions examine whether the strength of the association between education and environmental concerns are similar across contexts, and the extent to which economic, political, and environmental conditions help predict these relationships. Results stress the importance of environmental concern's dimensionality for future cross-national scholarship.

## 2. Cross-national research on environmental concern

Concern for the environment encompasses a number of attitudes, beliefs, behavioral intentions, and behaviors. Since the 1970s, scholars have tracked public opinion on environmental issues and concerns and have considered many explanations regarding the social factors influencing environmental concern. This scholarship generally asserts that environmental concern has many dimensions including beliefs about interconnections between the biophysical environment and humanity, trade-offs between economic growth and environmental protection, willingness to make personal contributions through paying higher prices or giving time to environmental causes, personal involvement in actions like recycling, and engaging in pro-environmental activism. In a comprehensive review, Dunlap and Jones define environmental concern as “the degree to which people are aware of problems regarding the environment and support efforts to solve them and/or willingness to contribute personally to their solution” (2002, p. 485). Beginning in the early 1990s, cross-national scholarship started with what has been noted as the conventional wisdom that environmental concern should be present only in wealthy or advanced industrial countries where citizens had their basic economic and material security needs met (for an excellent discussion, see Dunlap and York, 2008). Instead of geographic concentration among citizens in industrialized nations in line with the proposed conventional wisdom, however, research pointed to its wide dispersion globally (Brechin and Kempton, 1994; Dunlap et al., 1993).

Research seeking to explain the global reach of environmental concern argues for a prominent role of ‘context’, providing three main intersecting arguments. First, building on the aforementioned conventional wisdom, national affluence or prosperity has been advanced as a primary influence where citizens in some countries express greater levels of environmental concern given a certain baseline level of economic and material security (Franzen, 2003; Inglehart, 1995). Second, the objective problems-subjective values (OPSV) thesis advances contextual explanations linked with economic development to explain that environmental concerns exist across the globe yet are driven by different factors rooted in contexts (Brechin, 1999; Inglehart, 1995). A third explanation emphasizes the measurement or dimensionality of environmental concern, articulating its multifaceted, multidimensional features to account for its world-wide reach (Brechin, 1999; Diekmann and Franzen, 1999; Dunlap and York, 2008; Marquart-Pyatt, 2007, 2008; Xiao and Dunlap, 2007).

The prosperity explanation postulates that more affluent countries with higher gross domestic product (GDP) are more likely to have a citizenry that expressed concern for the environment, as a baseline of material wealth or security afforded such opportunities to focus on such values, in line with a post-materialist value explanation (Inglehart, 1990, 1997). Previous research is inconclusive, however. On the one hand, in support of the affluence thesis, research demonstrated country differences in support for environmental protection linked with economic development (Kemmelmeyer et al., 2002; Kidd and Lee, 1997). On the other, positive and negative relationships between national wealth and pro-environmental attitudes have been shown, with researchers arguing for the globalization of environmental concern (Brechin, 1999; Brechin and Kempton, 1994, 1997; Dunlap and Mertig, 1995, 1997). Empirical examinations of the affluence argument are inconclusive (Diekmann and Franzen, 1999; Dunlap and York, 2008; Franzen, 2003; Kemmelmeier et al., 2002). Whereas a positive association cross-nationally between environmental concern and national wealth was confirmed for some measures (Dunlap and York, 2008; Franzen, 2003), negative and no associations were also shown between affluence and multiple measures of environmental concern (Dunlap and York, 2008). More recent work demonstrates support for an effect of affluence on concern

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/955936>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/955936>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)