

# Are Spanish Youths Different? A Comparison of Some Values of Spanish Youths with Those of European Youths

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In order to know how Spanish youths think and to establish a comparison of values with European youths, several studies have been undertaken in recent years that allow analysis of these values based on specific behaviours, aspirations and feelings, which are key to understanding a social group. The sharing of this data allows the drawing of significant conclusions about Spanish youths and their European counterparts such as, for example, their greater permissiveness in relation to private behaviours or the general leaning towards localism over universalism.

To begin, I would like to draw attention to the subtitle, as it is impossible in the framework of these pages to respond fully, and even less so exhaustively, to a comparison between Spanish youth and that of Europe as a whole. Thus this article is subtitled “a comparison of *some* values”. I will limit myself to four points on which there is comparable documentation. These are the justification of behaviours that some denominate as moral values; the final values or life priorities; tolerance of what is different, even if this runs the risk of being stigmatised, and the feelings of belonging to different territorial enclaves.

We will always proceed in the same way. We will begin with a presentation of the values of Spanish youths based on the latest study published,<sup>1</sup> in which we participated, and then

– this time based on different European surveys, particularly those of the *European Values Study*, which in Spain in 2000 and 2008 we co-directed –, compare the data of Spanish youths with that of their European counterparts. Unfortunately, we cannot yet publish the data of the 2008 study.

## Justification of Behaviours

In general terms, it can be said that the behaviours related with private life and the relations of proximity – with the exception of domestic violence –, are those that receive most justification and acceptance from Spanish youths. In private life, in the relations of proximity involving emotion (divorce, couple

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1. Pedro González Blasco (dir.), *Jóvenes españoles 2005*, Madrid, Fundación Santa María/Editorial SM, 2006.

relationships, adoption of children, and by homosexuals), there should not be rules external to individuals. They are private rules and as such must remain.

At the extreme opposite, among the less justified behaviours, that is, those most rejected by youths, we find in the first place violent behaviours (terrorism and domestic violence, street vandalism, death penalty) as well as, in general terms, the behaviours related with civil ethics and public morality (accepting a bribe, not reporting damages caused to a parked car, cheating on tax payments, making noise which disturbs the neighbours, etc.).

*The behaviours related with private life and the relations of proximity are those that receive most justification and acceptance from Spanish youths*

The evolutionary analysis shows us that among Spanish youths permissiveness, normative tolerance and the justification of certain practices were much greater in 2005 than in 1984. Ethical values have become more liberal. Individual and proxemic behaviours increase the levels of justification, while the opposite happens in the more global behaviours, or with more collective consequences. Spanish youths are characterised as the most permissive, in comparison with their European counterparts, although they are stricter than them in the justification of the death penalty.

To illustrate this, we include here the results of a European-wide survey. In the

Eurobarometer 55.1 of August 2001 (Eurobaromètre 55.1 on the website)<sup>2</sup> a question was posed similar to the one we are dealing with here, although expressed differently. The youths were asked if their counterparts (from 15 to 24 years), in their opinion, “mostly agreed” or “mostly disagreed” with a series of behaviours. The interest lies in comparing Spanish and European youth, based on questions expressed in the same way in the Eurobarometer. We show in Table 1 some significant results of several countries and the average of the whole of Europe.

Spanish youths, with a significant exception of the death penalty, are more permissive in all the behaviours considered than those of the average European youth (in the Europe of the 15 in 2001). On some issues, such as sexual relations before marriage and cloning,<sup>3</sup> they are even the most permissive among the youths of all the countries we have included. On euthanasia and adoption of children by homosexuals, Spanish youths come immediately after the Dutch who stand out, in both cases, as the most liberal.

This data, when analysed in the European time and space of the last 25 years, must be classed within the phenomenon of individualisation. Jan Kerkhofs, in the Forum Deusto, on the occasion of the presentation of the study *España 2000, entre el localismo y la globalidad*,<sup>4</sup> specifically pointed out that in the whole of Europe and through “our surveys [of the *European Values Study*] from 1981, 1990 and 1999-2000, some trends are revealed which

2. The population group interviewed was 9,760 youths between 15 and 24 from the 15 countries that made up the European Union in 2000, separating West Germany and East Germany and with a specific sample for Ulster. The size of the sample in each country was around 600 interviews except in Luxemburg, which was 202, and in Ulster 196. In Spain the sample was 601 youths and the field work was carried out between 17 April 2000 and 12 May 2000 by the European INRA in its Spanish network.

3. But the item was toned down. We, in the present study, asked about the “cloning of people”. In the Eurobarometer 55.1 the item states: “Cloning, that is, reproduction of identical living beings from a single cell.”

4 Francisco Andrés Orizo and Javier Elzo (dirs.), *España 2000, entre el localismo y la globalidad. La Encuesta Europea de Valores en su tercera aplicación, 1981-1999*, Madrid, Universidad de Deusto/Ediciones SM, 2000.

**Table 1**  
**Percentages of youths from diverse European countries who “mostly agree”  
 with the following practices**

	European Union	Spain	Germany	France	Italy	The Netherlands	Sweden	Great Britain
Euthanasia	54	67	57	44	42	80	64	52
Death penalty	27	19	30	25	26	22	21	36
Adoption of children by homosexuals	41	54	46	43	20	62	41	43
Sexual relations before marriage	88	95	89	89	87	92	91	77
Cloning	12	19	10	8	16	11	12	10
Number	9,760	601	1,265	602	596	749	604	597

Source: Special Eurobarometer 55.1 on Young Europeans, August 2001.

involve almost all countries. I will name, in the first place, progressive individualisation and then what is denominated, rightly or wrongly, secularisation, increasingly more generalised.”<sup>5</sup>

### Final Values: Life Priorities

The young prioritise and value as an objective in their lives, first and foremost, the everyday, the closest, that is, family and friends, taking health for granted. In last place comes everything related to the holistic, the ideological, that is, politics and religion. In the middle, and in this order, come work, money, free time, moral dignity, sex life and studies for good training and professional skills.

The evolution of the importance of the final values in Spanish youths in recent years shows

that a good family relationship, good friends (not just acquaintances), without forgetting health, make up the basic triad, the substrate on which to build their symbolic universe. These three values should be read from a dual perspective: individualist (apparently autonomous) and in relation with the search for well-being and emotional security. In the end, they denote a state of personal instability, insecurity and uncertainty and they turn to friendship, gratitude and intimate relations with other people as the main desires of their life, as their first and main objectives in life.

In Table 2, compiled with the database of the Universidad de Deusto with the different studies carried out by the European and world study groups of values, we would like to contextualise the priorities of Spanish youths in comparison with those of their European counterparts.

5. Jan Kerkhofs, “Tendances relevées par les Enquêtes de l’European Values Study et perspectives d’avenir”, in José Chamizo de la Rubia and Kofi Yamgnane (coords.), *Movimientos de personas e ideas y multiculturalidad*, vol. 1, Bilbao, Universidad de Deusto, 2003, p. 266.

**Table 2**

**Importance given by youths aged 15 to 29 from various European countries to different questions, in percentages of those who have responded that the dimension proposed is “very important” in their lives**

	Spain	Belgium	Denmark	France	Germany	Greece	Italy	Great Britain	Turkey
Family	76	86	80	83	65	78	86	87	97
Friends	50	63	69	61	58	54	51	67	73
Free time	46	44	46	46	44	53	42	54	47
Politics	5	6	5	6	5	8	7	3	16
Work	59	59	38	69	43	57	57	44	78
Religion	7	11	6	6	8	25	20	9	78

Source: Compiled by the author based on *European Values Study*, *World Values Study* and the database of the Universidad de Deusto. 2000 Survey.

As can be seen, Spanish youths follow the average European with slight variations. Friends are less important, as in Italy, we think owing to the importance of the family, even greater than what the figures in the table suggest – it should not be forgotten that the data is from 1999 and 2000. Our hypothesis when interpreting these figures is based on the fact that, so far this century, among Spanish adolescents the importance of family in their socialisation has declined to the detriment of the group of friends and the media, particularly the parts aimed at them. According to data from our study, 63% of Spanish youths say that friends are “very important” in their lives. In this way, they are situated in the average European values with five or six years of “delay”. My hypothesis is based on the rapid and sudden evolution of the family structure in Spain over the last ten years.

The comparison with Italy is interesting for more than one reason. In Italy, the importance and acceptance of the Catholic Church are much greater than in Spain, where the im-

portance of religion, particularly in its institutionalised dimension, is at the level of the most secularised countries of Europe. On the other hand, in the table we have included the data on Turkey and Denmark as a contrast. The figures, especially on Turkey, speak for themselves.

### Neighbour Tolerance

In Table 3 we present the evolution of neighbour tolerance of Spanish youths, controlled following very partially the indicator proposed by Bogardus in 1928.<sup>6</sup> It is quite clear that the youths of 2005 were more intolerant than those of previous years. With the insignificant exception of the decrease of a single percentage point in tolerance of ETA members, which is still the most rejected group, more Spanish youths reject all other groups when asked who “you would not like to have as a neighbour.” The most striking case is the increase in neighbour rejection of immigrants, which goes from 1% of youths

6. We call attention to the fact that, for comparative purposes with other surveys, we have limited the table to youths aged between 18 and 24.

**Table 3**  
**Evolution (1981-2005) of neighbour tolerance: people who youths between 18 and 24 did not want as neighbours, in descending percentages**

	1981	1990	1994	1999	2005	2005 (-) Most distant
ETA members	–	–	–	83	82	–1
Neo-Nazis and extreme right wing people	–	–	68	70	80	+ 12
Skinheads	–	–	61	66	69	+ 8
Radical Muslims	–	–	–	–	69	–
Drug addicts	–	49	42	43	52	+ 3
Heavy drinkers	31	34	23	30	35	+ 4
Punks, squatters	–	–	24	21	35	+ 11
Gypsies	–	–	18	18	29	+ 11
People with criminal records	25	22	11	14	25	=
Immigrants*	1	5	2	4	12	+ 11
People of other races	6	5	2	4	8	+ 2
People with AIDS	–	25	9	7	–	–

\*Until 1999, immigrant/foreign workers.

who did not want them as neighbours in 1981 to 12% in 2005: 11 percentage points, the same as towards punks and gypsies, but in these cases we started from 24% and 18% of neighbour rejection respectively in 1994, when they were included in the questionnaire for the first time.

Note also that much of the intolerance towards specific groups (neo-Nazis, drug addicts, punks, people with criminal records and immigrants) has emerged in the last five years. Yes, something has happened to Spanish youths, or rather, to Spanish society, in the last few years: it has become spiritless.

However, the ranking of groups less desired as neighbours has hardly moved, and Table 3 shows this eloquently: ETA members and neo-Nazis are in first place and almost on a par in 2005. People of other races and immigrants are in last place, although radical Muslims (an item

we introduced for the first time in the study) appear immediately after ETA members and neo-Nazis.

If we compare the levels of neighbour tolerance of Spanish youths (16 to 29) with those of various European countries, we can deduce, in general terms, that Spanish youths are slightly more tolerant than European youths, as already known through various studies.

### Feelings of Belonging

We are wholly in agreement with Pere Vilanova when he affirms that the “issue of multiple loyalties of the individual, in terms of values he/she adheres to and that motivate his/her individual or group actions in our fragmented and globalised societies, will increasingly have more importance.”<sup>7</sup>

7. Manuel Castells and Narcís Serra (eds.), *Guerra y paz en el siglo XXI. Una perspectiva europea*, Barcelona, Tusquets, 2003, p. 21.



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We live in times of multiple belongings and globalisation in which identities of proximity have not disappeared, rather the contrary, they have multiplied. This process has not taken place without difficulties, as shown by the rejection by France and the Netherlands of the European Constitution project during the first half of 2005, and by Ireland of the project presented later.

We seek to control the issue of the feelings of multiple belonging in our surveys on youths through a question that comes from the *European Values Survey*. We see, in the first place, the evolution of feelings of belonging in Spanish youths in the last 25 years. It is perhaps worth mentioning here the exact formulation of the question, which asks: “Which of these

geographical groupings would you say you belong to, above all?”

Until 1999 inclusive, Spanish youths said, in the first place, they belonged to the locality, town or city where they lived. In the second place, that they were Spanish; in the third place, that they belonged to their respective autonomous community; in the fourth place, citizens of the whole world and, in the fifth place, Europeans. In 2005, the ranking experienced a variation in the second and third places, which were practically at the same level: young people felt both Spanish and as belonging to the autonomous community of residence. The analysis of the results, as a whole, shows us that, although with fluctuations, therefore not linear, youths have become more localist in the last

**Table 4**  
**Evolution of feelings of belonging in nine European countries between 1981 and 1999**  
**in the population as a whole and the young**

	1981		1990		1999	
	All	Youths	All	Youths	All	Youths
Locality, town or city where they live	43	39	41	36	49	47
Region or autonomous community	15	17	18	18	17	18
The country as a whole						
(France)	28	26	27	25	24	22
Europe	4	4	5	7	3	4
The whole world	9	15	10	14	7	10

Source: Céline Belot based on the European Values Surveys. The countries included are France, United Kingdom, Germany (only the West for 1981 and 1990), Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Ireland and Spain.

25 years in the most literal sense of the term: belonging to the locality, town or city where they live. Their feeling of belonging to their autonomous community has also increased, but to a lesser extent. This growing localist feeling takes place to the detriment, in the first place, of the feeling of belonging to the state, the country as a whole, to Spain in short; and, in second place, to that of belonging to the “whole world”. The feeling of belonging to Europe maintains similar values, slightly increasing.

This leaning towards localism over universalism and to belonging to Spain is not only an issue of young people, but is also observed in the whole of the Spanish population. All of this means that, once again, young people evolve in keeping with the population as a whole.

Moreover, this phenomenon is not just a Spanish phenomenon, although perhaps, as a state made up of autonomous communities, it has been slightly accentuated. One only has to look at what is happening in Europe, which took the academic Céline Belot<sup>8</sup> to adopt the expression “identity withdrawal” towards

the local to explain the phenomenon, especially in the young. In Table 4 we offer data grouped according to nine countries of the European Union, including Spain, on the evolution of feelings of belonging, distinguishing between youths and the population as a whole, between 1981 and 1999.

Let us say, in the first place, that European youths show a ranking of feelings of belonging similar to that of adults, which shows, once again, that there is no generation gap – apart from leisure activities, but here age, the body’s capacity to get through the night and the absence of major daytime responsibilities largely explain it.

It seems clear that in Europe, in the Europe of globalisation, the local predominates, with slight fluctuations in the twenty years examined. This data perhaps has some relevance for the young. And this is to the detriment of feelings of belonging “to the whole world” and the country. In conclusion, we will also point out that, in Europe, the feeling of being European has not taken off. Either among adults, or the young.

8. Céline Belot, “Du local au mondial : les espaces d’appartenance des jeunes européens”, in Olivier Galland and Bernard Roudet (dirs.), *Les jeunes Européens et leurs valeurs. Europe occidentale, Europe centrale et orientale*, Paris, La Découverte, 2005, p. 200.



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