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Non-Discrimination in Access to the Labour Market and its Support by Citizens in 26 Countries around the World

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on a novel public opinion survey covering 26 countries across various world regions, we analyse citizens' support the idea that job recruitment should be based on applicants' qualifications, rather than on ascriptive characteristics such as gender, family background, ethnicity, or religion. To understand attitude variation, we derive hypotheses from two theories: world society theory and modernisation theory. We find strong support for non-discrimination in most surveyed countries, but significant cross-country variation. Further analyses demonstrate that while both theories contribute to explaining citizens' attitudes, a country's degree of modernisation is not significantly associated with attitudes toward non-discrimination, whereas the degree of a country's embeddedness into world society is. At the individual level, most hypotheses derived from both theories are confirmed. Individuals who prioritise the equality of all people, possess higher levels of education, are secular, and hold post-materialist values are more likely to support the idea of non-discrimination.

1   INTRODUCTION

The concept that jobs should be awarded based on merit and that individuals should not face discrimination due to their gender, ethnicity, family background, or religion is relatively recent. The institutionalisation of anti-discrimination policies in the labour market reflects a broader cultural shift that gained significant momentum after World War II. Central to this transformative process is the recognition that all human beings possess unalienable rights and are inherently equal. This principle is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948. For the first time, the Declaration explicitly states in Article 1: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (United Nations 1948). The prohibition of discrimination is a logical extension of this principle, further articulated in Article 7, which asserts: "All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination."

John Meyer and his colleagues (Meyer 1980; Meyer 2010; Meyer et al. 1997; Meyer/Jepperson 2000) have demonstrated through numerous empirical studies how the concept of protecting the "sacred individual" has gained global traction, extending to an ever-widening array of social groups. These include children, women, Indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, immigrants, persons with disabilities, and individuals with diverse sexual identities (Boli-Bennett/Meyer 1978; Soysal 1994; Ramirez et al. 1997; Frank/McEneaney 1999; Schofer/Meyer 2005; Elliott 2007; Koenig 2008). Based on a comprehensive analysis of all human rights documents signed by most countries since the 1940s, Michael Elliot (2007) shows that the number of human rights documents steadily increased throughout the 1980s, with a significant surge following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. We interpret the prohibition of discrimination in access to the labour market as a key aspect of this broader cultural shift.

Non-discrimination implies that only applicants' qualifications and performance should determine their employment prospects, while characteristics such as family background, ethnicity, religion, or gender should be irrelevant.[1] A substantial

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1   Talcott Parsons describes the same cultural change from a differ-

number of international treaties and regulations have been established to make the prohibition of favouritism based on group membership a global norm. One of the most significant is Convention No. 111, the "Convention concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation," adopted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 1958 (Nielsen 1994). This convention obliges member states to enact legislation prohibiting all forms of discrimination and exclusion in employment. With 197 countries ratifying the convention, it has become a recognised global standard. Additionally, a wide array of regional and national laws further enforce the prohibition of discrimination. For example, since its inception, the European Union has progressively strengthened protections against discrimination, expanding its scope to include an increasing number of groups (Wouters/Ovádek 2021).

Drawing on a novel public opinion survey that covers 26 countries from various regions around the world, we investigate the extent to which the globally institutionalised norm of non-discrimination is reflected in or diverges from public attitudes. To what extent do citizens[2] across the world support the idea that job recruitment should be based solely on an applicant's qualifications rather than on ascriptive characteristics such as gender, family background, ethnicity, or religion? To understand the variation in citizens' attitudes toward non-discrimination, we derive hypotheses from two broader sociological frameworks, often referred to in the literature as competing theories: world society

theory and modernisation theory. Both theories allow us to consider country-level characteristics and individual-level factors. According to world society theory, we expect that respondents from countries more deeply embedded in world society, as well as individuals who support globally institutionalised norms and have attained higher levels of education, are more likely to endorse the principle of non-discrimination. From the perspective of modernisation theory, we hypothesise that the more modernised a country is, the better the respondents' economic situation, the more educated and secularised individuals are, and the more they have internalised postmaterialist values, the greater their likelihood of supporting non-discrimination in labour market access.

The empirical analysis yields the following key findings: (1) We find rather strong support for the idea of non-discrimination in the labour market in all surveyed countries. At the same time, there is substantial variation between countries. Support is highest in Chile, Latvia, and Sweden, while it is lowest in India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Türkiye. (2) Both modernisation theory and world society theory contribute to explaining citizens' attitudes, albeit to different degrees. When individual-level variables are controlled, a country's degree of modernisation is no longer significantly associated with attitudes toward non-discrimination. This suggests that the observed differences between countries are primarily due to the varying composition of individuals with specific characteristics within each country. In contrast, the degree of a country's embeddedness in world society is positively associated with attitudes toward non-discrimination, even after taking various socio-economic characteristics of respondents into account. (3) At the micro level, most hypotheses derived from both world society theory and modernisation theory are confirmed. Individuals who prioritise the equality of all people and possess higher levels of education are more likely to support the idea of non-discrimination.

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ent theoretical perspective, using the two concepts of "ascription" versus "achievement" (Parsons 1951: 101-112). Parsons contends that the notion of allocating jobs based on an individual's qualifications – what he refers to as "achievement" – has increasingly supplanted the traditional practice of assigning roles based on ascriptive characteristics such as family background, ethnicity, gender, or religion. According to Parsons, this transition reflects a broader societal shift towards merit-based systems, where personal qualifications are regarded as the only legitimate criteria for employment.

2   We use the term "citizens" in a rather broad definition. This refers to all residents of a country, regardless of whether they are citizens of that country or not.

Similarly, secularised individuals and those who hold post-materialist values demonstrate stronger support for non-discrimination.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

We formulate our hypotheses with reference to two grand theories often seen as competing with each other: world society theory and modernisation theory. Both theories address the characteristics of the countries in which respondents reside and the attributes of the individuals themselves. While modernisation theory links citizens' attitudes to endogenous developments within countries, world society theory emphasises the importance of exogenous factors such as a country's integration into world society.

2.1 EMBEDDEDNESS IN WORLD SOCIETY AND COMMITMENT TO VALUES OF A GLOBAL CULTURE

World society theory, as developed by John W. Meyer and his colleagues, posits the existence of a global model comprising a set of ideas about how societies should be organised.[3] Central to this global cultural model is the concept of legitimate actorhood. According to world society theory, actorhood is not an innate characteristic but rather the outcome of a historical process of cultural construction (Meyer 2010; Meyer et al. 1997; Meyer/Jepperson 2000). Meyer and his colleagues argue that global culture primarily attributes legitimate actorhood to individuals. It envisions the individual as an autonomous entity with the volitional capacity to make decisions about their own life and destiny rather than as the property of any

collective, such as gender, family, or ethnic or religious groups. Global culture upholds the belief that every individual has the right to self-determination by virtue of their humanity. This emphasis on the importance of the individual underpins the idea that all people should be treated equally and should not face discrimination based on their membership in any particular group.

According to world society theory, the extent to which global norms influence citizens' attitudes is linked to a country's degree of integration into world society. This integration is often measured by the country's membership in international institutions and the number of international treaties it has signed (Beckfield 2010; Cole 2017). The key country-level expectation is that the more deeply a country is embedded in global institutions and has adopted their normative principles, the more its citizens are exposed to these norms and, consequently, the more likely they are to support the values of global culture (Pierotti 2013; Pandian 2019; Kim 2020).

World society theory not only allows us to formulate hypotheses about county-level characteristics associated with anti-discrimination attitudes but also about the influence of individual-level characteristics. In particular, we expect a correlation between individuals' general commitment to the norms of global culture – especially its emphasis on the "sacred individual" – and their attitudes toward non-discrimination. This is because the principle that everyone should be treated equally and not discriminated against is rooted in the broader idea of universal human equality. Additionally, we hypothesise that education plays a significant role. Within a nation-state, various institutions contribute to the dissemination of global cultural norms, with educational institutions being particularly influential in transmitting these values (Ramirez et al. 2007). We expect that the more time individuals spend within educational institutions, the greater their exposure to

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3 Meyer and his colleagues employ a range of terms – such as cultural model, global culture, ideas, recipes, myth, blueprint, and script – to describe this global model of organising society. To maintain clarity, we will consistently use the term "global culture" to refer to the global norms outlined by world society theory.

these globally mediated norms and, consequently, the stronger their support for the principle of non-discrimination will be.

2.2 MODERNISATION AND POSTMATERIALIST VALUES

In contrast to world society theory, modernisation theory posits that people's attitudes are less shaped by their integration into global society and exposure to global cultural norms but rather by the endogenous development within individual countries, highlighting two different aspects. First, modernisation is characterised by a structural transformation of the economy, shifting from industrialisation to post-industrialisation, which has led to a historically unprecedented rise in prosperity and a dramatic increase in consumption for ordinary citizens, particularly in the period following World War II (Maddison 1995; van Zanden 2014). Second, modernisation involves expanding education, as reflected in declining illiteracy rates and the increasing number of years people spend in educational institutions. Modernisation theory argues that economic prosperity and educational expansion free individuals from traditional social constraints – such as those imposed by gender, family, ethnic groups, and religion – and empower them to lead more self-determined lives (Inkeles 1969).

Ronald Inglehart is perhaps the most influential scholar who has extensively demonstrated how a country's level of modernity and individuals' economic status and education shape people's attitudes and values (Inglehart 1971, 1990, 1997; Welzel 2013). We hypothesise that the underlying mechanisms also apply to attitudes toward discrimination, as the modernisation process fosters a shift in values that emphasises individual autonomy and rejects the dominance of traditional social categories such as gender, family, ethnicity, and religion. As societies modernise, the growing focus on the individual leads to greater

support for non-discrimination principles. Building on this argument, we expect that citizens from more modernised countries – characterised by greater economic wealth and higher levels of education – will be more likely to support the principle of non-discrimination compared to those from less modernised nations. Following Inglehart's theory, one would anticipate that this positive relationship will hold even after accounting for individuals' educational attainment and economic status. At the individual level, we hypothesise that people who are economically better off – those with higher incomes and savings – and who have attained higher levels of education are more likely to endorse non-discrimination. As noted earlier, the influence of education can be attributed to both modernisation theory and world society theory, making it a significant factor in both frameworks.

Moreover, the impact of economic resources and education on anti-discrimination attitudes may be mediated by other factors rather than direct. Ronald Inglehart and his colleagues suggest that modernisation processes drive a shift in values from materialist to post-materialist.[4] We, therefore, anticipate that individuals who hold post-materialist values are more likely to support the principle of non-discrimination in the labour market. Additionally, numerous studies have demonstrated that modernisation leads to secularisation, which, in turn, influences the values people hold (Norris/Inglehart 2004; Immerzeel/Tubergen 2011; Pollack/Rosta 2017). Against this background, we expect that secularised individuals – those who are not affiliated with a religious denomination or do not actively practice their religion – will be more inclined to support the idea of non-discrimination.

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4 While materialist values include satisfying economic living conditions, security, favouring group members and excluding non-members, postmaterialist or self-expression values, in contrast, are characterised by the desire for self-fulfilment, an emphasis on individual self-determination, participation, and tolerance.

3   DATA AND METHOD

We draw on data from a novel survey conducted between December 2021 and July 2022, which collected responses from 53'960 individuals across 26 countries. This survey includes a diverse range of nations from both the Global North and Global South, providing a comprehensive view of attitudes toward non-discrimination worldwide (Giebler et al. 2023).

The survey examines attitudes toward liberal values and perspectives on societal organisation. To ensure a broad representation of global diversity, countries were systematically selected to encompass a wide range of geographical, political, and socio-economic contexts. This selection includes coverage across four major world regions (based on the UN geoscheme), various political regimes (as classified by the Varieties of Democracy's Electoral Democracy Index, Coppedge et al. 2021), and differing socio-economic conditions measured by a combination of the Human Development Index and the Gini coefficient (Giebler et al. 2023). The target population in all 26 countries comprises permanent residents aged 18 or older living in private households, regardless of their nationality. In 19 of these countries, data collection was conducted using computer-assisted web interviews (CAWI). Respondents were recruited from an online access panel managed by the partnering survey company (Gallup International). The sample was stratified by gender, age, education, region of residence, and locality to reflect the demographic distribution of each country's offline population. In the seven countries where online surveys were impractical due to low Internet penetration, data was collected through personal interviews (CAPI) using a stratified probability sampling method with a random-walk approach.

To ensure the questionnaire's validity, extensive pretesting was conducted, including cognitive interviews and pilot studies, before the main fieldwork commenced. The survey was administered in the most widely spoken language(s) in each country. Quality control measures were implemented throughout the survey process, including during the setup phase and fieldwork. Post-fieldwork quality checks involved excluding CAWI interviews that lasted less than 50 per cent of the median duration for each country and CAPI interviews that were shorter than 15 minutes. After applying these quality controls and removing cases with missing values on key variables, the final dataset includes 38'863 valid responses.

3.1   DEPENDENT VARIABLE

This study examines the extent to which citizens in various countries support the principle that job selection should be based on qualifications rather than ascriptive characteristics. We specifically consider four ascriptive characteristics: gender, family background, ethnicity, and religion. Respondents were asked the following question:

> "Now, we would like to talk about the criteria for selecting people for a job. Some argue that certain groups should be preferred regardless of qualifications, especially when jobs are scarce. To what extent would you agree or disagree to each of the following statements?"
>
> (1) When jobs are scarce, men should be preferred over women.
>
> (2) When jobs are scarce, family members and friends should be preferred over others.
>
> (3) When jobs are scarce people who belong to the same ethnic group as me should be preferred over others.
>
> (4) When jobs are scarce, people who have the same religion as me should be preferred over others.

Agreement with these statements was measured on a six-point scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," with additional options for "prefer not to say" and "don't know." For the analyses, we reversed the scale so that higher

values indicate stronger support for the principle that job selection should be based on qualifications rather than ascriptive characteristics. Respondents who selected "prefer not to say" or "don't know" were excluded from the analysis.

We analysed whether citizens' attitudes toward job selection based on the four characteristics – gender, family background, ethnicity, and religion – are related and whether these characteristics can be considered indicators of a common latent construct of "non-discrimination." The results of an exploratory factor analysis confirm this. As shown in Table A1_1 in the Appendix, all items load onto a single factor, with factor loadings of at least 0.72. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of 0.82 supports the adequacy of the items for factor analysis, and the eigenvalue of 2.33 for the first factor indicates the one-dimensionality of attitudes.

We conducted separate factor analyses for each country and found a single-factor solution in almost all cases despite some variation in factor loadings between countries. In only five countries did we identify two-factor solutions when applying the strict criterion of retaining factors with non-negative eigenvalues. However, visual inspection of the eigenvalues (see Figure A1_1 in the Appendix) confirmed that a single-factor solution is generally more appropriate. Additionally, none of the retained second factors accounts for more than four per cent of the total variance, further supporting the adequacy of the single-factor solution.

In essence, this result indicates that respondents have a generalised attitude towards whether job applicants should be selected based on qualifications or ascriptive characteristics. People either believe that qualifications should be the primary criterion for job selection or that qualifications should be outweighed by factors such as gender, family background, ethnicity, and religion. Given

that the items are strongly correlated and form a single factor, we use the factor scores as our primary dependent variable. Higher scores on this latent construct of "non-discrimination" reflect more liberal attitudes towards job selection.

Our factor scores have an overall mean of zero (by construction) and a standard deviation of 0.91 (see Appendix A1_1). Importantly, the factor scores are highly correlated with scores derived from a mean scoring procedure (i.e. summing the four indicators and dividing by four), with a correlation coefficient of 0.9981. While we primarily use the factor scores in our analysis, the mean scores are be employed to examine the distribution of our dependent variable across different countries (see section "Country Differences" below).

3.2 INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

The "independent" variables or covariates are derived from two general theories.

3.2.1 WORLD SOCIETY THEORY

1. To assess a country's integration into world society and its associated norms, world society theory typically considers indicators such as the number of memberships in international organisations (both governmental and non-governmental) or the number of international treaties signed. Following this approach, we measure a country's institutional integration into world society by counting the number of ratified UN Human Rights Treaties (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2023). Compared to other possible measurements, this indicator has the advantage of being directly linked to our dependent variable, as the idea of non-discrimination is part of human rights. In our sample of countries, the indicator varies between 5 and 17 ratified UN Human Rights Treaties.

2. To gauge individuals' commitment to global cultural norms, we use the survey item: "Should every human have the same basic rights in all countries or should a country's society decide which rights people have?". Respondents rated their views on a six-point scale, with "1 – Every human should have the same basic rights in all countries" at one end and "6 – A country's society should decide which rights people have in its country" at the other end. For the analyses, we reversed the scale so that higher values indicate a stronger commitment to global cultural norms.

3. Education is measured based on respondents' highest level of educational attainment, categorised into low, medium, and high education. As previously discussed, educational attainment is relevant to both world society theory and modernisation theory.

3.2.2   MODERNISATION THEORY

1. To assess a country's level of modernisation, we use the Human Development Index (HDI), which is published annually by the UN (United Nations Development Programme 2021). The HDI encompasses three dimensions: the economic dimension, measured by gross national income per capita; the education dimension, assessed through the mean years of schooling for adults aged 25 and older, as well as the expected years of schooling for children of school-entry age; and the health dimension, evaluated by life expectancy at birth. For the analyses, we divided the HDI by 100, and it now ranges between 5.12 (Senegal) and 9.47 (Germany).

2. Respondents' economic position is assessed using their household income and savings. Household income is categorised relative to the national mean monthly income of each country, distinguishing between low (≤80 per cent of the mean), medium (>80 per cent and ≤200 percent), and high (>200 percent) income

levels. Savings are measured as a dichotomous variable, indicating whether respondents have household savings amounting to at least 50 per cent of the mean national yearly income.

3. Postmaterialist attitudes are measured using the Inglehart index (Inglehart 1971). Respondents are categorised as "Postmaterialist," "Materialist," or "Neither/Nor" based on their attitudes.

4. Secularisation is assessed through two variables. The first variable determines whether a respondent is a member of a religious community, with responses categorised into eight broad religious groups if applicable. The second variable measures the frequency of religious service attendance, with responses ranging from "never" (1) to "several times a week or more" (7). These responses are grouped into four categories: "never," "rarely," "sometimes," and "often."

3.3   CONTROL VARIABLES

In addition to the variables discussed, our models control for a country's unemployment rate in 2022 to account for the national labour market conditions at the time of data collection. This data is sourced from the ILO database. We also control for individual unemployment status (yes/no) and include demographic variables such as respondents' age, gender, whether they have children, and their citizenship status at birth. A detailed overview of the wording and coding of all variables used in the analysis is provided in Appendix A2.

3.4   STATISTICAL MODELS

We employ multilevel linear regression models to analyse attitudes toward non-discrimination, addressing the hierarchical structure of our data with respondents nested within countries. These models account for both within-country and

between-country variability.[5] At the country level, the models include random intercepts, the country characteristics previously mentioned, and the unemployment rate to control for labour market conditions. At the individual level, we incorporate the seven characteristics relevant to both theories and the five control variables outlined earlier.

Models are estimated using maximum likelihood estimation. Given the relatively simple structure of our models – without cross-level interaction terms – the sample size of 26 countries is generally adequate for reliably estimating country-level parameters, aligning with Bryan and Jenkins' (2016) recommendation of at least 25 countries for linear multilevel models. Nevertheless, to address the potential limitations imposed by the relatively small number of countries, we incorporate a degree-of-freedom adjustment in the statistical tests for the coefficients of country-level characteristics, following the approach suggested by Elff et al. (2021).[6] All models incorporate post-stratification weights at the individual level, as well as weights at the country level corresponding to the sample sizes. To address potential heteroscedasticity, we use robust standard errors in all models to ensure accurate and reliable inference.

Finally, to address the "explained" variation in our multilevel models, we report two R²-values for each of the two levels. These measures were proposed by Snijders and Bosker (1994) and Bryk and Raudenbush (1992), respectively.

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5   The null model (see Model 0 in Appendix III) reveals an intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) of 0.10. This result suggests that approximately ten per cent of the variability in respondents' attitudes toward non-discrimination can be attributed to differences at the country level, thereby justifying the use of a multilevel approach. However, the relatively low ICC also indicates that most of the variation in the dependent variable is attributable to individual-level characteristics and their distribution rather than country-level factors.

6   In our analysis, this means that the statistical tests for country-level parameters are conducted using a t-distribution with 22 degrees of freedom. This adjustment accounts for the estimation of four country-level parameters using data from 26 countries.

4   EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

We start by describing the differences in countries' degrees of support for non-discrimination. Second, we analyse the influence of the two country-level characteristics on support for non-discrimination. Third, we look at the association of individual-level characteristics with attitudes towards non-discrimination. Finally, we discuss results from some robustness checks we carried out to verify the stability of our findings.

4.1   COUNTRY DIFFERENCES

Figure 1 ranks all 26 countries based on the average support of the principle of non-discrimination.

As Figure 1 shows, the mean factor score across all countries – zero by construction – translates to an average of 4.4 on the original 6-point scale, indicating a generally strong endorsement of non-discriminatory attitudes. Furthermore, support for non-discrimination in the labour market significantly outweighs opposition, as in 22 of the 26 countries, the average values on the dependent variable reflect medium to high levels of support for non-discrimination, with scores exceeding 4 (as shown on the upper x-axis in Figure 1). This result indicates a surprisingly strong support for the idea of non-discrimination in the labour market in all of the surveyed countries.

At the same time, however, we find substantial variations between countries, even if the differences between countries next to each other are often not statistically significant, as can be seen from the overlapping confidence intervals. Citizens in Chile, Latvia and Sweden are, on average, the most supportive of the idea of non-discrimination, with mean values on the dependent variable corresponding to rather high levels of support (4.8 and higher on the original scale). At the other end of the spectrum, we find countries

Figure 1: Mean values of 26 countries regarding citizens' attitudes towards non-discrimination
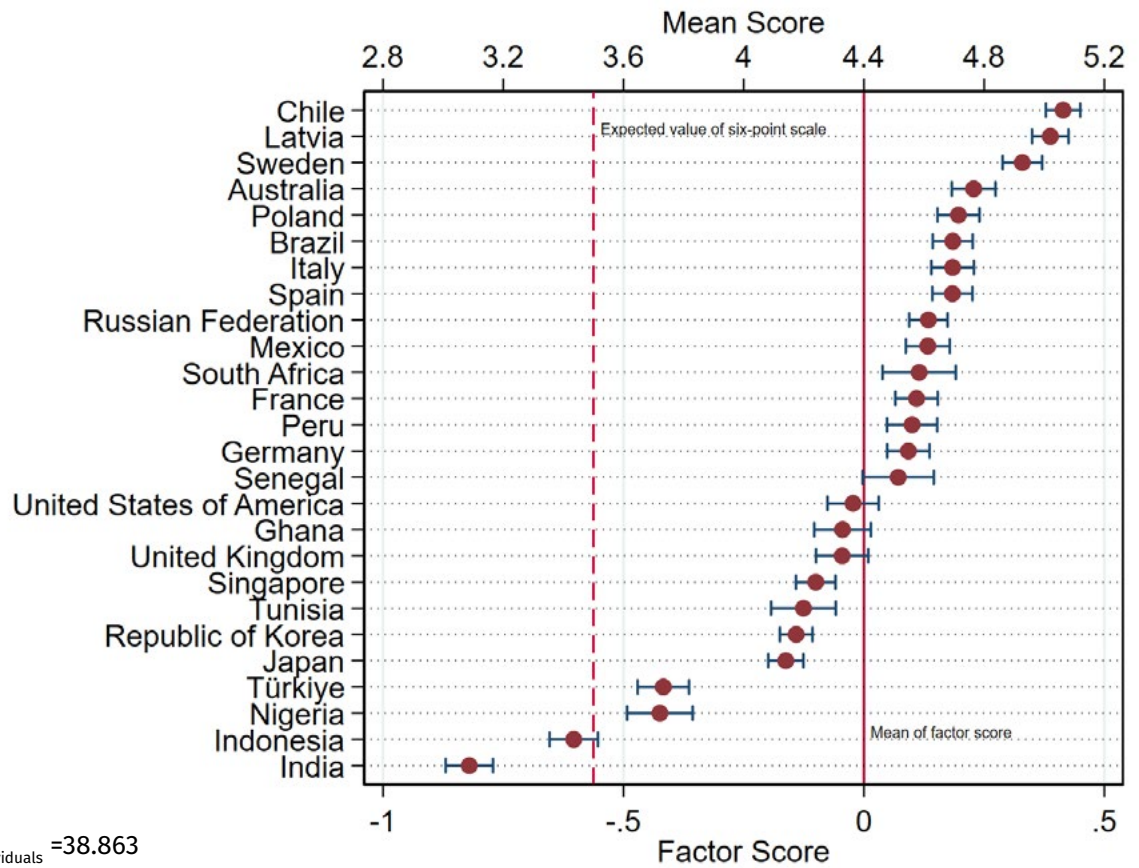
$N_{Countries}$ =26, $N_{Individuals}$ =38.863

Source: Data by Giebler et al. (2023)

such as Nigeria, Türkiye, Indonesia, and India, in particular, with low levels of support. While three countries of the lowest four are at least close to the theoretically expected mean value (3.5 on a six-point scale), citizens in India are, on average, more likely to oppose the idea of non-discrimination in the labour market.

Some country averages are surprising and somewhat contradict conventional understanding. The US and UK, for example, are among the oldest liberal democracies; however, support for the principle of non-discrimination in both countries falls slightly below the mean and is comparable with the average levels of support found in countries such as Ghana or Tunisia.

Given these country differences, a question arises: to what extent can the two theories and the indicators derived from them – at both macro and micro levels – help us better understand differences in non-discriminatory attitudes?

4.2 COUNTRY-LEVEL CHARACTERISTICS

To shed more light on the relationship between support for the principle of non-discrimination and country-level characteristics, we first ran a multilevel model that contained three country-level variables (level of modernity, integration into world society, and the unemployment rate as control variable) and no variables at the individual level. The red dots in Figure 2 show the regression coefficients for the two key country-level indicators estimated from this model (the full set of results can be found in Appendix A3). Both variables show the theoretically expected association with support for the principle of non-discrimination.

Figure 2: Associations between country-level characteristics and attitudes towards non-discrimination (with and without inclusion of individual-level characteristics)
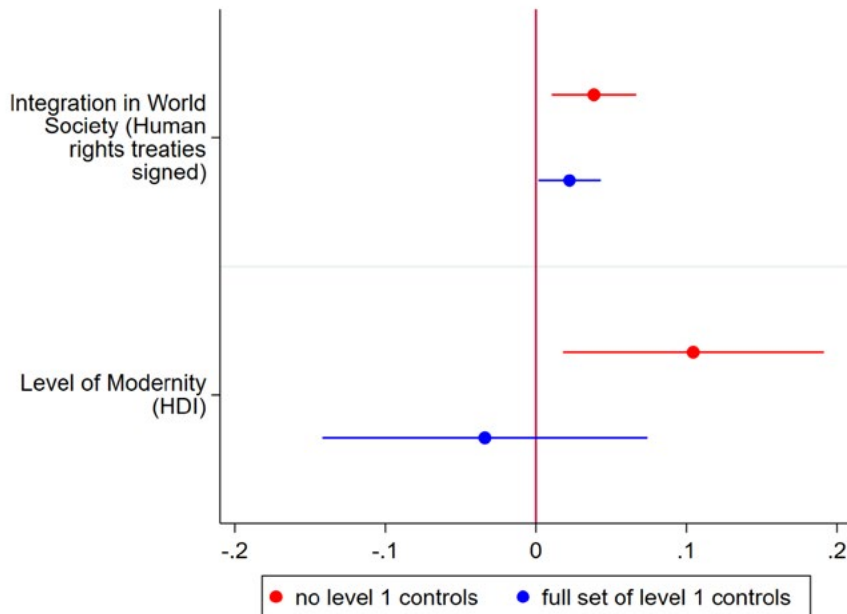
Results from linear multilevel models, maximum likelihood estimation, NCountries =26, NIndividuals =38.863
Source: Data by Giebler et al. 2023

Regarding world society theory, we see that citizens who live in a country that is strongly embedded in the culture of world society (measured by the number of human rights treaties signed) are more likely to support the idea of non-discrimination when compared to citizens who live in a country that is less embedded in the culture of world society. The model predicts a shift in the expected level of support by 0.46 scale points when the number of human rights treaties signed changes from its minimum (5) to its maximum (17) value. This corresponds to a shift of about half a standard deviation in the dependent variable.

Likewise, the indicator derived from modernisation theory shows a positive association with the level of support for the principle of non-discrimination: Citizens living in countries that have reached a high level of modernity are more likely to support the non-discrimination principle. The level of support increases by 0.45 points when the HDI divided by 100 changes from its minimum (5.12) to its maximum (9.47) value, corresponding

to a shift of about half a standard deviation in the dependent variable.

Taken together, the country-level characteristics included in the model capture about 40 per cent of the variation in the dependent variable at the country level (see the different measures for the R² reported in Appendix A3). Since the third country-level characteristic (unemployment rate) does not have a strong association with support for the principle of non-discrimination, the bulk of the "explained" variance at the country level can be attributed to the two theoretically derived characteristics, a country's level of modernity and its embeddedness in the culture of world society. It seems neither theory can explain citizens' attitudes alone, but both theories can contribute.

In a second step, we incorporated individual-level characteristics in the analysis, allowing us to assess whether the observed associations at the country level remain robust when accounting for compositional differences in education, income,

Figure 3: Associations between individual-level characteristics and attitudes towards non-discrimination (controlled for country-level characteristics)
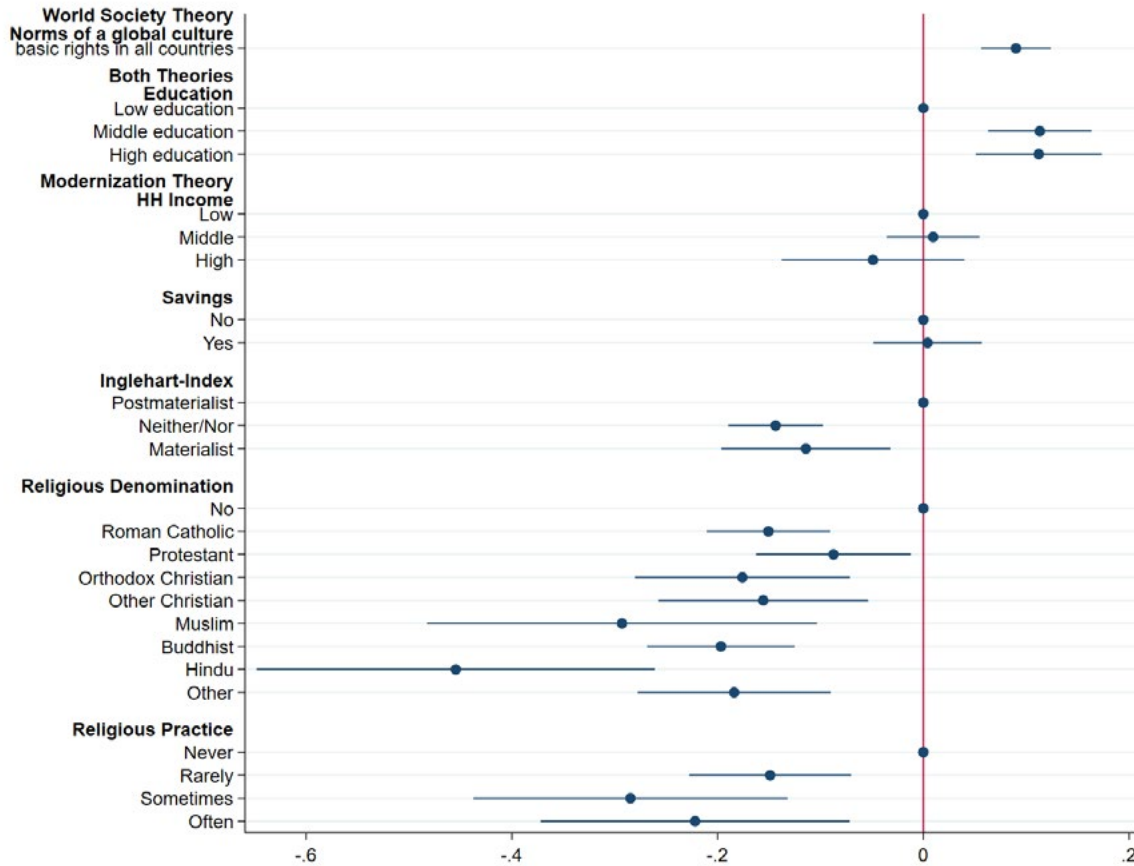
Results from linear multilevel models, maximum likelihood estimation, NCountries =26, NIndividuals =38.863
Source: Data by Authors (2023)

values, and other factors. As illustrated by the blue dots in Figure 2, citizens residing in countries deeply embedded in the culture of world society are more likely to endorse the principle of non-discrimination, regardless of their educational level and personal values. However, the results look different for the second country-level characteristic. Once we account for compositional differences at the individual level, the previously positive association between a country's level of modernity and support for the principle of non-discrimination becomes statistically insignificant. This suggests that differences in support for non-discrimination across countries cannot be directly attributed to varying levels of modernity. Instead, it appears that individual characteristics – such as education, (post-)materialist attitudes,

and religious beliefs and practices – are distributed differently in more modernised countries compared to less modernised ones. In the next section, we explore how these individual characteristics influence the support for the principle of non-discrimination.

4.3   INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL CHARACTERISTICS

Figure 3 presents the results of the linear multi-level regression model, now focusing on the individual-level characteristics derived from the two theories. The graph depicts the estimated coefficients for selected individual-level characteristics as well as their 95% confidence intervals (for the full set of results, see Appendix A3).

The estimated coefficients for the two variables related to world society theory – support for the idea that every human has the same basic rights, and the respondent's level of education – are in line with our theoretical expectations. Specifically, the more strongly respondents endorse the principle of equality of all people, the more likely they are to support the idea of non-discrimination. Additionally, individuals with medium or high levels of education are more inclined to support the principle of non-discrimination compared to those with lower levels of education. This finding might support our expectation that the more time individuals spend within educational institutions, the more they will be exposed to the norms of a global culture and the more they will support the idea of non-discrimination.

The findings are more nuanced when it comes to individual-level characteristics associated with modernisation theory. Contrary to our expectation, the hypothesis that individuals with greater economic resources are more likely to oppose discrimination is not supported by the data as neither respondents' income nor their savings show a statistically significant relationship with anti-discrimination attitudes. Notably, this result persists even when the model is re-estimated after excluding respondents' (post-)materialist attitudes, indicating that the lack of significance is not due to the inclusion of these attitudes in the analysis (results not shown). However, other individual-level characteristics do influence anti-discrimination attitudes, as theoretically expected. Respondents who hold postmaterialist values and secular citizens – those who are not affiliated with any religious denomination and do not practice religion – are more likely to support the principle of non-discrimination. Finally, as we already reported earlier and also in line with modernisation theory, citizens with medium or high levels of education are more inclined to endorse non-discrimination.

Incorporating individual-level characteristics into the model enhances the proportion of "explained" variation at both the individual and country levels (see R^2 measures reported in Appendix A3). At the individual level, the model accounts for approximately ten per cent of the variation in the dependent variable. At the country level, we observe R^2 values around 0.6, indicating that a substantial portion of the variation in support for the idea of non-discrimination across countries is captured when country-level characteristics are included – especially embeddedness in the culture of world society – as well as individual-level characteristics.

4.4 ROBUSTNESS CHECKS

We conducted additional analyses to ensure the robustness of our findings. Since these analyses yielded results consistent with those already presented, we provide only a brief summary of the robustness checks that were carried out.

First, the survey includes a variable that measures the degree of attention respondents paid while completing the questionnaire. The results discussed earlier are based on the full sample. In a separate analysis, we excluded the 4'906 respondents who failed an instructional manipulation check (an "attention check") as recommended by Oppenheimer et al. (2009). However, this exclusion did not significantly alter the outcomes of our analysis (results not shown in the Appendix).

Second, instead of using the factor scores as the key dependent variable, we conducted all calculations separately for each of the four items that comprised the factor. The results of these analyses are presented in Appendix A4 (Tables A4_1 and A4_2). Regarding the associations with the country-level variables, we found that the indicator "gender" showed the strongest associations, while "ethnic group" had the weakest. At the individual level, the patterns of association

were generally consistent across all four indicators, with the exception of respondents' gender, which showed a notably stronger association with the "gender" indicator. Overall, however, the robustness check indicates that our results, based on the combined factor scores, effectively represent a weighted average of different individual indicators. Most of our findings can be replicated when a single indicator is used as the dependent variable instead of the factor scores.

Third, since some studies use GDP per capita to measure a country's level of development instead of the Human Development Index (HDI), we conducted all our analyses using GDP per capita as an alternative to HDI. The results are strikingly similar: GDP per capita is initially positively and statistically significantly associated with attitudes toward non-discrimination. However, this association becomes statistically insignificant once individual-level variables are accounted for (see Table A4_3 in the Appendix).

5   CONCLUSION

The idea that jobs should be given to those with the best qualifications and no one should be discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity, family background, gender or religion has become an internationally institutionalised legal norm. Based on a novel public opinion survey covering 26 countries from all regions of the world, this paper explores to what extent the norm of non-discrimination is supported by citizens worldwide. We find strong support for the idea of non-discrimination in the labour market in many of the surveyed countries. At the same time, we see substantial differences across countries in citizen attitudes toward non-discrimination. To understand these differences, hypotheses were derived from two broader theories: the notion of the existence of a global culture drawn from world society theory on the one hand and modernisation theory on the other. With regard to both theories, we

distinguish between macro characteristics and features at the individual level.

Results from the multivariate analysis demonstrate that modernisation theory, as well as world society theory, contribute to explaining citizens' attitudes, albeit to different degrees. Citizens living in countries deeply embedded in the culture of world society are more likely to support the principle of non-discrimination. Furthermore, people's level of education and their general commitment to the norms of the global culture are associated with support for non-discrimination as postulated by world society theory. Findings are less clear regarding the characteristics we derived from modernisation theory. It is true that secularised individuals and those holding post-materialistic values are more likely to support the non-discrimination norm, which is in line with the expectations derived from modernisation theory. However, a country's degree of modernisation does not have a significant effect on attitudes towards non-discrimination when individual-level characteristics are included in the analysis.

At this point, it is important to note that a country's composition with individuals having certain characteristics is itself conditioned by macro characteristics and historical processes that can result from modernisation processes. For example, the fact that there are significantly fewer highly educated people in India compared to Latvia is the result of different historical developments of both countries. And, the high number of secularised individuals holding post-material values in a country like Sweden is likely to be due to the long history of liberal democracy and freedom as well as the high level of economic prosperity in Sweden. In other words, the relative importance of individual characteristics can be partially traced back to country features related to modernisation processes, even if we are unable to measure this relationship without time-series data. For this reason, macro features related to

modernisation processes remain, in a way, relevant for understanding the worldwide distribution of support and rejection of non-discrimination principles.

Our study has some limitations, which should not remain unmentioned. First, our data does not allow us to measure causal effects or analyse the specific mechanisms responsible for the correlation between two characteristics. For example, we claim a correlation between the degree to which a country is integrated into world society and citizens' support for the norm of non-discrimination. Rachael S. Pierotti (2013) has proposed a theoretical model that maps the diffusion process of ideas from the global level through domestic actors of nation-states down to individuals (see also Pandian 2019; Kim 2020). Unfortunately, we can neither operationalise this diffusion process nor the complex interaction process between the global, national and local levels. We can only roughly examine whether there is a correlation between a country's level of embeddedness into world society and people's attitudes.

Second, although the descriptive analyses demonstrate that countries differ in their approval of the non-discrimination norm, we can only make sense of these differences to a smaller extent. Classifying countries and individuals with broad categories such as "modernised" or "embedded in world society" does not do justice to the particular historical developments of individual countries. For example, it remains unclear why support for the idea of non-discrimination in the UK is at the same level as in Ghana. Our analysis might, therefore, not meet demands made by historically oriented social scientists who advocate more specific case study analyses (e.g. Mahoney 2004). We believe, however, that both methodologies are compatible. Analyses like the one presented here can develop a useful sketch of differences between countries but cannot replace qualitative studies that capture the historical

developments and the specific characteristics of individual countries.

Finally, it is important to recognise that attitudes people hold do not always align with their behaviour and social practices. Despite the widespread institutionalisation of non-discrimination rules and the support they enjoy among citizens, favouritism and discrimination in job access remain pervasive, as demonstrated by numerous experimental studies (Bertrand/Mullainathan 2004; Neumann 2018; Lancee 2019; Quillian et al. 2019). However, these findings in no way mean that citizens' attitudes are insignificant to their behaviour: they have an effect even if they do not determine peoples' behaviour, as, for example, Andrew Miles (2015) has shown (2015) by testing to what extent attitudes influence a wider range of behavioural outcomes across 25 countries.

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