Different Across, Similar Within?
Educational Polarization in Social and Political Attitudes

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Introduction

• **Globalization**
  - “Winners and losers”

• **Educational cleavage**
  - Economically (e.g. job insecurity)
  - Culturally (e.g. cosmopolitanism vs. nationalism)
  - Politically (e.g. diploma democracy)

• **Social and political attitudes**
  - Globalization = increasing
  - Attitudinal polarization = increasing (expectation)
Polarization

- **Process** (DiMaggio, Evans & Bryson, 1996)
  - Increasing opposition of opinions

- **Between-group differences**
  - Groups moving away from each other

- **Within-group differences**
  - Growing homogeneity within groups

- **Alignment** (Lelkes, 2016)
  - Aligning opinions to fit certain identity

- **Subjective polarization**
  - Perceived
  - Affective

To what extent have differences in social and political attitudes become **larger between** and **smaller within** educational groups over time?
Between-group differences

• "Silent revolution" (Inglehart, 1977)
  - Post-materialism: freedom, (political) participation, self-expression

• Secularization
  - Religiousness and related values (homosexuality, abortion, gender roles)

→ “Silent counter revolution” or “Cultural backlash” (Ignazi, 1992; Inglehart & Norris, 2019)

• Globalization progressing
  - Intolerance and political trust
Hypotheses

H1: The differences between the lower and higher educated in traditional attitudes (i.e. materialism, religiosity, moral permissiveness and gender roles) have not increased between 1981 and 2017.

H2: The differences between the lower and higher educated in post-traditional attitudes (i.e. intolerance and political trust) have increased between 1981 and 2017.
Mechanisms

• **Economic position**
  - Existential security
  - Job security
  - Income

• **Cognition**
  - Anomie
  - Cognitive sophistication

• **Cultural capital**
  - Upbringing
  - Schooling
### Lower educated more homogeneous

- **Educational expansion**

  - Economic (Solga, 2002)
    - Label more salient
    - Employment opportunities
    - Development during employment
  
  - Cognitive (Gesthuizen, 2004)
    - Different backgrounds (higher educated)
    - “Little hidden talent left” (lower educated)
  
  - Cultural (Van der Waal & De Koster, 2015)
    - Upbringing
    - Schooling

### Higher educated more homogeneous

- **Higher educated bubbles** (Bovens 2012; 2014)
  
  - Social circle
  
  - Well-organized interest groups
  
  - Social identity theory
  
  - Alignment
  
  - Socialization
  
  - Lower educated: older natives, immigrants etc.

**VS.**
H3: The attitudinal differences within the lower educational group have changed between 1981 and 2017.

H4: The attitudinal differences within the higher educational group have changed between 1981 and 2017.
Data and Methods

• **Data**
  - European Values Study (1981 – 2017), the Netherlands (N = 5642)

• **Dependent variables**
  - Post-materialism, Religiousness, Moral permissiveness, Gender roles (N = 4792), Intolerance (N = 4792), Political trust

• **Explanatory variables**
  - Education (age completing education) (low = 26.2%, middle = 32.5%, high = 41.3%)
  - Income, Cognition, Cultural capital
  - Cohort, Gender, Mode

• **Method**
  - Heteroskedastic ordered probit models (Jaeger, 2009)

• **Robustness check**
  - Education (highest level attained) (1999 – 2017) (low = 31.6%, middle = 36.1%, high = 32.2%)
Results – Post-materialism

- Higher educated more post-materialistic
- Decrease in educational differences

- Higher educated more homogeneous
- No in/decrease in homogeneity

- Cognition (++), Culture (+) (little mediation)
- Generational replacement

Results – Religiosity

- Higher educated less religious
- No in/decrease in educational differences
- Higher educated more homogeneous
- No in/decrease in homogeneity
- Culture (+) (suppression)
- Generational replacement
Results – Moral permissiveness

- Higher educated more permissive
- Decrease in educational differences
- Higher educated more homogeneous
- Increase in homogeneity
- Cognition (++), Income (+) (some mediation)
- Generational replacement

Results – Gender roles

- Higher educated more modern
- Decrease in educational differences
- Higher educated more homogeneous
- No in/decrease in homogeneity
- Cognition (++), Culture (+), Income (+) (some mediation)
- Generational replacement
Results - Intolerance

- Higher educated less intolerant
- (Increase in educational differences after controlling for CC)
- Higher educated more homogeneous
- No in/decrease in homogeneity
- Culture (-)
- Generational replacement
Results – Political trust

- Higher educated more trust
- Increase in educational differences
- Higher educated more homogeneous
- No in/decrease in homogeneity
- Culture (+) (total mediation in homogeneity), Income (+)
- Generational replacement (explains very little)
H1: The differences between the lower and higher educated in traditional attitudes (i.e. materialism, religiosity, moral permissiveness and gender roles) have not increased between 1981 and 2017.

→ Decreased (except for religiosity)

H2: The differences between the lower and higher educated in post-traditional attitudes (i.e. intolerance and political trust) have increased between 1981 and 2017.

→ Intolerance…

H3: The attitudinal differences within the lower educational group have changed between 1981 and 2017.

H4: The attitudinal differences within the higher educational group have changed between 1981 and 2017.

→ Exception: moral permissiveness
Conclusion and discussion

• **Affective polarization?**
  - Traditional values: increased homogeneity
  - Post-traditional values: increased heterogeneity

• **Alignment?**
  - Higher educated more homogeneous
  - Identity

• **Mechanisms**
  - Traditional values: cognition (anomie?) + generational replacement
  - Post-traditional values: cultural capital

• **Cultural backlash?**
  - Generation rather than education
Thank you for your attention!