

Have Young Adults' Opinions on the Social Role of the State Changed since the 2008 Economic Crisis?

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Abstract – The 2008 economic crisis, which has had a significant impact on young adults' entry into the labour market, may have changed their opinions on social policies and expenditure. Data from the *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP, 2006, 2016) allow analysis and comparison of these opinions and their evolution in 12 European countries, as well as in the United States and New Zealand. We also examine the differences between the opinions of young adults and other adults and their evolution over time. In order to take into account differences in national contexts, we use the standard typology of welfare state regimes. Young adults' support for public intervention in social issues increased between 2006 and 2016, except in the Scandinavian countries. Differences of opinion with their elders have increased in liberal countries and decreased in conservative countries, while the desire for increased social welfare remains high in countries where social welfare was least developed.

JEL Classification: C11, H51, H53, H55, I38

Keywords: welfare state, young adults, international comparison, public opinion, social policy, social expenditure, economic crisis

Reminder: The opinions and analyses in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect their institution's or Insee's views.

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The author would like to thank Laura Castell, Emmanuelle Nauze-Fichet and Lucie Gonzalez for the fruitful discussions on the first drafts of this study, and the anonymous reviewers whose comments and suggestions have greatly contributed to the finalization of this article.

Received on 25 January 2019, accepted after revisions on 13 March 2020.

Translated from: Les opinions des jeunes adultes sur le rôle social de l'État ont-elles changé depuis la crise de 2008 ?

Citation: Papuchon, A. (2020). Have Young Adults' Opinions on the Social Role of the State Changed since the 2008 Crisis? *Economie et Statistique / Economics and Statistics*, 514-515-516, 175–198. <https://doi.org/10.24187/ecostat.2020.514t.2013>

“**Y**outh” is a stage of the life cycle characterised by a process of increased autonomy from one’s parents, which is primarily based on the gradual acquisition of financial independence, for which access to employment is crucial. The economic crisis that was triggered in 2008 may have significantly affected this transition. Firstly, as new – and recent – entrants to the labour market, young people in many countries have experienced a deterioration of their situation, marked by a sharp rise in their unemployment rate. Secondly, they were able to see the support they received during that transition (to finance studies, obtain a driving licence, rent or buy a home, etc.) diminish, whether in the form of public support subject to reductions or support received from their families, which themselves may have been affected by the crisis. How has this experience of the crisis affected their opinions on the role of the state? We propose some responses to this question in this article.

More specifically, we focus on the evolution of young adults’ opinions in several countries where the state should intervene and the desirable evolution of social expenditure. We also focus on the differences between the opinions of young adults and other adults and their evolution: have differences in opinion across age groups on the role of the state widened in the years following the crisis?

To that end, the data from the *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP), the 2006 and 2016 editions of which focused on the role of the state, provide valuable insights. They make it possible to analyse the opinions of young adults – an issue on which work remains infrequent (Chevalier, 2018b; Garritzmann *et al.*, 2018) – and their evolution during this period of crisis. The data we use here cover 14 countries: France, Germany, Spain, Finland, Sweden, Norway, the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Switzerland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Latvia.

Comparing several countries requires taking into account the range of national contexts. Firstly, there is the context of the labour market situation for young people. In virtually all the countries studied, the unemployment rate for those aged 20-29 thus rose sharply in the years following 2008, with Germany being the exception at one extreme, where the unemployment rate continued its downward trend, and Spain at the other extreme, where it rose by an exceptional amount, reaching as high as 40% in

2013 (Figure I). In 2016, the unemployment rate for those aged 20-29, in most cases, remained higher than its 2008 level or just slightly lower. Moreover, this downturn in people entering the labour market does not take into account young people who may have postponed their entry due to the economic situation. These developments are reminiscent of those highlighted by Chauvel (1998), for France in the late 1990s, and in other work on previous recessions (Oreopoulos *et al.*, 2012). The most recent data available also show that, in 2013, the average wage for those aged 15-29 remained below its 2008 level in five countries (Hungary, Czech Republic, Spain, United Kingdom and United States), which puts into perspective the reassuring conclusions that could be drawn from the low unemployment rates in countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States.¹ These developments are all the more concerning given that the deterioration in the conditions of entry into the labour market impacts on later trajectories: in 2012, the unemployment rate for the cohort that entered the labour market in 2008 remained lower than that of the cohort that entered the labour market before the crisis (OECD, 2016, pp. 106–107).

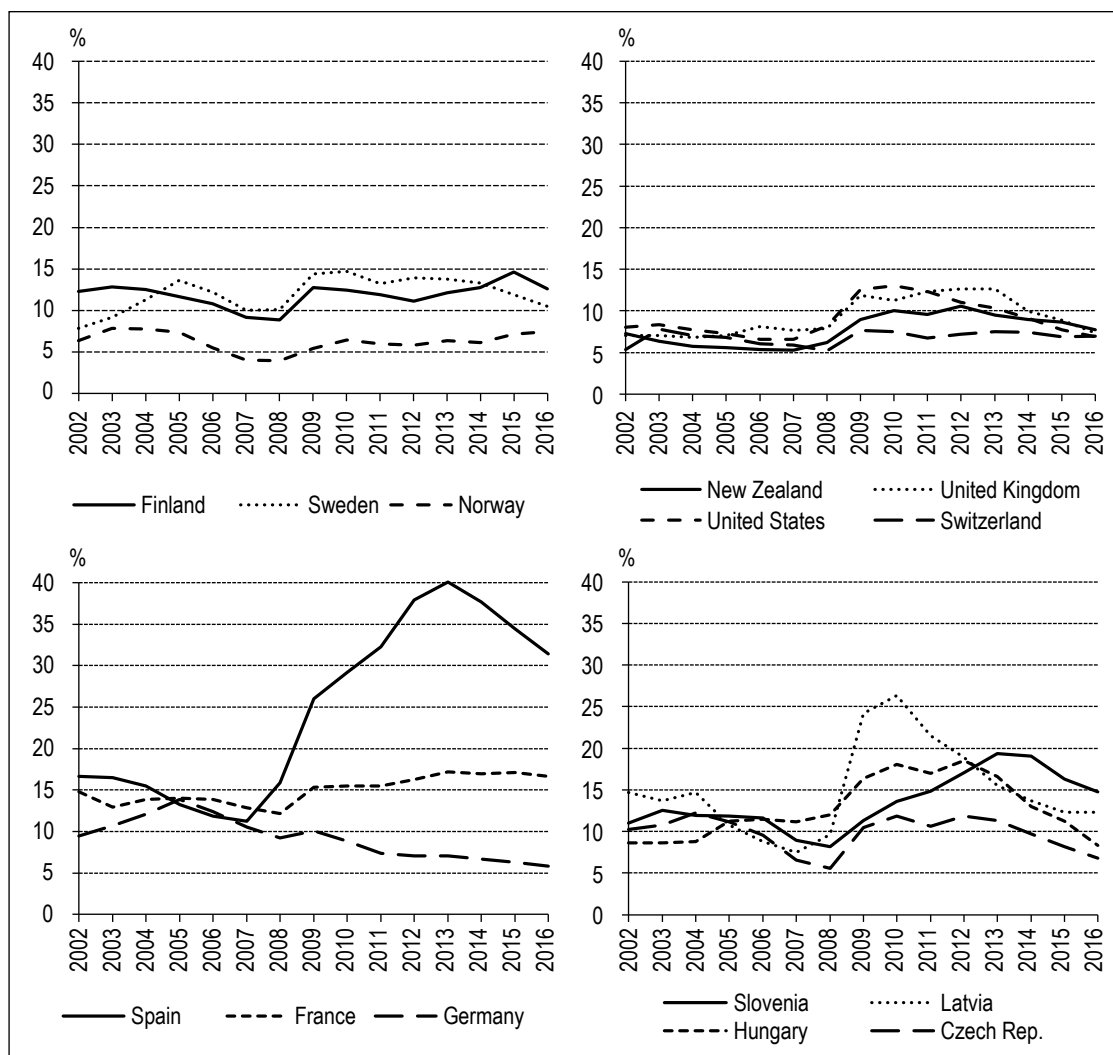
Furthermore, the range of national contexts also relates to the variation of social welfare schemes, in particular. In order to take this into account, we will differentiate between the countries studied using the now standard typology of welfare state regimes defined by Esping-Andersen (1990). The initial typology established three distinct regimes characterised by a degree of “decommodification”,² a different articulation of the roles of the state, the market and the family in the allocation of social resources and, from an institutional point of view, specific definitions of the right to collective solidarity (Arts & Gelissen, 2001).³ The “social-democratic” regime (characteristic of Scandinavian countries) is said to be “universal”, insofar as the rights that it guarantees are to benefit all citizens. The “liberal” model (United States, United Kingdom, etc.) is based, in particular, on a minimum safety net – which is why this model is also called the “residual”

1. OECD data. Information not available for Slovenia, Latvia, New Zealand and Switzerland.

2. The degree to which individuals, or families, can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living independently of labour market participation.

3. Subsequently, additional dimensions have been taken into account, such as the degree of “defamilialisation” (McLaughlin & Glendinning, 1996), and there has been much debate about the scope of the developments experienced by these different systems (Pierson, 2002).

Figure I – Unemployment rate for people aged 20-29



Sources and Coverage: OECD; people aged 20-29, living in the countries mentioned; author's calculations.

model⁴ – intended for those in society deemed unable to meet their basic needs through labour market participation. Lastly, a third model known as the “conservative” or “Bismarckian” model, with which France, Germany, Belgium and Austria are generally associated, relies more on income maintenance through a compulsory social insurance system. Later work (e.g. Ferrera, 1996; Katrougalos, 1996) introduced an additional model characteristic of southern European countries, known as the “mediterranean” or “family” model, in which – among other things – family support plays a more decisive role.

The rest of the article is organised as follows: in the first section, we discuss how the crisis may have affected young adults’ opinions on the role

of the state and social policies and we set out our main hypotheses. After a review of the data used, the second section presents the initial descriptive results. The third section provides a statistical analysis aimed, in particular, at determining the effects of age, country and period. Finally, the last section establishes the evolutions observed by social welfare scheme.

4. Associated with the liberal model by Esping-Andersen due to the limited role of social policies and the importance of means-tested schemes, some studies have highlighted the specific characteristics of the systems in Australia and New Zealand (less restrictive thresholds and more moderate pre-support inequalities). Nevertheless, most of the articles listed by Arts & Gelissen (2002) classify New Zealand among the liberal regimes.

1. The Potential Impact of the 2008 Crisis on Young Adults' Opinions on Social Policies and the Role of the State

Though it is likely that the experience of the crisis has had an impact on young people's views of state interventions and social welfare policies, it is difficult to anticipate the trend – especially at international level – due to the number and instability of the factors involved.

Generally speaking, opinions and attitudes towards the social welfare system can be guided by whether individuals perceive themselves more as beneficiaries or contributors (Svallfors, 1997). The groups at greatest risk of unemployment – such as young people – would thus be more supportive of unemployment benefits, as they are more likely to become beneficiaries of them and such protection secures their current social situation relatively more than that of the least exposed categories. A deterioration of the labour market situation for young people, higher educational costs or a significant reduction in family resources could lead more young people to adopt a stance in favour of wider public intervention.

A person's opinion may also be affected by the fact that many people or an increasing number of people are affected by a risk. In this case, it is the assessment of the social phenomena to which the public policies relate that changes. For example, the greater the risk of unemployment, the less likely the unemployed would be deemed personally responsible for their situation and the more legitimate the collective coverage of the risk of unemployment would appear to be in the eyes of the population (Blekesaune, 2007; Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Pfeifer, 2009).

Finally, individuals take into account not only their current situation, but also the likely evolution of their needs and rights to social welfare over the course of their life: young people may, for example, have an attitude similar to that of older people in relation to pensions or health expenditure if they believe that these will eventually benefit them; or they may have opposing views if they feel, on the contrary, that these rights will disappear over the coming decades. For example, the 2008 crisis probably shook confidence in the sustainability of the social welfare system in France (Grislain-Létrémy & Papuchon, 2017), causing a significant but temporary drop in support for universal social welfare cover (Papuchon, 2018b).

Furthermore, opinions can also be influenced by the national social welfare context. The social-democratic regime is associated with a greater aversion to income inequality and favours an extensive view of the role of the state. In contrast, the meritocratic justification of inequalities is more widespread in liberal regimes than in other national contexts, together with the notion that public social welfare should intervene as a last resort only. The Bismarckian regime, which promotes a so-called “principle of equity” by legitimising the link between provision and contribution, leads to a fairly broad view of the role of the state, but also to economic inequalities being considered more legitimate than in the Scandinavian countries (Arts & Gelissen, 2001; Svallfors, 1997).

However, differences of opinion between countries have often proved to be less “mechanical” and, ultimately, difficult to explain by the type of social welfare scheme (Blekesaune, 2007; Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Jaeger, 2006). A consensus seems to be emerging on the need to take into account, in addition to the type of social welfare scheme and the individual characteristics, the level of social expenditure (Jakobsen, 2011), the internal heterogeneity of the schemes and the risks covered (Pfeifer, 2009; Shaw, 2009) and the evolution of the economic and social context.

By framing the funding and distribution of benefits around specific definitions of the objectives of the social welfare system and its beneficiaries, social welfare policies do not only contribute to the dissemination of specific definitions of the right to collective solidarity among the population. Social policies also contribute significantly to the way in which the transition into adulthood takes place, the manner in which young people and their contemporaries live and the respective roles of public schemes, the family and the market in this process (Gaviria, 2005; Van de Velde, 2008; Thévenon, 2015; Chevalier, 2018a). To a certain extent, these phenomena should be reflected in young adults' conceptions of social welfare policies and the role of the state, especially as the intensity of the crisis and its impact on patterns of access to adulthood vary from country to country (Papuchon, 2014; Van de Velde, 2015). Specifically, with that in mind, the strong links between social welfare schemes and models of transition into adulthood should lead to young people's concepts being close to those of their parents, aside from the effects of their individual characteristics.

The issues of relationships between age groups or generations has become emblematic of discussions on the appropriateness and sustainability of social welfare regimes, embodied in the opposition between young working people and retirees. Salary conditions tend to vary from one cohort to another, due to changes in job structure, the degree of career continuity, the evolution of salaries and the level of insecurity and, since the economic situation at the point of entry into adulthood impacts the entire trajectory of individuals (scaring effect), its deterioration is reflected in generational inequalities: in all countries, at a given age, the cohorts that entered the labour market before 1975 have higher than average incomes, especially in the so-called “conservative” and “mediterranean” regimes (Chauvel & Schröder, 2014). The opinions of young adults on the social welfare system can therefore be expected to differ more from those of their elders in both of these types of national contexts, as well as in Central and Eastern Europe, where the shift towards a market economy has been achieved through a “generational policy” consisting, in particular, of limiting the political costs of deregulation by introducing support or maintaining certain protections for older workers (Vanhuysse 2006; Cerami & Vanhuysse, 2009).

In any case, to the extent that the 2008 crisis affected young adults more than retirees, it should have caused greater changes in the opinions of young people than in those of their elders. However, a number of studies covering the previous period conclude that there is a phenomenon of “parallel evolution” of opinion movements in various population groups (Page & Shapiro, 1992), and a trend common to all social groups seems to have emerged between 1990 and 2008 in 23 European countries: at the turn of the century, “*It is as if the Europeans interviewed were expressing a growing distrust of the market economy as an optimal means of distributing wealth*” (Gonthier, 2015). Another recent study on France also finds a parallel evolution of people’s opinions of the social welfare system over the period 2010-2014 (Grislain-Létrémy & Papuchon, 2017).

From this brief review of the literature, we draw four major hypotheses:

- [H1] on the effect of the social welfare regime: the perceived role of the state is most extensive in the social-democratic regime (Scandinavian countries) and most restricted in liberal countries,

with conservative and familial countries in an intermediate position.

- [H2] on the effect of the individual characteristics: support for social welfare expenditure depends on the immediate costs and benefits of the policies for individuals.

- [H3] on the effect of the crisis: the crisis causes an increase in support for public intervention between 2006 and 2016, and this increase is more pronounced among young adults than among their elders.

- [H4] on the opinion evolution trajectories (parallel publics): the opinions of young adults and those of people aged 65 or over evolve following a parallel trajectory.

2. Data, Indicators and Initial Statistical Overview

2.1. Data and Indicators

The data used are taken from the ISSP which, together with the “Values” surveys (*European Values Survey* and *World Values Survey*) and *Eurobarometers*, constitutes one of the three main traditions of international comparison surveys on views and attitudes (Bréchon, 2002). These surveys have been collecting comparative data on attitudes and opinions in industrialised countries since the mid-1980s, with one edition of thematic surveys being conducted each year, with a new edition every 10 years.

National samples (minimum 1,000 individuals) are created using a random sampling procedure⁵ (Faaß *et al.* 2008; ISSP, 2018). They are representative of the population living in ordinary housing, except in Norway and New Zealand, where their scope includes people living in institutions. The interview conditions can vary more from one country to another, although written self-surveying is the most common.⁶ This variation can affect the quality of comparisons between countries, but it appears less problematic when the analysis focuses on the dynamics observable within each national context.

5. Stratification variables have been used, except in France, Norway and Sweden (as well as New Zealand in 2006).

6. In the Czech Republic, Germany (in 2006: self-surveying with the presence of the interviewer), Hungary, Latvia, Spain, Switzerland and the United States, the questionnaire is conducted face-to-face. Except in Germany, the method used to conduct the questionnaire is similar in 2006 and 2016.

We rely here mainly on data collected during the last two editions of the “Role of Government” module in 2006 and 2016.⁷ The 14 countries selected⁸ are countries from Europe and North America for which data and literature on social welfare regimes and social stratification are available, as well as New Zealand. The 2005 and 2015 editions of the ISSP (“Work Orientations”) will be used occasionally to shed light on certain results. In order to ensure clear and appropriate limits for comparing different national contexts and sample sizes, young adults are considered to be respondents under 31 years of age, with the distinction between the youngest and the oldest within this age group – whose social profiles differ among themselves and between countries – to be deferred to subsequent work.

The ISSP therefore not only provides an opportunity to compare the opinions of young people and the differences between young adults

and their elders in many countries, but also to determine how their opinions have evolved in the decade since the onset of the 2008 crisis. The issue of the impact of the social position of young people within their cohort, although important in the context of the problem in question (Irwin, 1996; Reeskens & Wim van Oorschot, 2012; Papuchon, 2018a), must be deferred to subsequent work due to the limited size of the samples available in each country (see Appendix 1).

7. *References of the databases used:*

ISSP Research Group (2018), *Role of Government V - ISSP 2016*. <https://doi.org/10.4232/1.12994>; ISSP Research Group (2008), *Role of Government IV - ISSP 2006*. <https://doi.org/10.4232/1.4700>; ISSP Research Group (2017), *Work Orientations IV - ISSP 2015*. <https://doi.org/10.4232/1.12848>; ISSP Research Group (2013), *Work Orientation III - ISSP 2005*. <https://doi.org/10.4232/1.11648>.

8. See Appendix 1 for figures by country. Italy could not be included in the analysis as it did not participate in the 2006 edition of the ISSP. Denmark is excluded due to the coding of the “age” variable.

Box – Questions on the Role of the State and the Desired Evolution of Social Welfare Expenditure and Construction of the Scores

The *question on social expenditure* is phrased as follows:

"Listed below are various areas of government spending. Please show whether you would like to see more or less government spending in each area. Remember that if you say "much more", it might require a tax increase to pay for it".

Four major areas of expenditure are considered in this study:

- health;
- education;
- pensions;
- unemployment benefits.

The responses are in the form of a scale with five options: Spend much more / Spend more / Spend the same as now / Spend less / Spend much less.

The *question on the role of the state* is phrased as follows:

"On the whole, do you think it should or should not be the government's responsibility to..."

We consider six intervention areas:

- providing a job for everyone who wants one;
- providing healthcare;
- providing a decent standard of living for the elderly;
- providing a decent standard of living for the unemployed;

- reducing differences in income between the rich and the poor;

- providing financial support for students from underprivileged families.

Four responses were possible: Definitely should be / Probably should be / Probably should not be / Definitely should be.

Construction of the two scores:

For desires regarding the evolution of expenditure (social expenditure score), each response saying that expenditure “should be much more” scores 2 points, each “spend more” response scores 1 point; 2 points are deducted for each “spend much less” response and 1 point is deducted for “spend less” responses; “spend the same as now” responses score 0.

For state interventions (role of the government score), the principle is the same: 2 points for “the government definitely should be responsible” responses, 1 point for “the government probably should be responsible” responses; 2 points are deducted for “the government should definitely not be responsible” responses, and 1 point for each “the government should probably not be responsible” response.

A negative score therefore indicates a desire to restrict social expenditure or a view of that the state should have a low level of intervention.

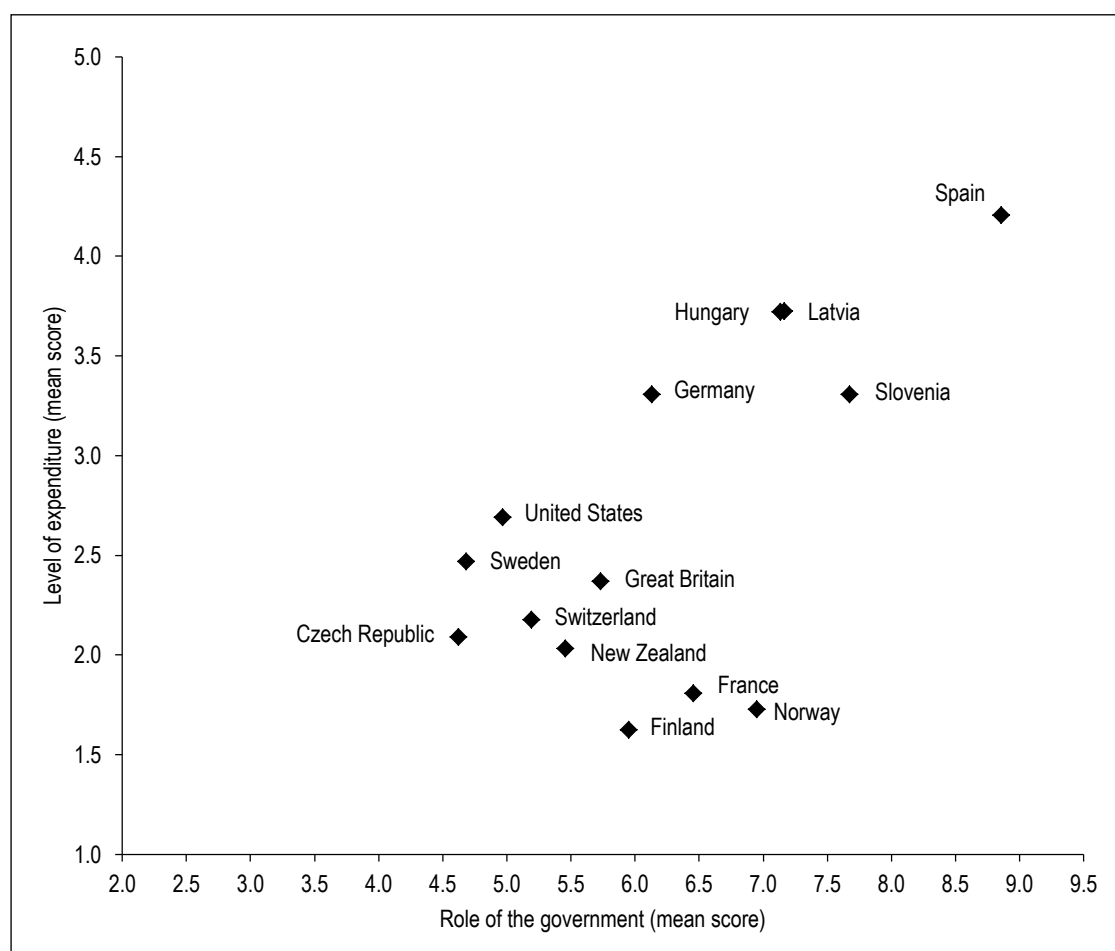
The distribution of the scores for all adults in 2006 and in 2016 is shown in Appendix 2.

We mainly use two sets of questions: the first concerns the desired evolution of the level of government expenditure, while the second concerns the extent of the role that the state should play in social welfare and financial redistribution. The responses make it possible to calculate two scores of support for state intervention: one on “social expenditure”, the value of which depends on the desire for increased expenditure in relation to health, education, pensions and unemployment benefits, and the other on the “role of the state”, the value of which depends on the opinion on the role that the state should play in various areas of intervention (see Box). These scores are then used to define a spectrum of opinions regarding public intervention, in which to situate the average opinions of young adults or “seniors” (aged 65 and over) in 2016, and to analyse changes between 2006 and 2016 in the various countries considered.

2.2. Young Adults and Public Intervention: Initial Descriptive Approach

Within the spectrum of opinions in 2016, the countries in which young adults have the most restrictive view of the role of the state are the Czech Republic, Sweden and the liberal countries (United States, Great Britain, New Zealand and Switzerland) (Figure II). At the other end of the spectrum is Spain, then the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (excluding the Czech Republic). In all of the countries considered, the responses tended to favour an increase in social expenditure, with a much higher demand in Spain and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Germany, France, Finland and Norway are in an intermediate position with regard to the role of government; nevertheless, it is in the last three countries that the desire for an increase in social expenditure is least pronounced (France and Finland are the first

Figure II – Young people’s opinions on the role of the state and social expenditure in 2016



Sources and Coverage: ISSP 2016; people aged 18-30.

and third-placed countries in the EU-15 in terms of the share of GDP devoted to financing social services), while Germany is instead among the countries in which the demand for more social expenditure is stronger.

As expected (H1), the responsibilities of the state are viewed the most narrowly in liberal countries, while conservative countries are in an intermediate position. In contrast, the position of Spain and the Scandinavian countries is fairly unexpected. This is particularly the case in Spain, where the score for the role of the state is very high, and in Sweden, where it is rather low, as is support for increased social expenditure.

Has the 2008 crisis resulted in a shift in opinions about public intervention that is specific to young adults? An initial set of answers can be provided by comparing the scores of those aged 18-30 in 2006 and 2016 in each national context, and by comparing this evolution with the dynamics that affect the opinions of their elders aged at least 65 (Figure III).

Between 2006 and 2016, young people's opinions shifted, practically everywhere, in favour of greater state intervention and increased social expenditure. This trend is very pronounced in France for both scores and in liberal countries for state intervention. This increase is not part of a pre-crisis trend: the previous edition of the "Role of Government" module (ISSP 1996) shows that, except in the case of Germany, Spain (increased expenditure) or Sweden (restriction of the role of government), there is no continuity in the trends observed between 1996 and 2016 (see Appendix 3). The exceptions to the general trend come from the Scandinavian countries: in Finland and Norway, the desire for increased social expenditure is declining, while in Sweden the idea of state intervention became more restricted between 2006 and 2016.

Among people aged 65 and over, shifts in opinions differ more between countries and have led, in most cases, to the opinions of young adults and those of their elders coming closer together. This time, it is in the liberal countries that a specific situation emerges, with the opinions of the two age groups on the role of government diverging markedly between 2006 and 2016.

Thus, in accordance with the expected effect of the crisis (H3), a shift towards increased support from young people for state intervention is seen, except in the Scandinavian countries. In contrast, due to the very disparate evolutions from one

country to another for seniors, the hypothesis of the parallel evolution of opinions (H4) is not verified overall (it is only observed for Sweden).

The results observed for the Scandinavian countries echo the literature that highlights the proliferation of liberal ideas in those countries during the 1980s and 1990s (Chenu & Herpin, 2006). In addition, the new generations are now socialising in a social and political context that is very different from that experienced by the post-war generations. Many of the young 25 year-olds surveyed in 2016 were born to parents who were themselves young adults in the 1990s: they therefore represent the first post-crisis generation of the "social democratic regime". Finally, though these young Scandinavians today differ from other young people in respect of their idea of the role of the state, it is above all from the point of view of the decline in their support for public intervention.⁹

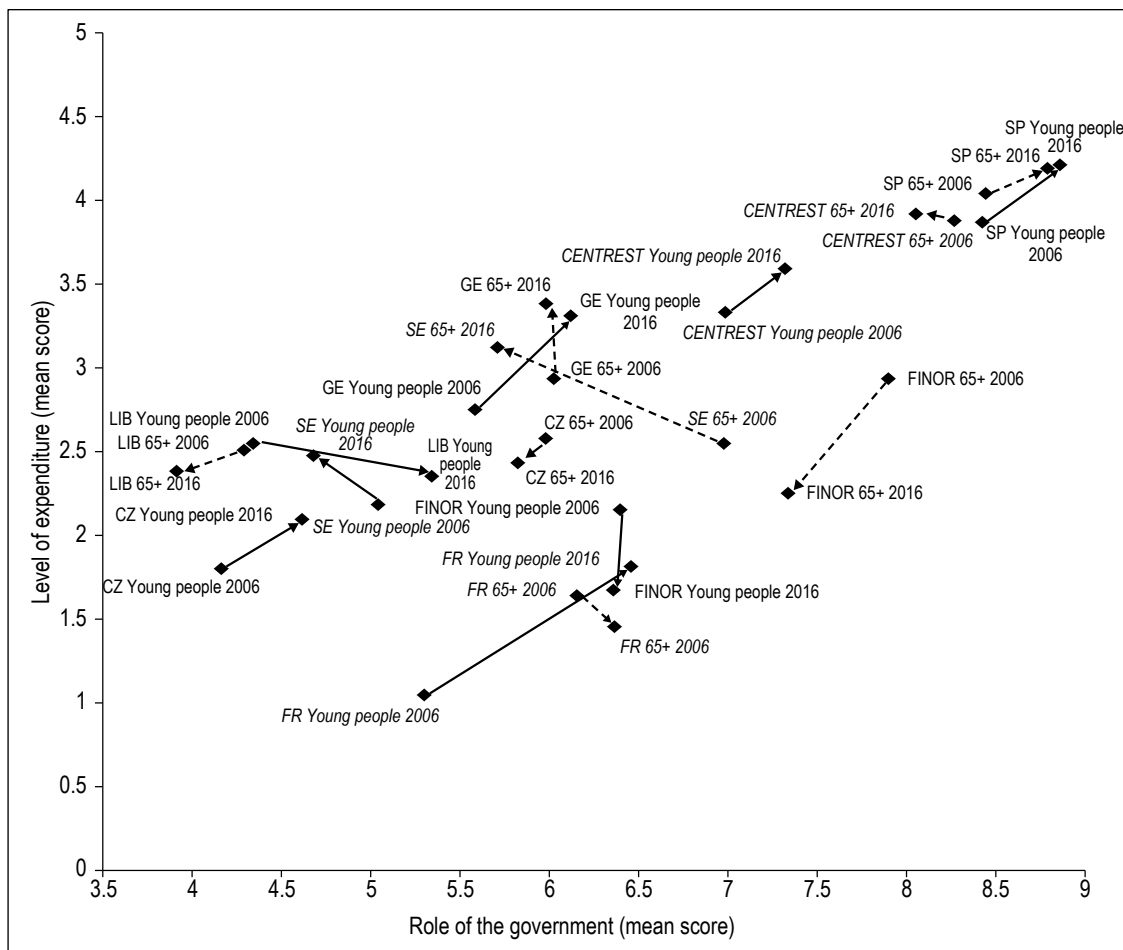
The incompatibility with the hypothesis of parallel publics, though validated by previous work, can be explained by the difference in the variables used in each study and by the overly general interpretation of previous results. It is also possible that the impact of the shock caused by the outbreak of the financial crisis on attitudes towards the social welfare system (Grislain-Letrémy & Papuchon, 2017) may reveal the specific effect of the deterioration in conditions of entry into adulthood and of the concern for the future of their social trajectory.

Finally, the results presented indicate that interpretations that postulate intergenerational conflict are based on an overly schematic view of intergenerational relationships and their respective "interests", with the very notion of generational interest being questionable.¹⁰ The respective opinions of the two age groups studied do not correspond to the supposedly more or less favourable orientation of different social welfare systems towards certain age groups, with the Scandinavian systems often being presented as relatively more favourable to young people and conservative systems or those of the former Eastern Bloc being presented as more protective for retirees than for young working people.

9. However, in Sweden there is growing support for increased expenditure, which is perhaps a first sign of a break with the surge in liberalism seen in the Scandinavian countries.

10. Concerning the construction of the issue of intergenerational relationships as an "intergenerational problem", see, for example, the work of Hummel & Hugentobler (2007).

Figure III – Evolution of the scores for opinions on the role of the state and social expenditure



Notes: LIB: United States, Great Britain, New Zealand, Switzerland. CENTRAL-EASTERN: Hungary, Latvia, Slovenia. FINOR: Finland and Norway. DE: Germany; ES: Spain; FR: France; SE: Sweden; CZ: Czech Republic. Sources and Coverage: ISSP 2006, 2016; people aged 18-30 and people aged 65 and over.

3. Effects of Age, Country and Period

Does being a young adult have a statistically robust effect on people's ideas of the role of the state and its social policy expenditure? Is this effect more pronounced in 2016 than in 2006?

To respond to these questions, we rely on a test of interaction effects built into the linear regression models estimated using ordinary least squares rather than multilevel models. The limitations of the latter for international comparisons are in fact increasingly stressed in recent literature (small number of countries available and non-random nature of their selection).¹¹ More specifically, two sets of models are used, the dependent variables of which are the two synthetic scores studied and into which the following independent variables are introduced: age group, gender, length of education, employment status (employed or not) and survey year.

For the country variable, Germany is chosen as the reference country, as a country in an intermediate position and which has descriptive results that appear similar for young adults and people aged 65 and over (cf. Figure III). The first pair of models contains no interaction terms. The second aims to test the interaction between the effect of the survey year and that of the age group. The third pair of models shows the interaction between age group and country of residence.

11. In cases where the number of level 2 units is low (less than 25, 30 or even 50), the estimates made by conventional multilevel models are unreliable, particularly with regard to random parameters (Browne & Draper, 2006; Bryan & Jenkins, 2016; Stegmueller, 2013). The estimates made by such types of models, carried out using frequentist or Bayesian methods, nevertheless lead to conclusions similar to those presented in this article.

3.1. The Crisis and State Intervention: Greater Impact on the Opinions of Young People than on their Elders

Support for state intervention (“role of state” score) appears significantly higher for young adults than for those aged 65 and older, all other things being equal (Table 1). In contrast, being a young adult rather than a “senior” does not have a significant effect on support for an increase in social expenditure. The estimated effect of being a young adult thus diverges from what the descriptive results suggested, in which the average scores of young people were generally lower than the scores of those aged 65 or older in 2016 and even lower in 2006 (see Figures II and III). If, all other things being equal, it is the responsibility of the state to intervene in more areas for young people than for their elders who have become inactive, it is likely due to the greater range of social risks faced by young people or the relatively lower level of public protection they currently receive in many countries (unemployment benefit, access to statutory minimums, etc.).

Compared to other working-age adults, young adults are significantly less supportive of an increase in social expenditure, but this difference is not significant with respect to the role of the state once employment status is taken into account. This result highlights the importance for young people of the stage where they enter the labour market, as their first work experiences can be decisive in changing their perception of inequalities and the social welfare system (Amadiou & Clément, 2016; Papuchon, 2018). However, it is difficult to interpret the effect of age group on the score for preferred evolution of expenditure in a clear-cut way.

The difference between the effects of age apparent in the descriptive statistics (see Figure 1, which showed that the average scores of young people tend to be lower than or equal to those of people aged 65 and over) and those of the modelling results could be explained by various compositional effects: in particular, young adults have a higher level of education (the effect of which is negative) and seniors are more likely to be female than male (and being female is associated with higher scores).

Having a job and a high level of education, markers of more valued social positions, are associated with opinions that are rather less supportive of the expansion of public intervention in social matters, from the point of

view of both the scope of intervention and desirable expenditure. These results tend to support the hypothesis that people in more favourable circumstances, who benefit less from state intervention, are less supportive of such intervention [H2].

Finally, opinions are more supportive of public intervention in 2016 than in 2006, particularly with regard to the principle of intervention, which supports the hypothesis that the crisis has led to increasing demand for public intervention [H3]. The introduction of an interaction between the survey year and the age group makes it possible to verify that, for the role of the state, this effect is greater among young adults than seniors (see Table 2). It does not come down to, for example, the lower probability of being in employment, which is controlled in the model.

3.2. The Effect of Age Varies Across Countries

The differences between countries of residence do not appear to be negligible for either score (Table 1), which confirms the idea that the opinion on the role of government and the amount of its social expenditure depend on the national context. However, the results of the estimates only partially align with the corresponding hypothesis [H1]. Concerning the role of the state, the results are in line with expectations for liberal countries (negative coefficients), as well as for Norway and Finland (positive coefficients) or Germany and France (intermediate position), but not for most of the Central and Eastern European countries (positive coefficients except for the Czech Republic), Spain (positive coefficient) or Sweden (negative coefficient). The model that seeks to explain the opinion on how social expenditure should evolve also leads to conclusions that diverge from the expected results: compared to Germany, opinions are more in favour in Spain, and they are less in favour in the Scandinavian countries and especially in France.

Beyond these average variations in scores, the effect of age also differs from country to country – especially with regard to the role of the state – even with identical social characteristics, as indicated by the tests on the effect of interaction between age group and country (see Table 3). Compared to Germany, where the average responses of young adults and those aged 65 or over are very similar for each survey edition (including after controlling for the variables

Table 1 – Linear regression models

	Model without interaction	
	Role of the state	Expenditure
Young adults	0.48***	-0.02 (ns)
Aged 31-64	0.40***	0.18***
65 or over	Ref.	Ref.
Male	Ref.	Ref.
Female	0.64***	0.33***
Number of years of education (numerical variable)	-0.13***	-0.05***
Unemployed	Ref.	Ref.
Employed	-0.82***	-0.33***
2006	Ref.	Ref.
2016	0.23***	0.07***
Germany	Ref.	Ref.
Czech Republic	-0.74***	-0.85***
Finland	0.55***	-0.71***
France	0.40***	-1.44***
Hungary	1.53***	0.85***
New Zealand	-1.65***	-0.83***
Norway	1.89***	-0.73***
Slovenia	2.57***	0.12 (ns)
Spain	2.82***	1.07***
Sweden	-0.53***	-0.36***
Switzerland	-1.51***	-0.92***
Great Britain	-0.88***	-0.56***
United States	-1.92***	0.01 (ns)
Latvia	1.05***	0.81***
Adjusted R2	0.17	0.13

Notes: *** Coefficient significant at the 0.001 threshold; ** Coefficient significant at the 0.01 threshold; * Coefficient significant at the 0.05 threshold; (ns) Coefficient not significant at the 0.05 threshold.

Sources and Coverage: ISSP 2006, 2016, people aged 18 and over.

Table 2 – Interaction between the effects of age group and year

	Year*age interaction	
	Role of the state	Expenditure
<i>Effect of being in 2016 rather than 2006...</i>		
for people aged 65 or over	0.06 (ns)	0.01 (ns)
for young adults, compared to the effect for people aged 65 or over	0.47***	0.10 (ns)
for people aged 31-64, compared to the effect for people aged 65 or over	0.14 (ns)	0.07 (ns)
Adjusted R2	0.17	0.13

Notes: The control variables are the same as those introduced in the models in Table 1 (results available from the author). *** Coefficient significant at the 0.001 threshold; ** Coefficient significant at the 0.01 threshold; * Coefficient significant at the 0.05 threshold; (ns) Coefficient not significant at the 0.05 threshold.

Sources and Coverage: ISSP 2006, 2016, people aged 18 and over.

introduced into the model),¹² this interaction effect is significant in 9 out of 13 countries for the role of the state and in 4 out of 13 for expenditure. Being aged 30 or under rather than 65 or over has a positive effect on the score for the role

of the state, which is clearly very pronounced in liberal countries (excluding Great Britain), and

12. See the descriptive results presented in Figure 3 and the coefficients that are not significant at the 0.05 threshold in the first row of Table 3.

a negative effect in the Scandinavian countries, the Czech Republic and Latvia. In the case of the score for desired expenditure, while the effect of being a young adult rather than a senior is not significant at the level of the entire sample (see Table 1), the effect of the interaction between age and country nevertheless proves to be significant due to Finland, Sweden and the Czech Republic on the one hand (negative coefficient) and the United States on the other (positive coefficient) (Table 3).

This set of results thus tends to confirm that the difference of opinion between age groups varies in accordance with the national context, but not in the way suggested by the approach in terms of social welfare regime, according to which the differences should be small in social democratic and liberal regimes and high in the others. These estimates are consistent with the descriptive results presented in Figure III.

The effect of being a young adult thus varies in accordance with the national context and it is higher in 2016 than at the threshold of the crisis, at least with regard to what is the responsibility of the state. All other things being equal, young adults are no less supportive of public intervention than seniors. The deterioration

of the conditions for entering adulthood and its effect on expected social trajectories thus seem to have led to a broadening of the desired scope of public intervention in the field of social policies.

However, do the variations analysed come from the same social policy areas in all countries? What is the basis for this unexpected distribution of international differences between the opinions expressed by young people and their elders? How can we understand the counter-trend described for the Scandinavian countries and what about the much discussed intergenerational divide in relation to conservative countries, as defined by Esping-Andersen? These are the questions addressed below.

4. Welfare State Regimes and Evolution of the Opinions of Young Adults

To stay within the framework of the article, we focus here on the situation in the liberal countries, the Scandinavian countries and three conservative/mediterranean countries that have been the subject of most of the recent work on young adults: Germany, Spain and France.

Table 3 – Interaction between the effects of age group and country of residence

	Country*age interaction	
	Role of the state	Expenditure
Effect of being a young adult rather than being aged 65 or over in Germany	0.42	0.06
<i>Compared to Germany</i>		
Czech Republic	-1.30***	-0.45*
Finland	-0.70*	-0.65**
France	-0.32	-0.08
Hungary	0.22	-0.27
New Zealand	0.79*	-0.33
Norway	-0.93**	-0.31
Slovenia	-0.60	0.03
Spain	0.82**	0.26
Sweden	-0.73*	-0.43*
Switzerland	1.57***	0.37
Great Britain	0.34	0.16
United States	2.19***	0.57**
Latvia	-1.00**	-0.35
Adjusted R2	0.17	0.14

Notes: The control variables are the same as those introduced in the models in Table 1 (results available from the author). *** Coefficient significant at the 0.001 threshold; ** Coefficient significant at the 0.01 threshold; * Coefficient significant at the 0.05 threshold; (ns) Coefficient not significant at the 0.05 threshold.

Sources and Coverage: ISSP 2006, 2016, people aged 18 and over.

4.1. A Surge in Demand to Reduce Economic Inequality in the Liberal Countries

In 2016, young people are more supportive than seniors of the development of the role of the state in the liberal countries (see Appendix 4).¹³ This difference has increased significantly in the United States and Switzerland over the past 10 years. In 2006, it was even the oldest people who had the highest averages in New Zealand and Great Britain.

This growing demand for public intervention among young people is based on a strong increase in the aspiration to reduce inequalities, which accounts for half of the increase in the overall score. In 2006, 56% of them felt that the state should intervene to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor, compared to 72% in 2016 (Figure IV), with 23% “absolutely” believing this in 2006, compared to 31% a decade later.

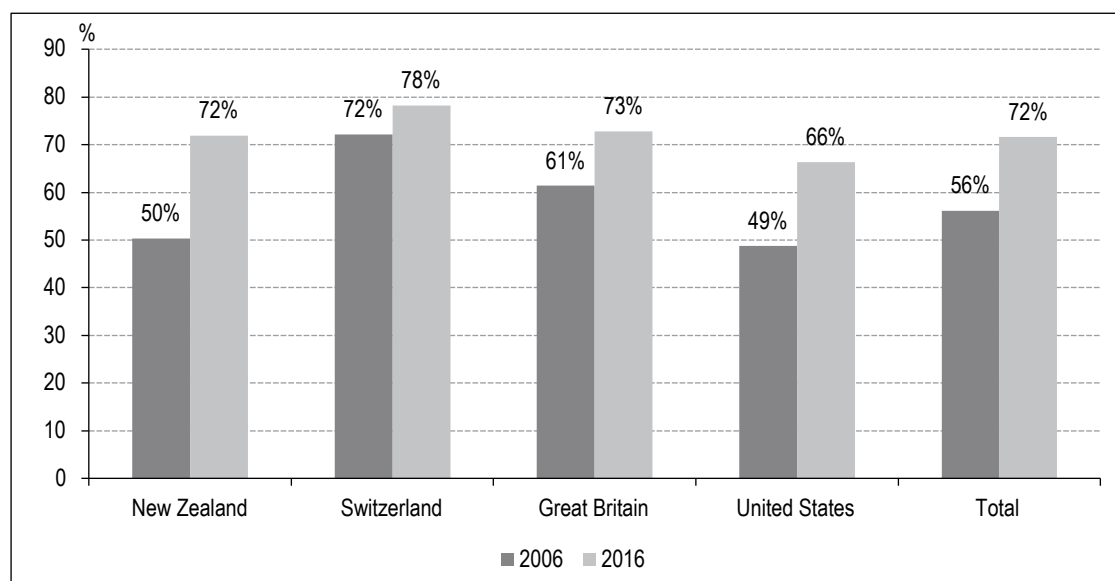
This change is mainly due to young people who have studied for longer than the median: the share of respondents who “absolutely agree” increases by 11 points, while the overall proportion of those who are in favour increases by 22 points.¹⁴ The increase is particularly noticeable among young people who are not employed at the time of the survey (+21 points), although it is also marked among those who are employed (+13 points).

The other major increase concerns the need to ensure a minimum standard of living for the unemployed. This accounts for one third of the increase in the average score for the role of the state among young people, while no change is observed in this respect among people aged 65 and over. Among young adults, opinions in favour of this type of intervention increase from 53% to 65% between 2006 and 2016, and this growth is similar regardless of whether they are employed or not, or whether they have studied longer or not. In contrast, differences among young people regarding the need for the government to ensure employment for all increased over the period. This idea is now supported by two thirds of those who have completed the shortest studies (+9 points), compared with half of those who have studied for longer than the median (stable).¹⁵

In the context of liberal regimes, in which the trajectories of each generation seem closer than elsewhere, albeit with strong inequalities between people of the same age and also between age groups (Chauvel & Schröder, 2014; Hausermann & Schwander, 2013), the crisis is thus manifesting itself through significant effects on the opinions of young adults. The

13. In contrast, opinions on the level of expenditure tended to converge.
 14. The differences among those who have studied less, 5 points and 7 points respectively, are not significant.
 15. The former are twice as likely as the latter to strongly support this objective (25% vs. 13%).

Figure IV – Reducing differences between the rich and poor: government responsibility according to young adults



Sources and Coverage: ISSP 2006, 2016; people aged 18-30 in the United States, Great Britain, New Zealand and Switzerland.

deterioration of their situation (lower employment rate, higher student debt), the spread of insecurity and the development of intra-generational inequalities is reflected among young people by a shift in attitudes not only in favour of reducing inequalities, but also – especially among those with fewest qualifications – in favour of public employment and support for the unemployed. The considerable increase in support for the objective of reducing inequalities among those who have completed longer studies could point to a particularly marked mismatch between their hopes based on their studies – and the personal and family investments required – and the conditions encountered at the beginning of their working life. The responses of those with fewest qualifications also underline the difficulties that they face on the labour market.

4.2. A Decline in the Expected Role of the State in Finland and Norway, but not in Sweden

The situation in the Scandinavian countries appears to be quite different from that in the liberal countries, not so much because of the level of the scores – those of young Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons are not that different – but because of their respective dynamics, with less homogeneous evolutions in the Scandinavian countries and no increase in the score for the role of the state (Figure V). In Finland and Norway, the “social expenditure” score among seniors fell the most between 2006 and 2016. However, the decrease is also statistically significant among young people (-0.3 points), with two thirds of the decrease stemming from the opinion on unemployment benefit expenditure. In 2016, young people are more likely to be in favour of decreasing such expenditure than in 2006 (37% vs. 26%), especially those who are employed.

It should be noted that, based on data from the “Work Orientations” module of the ISSP 2015, young people in Scandinavian countries, who are less exposed to the risk of unemployment than young people in other countries, are more exposed to the risk of having to combine two jobs: 3 out of 10 young people were in this situation at least once during the 12 months preceding the survey, which is double the proportion observed for those aged 31-60 (Figure VI), a level and differences of the same order as those observed for the liberal countries or the Czech Republic. Thus, the evolution of opinions on

expenditure to deal with unemployment cannot be interpreted as younger generations being less concerned about their situation. On the contrary, the perceptions of young people in Scandinavian countries about their position on the social scale are worsening:¹⁶ the proportion of young people in the lower half of the social scale increases from 37% to 47% between 2006 and 2016, while the proportion of those in the upper third decreases from 17% to 10%.

Sweden stands out from Finland and Norway due to a rise in opinions in favour of increased social expenditure. From the point of view of public policies aimed at young adults, the work of Thévenon (2015) set out two sub-units made up of Finland and Denmark on the one hand, and Sweden and Norway on the other. However, the divergence of opinions is related to a certain number of features specific to Sweden’s profile: it is the only one of these four countries whose social expenditure did not increase sharply as a share of GDP during the crisis,¹⁷ despite the increase in unemployment among young adults. It is also the country where, in 2015, the OECD workplace stress indicator¹⁸ was the highest for those aged 15 to 29 out of all the countries studied (after Spain). Thévenon also stresses that Sweden is the Scandinavian country with the highest rate of unemployed young people who have left the education system and are not in receipt of any public support (Thévenon, 2015).

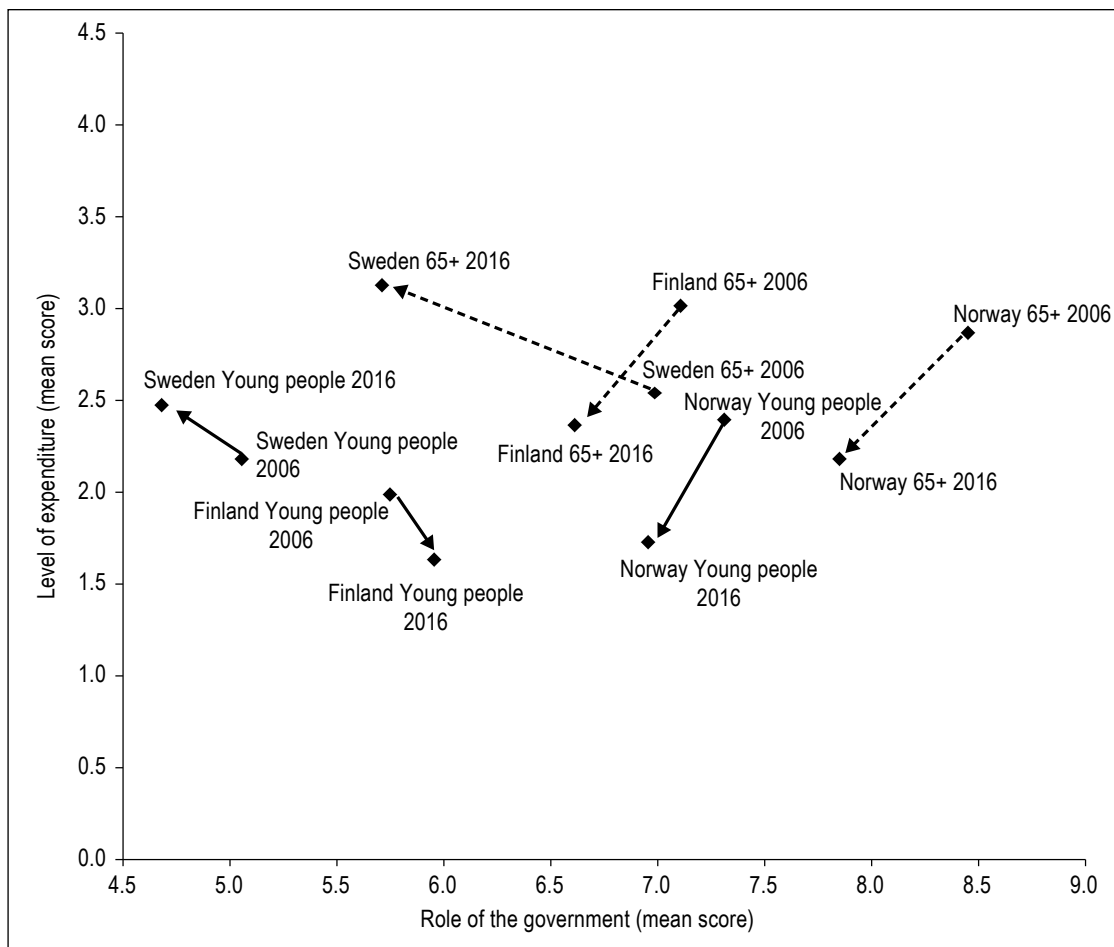
Young adults’ opinions could also be affected by the rise in inequalities and poverty, which has been greater in Sweden than in Finland or Norway over the last 20 years. Between 1995 and 2016, the Gini coefficient rose by one third in Sweden, while the poverty rate (at the 50% threshold) of people aged 65 and over tripled (OECD, 2019, pp. 187-189). The erosion of the subjective social position of young Scandinavians observed between 2006 and 2016 echoes the decline of the middle class in society that seems to have been taking place in countries with social democratic regimes since the mid-1990s.

16. Graduated scale from 1 to 10: “In our society, there are some groups that are higher up in society and those that are lower down. Here is a scale that goes from the top to the bottom. Where would you place yourself on this scale?”

17. OECD social expenditure database (SOCX).

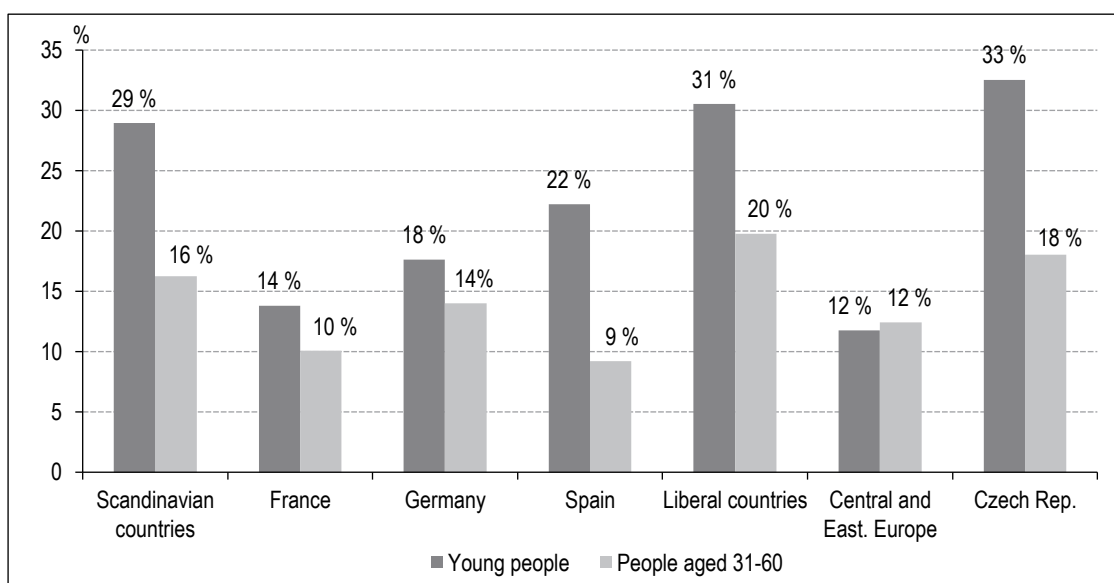
18. A job is considered a factor of stress when the worker faces demands that exceed the resources at his or her disposal (OECD, 2013, Chapter V).

Figure V – Range of scores in the Scandinavian countries



Sources and Coverage: ISSP 2006, 2016; people aged 18-30 and people aged 65 and over.

Figure VI – Proportion of people with a second job over the last twelve months



Sources and Coverage: ISSP 2015; people aged 18-30 and people aged 31-60.

4.3. Conservative and Mediterranean Countries: an Intergenerational Divide that is Becoming Blurred

With relatively similar opinions on the role of the state, the Germans and the French differ in respect of the desired evolution of social expenditure (see Figure III), with the Germans being much more in favour of increasing social expenditure. However, what these two countries both have in common is a clear increase in support among young adults for public intervention, from the point of view of both the role of the state and its expenditure. This is based primarily on the evolution of opinions with regard to the areas from which, at first glance, they benefit least directly: retirement and health policies, with increases of 10 to 20 points for “Definitely” responses (Tables 4 et 5). With the exception of the question on health expenditure in Germany, the responses of people aged 65 and over were relatively stable from one survey

edition to the next and the opinions of young people tended to move closer to those of their elders between 2006 and 2016.

The idea that there is a divide between young adults and their elders in relation to social welfare policies in Bismarckian or “conservative” countries therefore seems to have less and less empirical validity. It is possible that this alignment between age groups is the result of a general shift in how young people judge the standard of living or social situation of retirees. In France, for example, the proportion of young adults who believe that the average standard of living of retirees is lower than that of the population as a whole increased from 33% in 2006 to 63% in 2016, while the rate of increase was much lower – from 40% to 47% – among those aged 65 and over.¹⁹

19. DREES Opinion Barometer, 2006-2016.

Table 4 – Opinion on policies for health and the elderly in France

	Aged 30 or under		Aged 65 or over	
	2006	2016	2006	2016
It is the responsibility of the government...				
<i>To provide a decent standard of living for the elderly</i>				
Definitely	36	55	65	63
Yes	54	40	32	34
No	8	6	3	3
Definitely not	2	0	3	2
<i>To provide healthcare</i>				
Definitely	48	60	60	60
Yes	42	37	32	34
No	7	2	7	5
Definitely not	4	1	2	1
The government should spend more or less...				
<i>For pensions</i>				
Spend much more	9	15	19	21
Spend more	32	43	36	32
Spend the same as now	48	36	42	42
Spend less	9	5	2	4
Spend much less	3	2	1	1
<i>For health</i>				
Spend much more	11	16	25	21
Spend more	35	45	38	37
Spend the same as now	45	34	32	34
Spend less	6	5	5	8
Spend much less	3	0	0	1

Sources and Coverage: ISSP 2006, 2016, people aged 18-30 and people aged 65 or over living in metropolitan France.

Table 5 – Opinion on policies for health and the elderly in Germany

(%)

	Aged 30 or under		Aged 65 or over	
	2006	2016	2006	2016
It is the responsibility of the government...				
<i>To provide a decent standard of living for the elderly</i>				
Definitely	40	52	52	57
Yes	53	43	43	38
No	6	5	4	5
Definitely not	1	0	1	0
<i>To provide healthcare</i>				
Definitely	47	61	59	59
Yes	50	38	37	37
No	3	1	3	3
Definitely not	0	0	1	1
The government should spend more or less...				
<i>For pensions</i>				
Spend much more	18	28	21	25
Spend more	33	46	40	40
Spend the same as now	40	23	37	34
Spend less	8	3	2	1
Spend much less	2	0	0	0
<i>For health</i>				
Spend much more	20	26	21	32
Spend more	48	46	46	45
Spend the same as now	24	27	28	22
Spend less	8	1	4	1
Spend much less	1	0	0	0

Sources and Coverage: ISSP 2006, 2016, people aged 18-30 and people aged 65 or over living in Germany.

Young French people today also differ from young Germans in respect of their position on the labour market. The 2005 and 2015 editions of the ISSP show that, in France, concerns about the idea of becoming unemployed and the opinion that it would be difficult to find another job of the same level have increased significantly in 10 years, with the deterioration of the situation facing young people on the labour market. In Germany, however, the difficulty in finding work has decreased notably, if these subjective indicators or the unemployment rate for young people are to be believed. However, the poverty rate among young people has risen sharply in Germany since 2010 and is now well above the rates seen in France. It also appears that the proportion of young people working more than 40 hours per week and those working fewer than 20 hours increased in Germany between 2005 and 2015 (ISSP). However, the small sample sizes make it very difficult to study how these inequalities affect the opinions of young adults.

Spain – where social policies have little focus on young people – stands out due to its high scores and the similarity between the results of young adults and those of people aged 65 and over. Although the economic and social shock caused by the crisis has been particularly severe there, the indicators used do not make it possible to determine the impact on opinions about social welfare policies. The 2005 and 2015 editions (“Work Orientations”) appear more relevant from this point of view: the proportion of young people employed who think it would be difficult for them to find a job comparable to their own rose from 28% in 2005 – the lowest level among the countries studied – to 60% in 2015 – the highest level – while the proportion of young people who believe that they are in the bottom third of the social scale increased from 3% to 13%.

* *
*

For the first time, this article studies the opinions of young adults on social policies – the role of the state and the level of its expenditure – in Europe and in the liberal countries, as well as the differences in opinion between young adults and their elders and how those opinions have evolved in a period marked by the 2008 crisis.

Analysis of the ISSP data reveals that the crisis years have resulted in an increase in support among young adults for public intervention in the area of social welfare, as well as a tendency for their opinions to converge across countries, with the exception of the Scandinavian countries. This increase is interpreted as an effect of the deterioration of the conditions for young people entering adulthood and of their prospects, which is occurring in different ways depending on the different national contexts. By primarily affecting those who have only recently entered the labour market or are preparing to do so, the crisis has resulted in a greater increase in support for public intervention among young adults than among other working-age adults or their elders.

Neither the hypothesis concerning parallel publics nor the inferences drawn from a reading of the traditional typologies of social welfare regimes through the generational prism are validated by the results presented. Strong divergences are observed in countries usually considered to be similar: between France and Germany, between the Czech Republic and the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, or even between Sweden and Finland or Norway. In the so-called “liberal” countries, young people tend to be much more in favour of an expanded role for the state than people aged 65 or over, especially after the 2008 crisis.

From a point of view of dynamics, the differences between young people and their elders are increasing in the liberal countries and decreasing in the conservative countries, while the desire for greater social welfare remains high in countries where it was relatively less developed (Spain and Central and Eastern Europe). In contrast, a phenomenon of parallel evolution of the opinions of young adults and seniors is observed in

Sweden and Norway, which is part of an earlier trend that is rather less supportive of the increase of public intervention than elsewhere.

There are, however, some limitations arising from data constraints to be highlighted. The small sample size makes it impossible to distinguish between students, employees, those who are studying and working and, generally, to establish the class position of the young people, which reduces the likelihood of understanding the trajectories that young people are likely to enter. The fact that it is not possible to take into account that some young adults still live in the parental home is also a notable drawback, as this form of family support varies greatly from one country to another. To the best of our knowledge, there continues to be little study of the impact of these parent-child close relationships on young adults’ political and social opinions. Finally, the available control variables remain too rough to allow for the examination of the economic situation of young adults with a satisfactory degree of precision; in particular, the resources available to them are especially difficult to determine, as is regularly highlighted in work concerning this population.

These results suggest various avenues for future research, for example on youth in liberal countries or on the loss of effectiveness of “generational rhetoric” (Hummel & Hugentobler, 2007) in conservative countries. Further work could also seek to take more specific account of the policy decisions taken in the wake of this crisis, in order to make a distinction between the effect of the reforms adopted and other manifestations of the deterioration in the conditions for young people entering adulthood. The results presented also implicitly invite a study of class differentiations in the pathways for entering adulthood and their subjective interpretation: a new diversity, but perhaps also new connections between young people in different countries could thus be revealed, which have so far escaped sociology that too often tends to consider youth as a homogeneous whole, essentially constructed by the interaction between public policies and national models of intra-family support. □

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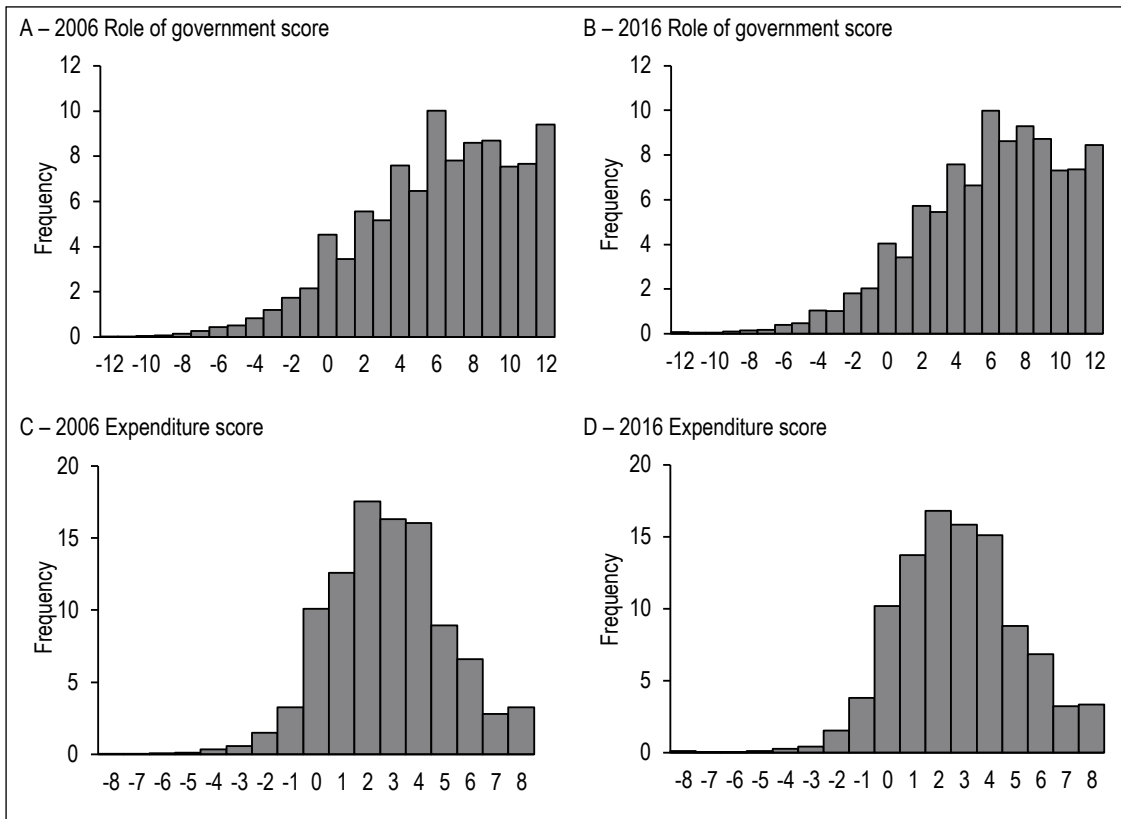
APPENDIX 1

NUMBER OF OBSERVATIONS BY YEAR AND COUNTRY

	Aged 18-30		Aged 65 or over	
	2006	2016	2006	2016
Finland	280	255	169	247
Norway	230	213	214	270
<i>Finland - Norway Total</i>	510	468	383	517
Sweden	204	141	215	365
United States	263	267	235	310
Great Britain	171	194	196	480
New Zealand	193	257	281	363
Switzerland	137	187	245	225
<i>Liberal Regimes Total</i>	764	905	957	1378
Hungary	196	122	231	182
Latvia	279	212	170	165
Slovenia	244	186	190	265
<i>Central and Eastern Europe Total</i>	719	520	591	612
Czech Republic	214	209	258	305
Germany	267	259	385	425
France	201	137	477	513
Spain	526	282	507	419
Total	3,405	2,921	3,773	4,534

Sources: ISSP 2006, 2016.

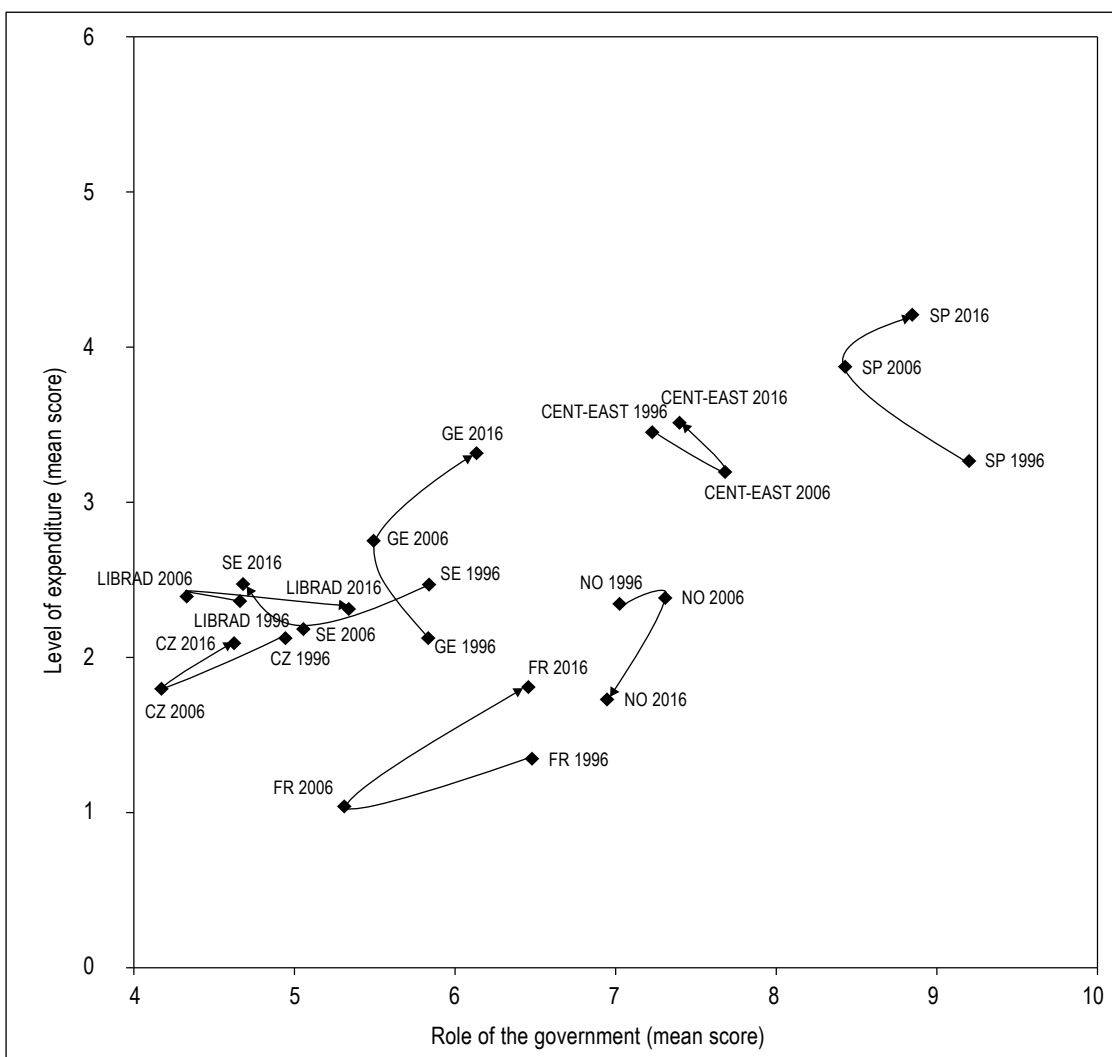
DISTRIBUTION OF SYNTHETIC SCORES BY SURVEY EDITION (%)



Sources and Coverage: ISSP 2006, 2016; aged 18 and over.

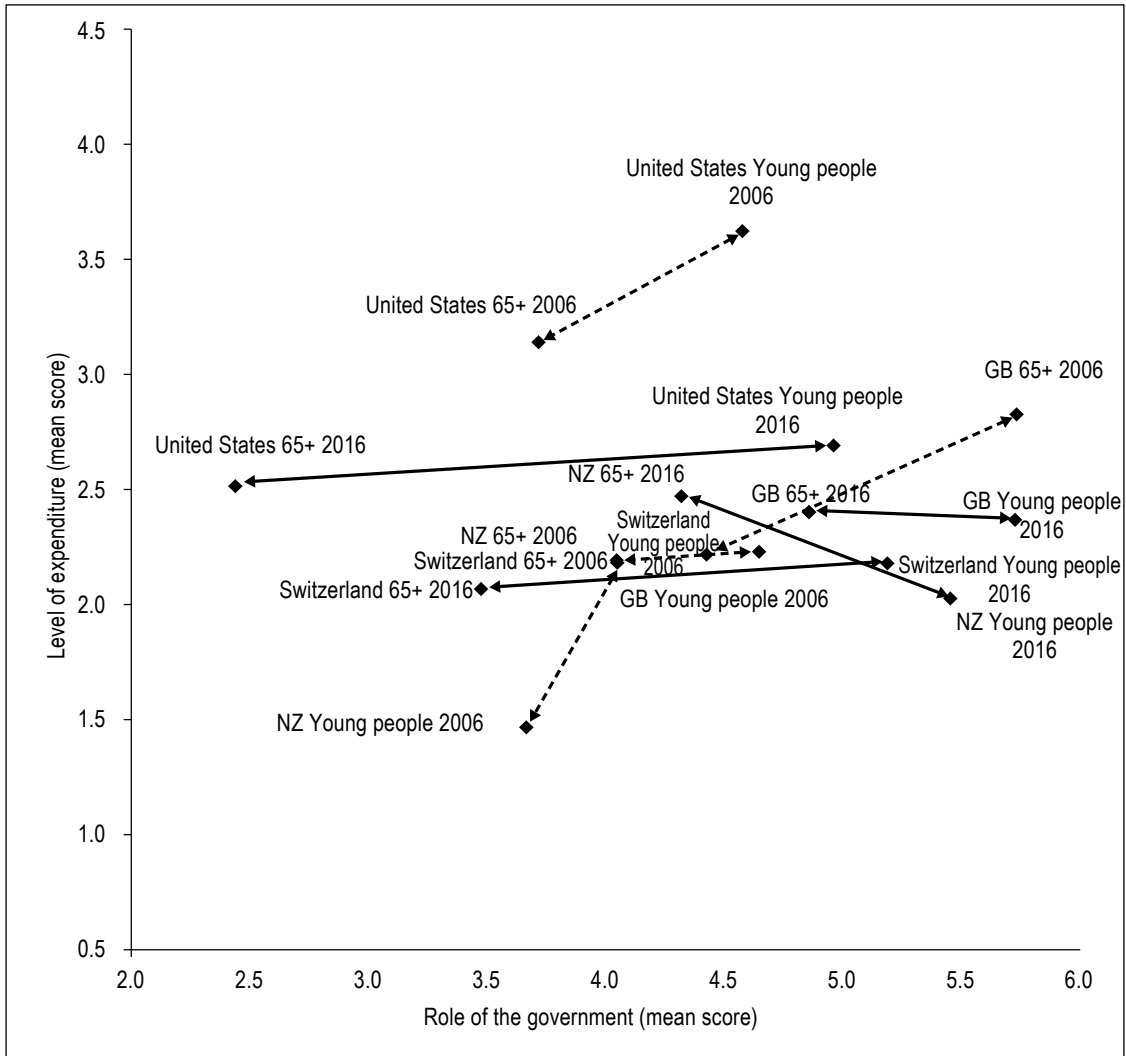
APPENDIX 3

EVOLUTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S OPINIONS ON THE ROLE OF THE STATE AND SOCIAL EXPENDITURE BETWEEN 1996 AND 2016



Notes: LIBRAD: United States, Great Britain, New Zealand, Switzerland. CENTRAL-EASTERN: Hungary, Latvia, Slovenia. NO: Norway. GE: Germany; SP: Spain; FR: France; SE: Sweden; CZ: Czech Republic.
Sources and Coverage: ISSP 1996, 2006, 2016; people aged 18-30.

RANGE OF SCORES: COUNTRIES WITH RESIDUAL SOCIAL WELFARE



Sources and Coverage: ISSP 2006, 2016; people aged 18-30 and people aged 65 and over in the United States, Great Britain, New Zealand and Switzerland.