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A Community of Shared Values?  
Dimensions and Dynamics of  
Cultural Integration in the  
European Union

**Plamen Akaliyski** (UC3M, Madrid)


**Christian Welzel** (Leuphana University)

**Josef Hien** (Mid Sweden University)



Is the EU a  
“community  
of shared  
values”?

## A community of shared values? Dimensions and dynamics of cultural integration in the European Union

Plamen Akaliyski <sup>a,b</sup>, Christian Welzel<sup>c,b</sup> and Josef Hien<sup>d,e</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Graduate School of System Design and Management, Keio University, Yokohama, Japan; <sup>b</sup>Laboratory for Comparative Social Research, National Research University - Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia; <sup>c</sup>Center for the Study of Democracy, Institute of Political Sciences, Leuphana University, Lüneburg, Germany; <sup>d</sup>Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Mid Sweden University, Sundsvall, Sweden; <sup>e</sup>Institute for Future Studies, Stockholm, Sweden

### ABSTRACT

The series of recent crises (EURO, refugees, backsliding, Brexit) challenge the self-portrayal of the European Union (EU) as a community of shared values. Against this backdrop, we analyse European Values Study data from 1990 till 2020 to assess the level and change in publics' acceptance of the EU's officially propagated values: personal freedom, individual autonomy, social solidarity, ethnic tolerance, civic honesty, gender equality and liberal democracy. We find that EU publics support these values strongly and increasingly over time. The EU-member publics are also remarkably distinct culturally from Eastern European non-EU-nations, especially concerning individual freedoms and gender equality. Simultaneously, however, member nations internalize EU-values at different speeds – alongside traditional religious fault lines that continue to differentiate Europe – in the following order from fastest to slowest: (1) Protestant, (2) Catholic, (3) Ex-communist and (4) Orthodox countries. In conclusion, the EU writ large evolves into a distinct value-sharing community at different speeds.

### KEYWORDS

EU-values; European Union; culture; religious legacies



1. Background and Theory

2. Data and Methods

3. Empirical Findings

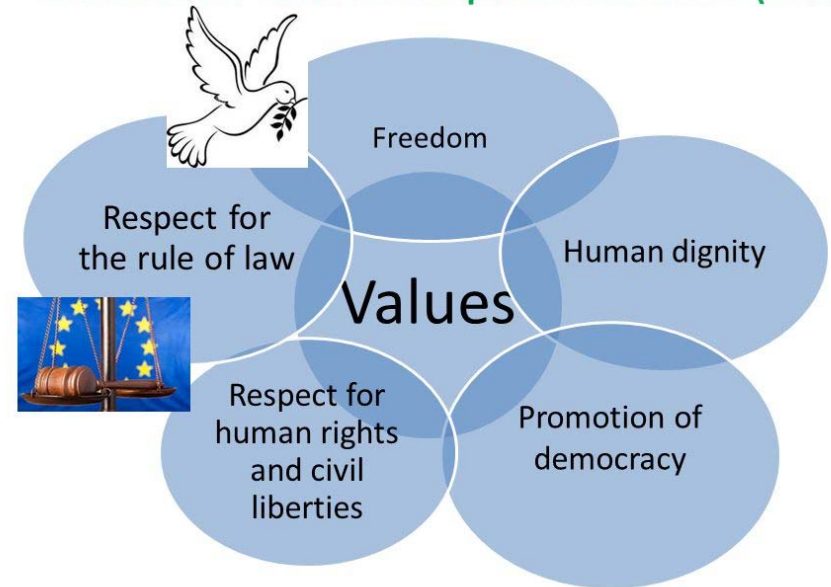
4. Conclusions and Discussion

# EU: A Community of Shared Values

*'Respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities [...], pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men.'*

(Treaty on European Union, 2007)

## Values of the European Union (EU)



# Is value diversity impeding EU- integration?

- The values of freedom, democracy, equality, tolerance (explicitly desired by the EU) are strongly *associated* with high socio-economic development, (*predict*) democratic governance (Welzel, Inglehart & Klingemann, 2003; Welzel, 2013, 2018, Minkov & Kaasa, 2021), subjective wellbeing (happiness) (Inglehart et al, 2008), transparency (vs. corruption), innovation output, road safety etc. (Minkov & Kaasa, 2021)
- Value differences:
  - predict interstate conflict (Bove & Gokmen, 2016), interstate mobility (Belot & Ederveen, 2012), economic exchange (Guiso et al., 2009; Tadesse & White, 2010)
  - are considered an obstacle for the EU's institutional integration (Guiso et al., 2016), a barrier to European integration (Gerhards, 2007), impeded collective action needed to address the Euro crisis (Hien, 2017, 2019)
- **“No demos thesis”** (Weiler, 1995) – commitment to democratic values is required to solve the EU-legitimacy crisis (Habermas, 2012)
- **Social identity theory** (Tajfel & Turner, 2004): “a community needs to be homogenous, distinct and not too large in order to energize the psychological sense of social identity among EU citizens” (Akaliyski & Welzel, 2020).

# EU in Perpetual Crisis



Euro crisis



Refugee crisis



Brexit

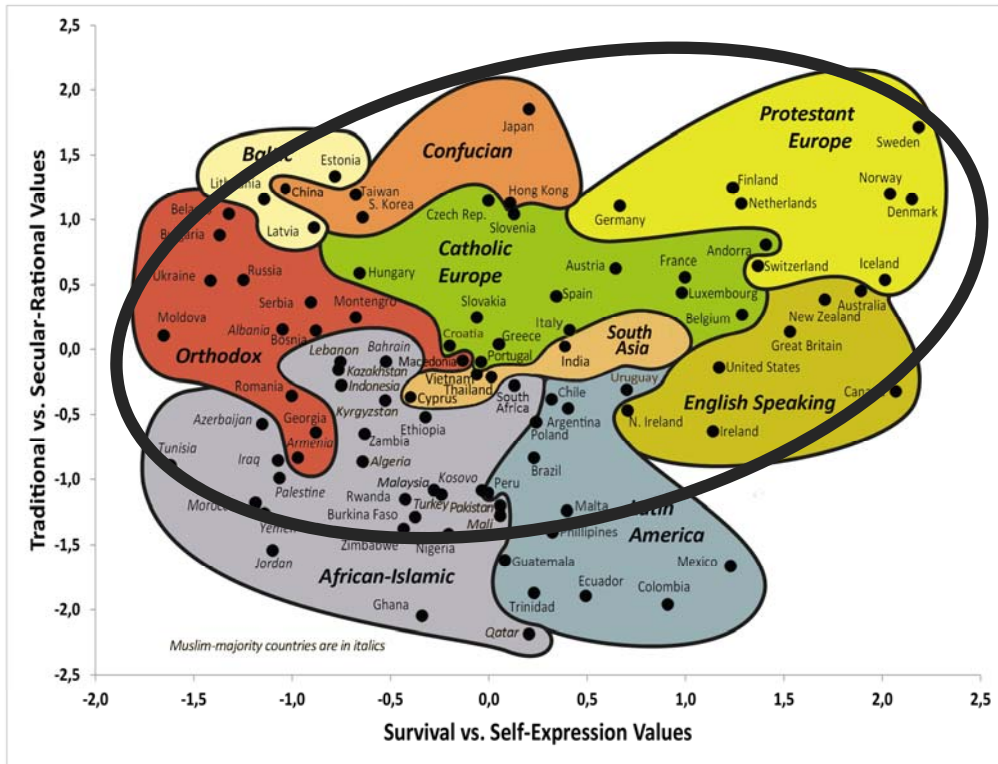


Rule of law crisis



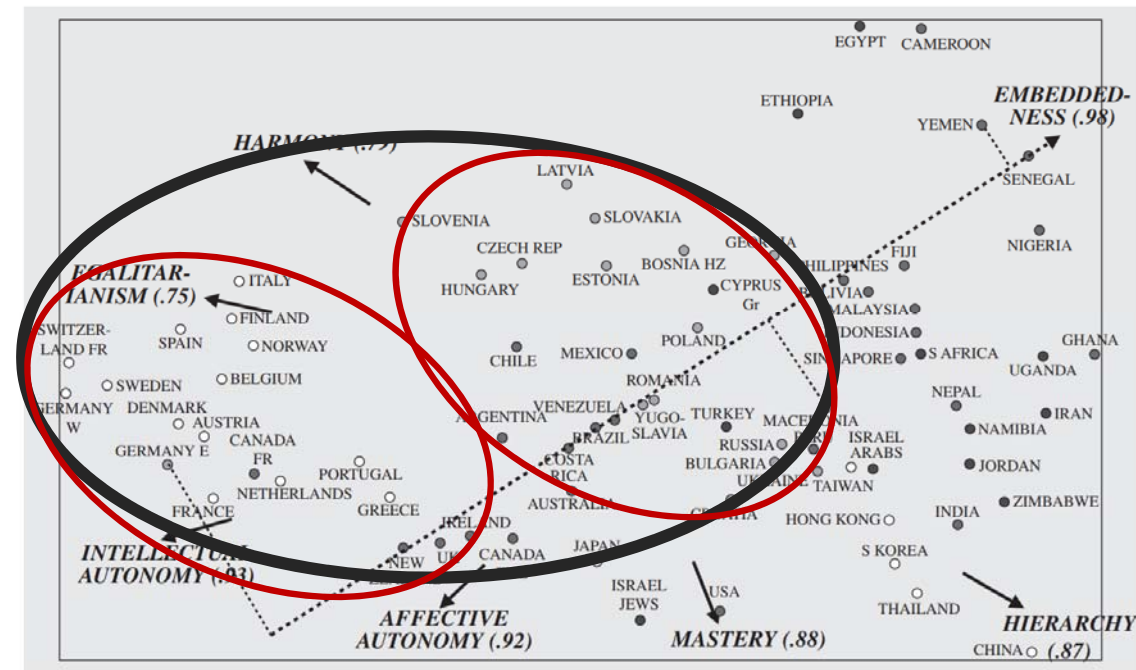


# EU on the Global Map




Inglehart-Welzel map (2017)

Co-Plot Map of 76 National Groups on Seven Cultural Orientations (coefficient alienation .11)



Schwartz cultural map (2006)



Overarching  
Research Question:

To what extent can the EU  
be defined as “a community  
of shared values”?



# Conditions: For “A Community of Shared Values” EU-values need to be...



1. Strong



2. Increasing



3. Shared



4. Converging



5. Distinct

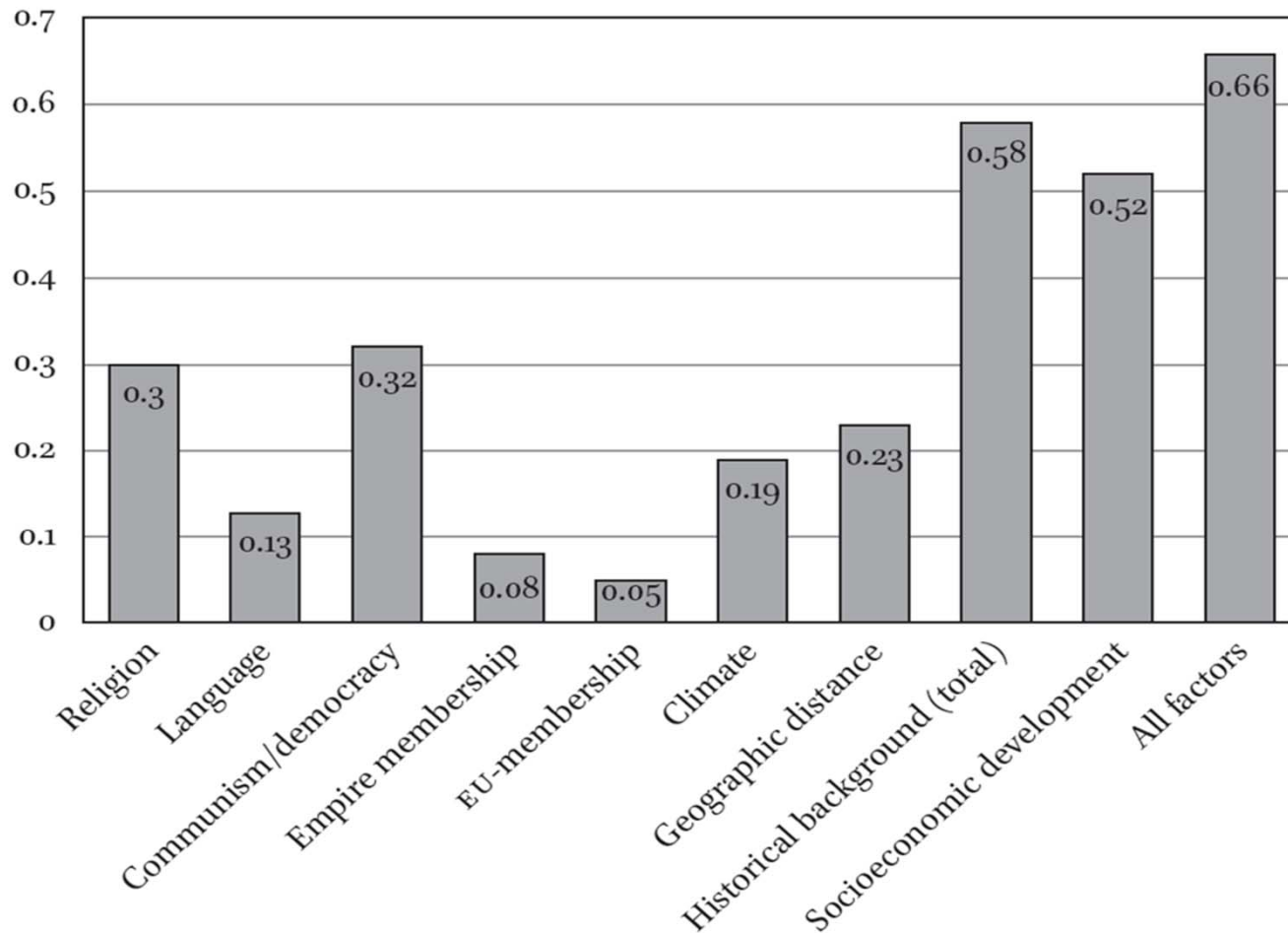
## Specific research questions:

1. Do the EU-member states **endorse** the values promoted by the EU?
2. Are these values **changing** in the direction desired by the EU?
3. Are the value **distances** between the EU-member states negligibly small?
4. Are the values of the EU-member states **converging** – within the EU and between previously identified culture zones?
5. Are the values of the EU-member states **distinct** from those of other European nations?

# Theories of value differences and change (in Europe)

1. **Modernization and Human Development theory** (e.g., Inglehart & Welzel): socioeconomic development
2. **Cultural identity (heritage)** (Huntington, 1996; Akaliyski & Welzel, 2020): supranational (civilizational) identity associated with historical religious traditions (also, Inglehart & Baker, 2000 and others)
3. **Climate** (van der Vliert, 2009; Welzel, 2013), and **Parasite stress theories** (Thornhill & Fincher)
4. **EU value promotion** (Akaliyski, 2019; Akaliyski & Welzel, 2020; Gerhards, 2008, 2009), “normative power Europe” (Manners, 2002)
5. **Cultural backlash** theory (Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Inglehart, 2019): losers of globalization (older and less educated population), especially in post-communist states





Predictors of value distances in Europe (Akaliyski, 2017)

Explained variance (R<sup>2</sup>) by individual and combined predictors



## Prevalence and change in EU-values among member states

- **EU value promotion** (Gerhards, 2010; Gerhards et al., 2009; Toggenburg and Grimheden, 2016, Akaliyski, 2019)
  - 'Acquis Communautaire' and Article 7 => legal enforcement of values on member-states
  - Socialization of values by citizens, e.g., democratic values (Oshri et al., 2016), emancipative and secular values (Akaliyski, 2019)
- **Socioeconomic modernization and existential security** linked to freedom and equality related values (Inglehart & Welzel)



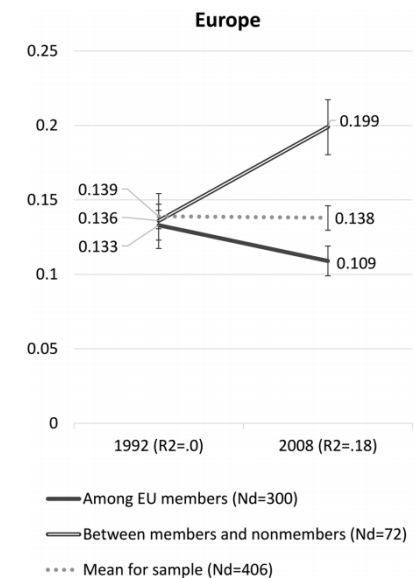
## Size of value distances among EU-nations

- All global cultural maps depict sizable distances between EU-countries (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Schwartz, 2006; Welzel, 2013; Minkov, 2018)
- Culture zones or geographic clusters:
  - Ex-communist (overriding), Orthodox, Catholic Europe, Protestant Europe, English-speaking (Inglehart & Baker, 2000)
  - Orthodox East, Returned West, Old West, Reformed West (Welzel, 2013)
  - Eastern Europe (ex-comm. Orthodox and Western Christianity) and Western Europe (Schwartz, 2006)
  - Southern Europe, Anglo and Northern Europe (Minkov, 2018)
- Gradual increasing distance from West to East (Fuchs & Klingemann, 2002; Gerhards, 2007; Gerhards & Hoelscher, 2003)



# Convergence on EU-values

- Convergence on emancipative and secular values (1990 – 2008) (Akaliyski, 2019)
- Divergence in LGBT-aversion and immigration acceptance; convergence on Euroscepticism (but growing) (2002 - 2016) (Van Houwelingen et al., 2019)
- Divergence on individual-sexual freedom; convergence on redistribution and cosmopolitan values (but decreasing) (1990 - 2017) (van Houwelingen et al., 2021)
- Closer interactions between states and populations => convergence (Bonikowski, 2010; also, word-society theory, Meyer et al., 1997)
- Convergence in societal organization, living standards, and existential security => convergence in cultural values (Schwartz & Bardi, 1997; Inglehart & Baker, 2000)



Source: Akaliyski (2019)

# Distances to other nations

- EU-value promotion => stronger socialization
  - Many of these values trace roots to Europe:
    - Freedom and equality to Enlightenment
    - Democracy to Ancient Greece
    - Rule of law to Rome
    - Solidarity to Christianity
- ⇒ part of (Western) Europeans' identity that further enhances them
- EU-nations are distinct with regard to democratic values (Oshri et al., 2016), and emancipative and secular values (Akaliyski, 2019; Akaliyski & Welzel, 2020)

# Hypotheses:

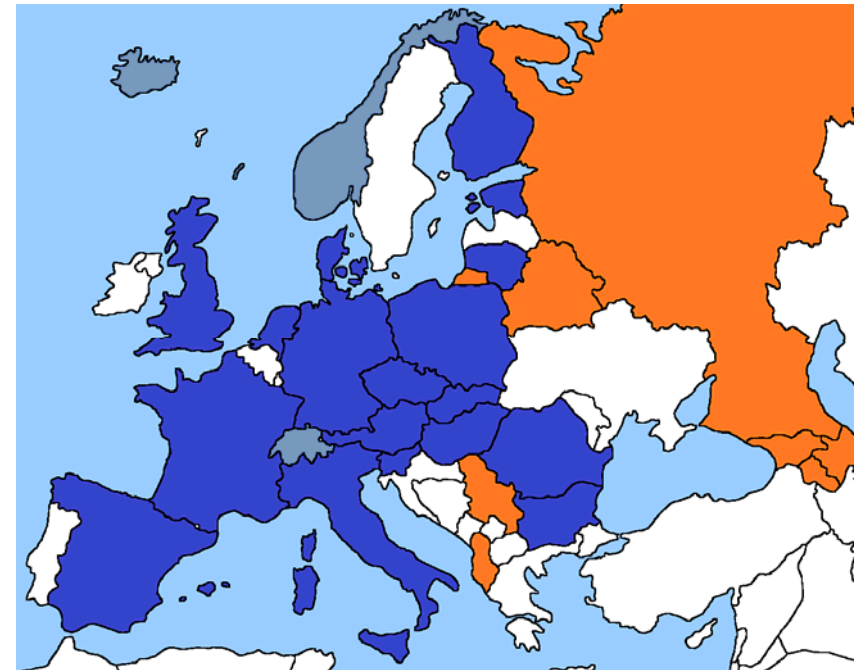
Hypothesis	Statement	Evaluation criterion
<b>Support hypothesis (H1)</b>	<i>On average, the EU-publics support the values propagated by the EU to a considerable degree.</i>	Average score of 50 points or more on EU-values measured on a 100-points scale.
<b>Increase hypothesis (H2)</b>	<i>The endorsement of the EU-values among EU-nations has increased over time.</i>	Statistically significant increase in support for EU-values from 1990 to 2017.
<b>Consensus hypothesis (H3)</b>	<i>The value distances among EU-member states are negligibly small.</i>	Average dyadic distance score of 10 points or less on a 100-point scale.
<b>Convergence hypothesis (H4)</b>	<i>The value distances between the EU-publics have decreased from 1990 to 2017.</i>	Statistically significant change in value distances across EU-publics.
<b>Distinction hypothesis (H5)</b>	<i>The values of the EU-nations are distinct from Europe's non-EU nations.</i>	Statistically significant value distances between the EU-nations, on the one hand, and the publics outside the EU (and EFTA), on the other.



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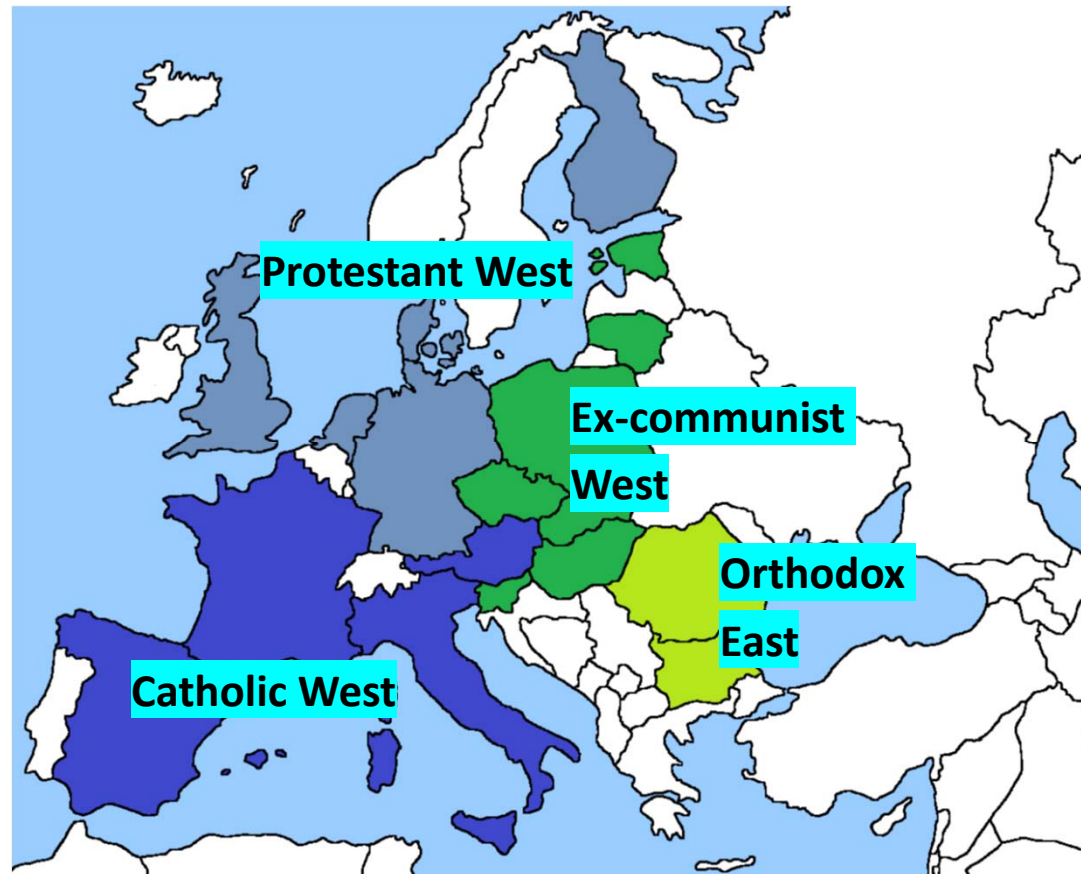
# European Values Study (~1990 to ~2017)

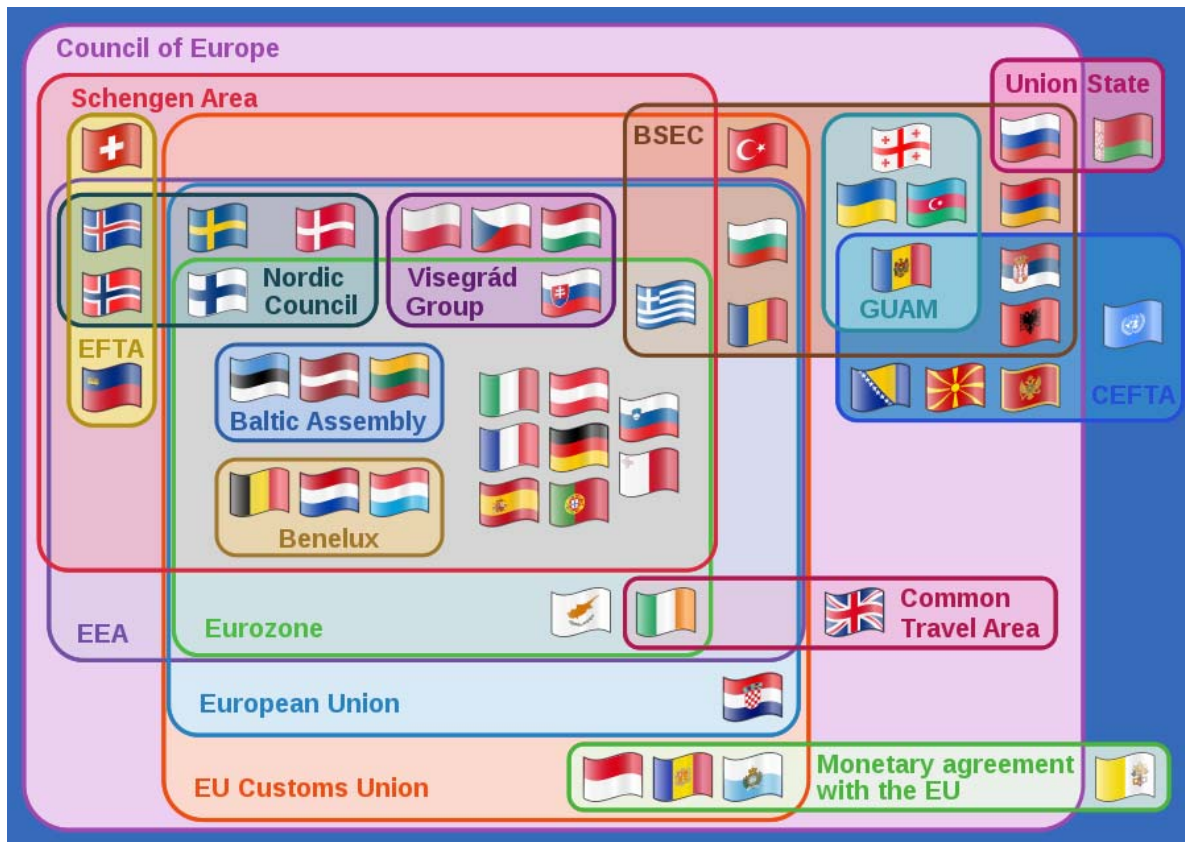
- F2F interviews; experiments with mixed modes in 2017.
- Nationally representative for population over 18 years old (quotas in first waves; probabilistic representative samples since 2008).
- Samples: at least 1000, or 1200 in 2017; up to 5000 in mixed modes.
- Waves at 9-year intervals: 1981, 1990, 1999, 2008, 2017 (appr.)
- Focus on change from 1990 to 2017 (slow change, avoid random measurement error and fluctuations).
- Sample in our analysis (total 29 countries):
  - EU: 19 (GB and NI surveyed separately) (blue)
  - EFTA: 3 (grey-blue)
  - Eastern European Non-EU: 7 (orange)



# Culture zones

(following Inglehart & Welzel)





## What about the EFTA non-EU countries?

- Part of some EU-institutions (Schengen Area, EEA)
- Rejected EU-membership in referenda
- Among the wealthiest, mature Western democracies
- Culturally belong to Western Europe.

⇒ we treat them separately from Eastern European non-members

(UK (only GB in our sample) was still a member state as of 2017)

# Operationalization of EU-values

All measures were rescaled to vary between 0 and a 100.

## 1. Personal freedom ( $\alpha=.91$ )

- F118 - Justifiable: Homosexuality
- F120 - Justifiable: Abortion
- F121 - Justifiable: Divorce

## 2. Individual autonomy ( $\alpha=.49$ )

- A029 - Important child qualities: Independence
- A034 - Important child qualities: Imagination
- A042 - Importance child qualities: Obedience (reversed)

## 3. Social solidarity ( $\alpha=.86$ )

- E157 - Feel concerned about: Europeans
- E159 - Feel concerned about: Elderly people
- E160 - Feel concerned about: Unemployed people
- E161 - Feel concerned about: Immigrants
- E162 - Feel concerned about: Sick and disabled people

## 4. Ethnic tolerance ( $\alpha=.89$ )

- A124\_02 - Accepting as neighbours: People of a different race
- A124\_05 - Accepting as neighbours: Muslims
- A124\_06 - Accepting as neighbours: Immigrants/foreign workers

## 5. Civic honesty ( $\alpha=.75$ )

- F114 - Justifiable: Claiming state benefits which you are not entitled to (reversed)
- F116 - Justifiable: Cheating on taxes (reversed)
- F117 - Justifiable: Someone accepting a bribe (reversed)

## 6. Gender equality

- C001 - When jobs are scarce, men should have more rights to a job than women (reversed)

## 7. Liberal democracy ( $\alpha=.76$ ):

- E114 - Political system: Having a strong leader (reversed)
- E116 - Political system: Having the army rule (reversed)
- E117 - Political system: Having a democratic political system

## EU-Values Index ( $\alpha= .78$ )



# Structure of EU-values

**Table 1.** Correlational matrix among value domains and EU-values index (N = 56).

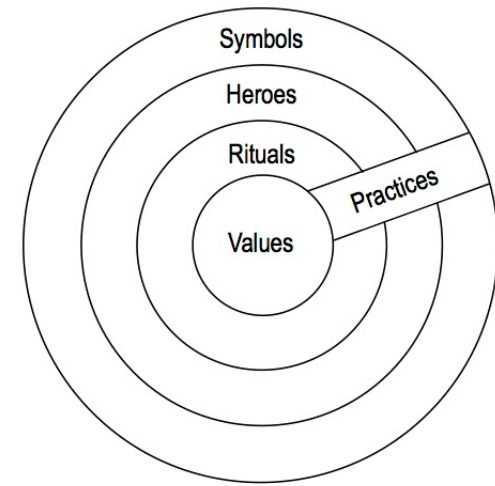
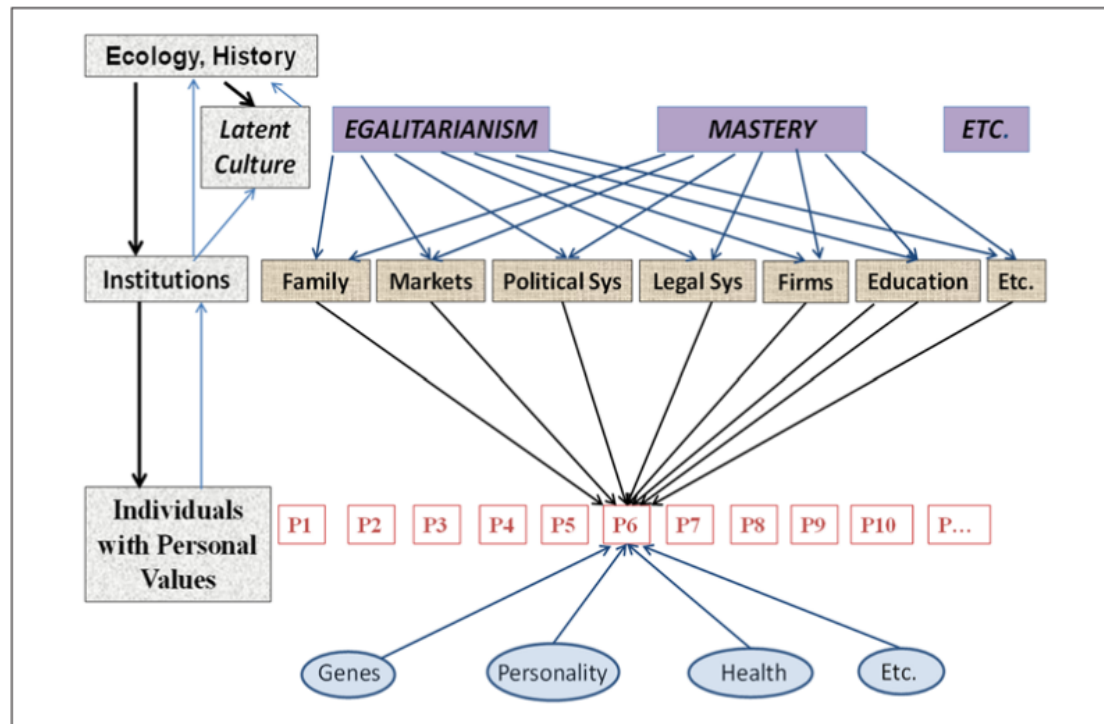
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Personal freedom	1.00							
2	Individual autonomy	0.64	1.00						
3	Social solidarity	0.12	0.06	1.00					
4	Ethnic tolerance	0.35	0.06	0.17	1.00				
5	Civic honesty	0.19	0.29	0.12	0.25	1.00			
6	Gender equality	0.84	0.49	0.10	0.47	0.28	1.00		
7	Liberal democracy	0.57	0.32	0.09	0.58	0.33	0.57	1.00	
8	EU-values	0.90	0.64	0.26	0.61	0.41	0.90	0.74	1.00

Culture is “the latent normative value system, external to the individual, that underlies the functioning of societal institutions [and] does not require consensus at the individual level.” (Fischer & Schwartz, 2011:1140)

“The core of culture [...] is formed by values. Values are broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others.” (Hofstede et al., 2010)

“Value emphases express shared conceptions of what is good and desirable in the culture, the cultural ideals.” (Schwartz, 2006)

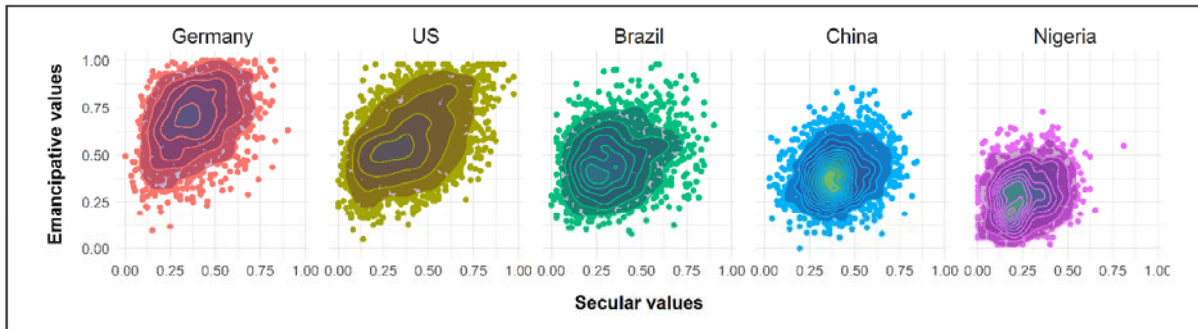
“utilities that people desire—so much that their actions are targeted towards pursuing them.” (Welzel, 2013)



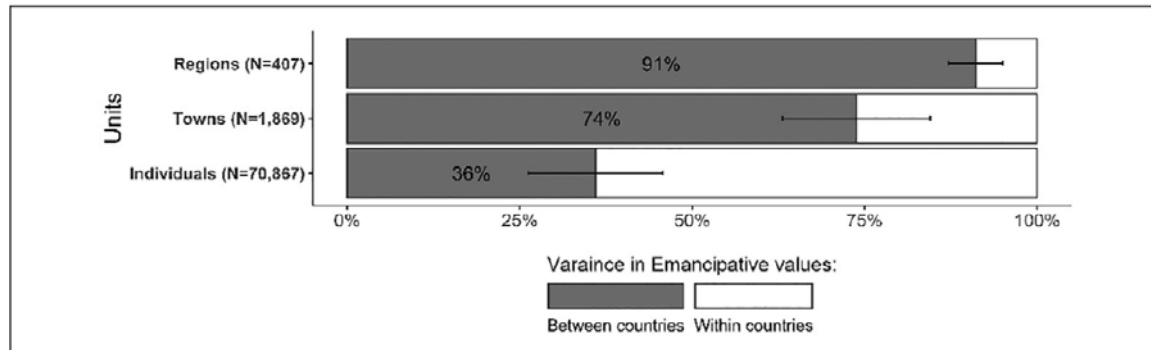
Hofstede, 1991.

Figure 1. A schematic representation of the relations between latent societal cultural value emphases, institutions, and the values of individuals.

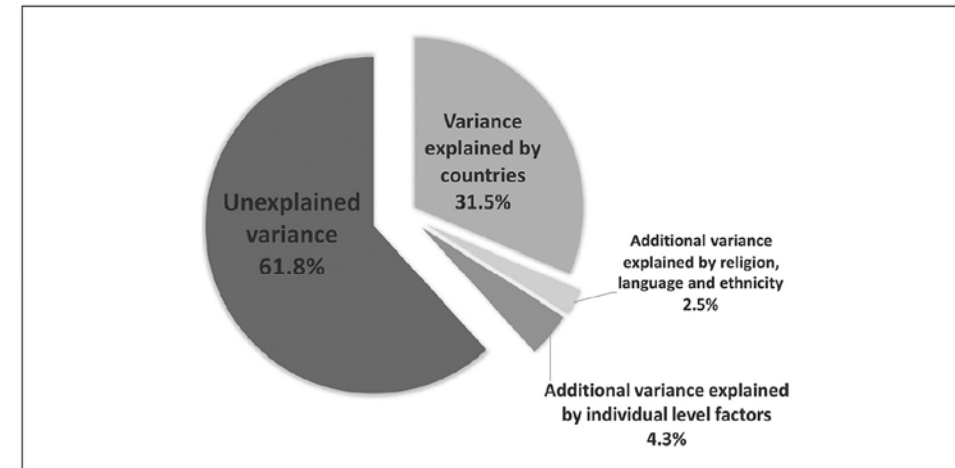
# Nations vs. other cultural units (Akaliyski et al., 2021)



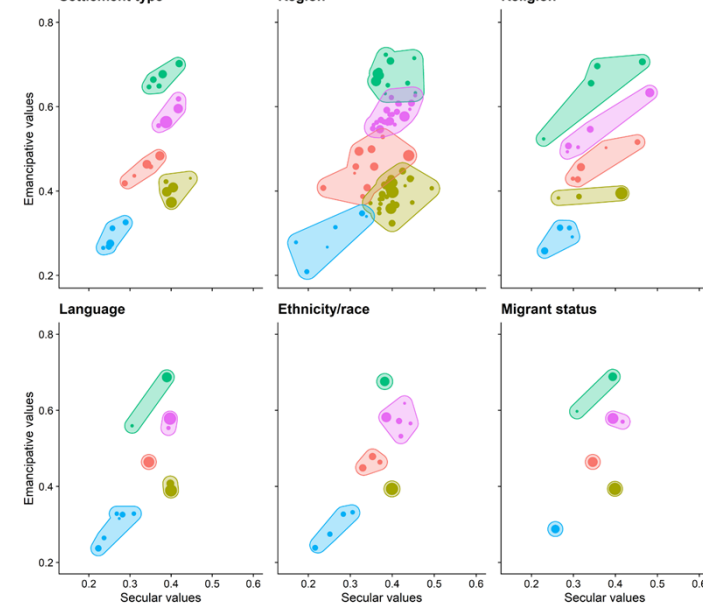
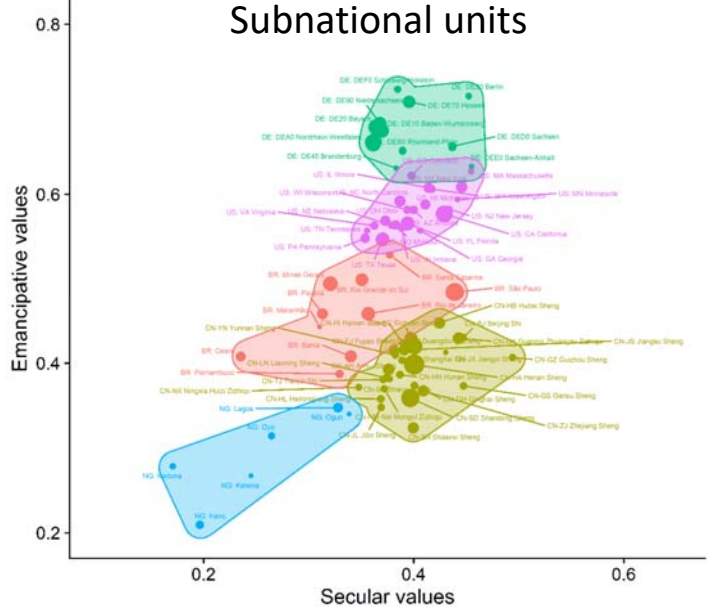
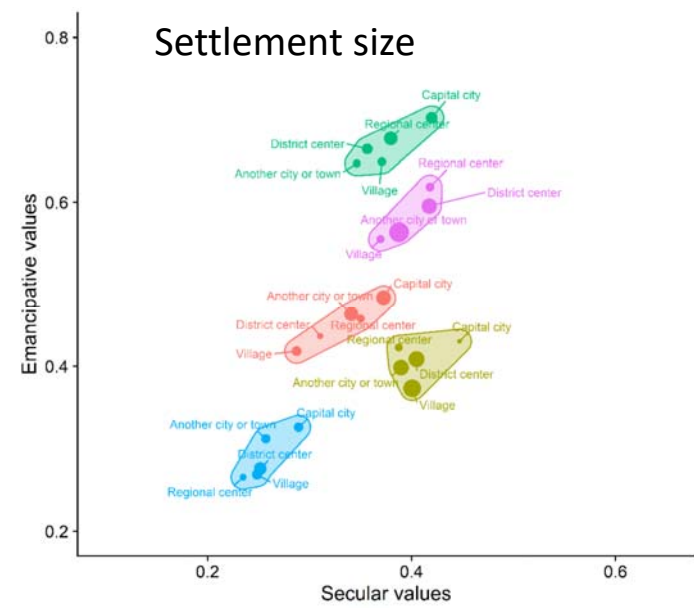
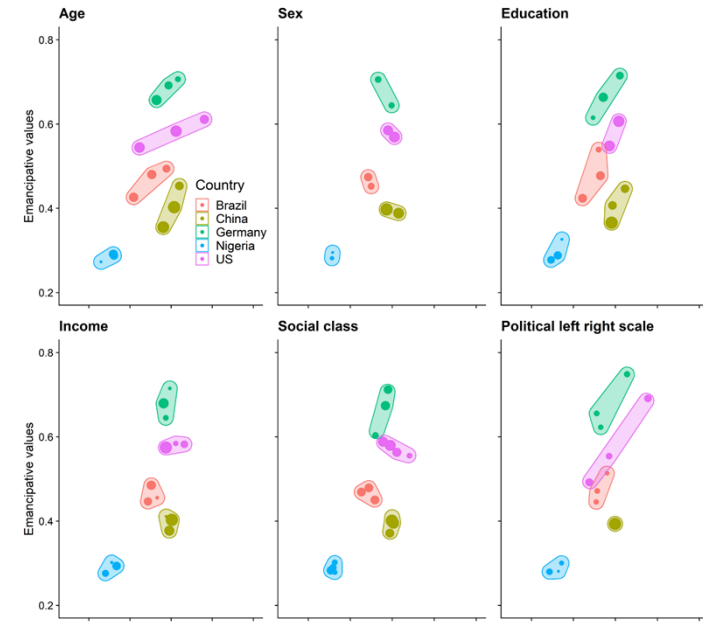
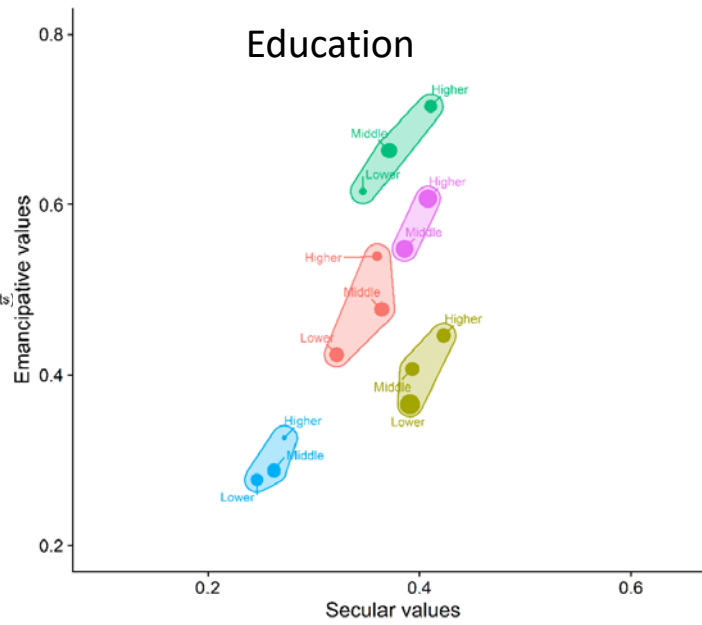
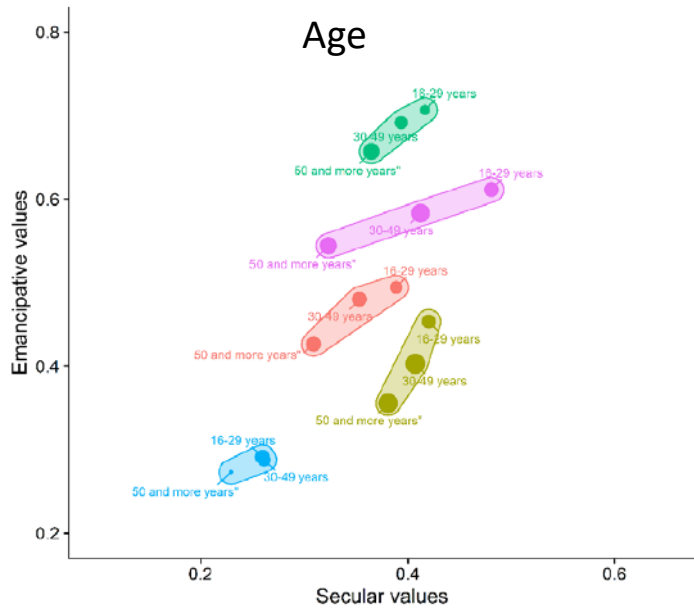
**Figure 2.** Concentric distribution of individuals along the distance from the culture's gravity center. Note. The concentric circles denote the density of the distribution. Data: WVS wave 7.



**Figure 3.** Variance in emancipative values accounted for by countries ( $N=49$ ) over individuals, towns, and regions (95% confidence intervals).



**Figure 6.** Variance in individual-level emancipative values explained by countries, other cultural groups and individuals' socio-demographic characteristics.



Country

- Brazil
- China
- Germany
- Nigeria
- US

N (respondents)

- 250
- 500
- 750
- 1000
- 1250

Country

- Brazil
- China
- Germany
- Nigeria
- US

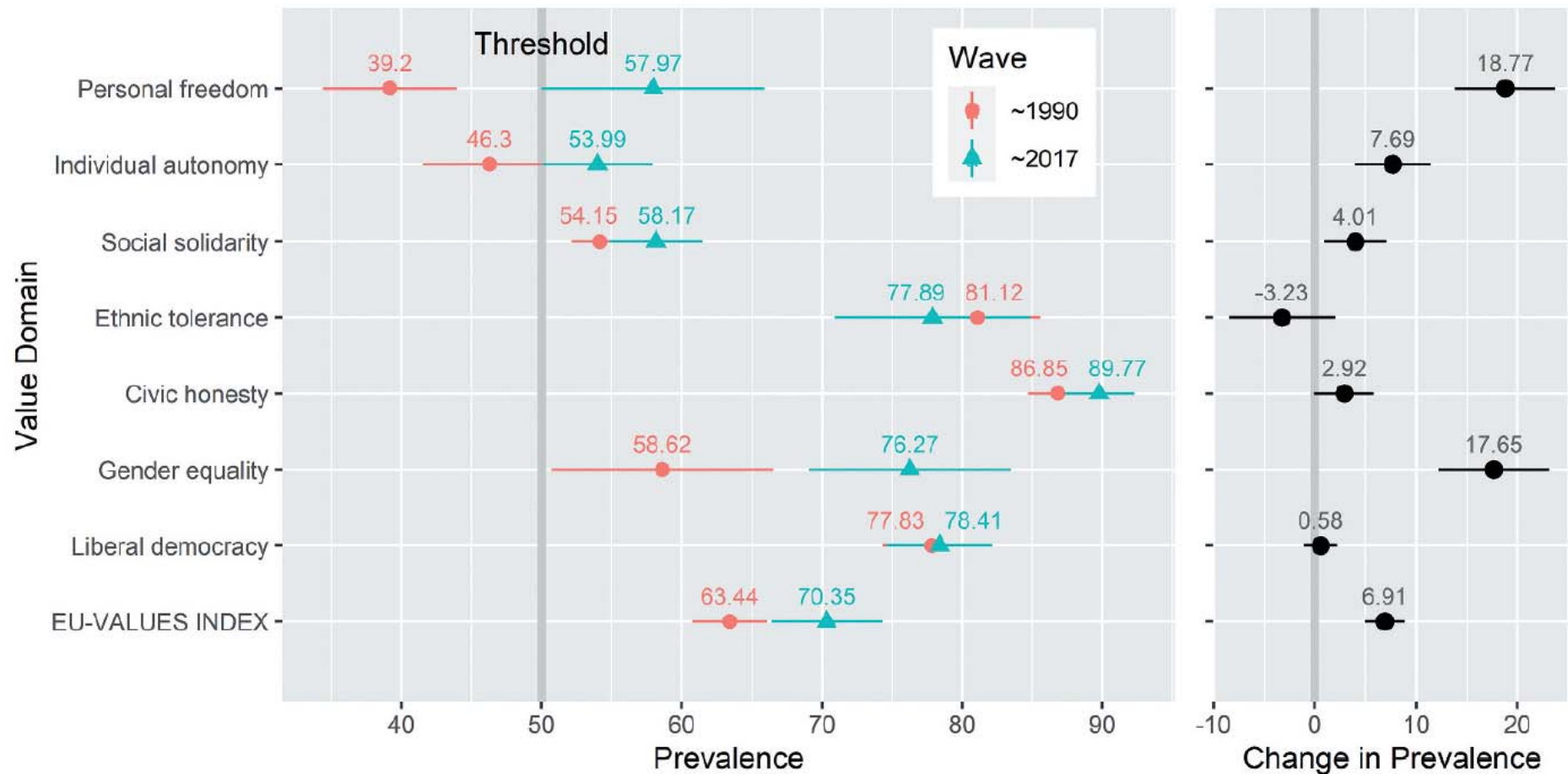
## Methods

- Statistical significance tests in country fixed-effects regressions (T as the single predictor).
- Statistical significance of differences in regressions with undirected dyadic data.
- Cluster-robust standard errors.
- Multidimensional scaling for more intuitive visual representation of value differences and clusters in a two-dimensional space.

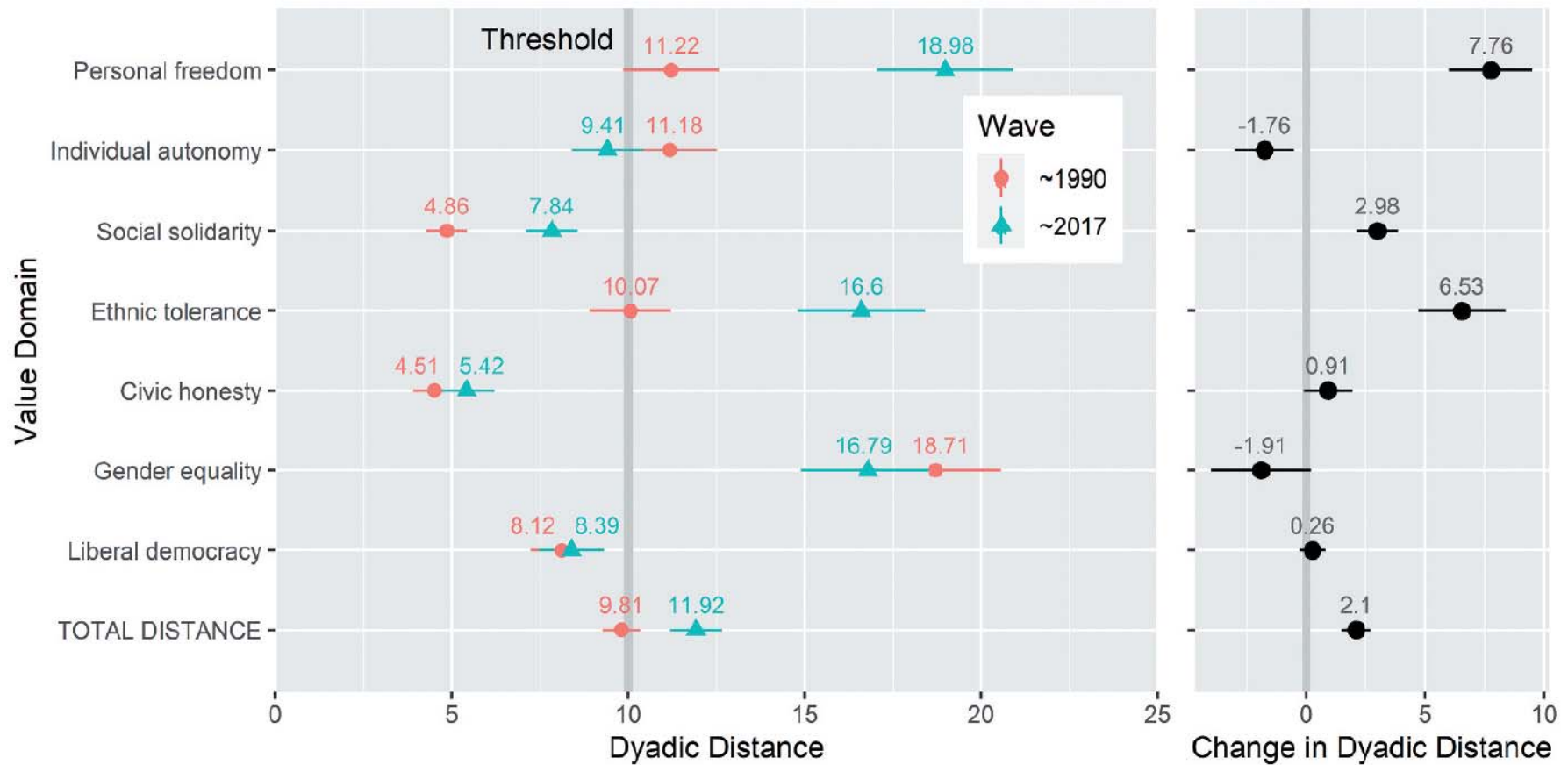


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  2. Data and Methods
  3. Empirical Findings
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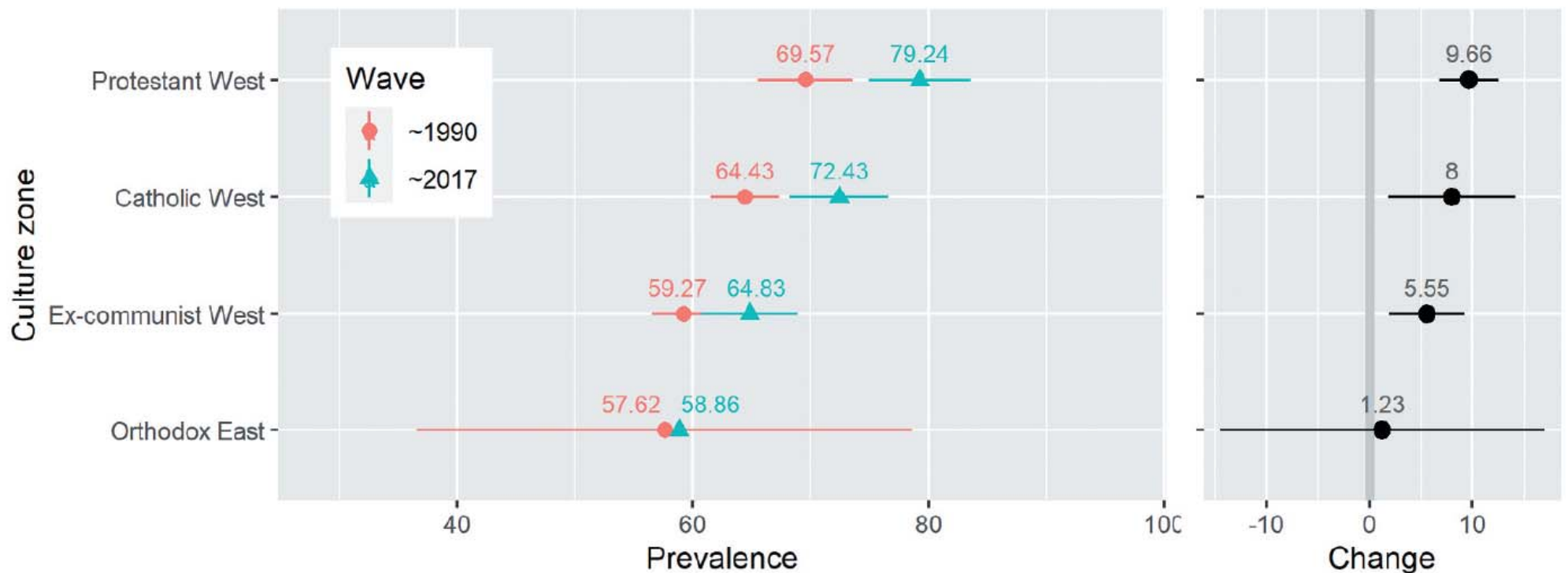
# Prevalence and change in EU-values among 19 EU-member states



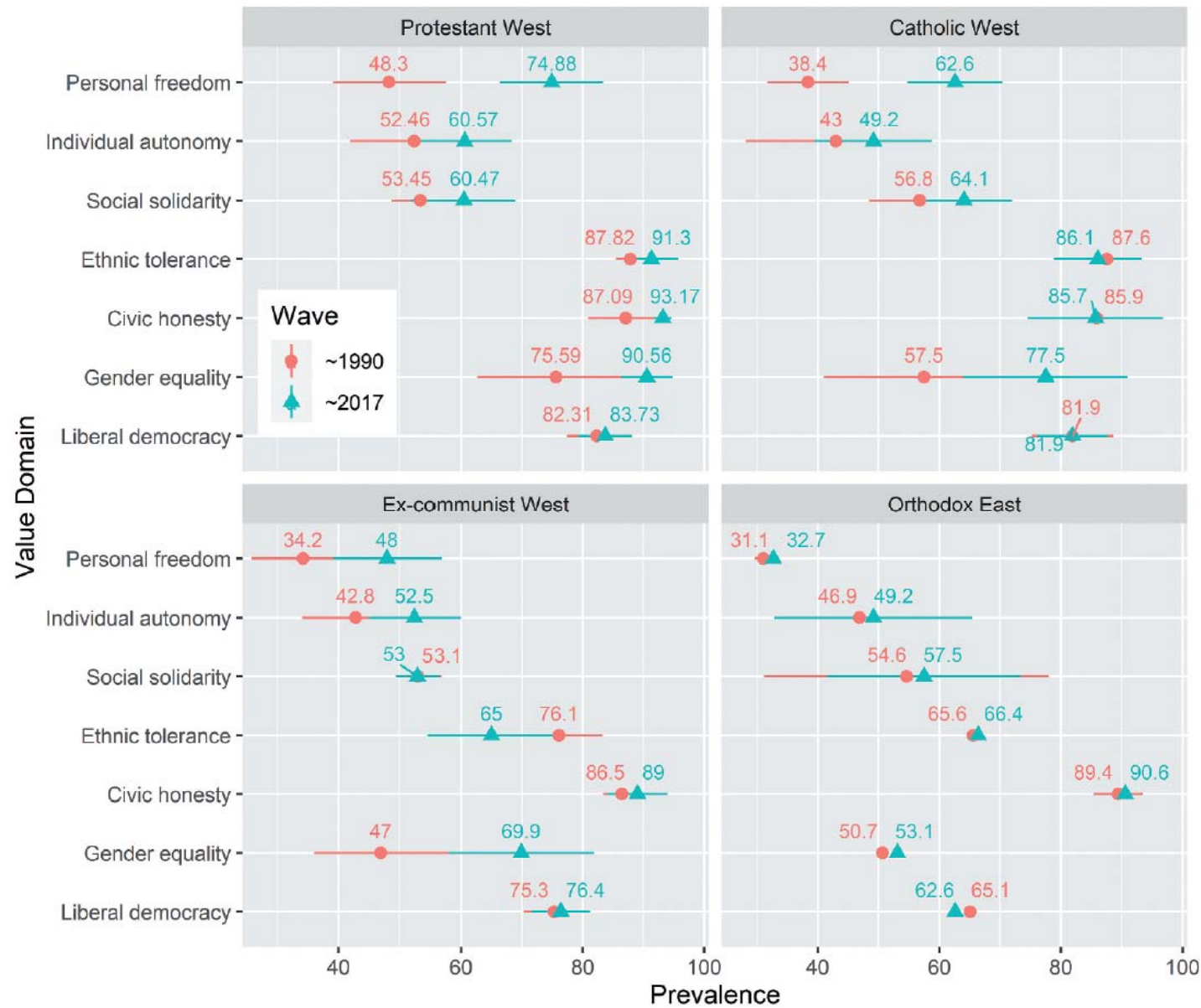
# Dyadic distances and change in distances in EU-values among 19 EU-member states



# Prevalence and change in EU-values among 19 member states by culture zone

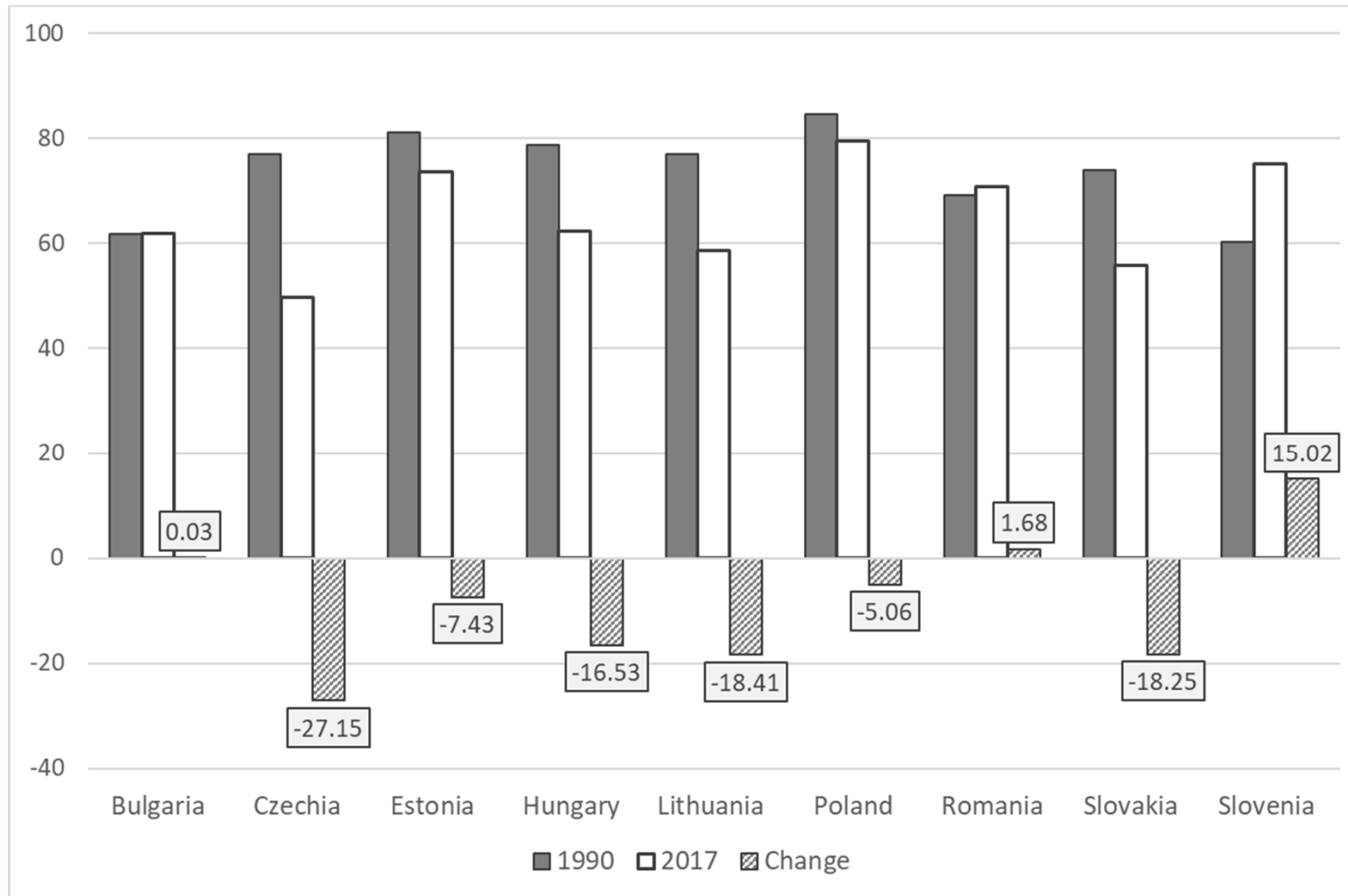


# Prevalence of EU-value domains in 19 member states by culture zone

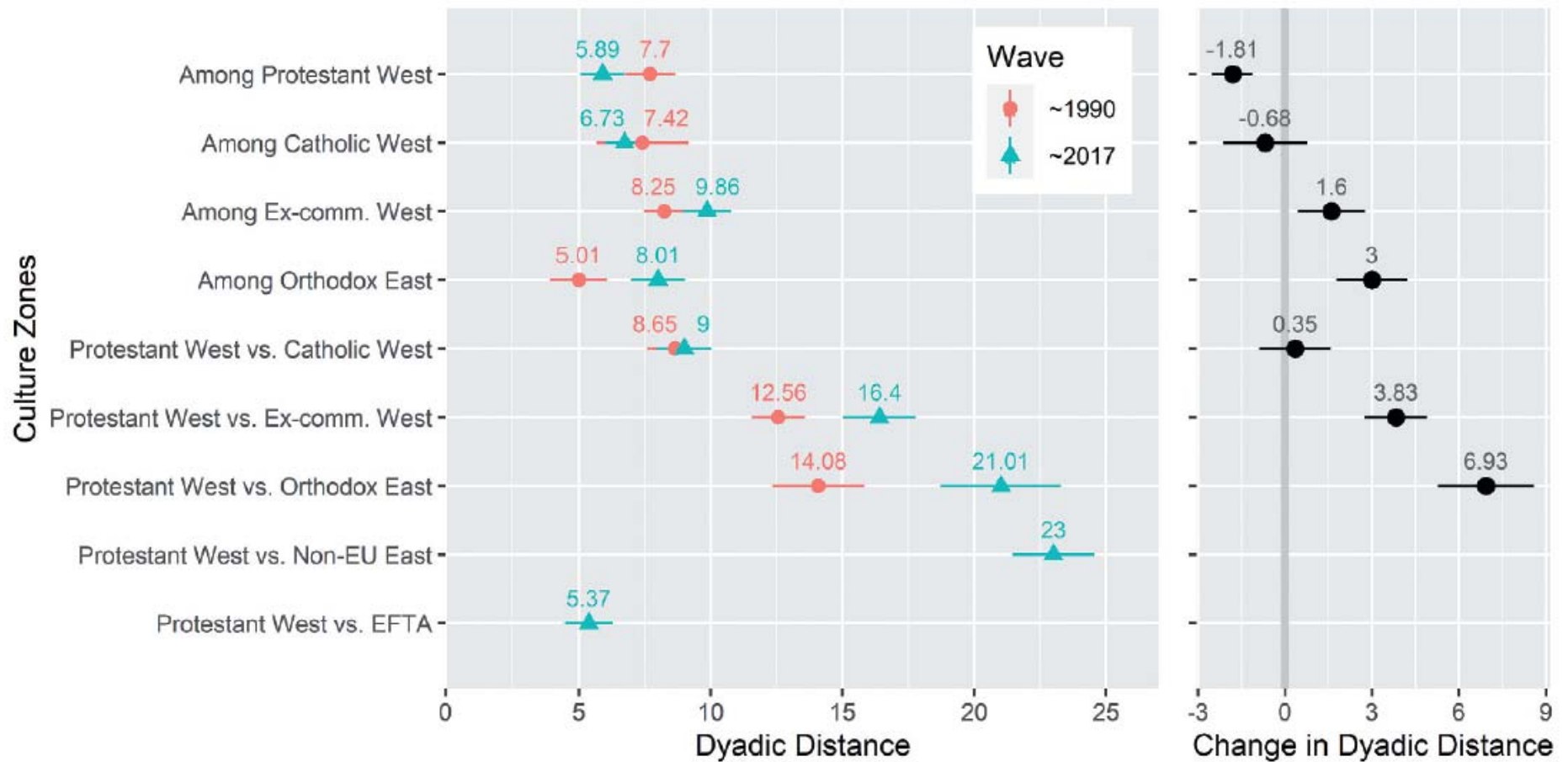




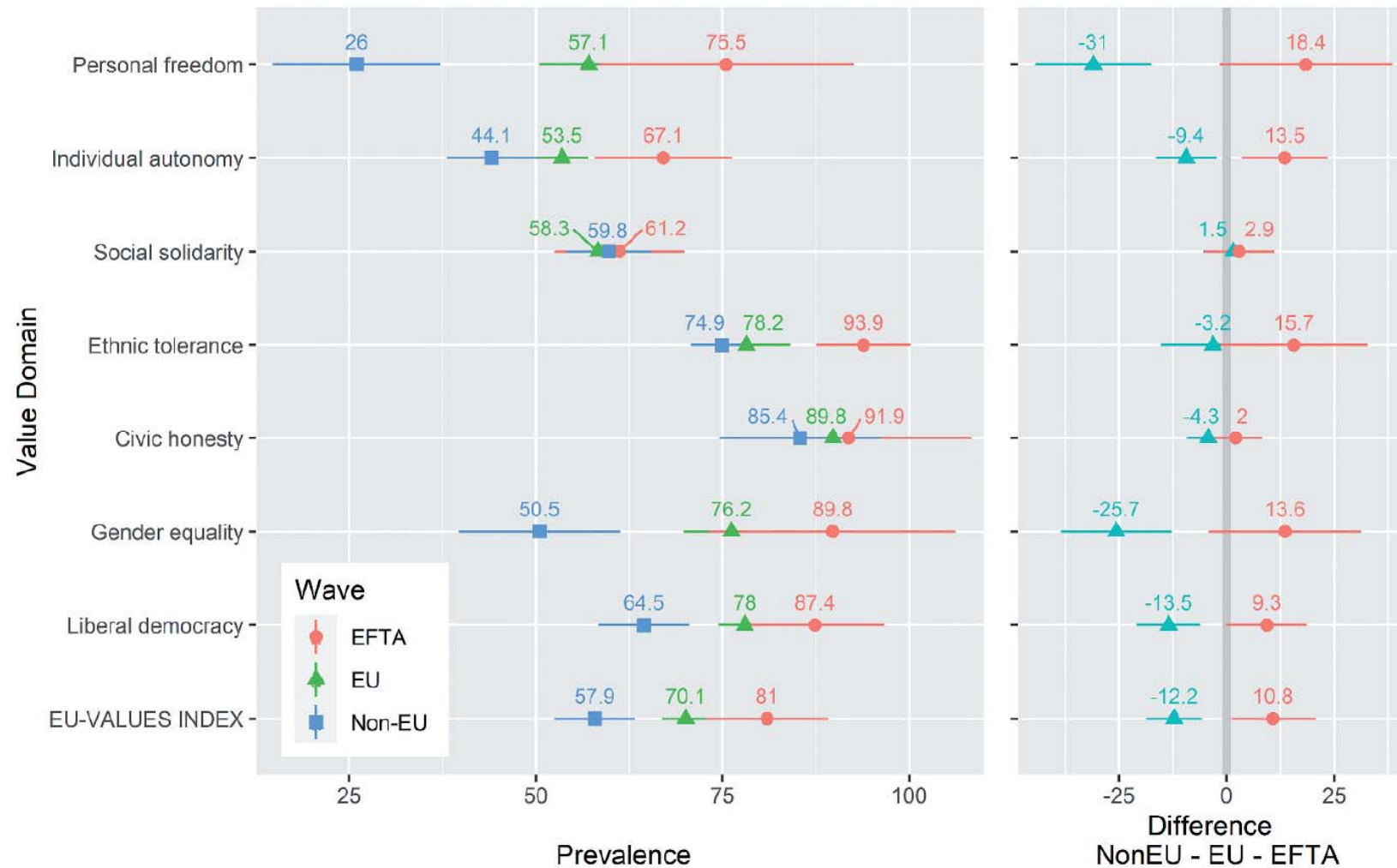
# Prevalence and change in ethnic tolerance among former communist EU nations



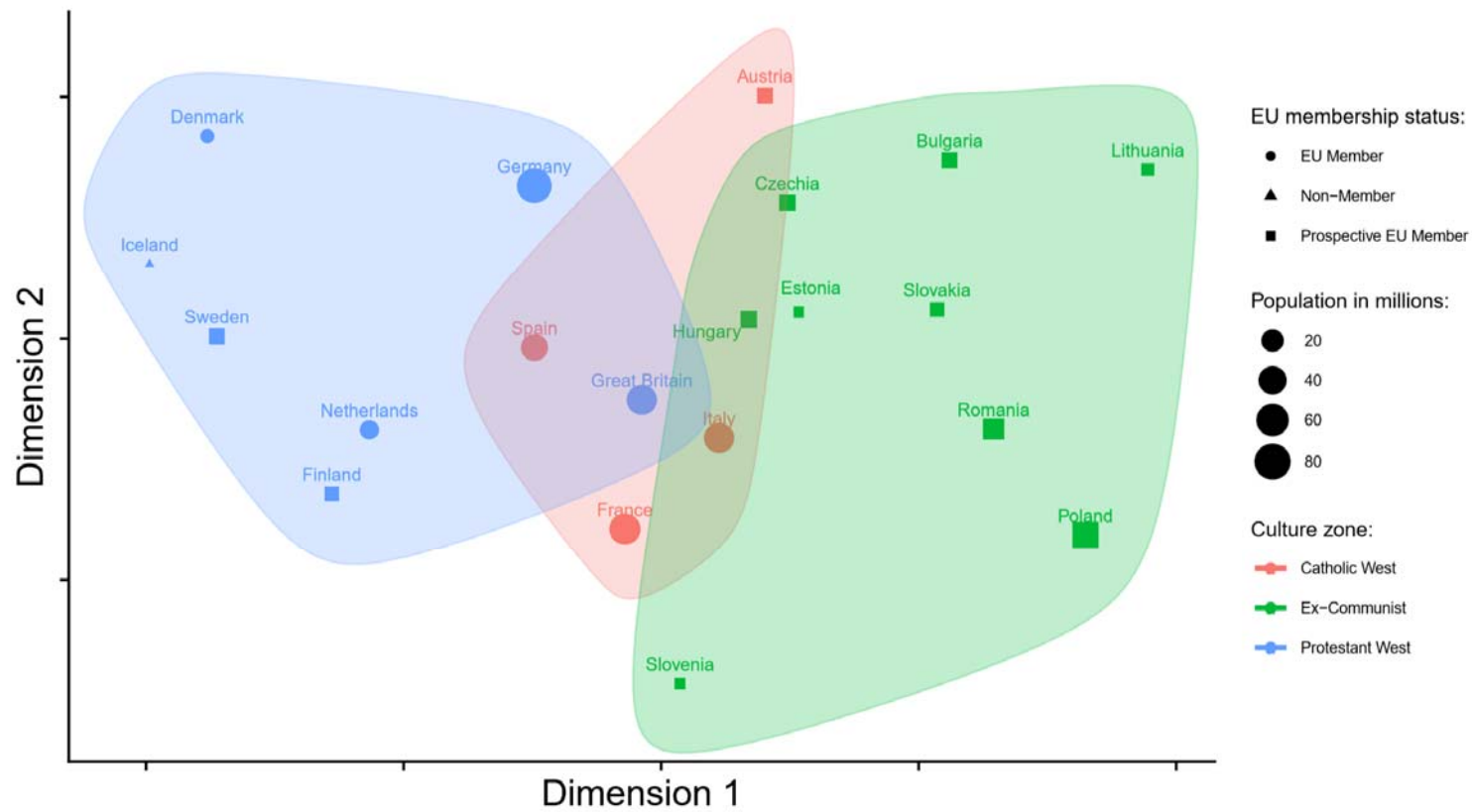
# Dyadic distances and change in total distances in EU-values among and between culture zones



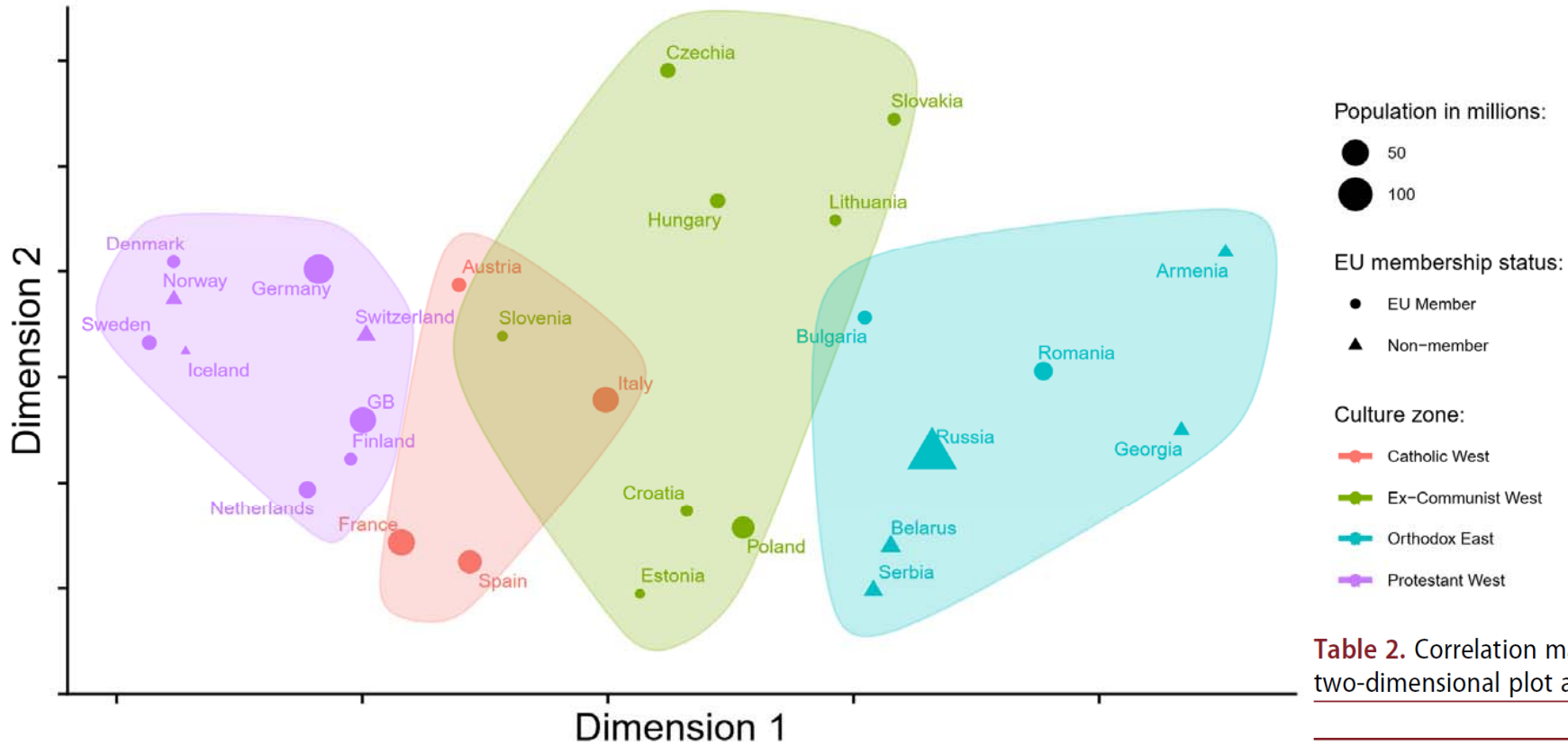
# Prevalence of EU-values among 19 EU, 7 Eastern European non-EU, and 3 EFTA Non-EU nations



# Cultural map of Europe 1990



# Cultural map of Europe 2017



**Table 2.** Correlation matrix between the coordinates on the two-dimensional plot and EU-values and domains in 2017.

	Dimension 1	Dimension 2
Dimension 1	1	
Dimension 2	-0.07	1
Personal freedom	-0.78	-0.11
Individual autonomy	-0.45	-0.45
Social solidarity	-0.02	0.23
Ethnic tolerance	-0.71	0.48
Civic honesty	-0.29	0.03
Gender equality	-0.81	0.21
Liberal democracy	-0.86	-0.03
<i>EU-VALUES INDEX</i>	<i>-0.87</i>	<i>0.08</i>



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# Summary of the findings

**Table 3.** Summary of findings.

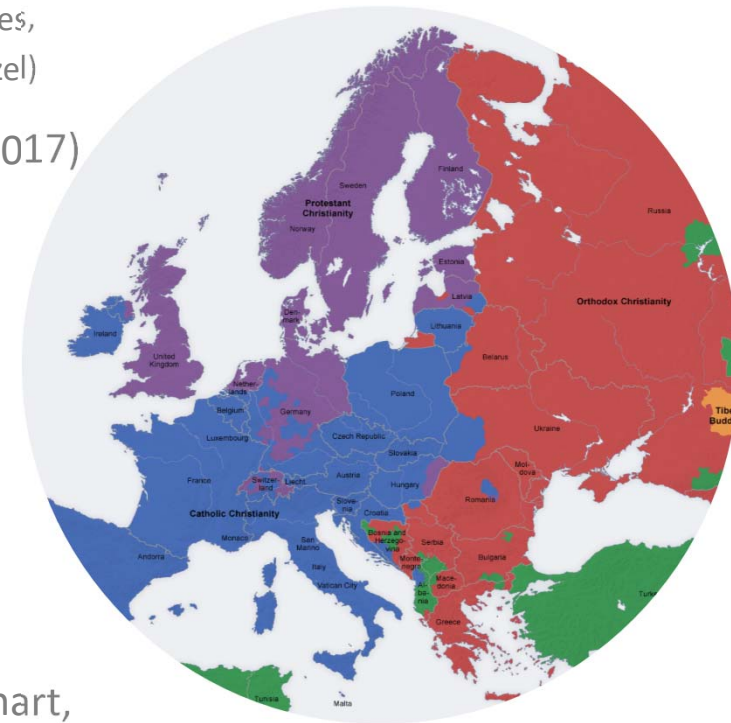
Hypothesis	Finding
Support (H1): EU-member states support the EU-values	Confirmed overall and on all 7 value domains
Increase (H2): Support for EU-values has increased among member states	Confirmed on average and on 4 out of 7 value domains
Consensus (H3): Value distances between member states are small	Disconfirmed overall and especially on 3 out of 7 value domains and between culture zones
Convergence (H4): Value distances between member states have decreased	Disconfirmed overall: confirmed on 1 out of 7 value domains but disconfirmed on 4 others and between culture zones
Distinction (H5): Support for EU-values separates EU-member states from non-members	Confirmed on average and on 4 value domains regarding Eastern non-EU nations; EU is distinct also from Western non-EU nations but in the opposite direction

# Conclusions

- Mixed evidence on the validity of EU's image as a "community of shared values."
  - **Positive:** Member states support the EU-values strongly and increasingly over time.
  - And EU is notably distinct culturally from Eastern European non-EU-nations, especially in individual freedoms and gender equality.
  - **But:** Increasing disagreement on issues of individual freedoms, solidarity and ethnic tolerance between member states.
  - Traditional cultural fault lines (along religious/historical divisions) remain and even *intensify*.
- ⇒ EU evolves into a distinct value-sharing community at *different speeds*.

# Discussion: Why culture zones? Causal mechanisms?

- Weber's thesis:
  - Religion => culture
  - Religion => economic attitudes => economic development (Barro & McCleary, 2003; Landes, 1998; Blum & Dudley, 2001; Hayward & Kemmelmeier, 2011) => culture (Inglehart & Welzel)
- Religious legacies represent historical divisions (Hofstede, 2010, Akaliyski, 2017)
- Reverse causality (Minkov)
- Supranational identity (Huntington, 1996; Akaliyski & Welzel, 2020)
- Trust towards newer member states (Klingemann & Weldon, 2013)
- Socio-economic modernization (Inglehart & Welzel)
- Cultural backlash (Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Inglehart, 2019)
- “Cascade effect” – reaching a tipping point facilitates further change (Inglehart, 2018)



# Implications

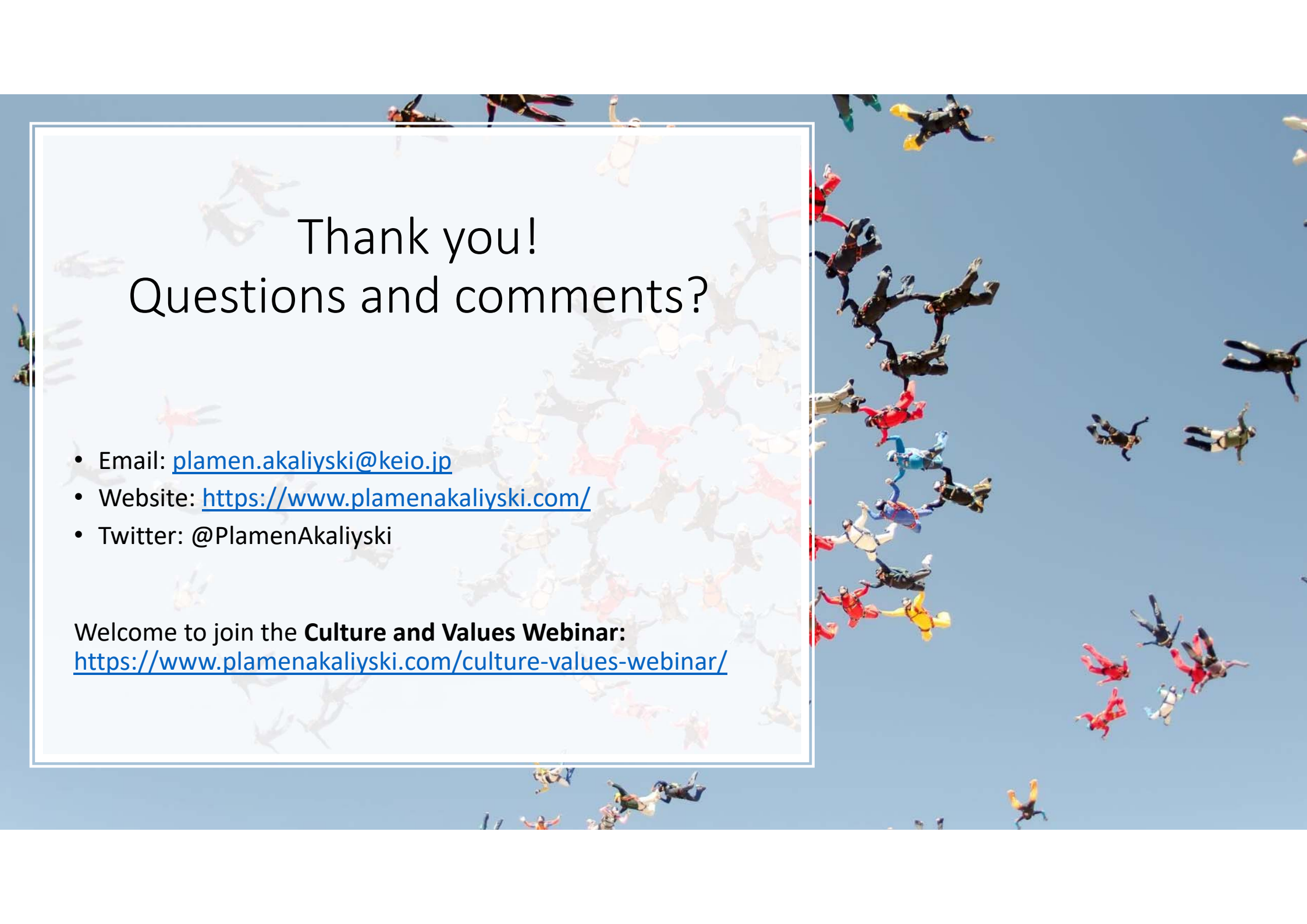
- EU-values may continue to experience internal tensions along its cultural fault lines.
- Determining and addressing the causes of the growing value differences might be essential, e.g.:
  - more economic redistribution,
  - more efficient regulations,
  - increased interconnectedness and mutual trust, reducing economic inequalities within nations.
- Acknowledging EU's built-in value architecture and adjusting decision-making to accommodate the cultural differences between EU societies.
- Finding value in its diversity ("United in Diversity").

# Further steps

1. What **explains** the value differences and recent dynamics in the EU?
2. Is value diversity **enriching or impeding** the EU-integration?
3. Does EU integration erode the cultural homogeneity of nation states and replacing it with an **EU-wide culture**?

Collaborators are very welcome!





Thank you!  
Questions and comments?

- Email: [plamen.akaliyski@keio.jp](mailto:plamen.akaliyski@keio.jp)
- Website: <https://www.plamenakaliyski.com/>
- Twitter: @PlamenAkaliyski

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