



# **CAUSAL ATTRIBUTIONS OF POVERTY IN LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES: COMPARING AMONG UNDERGRADUATES FROM NATIONS WITH DIFFERENT DEVELOPMENT LEVELS**

**José Juan Vázquez**

*Universidad de Alcalá, España*

**Sonia Panadero**

*Universidad Complutense de Madrid, España*

**Isabel Pascual**

*Universidad de Alcalá, España*

**Xavier G. Ordoñez**

*Universidad Complutense de Madrid, España*

## **Abstract**

The study analyzes the causal attributions of poverty in the less developed countries in a sample of 1,092 undergraduates from Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chile and Spain. Statistical analysis showed the existence of three components which initially grouped the various causal attributions for poverty in developing countries: "Fault of the world economic structure", "Fault of fate, nature, cultural habits, and political misconduct" and "Fault of the developing countries' population". Five types of subjects were subsequently identified according to the type of causal attributions of poverty that the undergraduates had made and their country of origin, perceived social class, economic situation, political ideology and religious beliefs. The results obtained show that the causal attributions of poverty in developing countries are mainly influenced by the level of development in the country of origin of interviewees, their political ideology and their economic situation.

## **Keywords**

causal attributions, poverty, development, developing countries.

## **Resumen**

El estudio analiza las atribuciones causales de la pobreza en los países menos desarrollados en una muestra de 1.092 estudiantes universitarios de Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chile y España. Los análisis estadísticos mostraron la existencia de tres componentes que inicialmente agrupaban las diferentes atribuciones causales de la pobreza en los estados menos desarrollados: "Por causa de la estructura económica mundial", "Por el destino, la naturaleza, los hábitos culturales, y la mala conducta de los políticos" y "Por causa de la población de los países en desarrollo". Posteriormente se identificaron cinco tipos de motivos en función de las atribuciones causales de la pobreza que realizaron los estudiantes y su país de origen, clase social percibida, situación económica, ideología política y creencias religiosas. Los resultados obtenidos muestran que las atribuciones causales de la pobreza en los países en desarrollo se ven influidas principalmente por el nivel de desarrollo del país de origen de los entrevistados, su ideología política y su situación económica.

## **Palabras clave**

atribuciones causales, pobreza, desarrollo, países en desarrollo.

ATRIBUCIONES CAUSALES DE LA POBREZA EN LOS PAÍSES MENOS DESARROLLADOS:  
COMPARACIÓN ENTRE ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS DE NACIONES CON DIFERENTES NIVELES DE  
DESARROLLO

There has been increasing interest in analyzing the attributions of causes of poverty in developing countries in recent years. They have been analyzed from the perspective of those living in developed countries and from the point of view of inhabitants of developing countries (e.g. Bolitho, Carr & Fletcher, 2007; Campbell, Carr & MacLachlan, 2001; Carr, Haef, Ribeiro & MacLachlan, 1998; Carr & MacLachlan, 1998; Harper, 2002; Hine, Montiel, Cooksey, & Lewko, 2005; Hine & Montiel, 1999; Panadero & Vázquez, 2008; Vázquez, Panadero & Pascual, 2010). Among other objectives, the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, 2008), and especially the primary goal of halving the proportion of people suffering extreme poverty and hunger by the year 2015, have stimulated interest in beliefs about the causes of poverty in developing nations (Bolitho *et al.*, 2007; Hine *et al.*, 2005; Vázquez, 2011; Vázquez & Panadero, 2009).

Attributions of causes of poverty in developing countries play an important role in determining attitudes and behaviour responses toward this problem (Harper, 2002; Hine & Montiel, 1999), among both the inhabitants of developed economies – potential economic donors – and those living in developing countries, who based on these attributions may foster the implementation of different development strategies according to the perceived opportunities for control. For example, if the causes of poverty are perceived to be uncontrollable, this can create feelings of helplessness that are accompanied by passiveness or inaction (Vázquez *et al.*, 2010; Vázquez, Panadero, & Rincón, 2007, 2010). These circumstances become particularly important when university students' attributions of the causes of poverty are studied, because as well as being a group with a high level of education, they are the core of the future intellectual and governing elites in their respective countries.

The study carried out in the United States by Feagin (1972) was the first to systematically examine the causal attributions of poverty, and enabled the author to determine three explanatory factors for the causes of poverty, which he called *Structural* (which held external and economic forces responsible), *Fatalistic* (which accounted for factors beyond the control of individuals, but which did not hold society responsible), and *Individualistic* (which attributed responsibility for poverty to the poor themselves). While this classification is supported empirically (e.g. Bullock, Williams & Limbert, 2003; Feather, 1974; Furnham, 1982a, 1982b; Niemela, 2008; Smith & Stone, 1989; Wollie, 2009; Zucker & Weiner, 1993), some subsequent studies have questioned its findings (Cozzareli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Lepianka, Oorschot, & Gelissen, 2009; Morçöl, 1997; Panadero & Vázquez, 2008; Vázquez, Pascual, & Panadero 2010), and attributed the differences observed mainly to variables such as cultural differences or the effect of the passing of time and possible historical change (time-lag).

According to the scientific literature, individuals tend to attribute the causes of their own behaviour to factors inherent in their situation, while they attribute the same behaviour in others to personal characteristics or dispositional factors (Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Carr (1996) confirms the consistency of this pattern, and as regards attributions for poverty in less developed countries, states that the tendency to make dispositional attributions is stronger among the inhabitants of developed countries than among the inhabitants of countries with lower levels of development. However, this attributional bias is not only apparent insofar as it is related to the level of development of the country of origin, but also with regard to other factors such as the personal economic situation and therefore the perceived distance from the situation of poverty. Research on poverty in developed states (e.g. Feather, 1974; Furnham, 1982a; Griffin & Oheneba-Sakyi, 1993) and in “developing” countries (Campbell *et al.*, 2001; Hine *et al.*, 2005; Singh & Vasudeva, 1977) shows that social groups with higher incomes, higher educational levels and less likelihood of being directly affected by poverty use individualistic rather than structural attributions in their causal explanations for it. The opposite effect is apparent among those in a situation of poverty or faced with the likelihood of being affected by it. Meanwhile, Lepianka, Gelissen and van Oorschot (2010) state that people living in countries with high levels of development (and presumably lower levels of poverty) are more likely to attribute living in poverty to misfortune than to modern progress.

Subjective social class has usually been considered an indicator of social status and therefore a relevant predictor of attributions of the causes of poverty. In general, those belonging to the upper and middle classes (and/or higher income groups) present a greater tendency to endorse individualistic than structural explanations for poverty, while individuals in less fortunate classes (and/or lower income groups) are more inclined to support structural rather than individualistic beliefs (Bullock, 1999; Feagin, 1972; Hunt, 1996; Kluegel & Smith, 1986). However, in the opinion of authors such as Nasser (2007), it is not entirely



clear that social class predicts attributions of the causes of poverty, as in the case of Lebanon, youth is more structuralist among the upper classes than the lower classes. In Nasser's opinion (2007), the results of his study in Lebanon, together with the results obtained in the United States (Cozzarelli *et al.*, 2001), Turkey (Morçöl, 1997), Iran (Hayati & Karami, 2005), India (Nasser, Singhal & Abouché, 2005) and South Africa (Nasser, Abouché & Kasshan, 2002) show that there is some universal social concurrence in the way young people in different socioeconomic classes attribute poverty to structuralist causes and an indication of egalitarian and critical social attitudes among them.

One individual difference that moderates causal beliefs about poverty is political ideology (Weiner, 2006; Weiner, Osborne & Rudolph, 2011). Political orientation, measured in terms of self-classification on the left-right (or conservative-liberal) spectrum is consistently associated with the type of attributions for the causes of poverty (Appelbaum, 2001; Lee, Lewis & Jones, 1992). A significant number of studies shows that liberals (i.e. those on the left of the political spectrum) tend to perceive structural causes of poverty (e.g. Bullock, 1999; Cozzarelli *et al.*, 2001; Furnham, 1982b; Lepianka *et al.*, 2010; Pandey, Sinha, Prakash & Tripathi, 1982;). Meanwhile, conservatives (i.e. those on the right of the political spectrum) place the causality among the poor (e.g. Bullock, 1999; Griffin & Oheneba-Sakyi, 1993; Hopkins, 2009; Wagstaff, 1983). As a result, by comparison with liberals, individuals with conservative ideologies present a greater tendency to generate causal attributions of poverty that are linked to dispositional factors for inhabitants of developing countries. However, they attribute poverty in these countries to structural economic factors to a lesser extent (Hine & Montiel, 1999; Panadero & Vázquez, 2008).

The relationship between religion and attributions of the causes of poverty is more ambiguous (Lepianka *et al.*, 2010). Brechon (1999) suggests that the impact of religion is indirectly influenced by national value systems. However, Lepianka *et al.* (2010) observed a significant direct relationship between living in countries with a strong Catholic tradition and the greater tendency to attribute poverty to reasons external to poor people – social injustice or misfortune.

Various studies conducted with undergraduates from developed countries have observed their tendency to explain the causes of poverty in developing countries by referring mainly to structural and situational attributions (e.g. government inefficiency, exploitation by developed countries, adverse climate, etc.) (Harper, Wagstaff, Newton, & Harrison, 1990). Among university students in these countries, the most common attributions are those related to the dispositional characteristics of the populations in less developed countries (Carr & MacLachlan, 1998). A possible explanation for this phenomenon could be that university students (despite living in countries with lower levels of development) do not see themselves as being in a situation of poverty, which would make them “observers” instead of “actors” in the situation, generating the causal attributions of poverty observed to a greater extent (Vázquez & Panadero, 2009).

In Latin America, where the levels of poverty are very high, there have been very few studies focusing on the causal attributions of this phenomenon. For this reason, we felt it was important to study the causal attributions of poverty in less developed countries using undergraduates living in countries with different levels of development, and to consider the relationship between these attributions and the different variables that characterize them.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants in the study were 1,092 undergraduates at public universities in Spanish-speaking countries with different levels of human development: Spain, which is in 20th position in the Human Development Index (HDI), Chile, in 45th position, El Salvador (90th) and Nicaragua (115th) (UNDP, 2010). 49.7% of those interviewed studied at the “National Autonomous University of Nicaragua in León” (Nicaragua), 18.5% at the “Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University” (Nicaragua), 6.1% at the “Regional Multidisciplinary Faculty of Estelí” (Nicaragua), 4.4% at the “University of El Salvador” (El Salvador), 8.9% at the “University of Concepción” (Chile) and 5.6% at the “Complutense University of Madrid” (Spain). Given the fact that in Nicaragua the cultural and the socio economic development differences between different regions are extremely pronounced (Vázquez & Panadero, 2016), in this country students from universities located in different regions were interviewed, so that the number of respondents in Nicaragua is higher than in other countries.

The characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Characteristics of the sample of undergraduates students.*

Variable	Percentage (subject)
<b>Sex</b>	
Male	29.6% (323)
Female	70.4% (769)
<b>Marital status</b>	
Single	85.5% (934)
Married	7.4% (81)
Living with partner	5.7% (62)
Separated or divorced	1.2% (13)
Widowed	0.2% (2)
<b>Country of origin</b>	
Nicaragua	74.4% (812)
El Salvador	4.4% (48)
Chile	8.9% (97)
Spain	12.4% (135)
<b>Political ideology</b>	
Left-wing	24.9% (272)
Centre-left	13.6% (148)
Centre	41.3% (451)
Centre-right	10.3% (112)
Right-wing	10.0% (109)
<b>Assessment of economic</b>	
Rich	0.7% (7)
Comfortable	6.7% (73)
Neither rich nor poor	43.4% (474)
Slightly poor	35.2% (385)
Poor	14.0% (153)
<b>Definition of religious beliefs</b>	
Practising Catholic	29.4% (321)
Non-practising Catholic	30.4% (332)
Practising Evangelical	11.0% (120)
Non-practising Evangelical	7.1% (78)
Agnostic / atheist	7.5% (82)
Uninterested	8.1% (88)
Other	6.5% (71)
<b>Social class</b>	
Upper class	0.7% (7)
Upper-middle class	6.7% (73)
Middle class	43.4% (475)
Lower-middle class	35.2% (384)
Lower class	14.0% (153)



As can be seen in Table 1, the students' mean age was less than 22 years old, and the vast majority were single. To a large extent, the sample consisted of female undergraduates. In economic terms, most of the interviewees considered themselves “neither rich nor poor” or “slightly poor”, middle class or lower class and Catholic.

### **Instruments**

Respondents completed a self-compiled questionnaire designed in Spain, consisting of 82 items. The tool was revised in America with the help of professors from Nicaragua, El Salvador and Chile in order to ensure that it was adapted to the varieties of Spanish used in those countries. The questionnaire was applied in groups in lecture halls, with the collaboration of the centres involved. After explaining the aims of the investigation and the treatment that would be given to the data obtained, the informed consent of the participants was requested, and those that took part were assured that their full anonymity would be respected at all times. An investigator remained in the classroom during the self-application of the questionnaire to resolve any of the participants' doubts. There was no time limit for answering, although the application time was approximately 20-30 minutes.

To gather information on causal attributions of poverty in the less developed countries, a 50 items scale was used, comprising the 18 items in the CTWPQ (Harper, 2002), together with items proposed by Hine *et al.* (2005) and Vázquez & Panadero (2009). The instrument consisted of the initial instruction “In your opinion, there is poverty in developing countries because of...” which was followed by a list of 50 possible causes of poverty in the less developed countries. A Likert-type scale was used to answer each item, with five possible response options, ranging between “-2” - “Strongly disagree” and “2” - “Strongly agree”. Each item answered positively stated a specific cause of poverty in less developed countries.

Also, for the implementation of this work the following items were used (see Table 1): sex (response options “Male” and “Female”), marital status (response options “Single”, “Married”, “Living with a partner”, “Separated or divorced”, and “Widowed”), political ideology (response options “Left-wing”, “Centre-left”, “Centre”, “Centre right”, and “Right-wing”), religious beliefs (response options “Practising Catholic”, “Non-practising Catholic”, “Practising Evangelical”, “Non-practising Evangelical”, “Agnostic / atheist”, “Uninterested”, and “Other”), country of origin, perception of their own and their families' economic situation (response options ‘Rich’, ‘Comfortable’, ‘Neither rich nor poor’, ‘Slightly poor’ and ‘Poor’) and social class (response options “Upper class”, “Upper- middle class”, “Middle class”, “Lower- middle class”, and “Lower class”).

### **Data analysis**

The methodology proposed by Lebart, Morineau and Piron (1995), which combines the use of factorial methods and cluster analysis for exploratory multivariate data analysis was used for the data analysis. When using this methodology, the factorial plans arising from the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) should be as clean and interpretable as possible, and as such an initial PCA with the 50 items available for the causal attributions of poverty in developing countries was performed. This first PCA enabled the identification of 3 components, defined by 30 items.

A second PCA was then performed with the 30 resulting items as active variables, and an Analysis of Conglomerates (AC) was performed after identification of the components. Although an extensive number of variables were initially considered in the construction of the clusters (country of origin, gender, political ideology, religious beliefs, social class, cooperation with non-governmental organisations, satisfaction with the economic situation, satisfaction with the employment situation, perceived economic situation, electoral participation, etc.), after an initial exploratory study only five variables with a significant presence in all the subgroups were included in the analysis: country of origin, political ideology, social class, economic status and religious beliefs, in addition to the factors mentioned above. The AC was used to identify and empirically characterize subgroups in the sample, which enabled observation of their relationship with the causal attributions made. In specific terms, this AC, using hierarchical classification using Ward's Method, enabled the definition of five clusters that are not independent of each other.

The number of subjects defining each cluster was then established using the classification based on an aggregation around mobile centres (K-means).

The description of each cluster was performed according to the nature of the variables. For quantitative variables it was done by comparing the mean of each cluster with the overall average, for categorical variables the percentage of each cluster with the overall percentage. To find out if these comparisons are statistically significant in the Cluster the statistical value *v.test* (hypergeometric test - Husson, Josse & Pagès, 2010) was used. If *v.test* value is positive, then the average of the cluster is greater than or equal to the total average (quantitative variables) or the percentage of the category in the cluster is greater than or equal to the total percentage (categorical variables).

The R language version 2.11.1 (R Development Core Team, 2010) and especially the FactoClass package, version 1.0.3 (Pardo & del Campo, 2007) were used for the multivariate data analysis.

### **Results**

Table 2 shows the three components obtained using Principal Component Analysis (PCA), and the variables that made the largest contributions to each one.



Table 2  
*Contributions of the various items to the total variance in each component.*

ITEMS	Contribution to total variance		
	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3
<b>There is poverty in developing countries...</b>			
Because of the economy and the big banks, which have created too many burdens for the poor	<b>7.9</b>	1.6	0.0
Because of exploitation by multinational companies	<b>7.5</b>	2.8	0.0
Because of excessive consumption of resources by rich countries	<b>7.4</b>	0.9	1.0
Because rich countries exploit them	<b>7.2</b>	2.8	0.4
Because the United States has an interest in these countries remaining poor	<b>6.6</b>	1.0	1.4
Because of economic globalization and free market policies	<b>6.0</b>	1.1	0.1
Because the European Union has an interest in these countries remaining poor	<b>5.8</b>	0.0	1.7
Because of the lack of awareness and support from the population of rich countries	<b>5.3</b>	0.0	1.8
Because of the high foreign debt of less developed countries	<b>5.0</b>	1.5	0.5
Because of exploitation by rich minorities (oligarchies) in these countries	<b>4.6</b>	2.3	0.8
Because of high taxes in poor countries	<b>4.4</b>	0.0	1.5
Because of the agricultural subsidies that rich countries give their farmers	<b>4.2</b>	0.4	1.2
Because the inhabitants of these countries lack opportunities to obtain financing	<b>2.8</b>	0.0	0.6
Because the land is not suitable for agriculture	0.4	<b>9.0</b>	4.0
Because of the climate in the region	0.5	<b>7.8</b>	6.2
Because of the high percentage of sick people in these countries	3.7	<b>7.4</b>	0.7
Because of their inhabitants' poor health and physical problems	2.2	<b>7.2</b>	1.5
Because it is God's will	0.0	<b>6.7</b>	0.5
Because the inhabitants of these countries consume too much alcohol	1.5	<b>6.4</b>	4.1
Because of the heavy impact of pests and insects that destroy crops	4.0	<b>6.4</b>	1.0
Because of the unsuitable religious customs and habits of the population of these countries	1.1	<b>6.0</b>	0.0
Because of fate or bad luck	0.1	<b>6.0</b>	1.8
Because their governments are corrupt	2.9	<b>5.0</b>	4.4
Because their governments are incompetent/inefficient	2.5	<b>4.2</b>	3.7
Because the inhabitants of these countries don't do anything to better themselves	0.4	2.2	<b>17.7</b>
Because of their inhabitants' laziness and lack of effort	0.3	3.1	<b>15.6</b>
Because people are not willing to change their old habits and customs	0.9	4.4	<b>11.3</b>
Because the inhabitants of these countries have too many children	1.3	0.0	<b>7.3</b>
Because of the lack of knowledge and skills among the inhabitants of these countries	1.9	3.5	<b>4.8</b>
Because of the lack of economic knowledge and poor management of resources by people in these countries	1.2	0.3	<b>4.1</b>

Note. The greatest contribution of each component are shown in boldface

As shown in Table 2, *Component 1* consists of 13 items, in which poverty in developing countries is mainly attributed to economic factors, which are generally the result of the process of globalization and external to the least developed countries. They are created by banks, multinational companies, developed countries and the rich people in the developing countries - in addition to high taxes and difficulties in obtaining financing. We called this component “Fault of the world economic structure”. *Component 2* includes 11 items, in which poverty in developing countries is attributed to elements inherent in them, such as natural causes, misfortune, disease, bad habits among the population and government corruption and incompetence. We called this component “Fault of fate, nature, cultural habits, and political misconduct”. Finally, the 6 items in *Component 3* consider the causes of poverty in less developed countries to be a number of dispositional characteristics in the population of these countries, as well as educational shortcomings. We called this component “Fault of the developing countries' population.”

The five clusters defined using the Analysis of Conglomerates (AC) are shown in Figure 1.

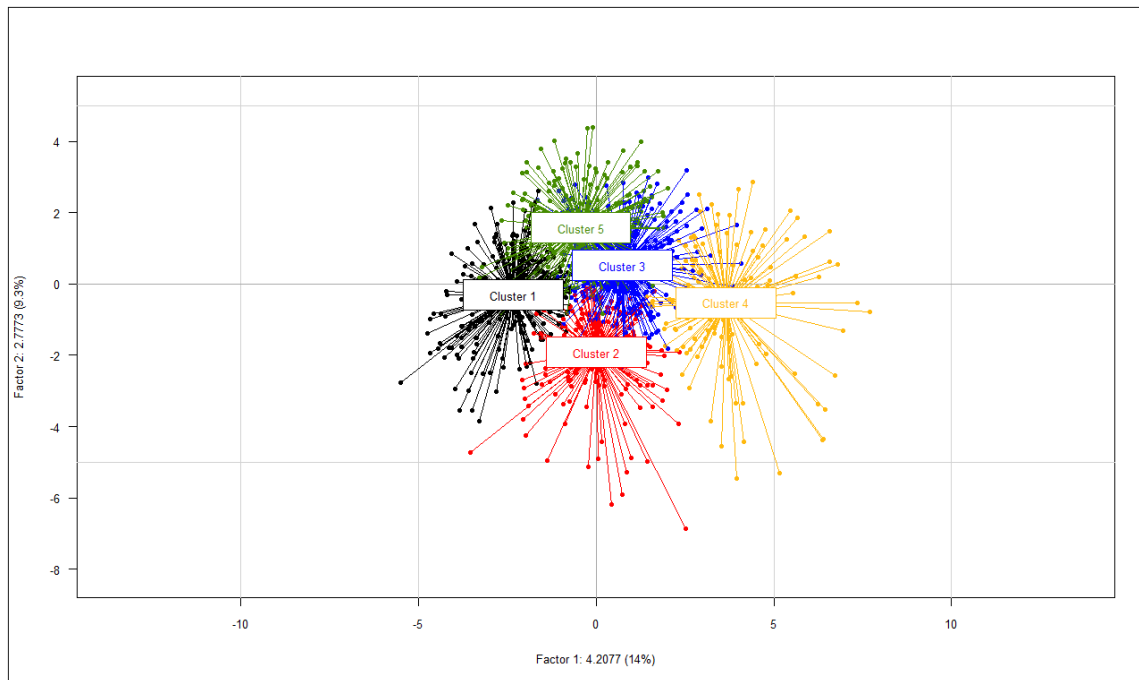


Figure 1. Definition of the clusters.

The composition of the five clusters is shown in Table 3.





Table 3  
*Characterization of the clusters*

	Test. Value*	p. Value	Class. Cat	Cat. Class	Global	Weight
<b>Cluster 1</b>						
Country of origin: Nicaragua	5.7	1.0	27.2	87.7	74.4	812.0
Political ideology: left	3.1	1.0	31.1	29.0	21.5	235.0
Social class: low	2.7	1.0	32.2	19.0	13.6	149.0
Religious belief: Practising Catholic	2.4	1.0	28.2	34.5	28.2	308.0
Economic situation: slightly poor	2.3	1.0	29.5	24.6	19.2	210.0
Political ideology: centre left	-2.3	0.0	14.8	7.5	11.7	128.0
Social class: middle	-2.6	0.0	19.1	34.9	42.2	461.0
Religious belief: agnostic / atheist	-2.9	0.0	10.1	3.2	7.2	79.0
Religious belief: uninterested	-2.9	0.0	10.6	3.6	7.8	85.0
Country of origin: Spain	-4.8	0.0	5.2	2.0	8.9	97.0
Country of origin: Chile	-5.0	0.0	7.4	4.0	12.4	135.0
<b>Cluster 2</b>						
Country of origin: Chile	3.0	1.0	27.4	19.4	12.4	135.0
Economic situation: neither rich nor poor	2.4	1.0	20.3	58.6	50.5	552.0
Political ideology: centre right	2.3	1.0	26.8	13.6	8.9	97.0
Political ideology: right	-2.1	0.0	9.6	4.7	8.6	94.0
Country of origin: Spain	-2.5	0.0	8.2	4.2	8.9	97.0
<b>Cluster 3</b>						
Country of origin: Nicaragua	7.4	1.0	32.3	89.7	74.4	812.0
Political ideology: right	4.0	1.0	45.7	14.7	8.6	94.0
Political ideology: centre left	-2.1	0.0	18.8	8.2	11.7	128.0
Political ideology: left	-2.8	0.0	19.6	15.8	21.5	235.0
Country of origin: Chile	-3.4	0.0	14.8	6.8	12.4	135.0
Religious belief: agnostic / atheist	-3.6	0.0	10.1	2.7	7.2	79.0
Country of origin: Spain	-6.7	0.0	2.1	0.7	8.9	97.0
<b>Cluster 4</b>						
Country of origin: Chile	4.8	1.0	25.9	27.1	12.4	135.0
Political ideology: centre right	2.5	1.0	20.6	15.5	8.9	97.0
Country of origin: Spain	-2.1	0.0	5.2	3.9	8.9	97.0
Country of origin: Nicaragua	-2.2	0.0	10.5	65.9	74.4	812.0
Economic situation: slightly poor	-2.6	0.0	6.7	10.9	19.2	210.0
<b>Cluster 5</b>						
Country of origin: Spain	Inf	1.0	79.4	33.8	8.9	97.0
Religious belief: agnostic / atheist	8.0	1.0	60.8	21.1	7.2	79.0
Political ideology: centre left	4.1	1.0	35.9	20.2	11.7	128.0
Social class: upper-middle	3.3	1.0	38.0	11.8	6.5	71.0
Political ideology: left	2.7	1.0	27.7	28.5	21.5	235.0
Economic situation: comfortable	2.6	1.0	29.1	21.1	15.1	165.0
Social class: middle	2.3	1.0	24.3	49.1	42.2	461.0
Religious belief: Uninterested	2.1	1.0	30.6	11.4	7.8	85.0
Social class: low	-2.1	0.0	14.1	9.2	13.6	149.0
Religious belief: Non-practising Catholic	-2.2	0.0	16.6	23.2	29.2	319.0
Religious belief: Practising Catholic	-2.5	0.0	15.9	21.5	28.2	308.0
Political ideology: centre right	-3.0	0.0	9.3	3.9	8.9	97.0
Country of origin: Nicaragua	-10.4	0.0	12.9	46.1	74.4	812.0

\*significant test values > 2 or < -2.

As can be seen in Table 3, *Cluster 1* has a large proportion of interviewees who are lower class, slightly poor, practising Catholics with a left-wing political ideology and who are of Nicaraguan origin. The cluster has a low proportion of respondents from the middle class, the centre-left, agnostics, atheists or those uninterested in religion, and of Spanish or Chilean origin. *Cluster 2* mainly includes undergraduates in an intermediate economic situation, who declare themselves to be either ideologically on the centre-right and who are mostly of Chilean origin. This cluster has a very low proportion of interviewees who declare themselves to be right-wing or of Spanish origin. *Cluster 3* mainly consists of university students who declare that their political ideology is right-wing and who are of Nicaraguan origin. This cluster includes fewer centre or centre-left interviewees, or those who consider themselves agnostic or atheist or come from Chile and Spain. Meanwhile, *Cluster 4* consists mainly of interviewees who state that they are on the centre-right and come from Chile, and includes fewer undergraduates who define their economic situation as slightly poor or who are of Spanish or Nicaraguan origin. Finally, *Cluster 5* mainly contains university students who are ideologically on the centre-left or left, are middle class or upper-middle class, economically comfortable, are agnostic, atheists or uninterested in religion, and are of Spanish origin. This cluster includes a very low proportion of interviewees who declare themselves to be on the centre-right, lower class, Catholic (practising and otherwise) or of Nicaraguan origin.

The components related with causal attributions of poverty in developing countries by undergraduates within the various clusters are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

*Characterization of variables in the clusters.*

	Test.	Class.Mean	Frequency	Global.Mean
<b>Cluster 1</b>				
Fault of the world economic structure	17.5	56.9	252	48.7
Fault of the developing countries' population	12.7	23.6	252	19.9
Fault of fate, nature, cultural habits, and political	12.3	33.3	252	29.1
<b>Cluster 2</b>				
Fault of fate, nature, cultural habits, and political	12.2	34.0	191	29.1
Fault of the developing countries' population	2.5	20.8	191	19.9
Fault of the world economic structure	-3.1	47.0	191	48.7
<b>Cluster 3</b>				
Fault of the developing countries' population	8.8	22.2	292	19.9
Fault of the world structure economy	-8.1	45.3	292	48.7
Fault of fate, nature, cultural habits, and political	-9.7	26.1	292	29.1
<b>Cluster 4</b>				
Fault of the developing countries' population	-8.0	16.4	129	19.9
Fault of fate, nature, cultural habits and political	-9.5	24.3	129	29.1
Fault of the world economic structure	-20.3	34.6	129	48.7
<b>Cluster 5</b>				
Fault of the world economic structure	9.7	53.5	228	48.7
Fault of fate, nature, cultural habits, and political	-6.1	26.9	228	29.1
Fault of the developing countries' population	-18.6	14.2	228	19.9

\*significant test values > 2 or < -2.

As can be seen in Table 4, the causal attributions of poverty that to the greatest extent define *Cluster 1* – comprising 252 interviewees – are those in *Component 1* (Fault of the world economic structure), although there is also a significant presence in this cluster of the attributions contained in *Component 2* (Fault of fate, nature, cultural habits, and political misconduct) and *Component 3* (Fault of the developing countries' population).

The 191 undergraduates comprising *Cluster 2* mainly attribute the causes of poverty in *Component 2* (Fault of fate, nature, cultural habits, and political misconduct). To a much lesser extent, *Component 3* (Fault of the developing countries' population) also affects *Cluster 2*.

The attributions that characterize *Cluster 2* – consisting of 191 undergraduates – to the greatest extent are those included in component 2, with a lower presence of the attributions of component 3.



*Component 3* (Fault of the developing countries' population) - consisting of 292 interviewees - is the only one that characterizes *Cluster 3*.

None of the three components characterizes the attributions of poverty by the 129 interviewees that comprise *Cluster 4*.

Finally, *Component 1* (Fault of the world economic structure) mainly characterizes *Cluster 5*, consisting of 228 interviewees.

### Conclusions

The three classic explanatory factors for the causes of poverty observed by Feagin (1972) ("Structural", "Fatalistic" and "Individualistic"), to a certain extent emerge once again – albeit with some variations - forty years later. In this study, the components found, which are very similar to the factors mentioned by Feagin, have been called "Fault of the world economic structure", "Fault of fate, nature, cultural habits, and political misconduct" and "Fault of the developing countries' population." The changes related to poverty that have taken place in recent decades and the influence of new information and communication technologies that make information more uniform (Vázquez, 2003) do not appear to have had a determinant influence on the type of causal attributions used to explain the causes of poverty.

The component "Fault of the world economic structure" mainly includes structural attributions for the causes of poverty in countries with a lower rate of human development (UNDP, 2010), which are not attributable to the population of these countries, although they are items that can potentially be controlled by those with the tools to influence the global economy, who are considered the main parties responsible for the situation. People in a situation of poverty are exempted from responsibility in this type of attribution, and no major responsibility for the situation of poverty is attributed to the governments of the developing countries, natural causes or misfortune. Meanwhile, the component "Fault of fate, nature, cultural habits, and political misconduct" tends to include causal attributions in which poverty in developing countries is situated both to factors inherent in them such as natural circumstances and diseases among their inhabitants, with a mixture of fatalism - they are beyond the control of the inhabitants - and cultural factors - they lead to bad habits among the population - and aspects arising from the corruption and incompetence of their governing classes. The third component, "Fault of the developing countries' population," essentially includes causal attributions that tend to hold the inhabitants of developing countries responsible for poverty, by considering that the population in these states has a number of dispositional characteristics and/or educational shortcomings that lead to the situation of poverty.

The type of attributions that characterize the component "Fault of the world economic structure" are mainly made by undergraduates that are ideologically on the political left. It includes students living in both a developed country (Spain) and a less developed country (Nicaragua), although there are differences in the profiles associated with each country of origin, which clearly distinguish the two groups in terms of their social class, economic situation and religious beliefs. As a result, the cluster that tends to include Spaniards also tends to include those who consider themselves middle or upper-middle class, economically comfortable and agnostic, atheist or indifferent to religion. Meanwhile, the cluster which mainly includes Nicaraguans tends to include undergraduates who consider themselves as lower class, slightly poor and practising Catholics.

The type of attributions characterizing the component "Fault of fate, nature, cultural habits, and political misconduct" tend to be made by students in countries with a medium (Chile) and low (Nicaragua) level of human development, although there are significant differences in the profiles of the two groups depending on their political ideology and economic situation. The cluster, which includes a high percentage of Chileans, tends to include undergraduates who are ideologically on the centre-right, in an intermediate economic situation (neither rich nor poor). Meanwhile, the cluster that includes Nicaraguan students tends to include undergraduates that are politically left-wing, lower class and slightly poor.

The type of attributions included in the component "Fault of the developing countries' population" are mainly those made by students in countries with low (Nicaragua) or medium (Chile) levels of human development. Those making this type of attribution are grouped in three clusters with profiles that are distinctive in terms of their political ideology and economic situation, as well as the undergraduates' country of origin: the first cluster contains a high proportion of right-wing Nicaraguan students; the second cluster contains mainly Chilean interviewees, from the centre-right, who are neither rich nor poor; and the third cluster above all contains left-wing Nicaraguan undergraduates, who consider themselves lower class, slightly poor and practising Catholics. The Spanish undergraduates – who live in a country with higher levels

of development - do not tend to attribute these characteristics when explaining the causes of poverty in developing countries.

The Spanish undergraduates – who live in a country with higher levels of human development (UNDP, 2010), appear to prefer to attribute the causes of poverty in developing countries to the international economic structure. Nicaraguan students who are not members of less fortunate social classes tend to make attributions to explain poverty in developing countries -including Nicaragua - that are included in the component “Fault of the developing countries' population,” which could be a self-protective attributional bias (Vázquez & Panadero, 2007). According to these data, the situation observed by Carr and MacLachlan (1998) and Harper *et al.* (1990) appears to be reproduced in English-speaking populations, so that university students in more developed countries tend to explain the causes of poverty in developing countries mainly in terms of structural and situational attributions, with attributions to the dispositional characteristics of the population of less developed countries the post. These are most common among the university students from these countries. However, Nicaraguan undergraduates belonging to less fortunate social classes and with limited economic resources, tend to make structural and situational attributions, as well as attributions involving the dispositional characteristics of the population of developing countries.

Furthermore, it should be emphasized that the undergraduates in the country with the highest levels of development (Spain) tend to make attributions for poverty in developing countries related to natural causes, misfortune, cultural habits and the incompetence and corruption of government, despite these factors being those that appear most prominently in the media, especially in those consumed in more developed countries. Meanwhile, in a less developed country like Nicaragua, the fact that lower class undergraduates - who perceive themselves to be poor - tend to make the type of attributions mentioned above seems to suggest some degree of fatalism and helplessness among this group, as in this case the attributions made may be self-referential, leading to a reduction in the implementation of strategies aimed at overcoming the situation.

As regards the effect of subjective social class on attributions about the causes of poverty by the undergraduates, by contrast with the results observed in the studies by Feagin (1972), Kluegel and Smith (1986), Hunt (1996), and Bullock (1999), no clear relationship in this regard was observed in this study. The attributions related to the component “Fault of the world economic structure” tend to come from undergraduates from very different social classes (upper middle class, middle class and lower class), and those who consider themselves financially comfortable and slightly poor. Meanwhile, attributions to the components “Fault of fate, nature, cultural habits, and political misconduct” and “Fault of the developing countries' population” mainly come from lower class undergraduates, and those who consider themselves slightly poor and “neither rich nor poor.” As with the results observed by Nasser (2007), it is unclear whether social class is a predictor for attributions of the causes of poverty, despite the fact that as was the case with young people in Lebanon, Spanish-speaking undergraduates from more well-off social classes are those who tend to make structural attributions to the greatest extent. In this respect, the type of causal attributions of poverty in developing countries by Spanish-speaking undergraduates from different social classes appears to be strongly influenced by other characteristics, including the level of development of their country of origin.

As with the findings of various authors (Appelbaum, 2001; Lee *et al.*, 1992; Weiner *et al.*, 2011), a significant relationship was observed between political ideology and the type of attributions for the causes of poverty in developing countries. As observed by Bullock (1999), Cozzarelli *et al.*, (2001), Lepianka *et al.* (2010), Pandey *et al.* (1982), and Vázquez and Panadero (2007), in this study the structural attributions are mainly made by more liberal students, who consider themselves on the left and centre-left. However, more conservative respondents who declare themselves to be on the right have a greater tendency to generate causal attributions for poverty linked to dispositional factors for people in developing countries, while to a lesser extent they attribute poverty in these countries to structural economic factors, which is consistent with the observations by Bullock (1999), Griffin and Oheneba-Sakyi (1993), Hine and Montiel (1999), Hopkins (2009), and Vázquez and Panadero (2007). However, this study also found that some (mainly Nicaraguan) university students declaring themselves to be on the left tend to make attributions for poverty to dispositional educational and characteristic shortcomings among the population in developing countries.

The role of religion in attributions of the causes of poverty is ambiguous, as highlighted by Lepianka *et al.* (2010). As Brechon (1999) suggests, the impact of religion on attributions for the causes poverty seems to be indirectly affected by interviewees' other values. The relationship observed by Lepianka *et al.* (2010) - according to which the population of countries with a strong Catholic tradition tends to attribute poverty to reasons external to poor people - is not observed in this study, as the Nicaraguans who state that they are practising Catholics, who live in a very religious country, tend to make causal attributions for poverty in



developing countries associated with three components: “Fault of the world economic structure”, “Fault of fate, nature, cultural habits, and political misconduct” and “Fault of the developing countries' population”.

Defining the causal attributions of poverty in the less developed countries in terms of socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. sex, marital status...), ideological characteristics (e.g. political ideology, religious beliefs...) or economical characteristics (e.g. personal economical situation, social class, level of country development...), can help to predict the support or rejection of certain sectors of the population to the implementation of specific policies to fight poverty, both in developing countries and developed states (e.g. development cooperation policies).

Causal attributions of poverty are related to the regard of which are the most appropriate strategies to deal with poverty, thus, identifying the causal attributions of poverty among the population more reluctant to implement public policies against poverty can facilitate the design of specific strategies to generate changes in the right direction. Therefore, it is important to deepen this line of work, considering the fact that the fight against poverty is a priority in any society, regardless of its level of development.

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