Consensus, Stability and Meaning in Abstract Social Values

VALERIE BRAITHWAITE AND RUSSELL BLAMEY*

Research School of the Social Sciences, Australian National University

The Social Goal Values Inventory comprises 18 abstract principles that represent people’s shared understandings of the good society. While measuring consensus, this instrument also assesses differences in how these shared values are prioritised. Responses from two different community samples were compared across a 20-year period to examine the related issues of consensus and stability in Australian values. Data were analysed at the level of individual items, underlying value orientations (security and harmony) and value types (the security oriented, the harmony oriented, dualists, and relativists). Shifts in individual values over time were meaningful in the context of changes in Australian political culture. The overall picture, however, was one of consensus and stability, with no evidence of value commitment waning in favour of relativism. The findings of this paper are used to support the argument that values as stable individual and socially shared phenomena are ideally located for bridging the gap between micro and macro social processes.

Values are one of a handful of constructs that bridge the social sciences (Inglehart 1971; Kluckhohn 1951; Smith 1965; Williams 1968). They have been defined narrowly in terms of object attractiveness (Becker and McClintock 1967), broadly as abstract principles guiding social life (Rokeach, 1968), and between these extremes, as stable preferences that individuals hold in relation to specific conditions of living (Inglehart 1977). This paper conceives of values as abstract principles (eg equality, human dignity). As such, they apply equally well as criteria that frame individual decision making and shape institutional practices. The applicability of the concept to both the micro-level of individual cognitions (about what is right and possible) and the macro-level of law and policy (about what is permissible and conceivable) makes values an ideal tool for analysing tensions between individuals and their social institutions.

The versatility of the construct has not been accepted uncritically, however. The usefulness of abstract values has been questioned by those concerned about their vagueness in meaning and action. This paper argues that in spite of these properties, values have sufficient shared understanding around their central core to be considered stable and meaningful phenomena that can be used reliably and validly to explain political choice at the level of individuals and of institutions.

* Our thanks to Bill Martin, John Braithwaite and Nathan Harris from the Research School of Social Sciences for sharing ideas and criticisms with us during the preparation of this manuscript.
Critique of Values

In recent years, values as abstract conceptions of the desirable have lost some of their legitimacy among those who have sought to explain the political behaviour of individuals through cognitive processes (Sears, Huddy and Schaffer 1986). Because of the abstract nature of values, doubts have been expressed about the extent to which values readily translate into human behaviour (Bauman 1993; Denver and Hands 1990; Schuman 1975; Ziegert 1995). In some quarters, values have been treated as social ideals that are divorced from the world of action (Krygier and Glass 1995), while others regard them as social propaganda that can be used to justify action (Kristianson and Zanna 1994; Stephenson 1974). Sceptics question the importance of values compared with other more context sensitive concepts such as need, interest, attitude and norm when the goal is to predict what a person will do in a specific situation (Ajzen 1991; Bandura 1986; Downs 1957; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975; Sears, Huddy and Schaffer 1986). In the midst of such arguments, abstract values have drifted toward a position of scientific irrelevance, being judged too far removed from the real world to be of interest and too open to multiple interpretations to shape action.

While such arguments command respect, they ignore the need for constructs that have meaning at both the level of individual behaviour and at the level of institutional practice. Values, as conceptualised by Kluckhohn (1951) and Rokeach (1973), are principles for action encompassing abstract goals in life and modes of conduct that an individual or a collective considers preferable across contexts and situations. Values, as such, are micro–macro concepts. At the micro-level of individual behaviour, values are motivating as internalised standards that reconcile a person’s needs with the demands of social life. They allow individuals to evaluate the options that are available to them for action. At the macro-level of cultural practices, values represent shared understandings that give meaning, order and integration to social living. Without values, Kluckhohn argued, ‘[t]here can be no personal security and no stability of social organization’ (p. 400). Values frame institutional decision making (Rokeach 1979). Within a democratic society, a social value such as rule by the people constrains the actions that governments consider legitimate in achieving their political agendas. The fact that there are many options within the constraints does not negate their usefulness. Indeed the versatility adds to their durability across time and context (Braithwaite 1998b), and entrenches them deeply in the culture in such a way that some options become unthinkable.

The Security–Harmony Model of Political Evaluation

Within the tradition of values as broad abstract principles, the security–harmony model has been used not only to describe interrelationships among values (orientations) but also to predict political attitudes, voting preferences and behaviour (Blamey and Braithwaite 1997a, b; Braithwaite 1982, 1994, 1997, 1998a; Braithwaite, Makkai and Pittelkow 1996; Heaven 1990a, b, 1991; Thamhauser and Caird 1990). The model proposes that both individual and collective behaviours are framed by a security orientation that is concerned with the protection and allocation of society’s material and social resources, and by a harmony orientation that represents the humanistic expression of integrity, placing supreme importance on finding peace within and with the external world, and on realising human potential in
oneself as well as others. The two dimensions of security and harmony have parallels in the work of Fromm (1949), Hogan (1973), Inglehart (1977), Lipset (1963), Scott (1960), Katz and Hass (1988), Rasinski (1987), Rokeach (1973), and Weber (1946).

The security and harmony value orientations comprise both personal and social values. Personal values refer to goals and ways of behaving that individuals can strive for in their daily lives such as economic prosperity, wisdom, being generous, or reliable. Social values refer to the goals that individuals would like their society to achieve, such as a world at peace or national economic development. The security and harmony value orientations at the personal and social levels have been used successfully to explain political preferences. Each orientation contributes to the variation that can be predicted net of the other. Security and harmony, for example, are both needed to locate a person's position on Inglehart's materialism-postmaterialism dimension (Braithwaite, Makkai and Pittelkow 1996). Furthermore, security and harmony explain variation on the liberalism-conservatism continuum. Those with a strong security orientation are more likely to adopt conservative attitudes, support conservative policies and institutions, and vote for the right. Those with a strong harmony orientation are more likely to express liberal attitudes, to support progressive social policies, to engage in political protest, and vote for the left (Braithwaite 1994, 1997, 1998a; Heaven 1990a, b, 1991; Thannhauser and Caird 1990).

The importance of both security and harmony in predicting individual political preferences has given rise to a four-fold typology of values: security-oriented individuals have a stronger commitment to security than harmony; harmony-oriented individuals have a stronger commitment to harmony than security; dualists have strong and balanced security–harmony commitments; while relativists have only weak commitments to both value orientations. As might be expected, the harmony oriented and the security oriented consistently favour left and right politics respectively. Dualists and relativists sometimes side with the right, sometimes with the left, depending on the issue of interest. They are differentiated not so much by their political attitudes as by their commitment to global principles. Relativists seek more contextual information than dualists in forming their judgements (Blamey and Braithwaite 1997b; Braithwaite 1998a).

The Social Goal Values Inventory

The above studies have been based on the Goal, Mode and Social Values Inventories (Braithwaite 1979; Braithwaite and Law 1985), a 125-item instrument developed to provide a representative and comprehensive coverage of Australian values. The Social Goal Values Inventory is part of the instrument and captures 18 societal goals that emerged from interviews with a community sample of 73 residents in 1975. This inventory has been used at regular intervals since its development, and factors into two major components, one representing security, the other harmony (Blamey and Braithwaite 1997a; Braithwaite 1982, 1994; Braithwaite and Law 1985). The items that have loaded most consistently on these factors across various analyses are listed in the appendix and form the security and harmony scales. Scale scores are obtained through summing responses to the items. Alpha reliability coefficients for security have ranged from 0.78 to 0.83, and for harmony from 0.83 to 0.86.
The Social Goal Values Inventory has been used mainly with student or convenience samples and has been completed by random samples from the general population only on three occasions, in 1975, 1995 and 1997. This paper uses the Social Goal Values Inventory administered in 1975 and 1995 to examine empirically the properties of values that make them ideal tools for micro–macro analyses. To date, most work has focused on the links between values and behaviour at the micro-level of analysis (Blamey and Braithwaite 1997a; Braithwaite 1994, 1997, 1998a; Braithwaite, Makkai and Pittelkow 1996). Instead, this paper focuses on whether abstract values have useful macro properties. If values are to be institutional building blocks (eg in an Australian constitution), it needs to be demonstrated that they attract high levels of support as principles of good governance (consensus) and that at an aggregate level, they are relatively enduring over time (stability). If values are in a constant state of flux, they cannot be used reliably as reference points for decision making by governments or branches of government.

At the same time as being enduring and attracting consensus, values must be meaningful. Meaningfulness can be inferred from observations of change in levels of value acceptability and differences in the importance attached to them by different social groups. Thus, having evaluated the Social Goal Values Inventory as an instrument that reflects value consensus and stability, a second question is addressed: Is there evidence of particular values changing in interpretable or predictable ways over time, and are there value differences between social groups that are consistent with previous findings and theoretical expectations? The capacity to identify change and difference is fundamental to demonstrating sensitivity of measurement in relation to highly abstract values. Change and difference can occur and is expected to occur within a bigger picture of consensus and stability.

The Argument for Consensus and Stability

Value consensus means that the vast majority of the population agree that the value is preferable as a goal that should be a guiding principle in formulating government policy and action. The consensual quality of values stems from the widely held view that values are cultural products with their perceived desirability acquired through the socialisation process (Kluckhohn 1951; Rokeach 1973; Williams 1968). This does not deny that individuals and groups give values private interpretations. For instance, widespread consensus might exist for the social value of a world at peace, but individuals will diverge in the degree to which they see peace as achievable through economic sanctions, military retaliation, negotiation, compromise, or turning the other cheek in a particular situation. The argument of this paper is that despite these differences, there is an element of shared understanding that is endorsed by the community at large, an understanding that says that the core meaning of values should be taken seriously in societal deliberations.

Stability in values is likely to follow from consensus about values. If values are shared as internalised standards of behaviour, and if individuals feel societal disapproval when these standards are transgressed, values might be expected to have a high degree of stability over time. Furthermore, their highly abstract nature adds to their resiliency. Values not only transcend objects and situations, they transcend institutions. The fact that the desirability of a value such as fairness is reinforced across a host of institutions from infancy to old age means that it is
much harder to discredit its relevance and importance as a social goal (Braithwaite 1998b).

The Argument for Value Change

At the same time as claiming stability, few would argue that values are immutable. As cognitions that facilitate the fit between the individual and society, they can be expected to change as the environment changes, forcing adjustments at both social and individual levels (Inglehart 1977; Rokeach 1979). While the abstractness of values lends resiliency, abstractness also provides leverage for change when values can no longer be stretched to accommodate new social circumstances. The variation in meanings attached to values provides a rich base for public debate, and through this process, the breakdown of consensus and the erosion of values becomes possible (Kluckhohn 1951).

Changes in abstract values have been documented overseas. Rokeach and Ball-Rokeach (1989) tracked movements in values in the United States from 1968. Among the changes they observed was a declining emphasis on equality between 1971 and 1981, leading to the conclusion that American society had shifted away from ‘a collective morality value orientation’ to ‘a personal competence value orientation’.

Inglehart (1971, 1977, 1990) has argued that the cultural shift in advanced industrial societies is somewhat different away from materialist goals (sustenance and safety) to postmaterialist goals (openness to innovation and self-actualisation). He explains the change as a cohort effect. Older generations cling to materialism because of the deprivation suffered in their formative years due to poverty and war. In contrast, younger generations are attracted to postmaterialism, having grown up in an environment of economic prosperity and national stability.

A comparison of values data from 1975 and 1995 provides an opportunity to gain some insight into the changes that are taking place in Australia at the level of general and abstract values. Change is examined at both the item level of analysis (18 social goals), at the level of value orientations (security and harmony), and at the level of value types (harmony oriented, security oriented, dualists, or relativists). Changes in value types are particularly interesting given current arguments about declining confidence in community values. Gundelach (1992) has claimed that values are changing in an individualistic direction and that as a consequence, culture is becoming more differentiated with a variety of lifestyles articulating competing values. Bauman (1993) has argued that the search for universally acceptable norms and ethics is not only an outmoded means of regulating human conduct, but also that such standards have lost legitimacy in the eyes of the public (Bauman 1993; Martin 1996). If this is so, one might expect that the proportion of the population who are relativists would have increased from 1975 to 1995. An increase of this kind would call into question the usefulness of a consensus-based approach to values in the 1990s.

The Argument for Group Differences in Values

While the socialisation process ensures that values are transmitted and internalised to some degree by all members of a culture, subgroups differ in the degree of importance they place on certain values and value orientations. Inglehart’s work
(1977, 1990) has shown older and less well-educated people as being more in favour of materialist values than postmaterialist values. The Social Goal Values Inventory has shown older and less well-educated respondents expressing stronger commitment to the security value orientation scale (Braithwaite 1994).

Gender has also been associated with differences in value commitment. Women are more likely to prioritise collective well-being over individual well-being and the expressive over the instrumental in social relations (Gilligan 1982; Eisenberg, Fabes and Shea 1989). Beutel and Marini (1995) have found support for these differences in United States samples of high school seniors from 1977 to 1991. Females expressed greater concern for the well-being of others, were less likely to accept materialism and competition, and placed greater importance on finding purpose and meaning in life.

The Social Goal Values Inventory has not produced consistent gender differences (Braithwaite 1994), although this may reflect a changing culture rather than measurement instability. Shapiro and Mahajan (1986) have brought together a body of United States public opinion data to show a strengthening of gender differences on policy issues after 1976, a change that they associate with the women’s movement. Women not only continued to be supportive of policies that avoided violence, but also pulled ahead of men in their support for policies that sought to protect the well-being of others and find more compassionate solutions to society’s problems.

It is highly probable that in Australia in 1975, women did not articulate a set of values that were markedly different from men because, as a group, they did not identify with a distinctively different abstract code of conduct. Since 1975, the politics of gender and the ‘same-difference’ debate have aroused much public interest and awareness. Central to this debate is the assertion of differences between men and women in their care and concern for the well-being of others. Thus, we hypothesise a gender difference in the 1995 data set, with women espousing a stronger commitment to harmony values than men.

Method

Participants and Procedure in 1975

The Social Goal Values Inventory was part of a survey of values mailed to a random sample of 1040 adults. The sample was stratified on social class and selected from the electoral rolls for the city of Brisbane, Australia. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire within two weeks and were told that an interviewer would call to collect their questionnaire after that period and/or help with its completion. Completed questionnaires were obtained from 483 respondents, giving a response rate of 46%. The sample comprised 54% women and 46% men with 4% aged under 20, 24% aged 20–29, 20% aged 30–39, 20% aged 40–49, 18% aged 50–59, and 14% aged over 60 years; 59% were in paid work. With regard to education, 56% had left school before or after completing junior/leaving, 21% received additional secondary schooling, and 23% had received some tertiary education.

Sample statistics on age, sex and occupational status were compared with the population parameters from the 1971 Census (Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics 1973). The sample underrepresented those less than 20 years of age.
and those over 60 years and was biased in favour of the higher status occupational groups.

**Participants and Procedure in 1995**

The Social Goal Values Inventory was part of the National Forest Attitudes Survey (Blamey 1995) that was mailed with a reply-paid envelope to a random sample of 3500 adults on electoral rolls in Australia. Two weeks after the initial mailing, a reminder card was sent to all non-respondents, and in cases where no reply was forthcoming in the subsequent two weeks, another copy of the questionnaire was sent. Completed questionnaires were returned by 1680, giving a response rate of 48%.

The sample comprised 49% men and 51% women ranging in age from 16 to 95 years (M = 45.48, SD = 16.50). Just over half were in paid work (58%) with a further 4% looking for paid work. In terms of education, 39% had left school at junior/year 10 or less, 38% had completed high school and/or a diploma, and 23% had completed or were completing a tertiary or higher degree.

Sample statistics on age, income and sex were similar to population parameters available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics census for 1991 (ABS 1993). The sample was biased, however, toward those with higher levels of education.

**Design**

Since the 1975 and 1995 studies were undertaken independently with no intention of being comparative, differences arise in relation to the population sampled, the survey methodology used and the content. Nevertheless, the response rates from the two studies are comparable, and the biases noted are not so greatly different that they are expected to produce value differences between the two sets of data. Care clearly is required in interpreting value change and inconsistencies between samples. At the same time, success in demonstrating value stability would support the robustness of the findings.

**Measures**

**The Social Goal Values Inventory.** The Social Goal Values Inventory requires respondents to read through a list of societal goals (see appendix) and to judge each as a standard that they might use to make judgments about world and community events and to guide their actions (eg when voting). Responses are given on a seven-point rating scale where 1 = I reject this, 2 = I am inclined to reject this, 3 = I neither reject nor accept this, 4 = I am inclined to accept this, 5 = I accept this as important, 6 = I accept this as very important, 7 = I accept this as of the utmost importance.

The 1995 pilot study identified one of the 18 values as ambiguous, 'upholding traditional sexual moral standards (opposing sexual permissiveness and pornography)'. In 1975, this item was interpreted as being internally consistent, whereas in 1995 it was not. The desire to outlaw sexual exploitation did not overlap with support for traditional morality in 1995 as it had done in 1975. This item was omitted from the 1995 study.
In another two cases, minor changes to wording occurred from 1975 to 1995. ‘Man’s domination of nature’ was changed to ‘domination of nature’, and the descriptor for ‘reward for individual effort’ was modified slightly to improve clarity. ‘Letting the individual profit from initiative and hard work’ was replaced by ‘letting individuals prosper through gains made by initiative and hard work’.

Social-demographic variables. Sex was indexed using 1 = male and 2 = female. Age was measured in six categories in 1975 (under 20 = 1, 20–29 = 2, 30–39 = 3, 40–49 = 4, 50–59 = 5, 60 and over = 6). Age was measured in years in 1995 and collapsed into the 1975 categories for the analyses. In 1975, education was indexed with three categories: doing junior (year 10, leaving) or less = 1, doing part of or completing senior (year 12) = 2, and doing tertiary study = 3. A more elaborate 11-category schema was used in 1995, but again these were collapsed to correspond with the three categories used in 1975.

Results

The findings are reported in two sections. First, the questions of consensus, stability and change are addressed. Consensus is evaluated within each time period, while stability is assessed through comparisons of 1975 and 1995 data. In the second section, value differences among social groups defined by gender, age, and education are examined for 1975 and 1995.

In each section, the data are analysed at three levels of measurement using a) individual items of the Social Goal Values Inventory, b) scale scores on the security and harmony value orientations, and c) the typology of individuals as security oriented, harmony oriented, dualist, or relativist.

Is there Value Consensus that is Stable Across Time?

Using the social goal values individually as the unit of analysis, four statistics were calculated to gauge consensus and stability over the 20-year period (see Table 1). The first statistic was the percentage of respondents who accepted each value as at least somewhat important (that is, with a rating from 4 to 7). The second and third statistics were the mean score for each value on the seven-point rating scale and the corresponding standard deviation, giving an indication of overall commitment and variability. The fourth statistic used the mean scores to rank the values from the most highly valued (1) to the least highly valued (18 for 1975 and 17 for 1995).

From Table 1, rates of acceptance for the social goals tend to be consistently high in 1975 and in 1995. In 1975, two values fall short of reaching the 80% endorsement rate of being considered at least somewhat important: ‘upholding traditional sexual moral standards’ (73%) and ‘domination of nature’ (61%). In 1995, ‘upholding traditional sexual moral standards’ was omitted because of the item ambiguities referred to earlier. ‘Domination of nature’ remained a controversial social goal with only 52% recognizing some value in it as a guiding principle for social action. By 1995, one other value had slipped below the 80% endorsement mark. ‘National greatness’ was endorsed by 78%, making it the second least popular social goal for the 1995 sample. ‘Upholding traditional sexual moral standards’, ‘domination of nature’, and ‘national greatness’ not only are less
### Table 1. Descriptive statistics for social values in 1975 and 1995.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social value</th>
<th>1975 (N = 483)</th>
<th>1995 (N = 1680)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A world at peace (H)</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>6.30 (1.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National security (S)</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>6.01 (1.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human dignity (H)</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>5.98 (.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserving the natural environment</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>5.98 (1.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>5.91 (1.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rule of law^ (S)</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>5.90 (1.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal opportunity for all (H)</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>5.88 (1.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International cooperation (H)</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>5.74 (1.23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A world of beauty (H)</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>5.62 (1.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward for individual effort</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>5.44 (1.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good life for others (H)</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>5.44 (1.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National economic development (S)</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>5.40 (1.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social progress or social reform (H)</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>5.29 (1.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National greatness (S)</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>5.09 (1.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule by the people (H)</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>5.07 (1.52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater economic equality (H)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>4.93 (1.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upholding traditional sexual morals</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>4.87 (1.90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominination of nature</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3.94 (1.67)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

^ A typographical error in the survey resulted in this item being written as ‘the rule of the law’ in 1995.

* An independent two tailed t-test produced a significant difference between 1975 and 1995 with \( p < 0.01 \).

(H) This item is part of the harmony scale.

(S) This item is part of the security scale.

Popular social goals but also have higher standard deviations than the other values, suggesting greater community division surrounding their importance as guiding principles for policy. From these data, it is possible to identify standards that are losing widespread support and stand apart from others attracting high levels of consensus.

Turning to the rankings for each time period, Table 1 reveals that the top ranking values in 1995, with over 95% endorsement, were ‘human dignity’, ‘a world at peace’, ‘the rule of law’, ‘freedom’, ‘equal opportunity for all’, and ‘preserving the natural environment’. The same values were the most widely accepted in 1975 with one addition, ‘national security’. Overall, these data show remarkable stability over the 20-year period.

Nevertheless, the Social Goal Values Inventory should be sufficiently sensitive to pick up some changes in values over this time. To investigate change, differences in mean scores for each value in 1975 and 1995 were tested for statistical significance using a series of two-tailed independent t-tests. Given the number of tests involved, and the subsequent increase in the probability of a Type I error, \( \alpha \) for all statistical tests was set at 0.01. Seven significant differences were found. ‘National security’ (\( t(2161) = 6.64, p < 0.01 \)), ‘international cooperation’
\( t (2161) = 4.00, p < 0.01 \), ‘a good life for others’ \( t (2161) = 3.23, p < 0.01 \), and ‘a world of beauty’ \( t (2161) = 3.06, p < 0.01 \) were less important in 1995 than they were in 1975. This movement was also reflected through the rankings of the values. ‘National security’ dropped in rank from second to eighth. The change in rank for ‘international cooperation’ was less marked, moving from eighth to ninth. ‘A world of beauty’ moved from ninth to eleventh, and ‘a good life for others’ from tenth to thirteenth.

In contrast, ‘the rule of law’ \( t (2161) = -5.08, p < 0.01 \), ‘reward for individual effort’ \( t (2161) = -4.62, p < 0.01 \), and ‘greater economic equality’ \( t (2161) = -4.89, p < 0.01 \) emerged as significantly more important in 1995 than 1975. ‘The rule of law’ moved up the ladder from sixth to second, ‘reward for individual effort’ from tenth to seventh, and ‘greater economic equality’ from sixteenth to twelfth. These value changes together reflect an increase in concern for the domestic ‘bread and butter’ issues of daily life and less interest in what is happening on the international scene.

In addition to comparing individual values, the security and harmony values scales were tested for significant differences across time using two-tailed independent t-tests. Responses to the following four items were summed and divided by four to produce a security value orientation score for each individual: ‘national security’, ‘the rule of law’, ‘national economic development’, and ‘national greatness’. Harmony value orientation scores were calculated through summing responses to the following 10 items and dividing by 10: ‘a world at peace’, ‘human dignity’, ‘preserving the natural environment’, ‘equal opportunity for all’, ‘international cooperation’, ‘a world of beauty’, ‘a good life for others’, ‘social progress or social reform’, ‘rule by the people’, and ‘greater economic equality’. Mean scores and standard deviations for the scales are presented in Table 2. No significant differences emerged between the support given to the security and harmony orientations by the 1975 sample and by the 1995 sample. The means and standard deviations for the scales are stable, as are the alpha reliability coefficients. The correlation between the security and harmony scales in 1975 was 0.38 compared with 0.44 in 1995.

Finally, the breakdown of the 1975 sample into the four types of security oriented, harmony oriented, dualists, and relativists was compared with the breakdown for 1995. In 1975, the four groups were formed by splitting the sample at the median (5.7 in each case). These same cut-offs were used in 1995 so that change in the distribution of each type, particularly relativists, could be observed. From Table 3, the picture is one of considerable consistency in the popularity of corresponding types from 1975 to 1995. Relativists made up 39% of the sample in 1975 as they did in 1995. On both occasions, the majority of respondents (approximately 70%) belonged to the balanced categories where one orientation did
not clearly dominate the other. The harmony oriented and the security oriented were a minority in 1995, as they had been in 1975.

Do Values Differ Across Gender, Age and Educational Groups?

The 1975 data. Pearson product–moment correlations between the security scale and age and education (see Table 4) confirm the hypotheses that security values were more important to older respondents and the less educated. The findings were supported at the item level of analysis where all but one of the security items correlated significantly with age and education at the 0.01 level.

The harmony scale was related to neither education nor age (see Table 4). Neither the harmony nor the security scale was related to gender (see Table 4).

The values typology (security oriented, harmony oriented, dualist, and relativist) was cross tabulated with gender, education and age, using chi-square tests of independence in each case to test for significant relationships (see Tables 5 to 7). Dualists were the least educated, while the harmony oriented had the highest educational qualifications ($\chi^2 = 19.28, df = 6, p < 0.01$) (see Table 6). The harmony oriented were also most likely to be under 30 years of age ($\chi^2 = 16.39, df = 6, p < 0.01$) (see Table 7).

The 1995 data. Pearson product–moment correlation coefficients confirmed the earlier findings that older and less educated respondents scored more highly on security values (see Table 4).

As predicted, gender was related to harmony values in 1995, in spite of the absence of a significant relationship in 1975 (see Table 4). Women were more likely to support harmony values, a finding that held at the level of the harmony scale and for 8 of the 10 items comprising the scale.
Table 5. Gender by value type in 1975 and 1995.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Security–harmony type</th>
<th>% 1975</th>
<th></th>
<th>% 1995</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security oriented</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony oriented</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dualist</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relativist</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Education* by value type in 1975 and 1995.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Security–harmony type</th>
<th>% 1975</th>
<th></th>
<th>% 1995</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leaving or less</td>
<td>Completed secondary/ diploma</td>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>Leaving or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security oriented</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony oriented</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dualist</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relativist</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Only the lowest and the highest of the three educational categories are reported.

Table 7. Age* by value type in 1975 and 1995.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Security–harmony type</th>
<th>% 1975</th>
<th></th>
<th>% 1995</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; 30</td>
<td>30–49</td>
<td>&gt; 50</td>
<td>&lt; 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security oriented</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony oriented</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dualist</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relativist</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Categories have been collapsed and data are reported for only the lower and upper age groups.

When the value types (security oriented, harmony oriented, dualist, and relativist) were cross tabulated with gender, education and age (see Tables 5 to 7), significant relationships emerged in all cases. As was found in 1975, dualists were the least educated, while the harmony oriented were the most educated ($\chi^2 = 83.75$, $df = 6$, $p < 0.01$) (see Table 6). In 1995, the harmony oriented no longer congregated in the under 30 age group. Twenty years on, the harmony oriented were distinguished by being under 50 years
of age. Most likely to be over 50 years of age were the security oriented and dualists ($\chi^2 = 89.44$, $df = 6$, $p < 0.01$).

On the issue of gender, an unexpected finding emerged when security and harmony were considered conjointly. The security oriented were disproportionately men. As expected from the bivariate analysis, women were somewhat more likely to be harmony oriented ($\chi^2 = 33$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.01$).

Discussion

This paper demonstrates that when individuals are given an opportunity to indicate the extent of their commitment to abstract social values on a rating scale, the consensual quality of values becomes evident, with most people regarding most goals as desirable principles to live by. Measuring consensus values, however, does not preclude the analysis of difference. Differences can be detected within a broad band of basic agreement (4 = ‘inclined to accept’ through to 7 = ‘accept as of the utmost importance’), and these differences, like the consensus itself, are meaningful.

Of the 18 values of the Social Goal Values Inventory, 16 enjoy widespread acceptance in the community that has extended over 20 years. Consensus was inferred from respondents indicating that the social goal was at least somewhat important as a guiding principle for social action. Acceptance consistently exceeded 80% in 15 cases, and just fell short of the mark at 78% in one case.

The notable exceptions were ‘domination of nature’ and ‘upholding traditional sexual moral standards’. Support had started to erode for ‘domination of nature’ and ‘upholding traditional sexual moral standards’ with the social movements of the 1970s, and has continued with the liberalisation of homosexuality and divorce laws, diversity in family structures, legislation to protect the environment, and environmental education programs through schools and the media. The community indicated different views about the desirability of these goals in 1975, a tension that has continued to grow for 20 years, and that has been supported by qualitative feedback, and by research documenting value shifts in the areas of the environment, religion and morality (Gundelach 1992). The Social Goal Values Inventory, therefore, appears to have the capacity to weed out values on which consensus has been waning.

Even where there is a high degree of value consensus, commitment levels can fluctuate with changing social conditions. The Social Goal Values Inventory was expected to detect such changes over time, some reflecting international trends, others reflecting responses to local events. One shift of interest was from a collective morality to a morality of personal competence. This thesis was proposed by Rokeach and Ball-Rokeach (1989) to interpret their national survey data in the USA and has been strengthened by Gundelach’s (1992) analysis of value changes in the social institutions of Western Europe. The differences that did emerge in the present study support the hypothesis up to a point. The downgrading of ‘international cooperation’ and ‘a good life for others’ and the upgrading of ‘reward for individual effort’ are consistent with movement away from international communal values, but there was no evidence of abandonment of collective aspirations for the Australian community. If individuals were becoming more preoccupied with their own lives and competencies, one would have expected increases in the ideologically committed group, the security oriented, who are more likely to endorse
policies of rugged individualism (Blamey and Braithwaite 1997b), or the group with low commitment to social values, the relativists (Braithwaite 1998a). Neither change was evident in these data. Instead, Australians supported ‘greater economic equality’ more strongly in 1995 than 1975.

Also contrary to international trends was the absence of a shift from materialism to postmaterialism. The materialist value of ‘the rule of law’ was more strongly supported in 1995 than 1975, while the postmaterialist value of ‘a world of beauty’ dropped in importance.

Although these findings may be out of step with global themes, they are changes that sit comfortably alongside Australian research findings. Using the 1984–85 National Social Science Survey, Graetz and McAllister (1988) tested the proposition that difficult economic times would retard a cultural shift from materialist to postmaterialist values. Of Inglehart’s (1977) 12 social goals, the four goals most frequently ranked first in importance were fighting crime, a stable economy, fighting rising prices, and protecting free speech. Beautiful cities was the second least likely goal to be at the top of anyone’s list (Graetz and McAllister 1988). One could infer from these data from the mid-1980s that Australians were concerned about the economic and safety needs of ordinary hard-working citizens during a period marked by economic recession and high unemployment. In such conditions, aesthetics and good causes became issues of lesser importance. This interpretation is consistent with the change in value priorities described in this paper between 1975 and 1995.

Rokeach (1979) has argued that as social issues are made salient by mass media coverage, people’s awareness of themselves with respect to their stand on such issues also becomes salient. During this consciousness raising exercise, values change as individual’s reassess their priorities in line with the sort of person they think they are or should be. Thus, in a nation that prides itself on its egalitarianism and fairness, it is not surprising to find Australians increasing the importance they attach to ‘greater economic equality’ along with ‘reward for individual effort’. The same argument applies to the decrease in support for ‘national security’ between 1975 and 1995. In 1975, Australia’s last major military commitment, the Vietnam war, came to an end. ‘National security’ was more likely to be a salient value in 1975 than 1995 because a military threat to Australia was widely feared at that time and many Australians had been conscripted to fight in Vietnam. Twenty years on, Australians were no longer preoccupied with a military threat. The economy was a far greater priority (Jones, McAllister, Denemark, and Gow 1993).

Thus, the fluctuations in value commitments at an aggregate level are meaningful within the context of Australian political culture. These findings are interpreted as supportive of the sensitivity of the Social Goal Values Inventory to detect shifts in value commitments while at the same time monitoring value consensus.

Apart from measuring both stability and change over time, the Social Goal Values Inventory has been used successfully to detect differences in value commitments between groups. Older, less well-educated Australians are more likely to be concerned about security, a finding that is robust across time and consistent with Inglehart’s (1971, 1977, 1990) work on materialism and its social demographic correlates. In 1995, a gender effect was documented with the Social Goal Values Inventory for the first time in a random population sample. Women were more strongly supportive of the harmony value orientation than men, as was predicted on the basis of work by Beutel and Marini (1995).
In identifying groups with different value commitments within the population, this paper goes one step further and uses the information contained in the rating procedure to classify individuals into four value types: the security oriented, the harmony oriented, dualists, and relativists. The harmony oriented, who are the most consistent supporters of the political left (Braithwaite 1994, 1997, 1998a), are most likely to be found among the highly educated and least likely among older Australians (those over 50 years of age). In 1995, the harmony oriented, together with the dualists, attracted more women than men. From a values perspective, women, the well-educated, and young or middle-aged groups are most likely to have sympathy with the arguments put forward by the left side of politics.

Support for traditional ideologies of the right is most characteristic of the security oriented. The security oriented were overrepresented in the 50 plus age group, and most interestingly, were underrepresented among those less than 30. The young gravitated toward the harmony-oriented or relativist categories.

These findings suggest some interesting insights into Australian political behaviour from a values perspective. The essentially cooperative ideals of the left, related to tolerance, compassion, and equality, appear to be far more salient in the minds of women and the young or middle-aged educated elite than 'mainstream' Australia. Values may have a role to play in current analyses of how political elites, particularly of the left, have lost touch with ordinary Australians (Jackman 1998).

Older Australians have greater concerns about security, wanting a strong, powerful and economically prosperous Australia. Interestingly enough, young Australians do not share these aspirations. These findings suggest a potential schism between generations and raise questions about where conservative parties will look for their support in future years. The most likely recruiting ground for 'new blood' lies with the relativists. Relativists are most akin to the security oriented in their pursuit of individualistic social policies (Blamey and Braithwaite 1997b).

Finally, men and women appear to have moved apart in their priorities from 1975 to 1995. Women place more importance on cooperative, harmony values, men on competitive, security values. This tension poses an interesting challenge for agents of social change, urging a sharing of labour in modern society rather than the perpetuation of the traditional sexual division of labour. Women appear to have forged their own view of how the world should be, but have men responded by digging trenches to protect their own identity, one that is wedded to issues of economic development, national security, rule of law and national greatness?

As these differences are used to understand tensions and conflict among social groups, the more fundamental message of this paper should not be lost. These groups do not differ on the goals that they believe are desirable for their society: They differ in the priority that they believe should be attached to these goals. Value priorities are debatable phenomena. They vary with the likelihood of finding a way to realise a value, with the options on offer, and the costs incurred. All of these factors require careful judgement and a sound knowledge base. Differences in priorities that are discussed within an acknowledged framework of value consensus provide a rich and diverse basis for collective decision-making in a democratic society.
Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to demonstrate that the consensual quality of values need not be sacrificed in order to assess how different values play different roles in the decision making of individuals. If one takes the usual micro perspective of wanting to predict specific human behaviours, the present argument will carry little weight, because a host of more context sensitive constructs will have greater explanatory power than values. If, on the other hand, the focus changes to understanding macro processes from principles operating at the micro-level, the abstract, consensual nature of values provides a bridge between unlike units of analysis. Values have meaning as expressions of individual conscience as well as collective conscience. As an individual deliberates on how to prioritise his/her values, so can a society, with the knowledge that for the majority of the population, all the values in question have merit. Recognition of these shared values provides an important reference point for democratic deliberation. While they are too broad to dictate law and policy, they can and do shape both; and, through a deliberative process, may signal to individuals and collectivities the sorts of political actions that are beyond the bounds of acceptability to the majority of Australians.

Appendix: The Scales and Items of the Social Goal Values Inventory

| Harmony: |
| a good life for others (improving the welfare of all people in need) |
| rule by the people (involvement by all citizens in making decisions that affect their community) |
| international cooperation (having all nations working together to help each other) |
| social progress and social reform (readiness to change our way of life for the better) |
| a world at peace (being free from war and conflict) |
| a world of beauty (having the beauty of nature and the arts: music, literature, art, etc.) |
| human dignity (allowing each individual to be treated as someone of worth) |
| equal opportunity for all (giving everyone an equal chance in life) |
| greater economic equality (lessening the gap between the rich and the poor) |
| preserving the natural environment (preventing the destruction of nature’s beauty and resources) |

| Security: |
| national greatness (being a united, strong, independent, and powerful nation) |
| national economic development (having greater economic progress and prosperity for the nation) |
| the rule of law (punishing the guilty and protecting the innocent) |
| national security (protection of your nation from enemies) |

| Additional items: |
| freedom (being able to live as you choose whilst respecting the freedom of others) |
| reward for individual effort (letting individuals prosper through gains made by initiative and hard work) |
| domination of nature (controlling nature and making use of the forces of nature) |
| upholding traditional sexual moral standards (opposing sexual permissiveness and pornography) |

References


Martin, B. 1996. ‘Knowledge, Identity and the Middle Class: The Transformation of Expertise and the Restructuring of the Middle Class,’ paper presented at the American Sociological Association Meeting, August.


