System Cynicism in Twenty Contemporary Nations

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Measuring Cynicism and Idealism

Two definitions of "idealist" in the Random House Dictionary of the English Language capture a nice polarity. An idealist is defined there as 1) "one who cherishes or pursues high or noble principles, goals, etc." and 3. "one who represents things as they might or should be rather than as they are." The opposite will do as a working definition of "cynic", sometimes know as realist.

The ISSP (International Social Survey Programme), a confederation of some two dozen survey centers who carry out annual probability samplings of their nations using a common questionnaire, put these issues to some 41000 respondents in 1987 and 1992 with the following question:

"To begin we have some questions about opportunities for
 getting ahead...Please tick one box for each of these
 to show how important it is for getting ahead in life...
 (Essential, Very Important, Fairly Important, Not
 important at all)

*a) coming from a wealthy family (7, 2.78)
 b) having well-educated parents (6, 3.01)
#c) having a good education yourself (3, 3.86)
#d) having ambition (1, 3.93)
#e) natural ability (4, 3.71)
#f) hard work (2, 3.89)
*g) knowing the right people (5, 3.46)
*h) having political connections (8, 2.51)
 i) a person's race (10, 2.25)
 j) a person's religion (13, 1.89)
 k) the part of the country a person comes from (12, 2.05)
 l) being born a man or a woman (9, 2.31)
 m) a person's political beliefs (11, 2.21)

Responses marked with * I consider to be "cynical", those marked with # I consider to be "idealistic". Unmarked items are either ambiguous (b) or have very low marginals (i-m) as shown by the figures in parentheses which give the rank and the overall 1992 mean on a scale in which 5=Essential and 1=Not important at all.

Table 1 summarizes the available data.

Table 1
Participants in the 1987 and 1992 ISSP Surveys

(Cell entry is number of respondents
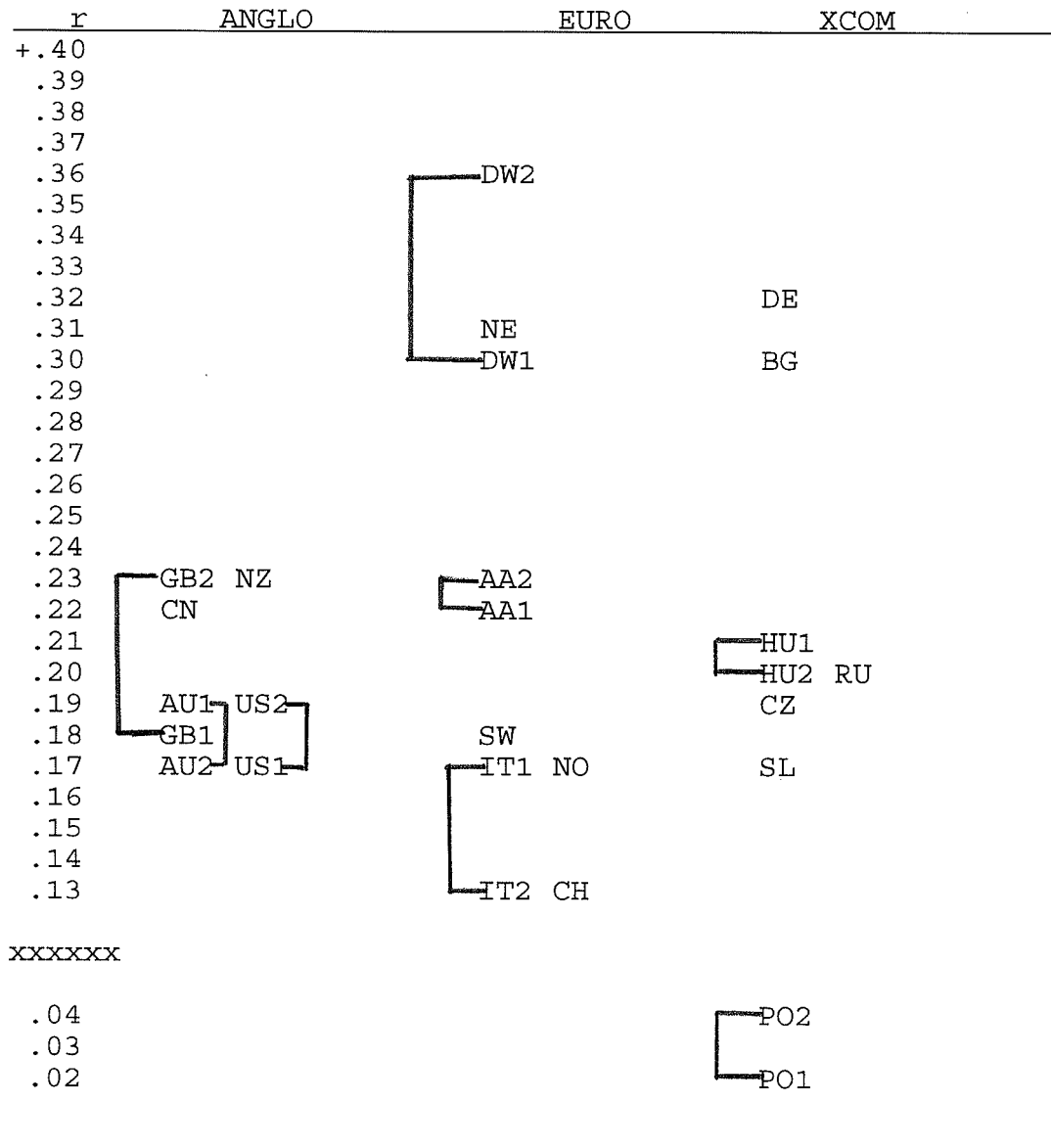with answers on cynicism/idealism)

Region	Nation	Abbreviation		1987	1992
ANGLO					
	Australia	AU1	AU2	1625	2080
	Canada	CN			943
	Great Britain	GB1	GB2	1211	1003
	United States	US1	US2	1548	1165
	New Zealand	NZ			1179
EUROPE					
	Austria	AA1	AA2	972	965
	Italy	IT1	IT2	1026	961
	Netherlands	NE		1624	
	Norway	NO			1380
	Sweden	SW			639
	Switzerland	CH		977	
	West Germany	DW1	DW2	1386	2093
POSTCOMMUNIST					
	Bulgaria	BG			875
	Czech Republic	CZ			979
	East Germany	DE			979
	Hungary	HU1	HU2	2554	1138
	Poland	PO1	PO2	1948	1302
	Russia	RU			1149
	Slovenia	SL			904
Phillipines		RP			1191
	Total			17009	23903

Twenty nations are represented, eight of which have data from
both 1987 and 1992. I divided them into three common sense groups:
ANGLO=5 English speaking nations, EUROPE=7 European nations never
behind the iron curtain, and POSTCOMMUNIST=7 recently Communist
nations. The Phillipines, the only non-Western nation doesn't fit
into any of the three. At the time of the surveys all
20 nations were representative democracies.

After reversing scores on all the items so 1 equals low
importance and 5 equals high, I constructed a cynicism index by
averaging the three cynical items and an idealism index by
averaging the four idealistic items. It turns out that Random House
to the contrary notwithstanding, cynicism and idealism are
positively correlated. For the pooled 92 data r=+.195 (N=20,848)

Figure 1 shows the sample by sample values of the correlation and
also illustrates the analysis strategy.

Figure 1
Correlation between Idealism and
Cynicism Indices (r) by Survey

```
    r        ANGLO                  EURO              XCOM
+.40
 .39
 .38
 .37
 .36                            ┌───DW2
 .35                            │
 .34                            │
 .33                            │
 .32                            │                      DE
 .31                       NE   │
 .30                            └───DW1                BG
 .29
 .28
 .27
 .26
 .25
 .24
 .23    ┌─GB2 NZ            ┌──AA2
 .22    │  CN              └──AA1
 .21    │                                  ┌──HU1
 .20    │                                  └──HU2 RU
 .19    │  AU1┐US2┐                            CZ
 .18    └─GB1 │   │         SW
 .17       AU2┘US1┘       ┌─IT1 NO             SL
 .16                      │
 .15                      │
 .14                      │
 .13                      └─IT2 CH

xxxxxx

 .04                                        ┌──PO2
 .03                                        │
 .02                                        └──PO1
```

Although the technical quality of these surveys are well above the average for cross-national research (samples of entire nations, full probability designs with only one or two exceptions, no telephone samples, etc.), these data will be noisy. In most cases we will be seeing small relationships, "house effects", and the vicissitudes of translation on top of the usual sampling variation. The latter should not be a major problem since the vast majority of analyses have Ns of 1000 or more.

I decided that the best way to proceed was akin to meta-analysis, that is to lay out the complete range of results and look for patterns.

Figure 1, which displays the idealism/cynicism correlations, illustrates the strategy, without revealing anything particularly interesting. It tells us:

1) All the correlations are positive and, save for Poland, lie between +.13 and +.36

2) The eight replications (connected by lines) show stability across the five year period.

3) There are no consistent differences among the three regions.

4) There is a hint of a language effect. The eight English speaking correlations cluster together and the five Germans ones (DW2, DW1,DE,AA1,AA2) are all on the high side.

To give a sharper focus I constructed a third index, NetCynicism. For each respondent it is Cynicism minus Idealism, that is, the difference in the average importance given to the three cynicism items and the average for the four idealism items. This should correct for personal propensities to give generally high or low ratings. Table 2 shows the distribution for the 1992 samples:

Table 2.

Distribution of NetCynicism Scores (1992 samples)

Min	QU	Median	Mean	QU	Max	Std. Dev.	N
-4.00	-1.58	-1.00	-0.95	-0.33	3.25	.94	20848

Taken at face value the contemporary citizens are more idealistic than cynical, with minus signs dominating. Overall 14 per cent were cynical (positive scores), 3 per cent had zero scores and 83 per cent had negative scores (higher cynicism than idealism.)

National Differences

The obvious next question is national variation. Table 3 gives the results. Since the metric for NetCynicism index is arbitrary, I transformed individual scores to Z's, subtracting the mean (-.95) and dividing by the 1992 standard deviation (.94). The adjusted scores tell us how many standard deviations above or below the 1992 pooled mean a case is. Note that 1987 scores are standardized on 1992 values.

Table 3 displays the national results.

Table 3
National Levels on Key Variables
(See text for explanations)

Nat	Year	IDEAL	CYNIC	NETCYN	ZIDL	ZCYNIC	ZNET	POSITION
AU	92	4.00	2.91	-1.10	.23	-.00	-.16	4.9
	87	4.02	2.68	-1.36	.30	-.27	-.44	4.9
CN	92	3.99	2.67	-1.32	.22	-.28	-.40	4.8
GB	92	3.95	2.56	-1.39	.14	-.42	-.47	4.3
	87	3.97	2.67	-1.30	.19	-.28	-.38	4.2
US	92	4.01	2.81	-1.27	.36	-.12	-.35	4.5
	87	4.10	2.88	-1.22	.41	-.04	-.29	4.8
NZ	92	4.03	2.46	-1.57	.28	-.53	-.66	5.0
AA	92	4.08	3.30	-0.79	.36	.45	.17	4.8
	87	4.02	3.33	-0.69	.27	.49	.28	4.4
CH	87	3.85	2.94	-0.91	-.01	.03	.04	4.6
DW	92	3.74	2.86	-0.88	-.19	-.06	.07	4.7
	87	3.84	3.01	-0.84	-.03	.11	.12	4.6
IT	92	3.77	3.38	-0.38	-.16	.55	.60	3.9
	87	3.71	3.46	-0.25	-.26	.64	.75	4.7
NE	87	3.72	2.53	-1.19	-.22	-.44	-.26	NA*
NO	92	3.83	2.57	-1.26	-.06	-.40	-.33	4.8
SW	92	3.76	2.65	-1.11	-.17	-.31	-.17	4.7
BG	92	3.90	3.09	-0.84	.07	.21	.12	2.8
CZ	92	3.59	2.85	-0.74	-.45	-.08	.22	3.7
DE	92	3.86	2.87	-0.98	-.01	-.04	-.03	3.7
HU	92	3.50	3.00	-0.51	-.60	.10	.47	2.9
	87	3.68	3.05	-0.06	-.29	.16	.34	3.7
PO	92	3.97	3.28	-0.68	.17	.44	.29	3.3
	87	3.64	3.13	-0.52	-.37	.25	.46	3.6
RU	92	3.57	3.12	-0.44	-.48	.25	.54	3.4
SL	92	3.66	2.86	-0.79	-.33	-.06	.17	3.8
RP	92	4.14	3.22	-0.92	.47	.36	.03	3.4

* see discussion in text.

Figure 2
NETCYNICISM (2) 1987 AND 1992

Z
1992

.8

.6   IT ● $\dfrac{\begin{array}{c}.60\\.75\end{array}}{-.15}$

.4   HU ● $\dfrac{\begin{array}{c}.47\\.34\end{array}}{+.13}$

PO ● $\dfrac{\begin{array}{c}.29\\.46\end{array}}{-.17}$

.2   AA ● $\dfrac{\begin{array}{c}.17\\.28\end{array}}{-.11}$

DW ● $\dfrac{\begin{array}{c}.07\\.12\end{array}}{-.05}$

O

AU ● $\dfrac{\begin{array}{c}-.16\\-.44\end{array}}{+.28}$

-.2

US ● $\dfrac{\begin{array}{c}-.35\\-.29\end{array}}{-.06}$

-.4   GB ● $\dfrac{\begin{array}{c}-.47\\-.38\end{array}}{-.09}$

-.6

-.8

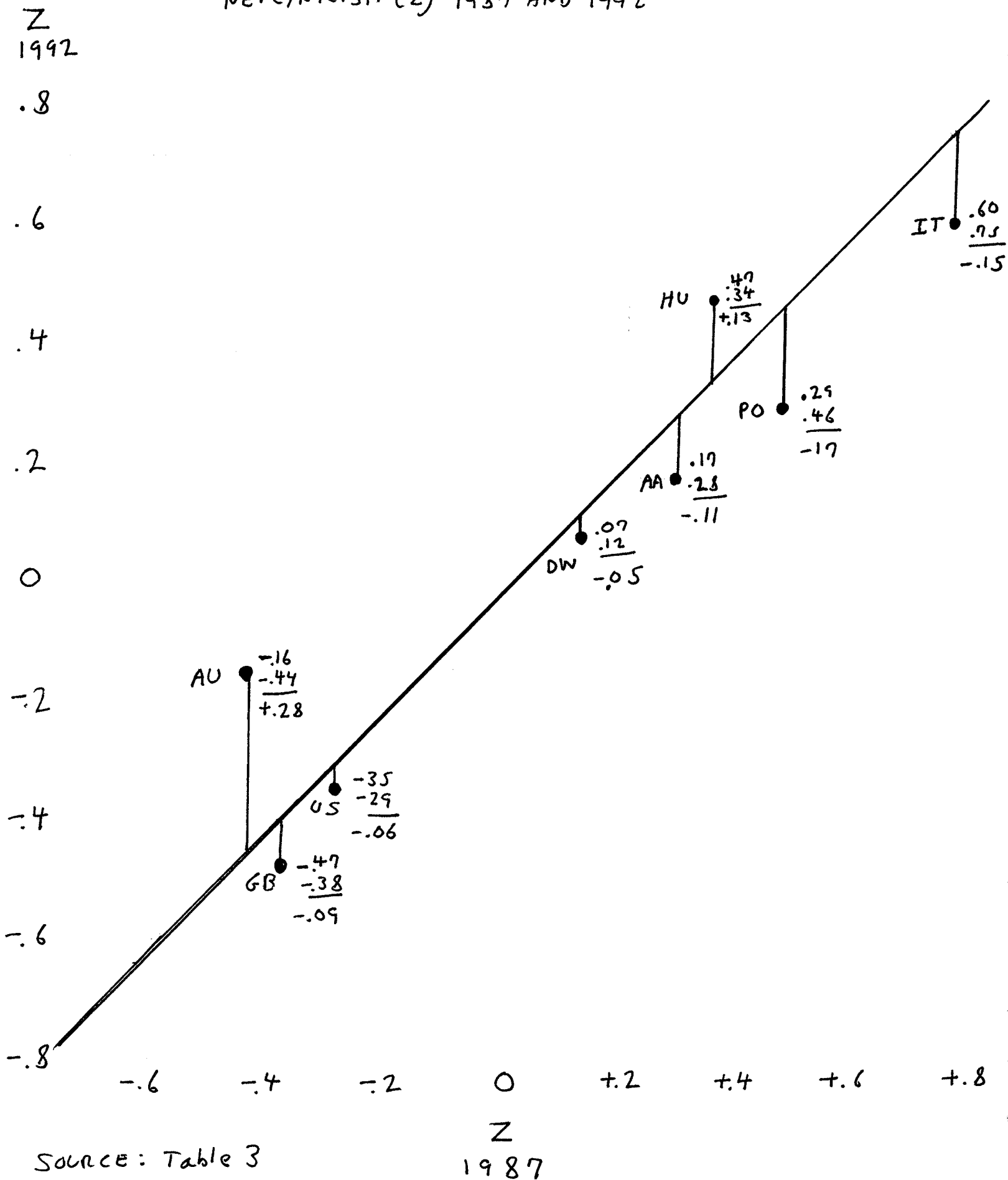-.6   -.4   -.2   O   +.2   +.4   +.6   +.8

Z
1987

SOURCE: Table 3

Table 3 may be read as follows, using the top line as an example: In their 1992 sample Australians averaged:

```
 4.00 on Idealism
 2.91 on Cynicism
-1.10 on NetCynicism
+.23 std. deviations on Idealism
 .00 std. deviations on Cynicism
-.16 std. deviations on NetCynicism
```

(The right hand column will come up later.)

The national differences are strong and persistent. Figure 2 shows the 1987 1992 correlation for the eight nations with replications.

(Figure 2 here)

While Hungary and Australia increased Cynicism from 1987 to 1992, Britain, the United States, West Germany, Poland, and Italy showed decreases. Despite these changes the product moment correlation over the five years is +.914, suggesting relatively fixed levels of national cynicism rather than values that fluctuate with short term economic or political trends.

Figure 3 shows the cross-sectional patterns:

Figure 3.

NetCynicism by Nation, Year, and Region

Z	to	Anglo			Euro		XCOM	
.80	.89							
.70	.79				IT1			
.60	.69				IT2			
.50	.59						RU	
.40	.49						HU2	PO1
.30	.39						HU1	
.20	.29				AA1		CZ	PO2
.10	.19				AA2	DW1	BG	SL
.00	.09				CH	DW2		
-.00	-.10						DE	
-.10	-.19	AU2			SW			
-.20	-.29	US1			NE			
-.30	-.39	US2	GB1		NO			
-.40	-.49	CN	GB2	AU1				
-.50	-.59							
-.60	-.69	NZ						
-.70	-.79							

Unlike Figure 1, Figure 3 shows a definite pattern. The English speaking nations are clustered toward the bottom, the ExCommunists toward the top and the Europeans range up and down. Thus:

1) There is no overlap between the Anglos and ExComs. All the Anglo nations are less cynical than any ExCom.

2) While the United States is among the least cynical, it is in no way outstanding within the Anglo group.

3) The EURO nations appear to fall in the increasing familiar North-South gradient, with "Anglo" levels of cynicism among Norwegians, Swedes and Dutch, XCOM levels among the German Speakers and Swiss, and strikingly high levels among the Italians - the latter validating the sociological aphorism that "social stereotypes are really true."

The pattern is clear, but its origins are not. The Anglo cluster suggests a translation factor as do the similar results among the German versions, but language and society are so confounded I am reluctant to draw a conclusion. Consideration of the extremes leads to a somewhat ethnocentric hypothesis about the deleterious effects of communism - until one notes that Germany and Switzerland (For Gosh sakes) have about the same levels of cynicism as Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Slovenia, and Poland.

One of the few rules of comparative research is "when in doubt try GNP." To do so, I took 1990 GNP per capita data from the Statistical Abstract (no data for East Germany, Russia, and Slovenia) and handled Region as a trinomial variable with values of +1 for XCOM, 0 for EURO, and -1 for ANGLO. Applying these to the results in Table 3, I got the following Betas for NetCynicism (the cases are nation/samples, $N=23$):

Predictor	Bivariate	Beta	Prob
Region	.76	.81	.0001
GNP	-.38	.08	.644

Region certainly isn't acting as a stalking horse for GNP. While Richer countries are less cynical ($r= -.38$), in multiple regression the GNP effect vanishes while the Region effect remain a strong .81.

So far, the points seem to be this: (1) There are clear cut persistent national differences in cynicism about the mobility system and (2) American cynicism while low by comparison with the total pool is about at the same level as other English speaking or Northern European nations.

Internal Differences

     Within nations there is no shortage of variability. Intra-
national standard deviations for NetCynicism usually run between
.80 and 1.0. Even in Italy and Russia about sixty per cent have
negative (more idealist than cynical) scores and the Anglo nations
usually have five or six percent with positive (more cynical than
idealistic) scores.

     Nor is there a shortage of plausible hypotheses (hunches).
I considered the following:

     1) AGE/COHORT: The common view is that the younger generation
                 is more cynical, although it could be that we
               become more cynical (realistic) with age and
             experience.

     2) EDUCATION: Schooling might well indoctrinate one with
               pro regime attitudes or it might make one
               more aware of "things as they are". The ISSP
               reports years of schooling or national
               equivalents.

     3) SEX: I trust it would not be viewed as too old fashioned
            to consider whether females are more idealistic
            (less realistic).

     4) MARITAL STATUS and CHURCH ATTENDANCE: It could be that
             people with traditional conventional statuses
             (Married, Frequent attenders) are less cynical.

     5) STRATIFICATION: A cynic might allege that the better
              one has done, the less cynical one becomes about
              how one does well.

     Age, Sex, Education (in years), Marital Status, and Frequency
of Church Attendance are available in the conventional forms.
SEX was treated as a dummy variable with Female=1. MARITAL STATUS
was treated as a dummy variable with Married=1. Church attendance
was measured on a 6 point scale from 1=Weekly to 6=Never.
I reversed the scale to make frequent attendance the high end.

     For stratification these ISSP samples have two relevant
measures:

      POSITION: Self-rating on a 1 to 10 scale in answer to..
             "In our society there are groups which tend to
             be towards the top and groups that tend to be
             towards the bottom. Where would you put yourself
             in this scale?"

Offhand, the measure might seem like a fragile device but ISSP analysts have come to respect it. It gives plausible results and avoids the booby traps embedded in national measures of occupation, income and education. I reversed the original scoring so high values go with high positions and combined the top 3 values (8-9-10) because they were rarely chosen.

> UPMOBIL: "Please think of your present job (or last one if you don't have one now). If you compare this job with the job your father had when you were (14, 15, 16 depending on the country) would you say the level or status of your job is (or was) ...1) Much higher than your father's 2) Higher 3) About equal 4) Lower 5) Much lower than your father's?" I reversed to scoring to make upward mobility positive.

For each nation/sample I regressed NetCynicism on these seven measures. The results (beta weights, i.e. standardized partial regression coefficients) appear in Table 4.

Table 4
Multiple Regression of NetCynicism on Seven
Predictor Variables (ISSP 87 and 92)

Nat	Year	R	Age	Female	Educ	Married	Upmob	Attends	Position
AU	92	.143	-.057	-.067	.063	.019	-.018	-.062	-.072
	87	.200	-.011	-.120	-.059	.041	-.060	-.087	-.083
CN	92	.170	.030	-.070	.026	-.052	-.140	.040	-.044
GB	92	.143	.001	-.104	-.017	-.049	-.036	-.003	-.075
	87	.161	-.003	-.059	-.112	.004	-.052	-.020	-.053
US	92	.111	.043	-.075	-.046	-.044	-.004	-.009	-.034
	87	.251	.012	-.146	-.146	-.066	-.001	-.001	-.098
NZ	92	.127	-.064	-.060	-.058	-.006	-.010	NA	-.070
AA	92	.169	-.041	.011	.008	-.067	-.057	-.112	-.060
	87	.251	-.071	-.055	.040	.084	.058	-.092	-.159
CH	87	.161	.009	-.074	-.107	-.083	-.012	.067	-.039
DW	92	.138	-.061	-.074	.012	-.031	-.044	.017	-.084
	87	.201	-.051	-.001	-.033	-.084	.086	-.079	-.122
IT	92	.158	-.070	-.082	-.083	-.033	-.086	-.048	.004
	87	.159	-.027	-.018	-.014	-.006	.007	NA	-.157
NE	87	.174	.058	-.035	-.098	-.024	.009	-.059	-.082
NO	92	.182	.067	-.030	-.084	-.046	-.025	-.004	-.103
SW	92	.146	-.029	-.105	-.087	.019	-.022	NA	-.040
BG	92	.210	-.119	-.041	-.099	.036	-.051	-.033	-.145
CZ	92	.230	-.028	-.013	-.117	.044	-.035	.133	-.105
DE	92	.083	.026	.027	.030	.046	.036	.027	-.001
HU	92	.154	-.058	-.055	-.023	.036	.001	-.043	-.118
	87	.129	-.107	-.048	.031	-.013	-.010	NA	-.027
PO	92	.205	-.048	-.036	-.066	.113	-.058	-.105	-.076
	87	.097	-.037	-.045	NA	NA	.006	.058	-.066
RU	92	.171	-.071	-.022	.110	.039	.022	NA	-.122
SL	92	.195	-.071	-.042	-.119	.091	-.036	NA	-.093
RP	92	.201	-.003	-.010	-.201	-.012	-.015	.051	.001

The multiple correlations, Rs, are uninteresting in an interesting way. They cluster around the median, .17, with two thirds between .15 and .23. While the betas vary considerably - the major point of the analysis - their combined strength, though modest, is similar across countries. Putting it another way, there seem to be no outlier nations or samples where things are working in a very different fashion.

The seven predictor items seem to fall into three groups:

1) Nothing much: Church Attendance (ATTEND)
                 Upward Mobility (UPMOBIL)

2) Regional Interaction: Marital Status (MARRIED)
                         Age/Cohort (AGE)

3) Consistent Predictors: Education (?)
                          Sex
                          Position

Figures 4 and 5 organize the results for Church Attendance and Upward Mobility. In both cases the medians are near zero and there is no regional pattern. Common sense would suggest that the conventionally pious and the upwardly mobile would be less cynical but the ISSP data do not support either idea.

Figure 4
Betas for ATTEND (Table 4)

Beta	Anglo	Euro	XCom	
+.14				
.13			CZ	
.12				
.11				
.10				
.09				
.08				
.07		CH		
.06			PO1	
.05				
.04	CN			
.03			DE	
.02		DW2		
.01				
.00	GB2 US1	NO		
-.01	US2			
-.02	GB1			
-.03			BG	
-.04			HU2	
-.05		IT2		
-.06	AU2	NE		
-.07				
-.08		DW1		
-.09	AU1	AA1		
-.10			PO2	
-.11		AA2		
-.12				
+	1	2	3	6
0	2	1		3
-	4	5	3	12
Median	-.01	-.055	.00	-.02

Figure 5
Betas for UPMOBIL (Table 4)

Beta	Anglo	Euro	XCom
+.10			
.09		DW1	
.08			
.07			
.06		AA1	
.05			
.04			DE
.03			
.02			RU
.01		IT1 NE	PO1
.00	US1 US2		HU2
-.01	NZ	CH	HU1
-.02	AU2	NO SW	
-.03			
-.04	GB2	DW2	CZ SL
-.05	GB1		BG
-.06	AU1	AA2	PO2
-.07			
-.08			
-.09		IT2	
-.10			
-.11			
-.12			
-.13			
-.14	CN		
-.15			

+		2	3	5
0	2	2	1	5
-	6	6	5	17

| Median | -.03 | -.015 | -.01 | -.02 |

Two variables, MARRIED and AGE/COHORT appear to operate differently in different regions. (See Figures 6 and 7.) While currently married respondents are neither especially cynical nor especially idealist in the ANGLO and EURO data, among the XCOM surveys, seven of eight show the Married to be more cynical (net of the other predictors). A similar pattern turns up for AGE/COHORT. In the XCOM sets older respondents are **less** cynical in eight of nine sets but no consistent pattern appears in the other two regions. Whether the pattern reflects a life cycle process or cohort replacement remains to be seen. Where Cohort replacement is at work, the consequence should be an increase in cynicism as more cynical younger generations replace less cynical older ones. We have 1987-92 replications for four countries with negative

AGE->CYNICISM betas both times: Poland, Hungary, West Germany, Italy, and Austria. Figure 2 showed that Hungarians did become more cynical, but Poles, West Germans, Italians, and Austrians did not. Thus, there is little prima facie case for a Cohort interpretation.

Figure 6
Betas for MARRIED (Table 4)

Beta	Anglo	Euro	XCom	
+.12				
.11			PO2	
.10				
.09			SL	
.08		AA1		
.07				
.06				
.05			DE	
.04	AU1		BG CZ HU2 RU	
.03				
.02	AU2	SW		
.01				
.00	GB1			
-.01	NZ	IT1	HU1	
-.02		NE		
-.03		DW2 IT2		
-.04	US2			
-.05	CN GB2	NO		
-.06				
-.07	US1	AA2		
.08		CH DW1		
-.09				
+	2	2	7	11
0	1			1
-	5	8	1	14
Median	-.01	-.03	+.04	-.01

Figure 7
Betas for AGE (Table 4)

Beta	Anglo	Euro	XCom	
+.08				
.07		NO		
.06		NE		
.05				
.04	US2			
.03	CN		DE	
.02				
.01	US1	CH		
.00	GB1 GB2			
-.01	AU1			
-.02				
-.03		IT1 SW	CZ	
-.04		AA2	PO1	
-.05		DW1	PO2	
-.06	AU2 NZ	DW2	HU2	
-.07		AA1 IT2	RU SL	
-.08				
-.09				
-.10				
-.11			HU1	
-.12			BG	
-.13				
+	3	3	1	7
0	2			2
-	3	7	8	18
Median	.00	-.03	-.06	-.04

Lacking any plausible interpretations for the interactions, I hasten on. Three variables showed consistent (though hardly powerful) statistical effects on cynicism across times and nations. Although there are more exceptions than one would like, educational attainment appears to promote idealism with a majority of negative betas overall and in each region. (See Figure 8).

Figure 8
Betas for EDUCATION (Table 4)

Beta	Anglo	Euro	XCom	
+.12				
.11			RU	
.10				
.09				
.08				
.07				
.06	AU2			
.05				
.04		AA1		
.03	CN		HU1 DE	
.02				
.01		AA2 DW2		
.00				
-.01		IT1		
-.02	GB2		HU2	
-.03		DW1		
-.04				
-.05	US2			
-.06	AU1 NZ			
-.07			PO2	
-.08		IT2 NO		
-.09		SW		
-.10		NE	BG	
-.11	GB1	CH		
-.12			CZ SL	
-.13				
-.14				
-.15	US1			
-.16				
+	2	3	3	8
0				
-	6	7	5	18
Median	-.05	-.055	-.04	-.055

The final pair are more clear cut. In 24 of 27 samples women are less cynical than men, especially so in the Anglo region. (See Figure 9.) The finding is consistent with the literature on sex differences in public opinion. From a research point of view, however, it gives little leverage. Since gender composition varies hardly at all over time or across nations, the finding will be of little use in explaining trends and national differences.

Figure 9
Betas for FEMALE (Table 4)

Beta	Anglo	Euro	XCom			
+.04						
.03			DE			
.02						
.01		AA2				
.00		DW1				
-.01			CZ			
-.02		IT1	RU			
-.03		NO				
-.04		NE	BG	PO2	PO1	SL
-.05			HU1			
-.06	GB1 NZ	AA1	HU2			
-.07	AU2 CN	CH DW2				
-.08	US2	IT2				
-.09						
-.10	GB2	SW				
-.11						
-.12	AU1					
-.13						
-.14						
-.15	US1					
-.16						
+		1	1	2		
0		1		1		
-	8	8	8	24		
Median	-.08	-.05	-.04	-.06		

The most consistent predictor is POSITION (Figure 10). In all but two samples the higher the position the less the cynicism. A cynical interpretation of elite idealism would be sweet-and-sour grapes but it may be not so simple. If it were, UPMOBILE would also predict cynicism, perhaps even more strongly since the original items are about "getting ahead". But it isn't. POSITION is especially interesting because it shows definite and familiar national differences. Figure 11 displays the national means for the original ten point scale from the right hand column of Table 4.

Figure 10
Betas for POSITION (Table 4)

Beta	Anglo	Euro	XCom	
+.01				
.00		IT2	DE	
-.01				
-.02				
-.03	US2		HU1	
-.04	CN	CH SW		
-.05	GB1			
-.06		AA2		
-.07	AU2 NZ		PO1	
-.08	AU1 GB2	DW2 NE	PO2	
-.09			SL	
-.10	US1	NO	CZ	
-.11			HU2	
-.12		DW1	RU	
-.13				
-.14			BG	
-.15				
-.16		AA1 IT1		
-.17				
+				
0		1	1	2
-	8	9	8	25
Median	-.07	-.08	-.09	-.08

Figure 11
Mean POSITION (1 to 10 scale) by Nation and Sample

Mean Position	Anglo	Euro	XCom
5.0	NZ		
4.9	AU1 AU2		
4.8	US1 CN	AA2 NO	
4.7		DW2 IT2 SW	
4.6		DW1 CH	
4.5	US2		
4.4		AA1	
4.3	GB2		
4.2	GB1		
4.0			
3.9		IT1	
3.8			SL
3.7			CZ DE HU1
3.6			PO1
3.5			
3.4			RU
3.3			PO2
3.2			
3.1			
3.0			
2.9			HU2
2.8			BG
2.7			

Respondents in the ExCommunist nations seem to see themselves collectively lower on the totem pole even though the item uses an abstract scale and implies a relative perspective by the phrase "in our society". Translation problems are not a likely candidate since few words are involved and the ExCommunist region has a melange of languages. (The Netherlands data are excluded because their survey gave the respondents a picture of a ladder that was much wider at the bottom than the top. Consequently, the Dutch have a suspiciously low mean of 3.2.)

From a comparative perspective one may think of mean POSITION as a measure of the height of the totem pole. If so, the ExCommunist nations seem to have rather short totem poles which might account for the relative cynicism of their citizens. A path analysis (Figure 12) with nation/samples as cases sheds light on the matter.

Figure 12
Path Model of Stratification Variables (18
nations, 26 samples)

GNP

-.56   +.03

Region   +.76   Cynicism

-.53   +.47   +.03
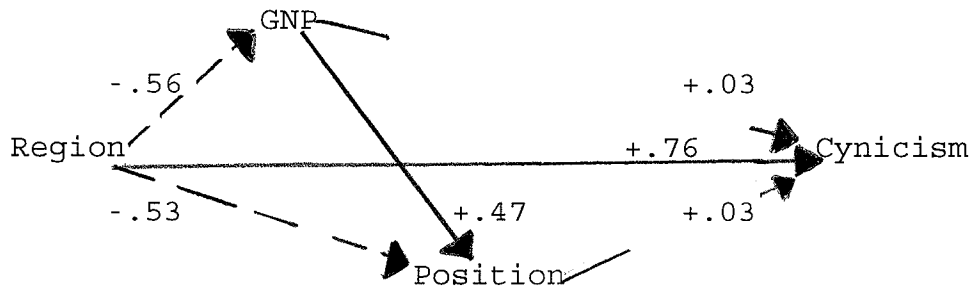
Position

The answer is "no". While Mean Position is sensitive to both
national GNP and tripartite region, neither GNP nor Position
account for the strong regional differences in Cynicism.

Returning to individuals we can summarize the major factors that
influence system cynicism by a regression model using REGION,
SEX and POSITION. When NetCynicism is regressed on the three,
the coefficients may be used to predict the mean cynicism of
Men and Women at High, Medium, and Low positions (using the 1-8
scale) for the three regions. Figure 13 shows the results.

Figure 13
NetCynicism (Z Scores) predicted from Sex,
Position and Region (ISSP92)

Z		Position 8	Position 4	Position 1
+.60	.65			
.55	.59			
.50	.54			
.45	.49			XCom Male +.46
.40	.44			
.35	.39			XCom Fem. +.38
.30	.34		XCom Male .31	
.25	.29			
.20	.24		XCom Fem. .23	
.15	.19			Euro Male +.18
.10	.15	XCom Male .11		
.05	.09			Euro Fem. +.09
.00	.04	XCom Fem. .02	Euro Male .03	
-.00	-.04			
-.05	-.09		Euro Fem. -.06	
-.10	-.14			Anglo Male -.11
-.15	-.19	Euro Male -.17		Anglo Fem. -.19
-.20	-.24			
-.25	-.29	Euro Fem. -.26	Anglo Male -.26	
-.30	-.34		Anglo Fem. -.34	
-.35	-.39			
-.40	-.44			
-.40	-.49	Anglo Male -.46		
-.50	-.54			
-.55	-.59	Anglo Fem. -.55		
-.60	-.64			

While these relationships are too small to be of use in predicting individual cynicism one should not underestimate their cumulative impact on group differences. At the extremes ExCommunist Males at the bottom of their totem poles average almost have a standard deviation above the general level of cynicism, while Anglo Females at the top of their totem poles average almost half a standard deviation below the general level of cynicism.

Conclusions

To me these findings make the following prima facie case:

1) System cynicism can be measured reliably and plausibly.

2) In "a cynical world" the clear majority in all these countries are more idealistic than cynical about their mobility regimes.

3) Actual structural features (Region and Position) have a greater impact on cynicism than "cultural" or "perceptual" ones.

4) System cynicism seems to be relatively sluggish with little short term fluctuation.

In short, to a large extent both the cynics and the idealists appear to be not far from being realists.

As for what we have learned about the contemporary United States, the main finding is an exception to American exceptionalism. While the US is among the least cynical of the countries studied there is no way in which it stands out among the Anglo countries. To put it bluntly you could substitute the data for sylvan New Zealand or "class ridden" Britain for the American results without doing much damage to the conclusions! In that light the American mobility regime seems neither uniquely benign nor uniquely stressed.