

# Clashing Values: Supranational Identities, Geopolitical Rivalry and Europe's Growing Cultural Divide

Plamen Akaliyski<sup>1,2,3</sup> and Christian Welzel<sup>4,3</sup>

Version of the paper accepted for publication by the Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, August 2020

## Abstract

Soon after the collapse of Soviet-type communism in Central and Eastern Europe, a new geopolitical division began to reshape the continent. Our study demonstrates that this newly emerging geopolitical divide has been underpinned by a corresponding cultural divergence, of which “emancipative values” are the most powerful marker. Using the European Values Study/World Values Survey 1990 to 2014, we find that the former Iron Curtain no longer constitutes a cultural boundary because the ex-communist states that joined the European Union have been converging with the West's strong emphasis on emancipative values. Instead, a new and steeply growing cultural gap has emerged between the European Union and its Eastern neighbors. The two competing geopolitical formations in the West and East—the European and Eurasian Unions, respectively—have diverged culturally in recent decades. The divergence goes back to contrasting supranational identities that originate in different religious traditions, which rulers have increasingly accentuated to strengthen their nations' endorsement or dismissal of emancipative values. Through this sorting-out process, emancipative values became an increasingly significant marker of a Western-vs-Eastern cultural identity. Our study is the first to link this groundbreaking cultural transformation to civilizational identities and geopolitical rivalry.

## Keywords

culture, values, supranational identity, Europe, geopolitics

<sup>1</sup>University of Oslo, Norway

<sup>2</sup>Keio University, Yokohama, Japan

<sup>3</sup>Laboratory for Comparative Social Research, National Research University - Higher School of Economics, Russia

<sup>4</sup>Center for the Study of Democracy, Leuphana University Lüneburg, Germany

## Corresponding Author:

Plamen Akaliyski, Graduate School of System Design and Management, Keio University, Collaboration Complex, 4-1-1 Hiyoshi, Kohoku-ku, Yokohama, 223-8526, Japan.

Email: [plamen.akaliyski@keio.jp](mailto:plamen.akaliyski@keio.jp)

The Iron Curtain divided Europe for half a century. This geopolitical separation and fundamentally different principles of societal organization coincided with a well-documented cultural division of Europe between the Eastern and Western bloc (Akaliyski, 2017; Schwartz & Bardi, 1997). Many studies have depicted two clearly distinguishable value clusters in Europe, East and West of the former Iron Curtain (e.g., Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Schwartz, 2006). Even though three decades have passed since the collapse of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, only a few studies have examined whether this cultural division persists, or whether it has been reshaped in alignment with the geopolitical transformation of Europe. Given the relative plasticity of culture (Beugelsdijk & Welzel, 2018), such an investigation is warranted and long overdue.

Recently, Akaliyski (2019) showed that, between 1992 and 2008, countries that have joined the European Union (*EU*), together with the accession candidates, have converged significantly toward the cultural model of the core EU members. But Akaliyski's study is limited to the EU integration itself, while an investigation of the wider processes of cultural change in Europe and the post-Soviet space in relation to the geopolitical turns in the last three decades is to date still lacking. Against this background, we take up the task to examine whether the geopolitical restructuring of Europe after the end of the Cold War has coincided with a cultural value transformation of the continent.

There is a growing literature on the importance of value differences in international relations, including such issues as migration (Belot & Ederveen, 2012), trade (Guiso et al., 2009), interstate conflict (Bove & Gokmen, 2017), EU integration (Gerhards, 2007; Guiso et al., 2016) and the financial crisis (Hien, 2019). Upholding shared values is crucial for regional integration as it supposedly increases cohesiveness, eases communication, consensus building and coordinated action (Moldashev & Hassan, 2017), and may provide democratic legitimacy in the absence of a shared *demos* (Habermas, 2012). Previously, Inglehart (1997, p. 26) has noted that cultural values have been utilized to legitimize the established social order, suggesting that the ruling elites attempt to mold societal culture in order to increase their legitimacy and, thus, to consolidate their political authority. We extend this argument by proposing that values are related to legitimacy not only on the national level, as Inglehart has claimed, but also at the level of supranational organizations such as the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union (*EEU*). This proposition has critical geopolitical implications concerning the future of Europe. Knowing whether and to what extent the two opposing supranational organizations in the West and the post-Soviet space represent conflicting value systems, we may be in a better position to dissect the nature of the geopolitical confrontation Europe is presently experiencing.

Our study draws on Huntington's controversial "clash of civilizations" thesis, which posited a redrawing of the geopolitical map of Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall following centuries old civilizational identities (Huntington, 1996). This paper links supposed cultural transformations to long-lasting religious traditions of European societies that manifest themselves in *contrasting* supranational identities, which—upon intentional accentuation by ruling elites—might be increasingly perceived as *clashing*.

Our civilizational analysis is corroborated by social identity theory (*SIT*) (Tajfel & Turner, 2004), which we apply to the supranational level. A civilizational framework has been used in

other areas in the European integration literature (McMahon, 2017; Pop-Eleches, 2007), but our application to cultural change in Europe is novel and potentially controversial. Yet, we do not argue in favor of a deterministic nature of cultural change based on historical legacies that present-day populations cannot overcome. Instead, we wish to empirically assess the implications and limitations of a civilizational explanation, thus potentially providing a better foundation for understanding processes of cultural transformation in Europe.

The remainder of our article is structured as follows. After this introduction, we portray our theoretical framework and derive from it testable hypotheses. Next, we describe our operationalization of cultural values and the independent variables and proceed with the empirical test of our hypotheses. We finish with a discussion of the implications of our research and the way it expands the field of cross-cultural research.

## **Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses**

### *Religious Legacies and the Geopolitical Transformation of Europe*

Regarding Europe's geopolitical transformation, we draw on the predictions laid out in Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis. Huntington (1996) made provocative predictions for the post-Cold War world order, which, he claimed, would be based on the revival of centuries- or even millennia-old cultural entities called civilizations. His civilizations encompass both subjective elements, namely supranational identities, and objective elements: religion, language, culture, values,<sup>1</sup> and traditions. In Europe specifically, the delineation touches upon the historically predominant religious traditions of societies. According to Huntington, Catholic and Protestant countries constitute Western civilization. Eastward lies a Slavic-Orthodox civilization, which was influenced by Eastern Orthodoxy and the Russian, and partly also the Ottoman, Empires. A third division is part of a broad Islamic civilization and includes Muslim-majority countries like Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey, and the Central Asian post-Soviet republics.

Contrary to a common interpretation of Huntington's classification, his civilizations are not fixed entities, and he describes many countries as "torn" in their civilizational identity. Huntington's main examples for such torn countries include Russia (divided between Western and its own civilizational identity) and Turkey (divided between Western and Islamic civilization). These and other countries can theoretically change their civilizational belonging as long as they fulfill three criteria: (1) their elites decisively declare their aspirations to join another civilization, (2) there is consensus among the population that such a reorientation is desirable, and (3) the host civilization welcomes the newcomer. If one or more conditions are not met, civilizational relocation is deemed impossible (Huntington, 1996, p. 139).

We rely on Huntington's specific predictions of the European post-Cold War transformations, which are as follows: (1) Catholic and Protestant former communist countries will return to their 'natural habitat' in the West; (2) Orthodox countries will be split in their civilizational identity, and they will either attempt to join the West or create a civilization of their own

(Slavic-Orthodox civilization); (3) Muslim countries will also be split in their identity, but they will be rejected by the West and therefore will opt for reaffirming their civilizational belonging to the Muslim world; (4) regional political and economic organizations will encompass each of the civilizations: the borders of the EU will be the demarcation line of the Western civilization, while a new regional bloc may emerge to unite the nations East of the EU.

Huntington was convinced that the shared civilizational identity and culture would play a crucial role in the geopolitical restructuring of Europe. However, the cultural aspect is not explicitly elaborated in the clash of civilizations framework, and he has been criticized for deeming cultural differences immutable. Furthermore, he conflates objective elements of culture such as religion and language with subjective ones such as values, claiming that they overlap within civilizations.

In this article, we use Huntington's scheme of civilizations as our departure point, but we overcome his assumption that culture is static. Instead, we examine to what extent cultural values in Europe *changed* and whether these changes proceeded in a manner that deepened the main civilizational fault lines in Europe—those between the EU and the rest of Europe. We treat supranational identity and values as malleable subjective elements of culture and religion as a constant objective element and test how they align through time.

We follow Huntington in distinguishing between civilizations in Europe based on the societies' historically predominant religions. No question, religion may play a marginal role in contemporary societies and the share of religious people may have been surpassed by atheists and agnostics in many European countries. Nevertheless, the norms originating in different religious traditions may have been encultured long ago in the societies' institutions. Therefore, religion-originating norms persist even under progressing secularization (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Furthermore, even if people define themselves as non-religious, the majority in most countries are still affiliated to a particular religion, which becomes a group identity marker. In our framework, we are mostly interested in religion as a source of identity, rather than the particular doctrines the denomination stands for.

We root our theoretical framework in SIT, which “is essentially a theory of group differentiation: how group members can make their ingroup(s) distinctive from and, wherever possible, better than outgroups.” (Brown, 2000, p. 757). By drawing a line between “us” and “them” and attaching a positive evaluation of the ingroup, individuals find an additional source of identity and self-esteem. Individuals belong to various overlapping and sometimes even conflicting “moral circles” (Hofstede et al., 2010), among which civilization is the broadest circle of cultural identity, according to Huntington. Although some cultural elements might be universal for all humanity (Brown, 1991), a global identity is unlikely to exert strong motivational impulses because a positive social identity is derived from a comparison with a distinct and relevant outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). In that sense, a positive affect of belonging to the Western cultural community is supposedly possible only as long as its values of, for example, freedom, equality, human rights and democracy are not universal but exclusively shared within the ingroup and in opposition to a meaningful other group. Therefore, the expansion of the West would be confined within a reasonable boundary—expectedly not a long stretch from that of the Western Christianity—and further enlargement may lead to a

decrease in internal cohesion. As Rosenmann et al. (2016) argue, even though Western culture is “globalized” in a sense that it is relevant for all humanity, it is also exclusive as a social identity as it poses a threat to cultures whose worldviews are conflicting with those of the West.

According to SIT, when a group’s social identity is not positively evaluated, as we can assume was the case of all societies that, in early 1990s, found themselves on the losing side of the Cold War, there are two alternatives: (1) leave their current group and join another one that is more positively evaluated or (2) redefine their existing group in a more positively distinct manner (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Therefore, according to our theoretical framework, for the Central and Eastern European countries, which historically belonged to the West, leaving the communist bloc was a long awaited aspiration and rejoining the Western European community through membership in the EU and NATO was a natural rectification of a historical injustice.

For the rest of the European countries, the geopolitical choices were less apparent. While some attempted to integrate with the West, others had to opt for redefining their distinctiveness on a new ground that can be a satisfactory source of identity and a sense of self-worth. Struggling to draw a positive distinctiveness in terms of superior economic performance and quality of life, we argue that the countries excluded from the Western European integration project shifted their focus of comparison by attaching a positive evaluation to the cultural characteristics that distinguishes them from the West. In this form of “particularistic opposition”, non-Western societies proclaim a cultural superiority over the West and reinforce their “authentic” way of life (Headley, 2015; Rosenmann et al., 2016).

We follow Rosenmann et al. (2016) in claiming that “collective identities therefore are more than simply a basis for self-definition and worth but also psychological vehicles for social change or the resistance to change” (p. 204). By social change we particularly focus on the cultural transformation that has previously been associated with modernization, that is, the rise of emancipative values (e.g., Welzel, 2013). As these values progressed by far the most in Western countries, they turned increasingly into a signature marker of Western cultural identity. Linking this observation to the theoretical premises of Huntington and SIT, the central proposition follows suit: *In countries with a non-Western religious tradition (i.e., Orthodox or Islamic), ruling elites increasingly accentuated their cultures’ non-Western identity. Pushing back emancipative values, which are perceived as typically Western, was both a means and a consequence of this non-Western identity accentuation. Western elites, by contrast, emphasize emancipative values even more strongly to ascertain their own cultural identity. As a consequence, the newly emerging geopolitical confrontation between West and East in Europe became underpinned by a growing cultural polarization over emancipative values and a deepening divide in supranational identities.*

To build on this general proposition, in the following sections we proceed with hypothesizing the process through which the geopolitical orientation of European countries leads to opposite directions of cultural change. We analyze a particular set of values, namely authoritarian versus emancipative values (in short emancipative values) (Welzel, 2013), which conceptually overlap with those promoted by the EU. The emancipative value index measures both freedom of choice and equality of opportunities, whose explicit articulation originate in the Enlightenment philosophy of Western Europe. Emancipative values are closely related to

individualism, which Huntington depicts as a distinct feature of the West (Huntington, 1996, pp. 71–72). Huntington also underlines the unique historical experience of the Enlightenment that sets the West apart from any other cultural regions in the world (Huntington, 1993, p. 30). For these reasons, we link Western identity with an expected increase in emphasis on emancipative values, while we will hypothesize that non-Western identity leads to their decrease.

### *Western Identity and Rising Emancipative Values*

European Protestant and Catholic countries<sup>2</sup> constitute the West; several of them formed the EU, and for the rest, the door to membership is widely open. Norway, Switzerland, and Iceland, for example, were not restricted by the conditionality principle or older members' disapproval, as were many candidates. Their populations rejected formal membership in national referendums, without this signaling rejection of belonging to the West. Even though not formal members, these countries are parts of the visa-free Schengen Area, the European Single Market, and many EU initiatives.

The former communist societies that were predominantly Protestant or Catholic identified with the West after the collapse of the communist regimes. These societies' identification with the West presumably reaches much farther back in time, which would explain the many indications that large majorities in these societies experienced Soviet-type communism as a foreign imposition (Schwartz & Bardi, 1997). These countries applied for admission to the EU and within a decade were all accepted.

Evidently, Orthodox societies were considerably more split in their identity. Some, like Bulgaria and Romania, relatively quickly declared their Western orientation. Their integration in the EU was more contested and slower, but they were also accepted as full members three years after the first eastward expansion, although not yet in the Schengen and the Euro areas, despite their aspirations. Cyprus and Greece were other two predominantly Orthodox countries that became part of the EU, supporting Huntington's speculation that nations may be able to shift their civilizational belongingness under certain conditions.

The EU avows to be based on and to pursue shared values. Indeed, one of the EU's declared primary goals is to promote certain values both internally and externally (Akaliyski, 2019; Toggenburg & Grimheden, 2016; Oshri et al., 2016). This relates to the image of the EU as a "value entrepreneur" (Gerhards, 2008, 2010) and a normative power (Manners, 2002). Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (2008, p.17) explicitly states the values the EU is founded on: "respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, respect for human rights, pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men." Ostensibly, the EU has attempted to build a civilizational identity around these values, which are upheld as universal and as a "source for good" (Panke, 2015).

Because of the prominent role the EU plays in promoting its freedom and equality related values, we would argue that countries' orientation toward the West and their institutional integration in the EU are the crucial factors determining the societies' direction of change in

emancipative values. The EU's legal and political framework, together with the possibilities for social interactions for both elites and ordinary citizens, enables the diffusion of emancipative values to the whole population (Akaliyski, 2019; Noutcheva, 2016). Identification with the EU increases people's receptiveness to the cultural script promoted by EU institutions (Vasilev, 2016; Zapryanova & Surzhko-Harned, 2016).

Furthermore, the EU stands for political freedom, freedom of speech and independence of the media, which facilitate the expected rise of emancipative values under the conditions of economic prosperity. The EU has also been economically successful and new member states benefited from its pre-accession assistance and redistribution funds. Protected rights, civic entitlements, rule of law, social security and high living standards strengthen the sense of security and opportunity from which emancipative values grow (Welzel, 2013). Based on these arguments, we frame our first hypothesis as follows:

*Hypothesis 1: The populations of European countries historically belonging to Western Christianity and those aligned with the West increased their support for emancipative values since the end of the Cold War.*

### *Cultural Distinctiveness and Decreasing Emancipative Values*

Could non-EU members avoid the supposed emancipatory consequences of modernization and shift away from emancipative values even in the presence of economic stability and growth? In both Russia and Turkey, the economic output per capita between 1990 and 2011 increased more than four times, but we still hypothesize that these countries weakened their emphasis on emancipative values over time. Huntington argues that "rejectionism" is one possible reaction to the Western expansionism in non-Western societies. This also aligns with one of SIT's expected reactions to unsatisfactory social identity, mentioned earlier. Rosenmann et al. (2016) describe "particularistic opposition" as a reaction to the threat of a globalizing Western culture, whereby heritage cultures seek alternative dimensions for comparison with outgroups, on which they rank themselves superior. An antagonistic relationship with the West may lead to the accentuation of a distinct identity, in opposition to the West. Identity then serves as a cultural filter to the diffusion of EU values and norms (Manners, 2002). Without a shared identity between norm promoters and receivers, the transformative power of the EU is limited or faces resistance (Vasilev, 2016). The promotion of European values in neighboring regions is perceived as pursuing selfinterest and leads to a critical evaluation of the "normative power [of] Europe as hegemony" (Diez, 2013) or as a case of cultural imperialism, which compromises its relationships with its Eastern neighbors, particularly Russia (Panke, 2015).

In contrast to Catholic and Protestant countries, most Orthodox countries have been significantly more torn in their identity and frequently changed their geopolitical allegiance between the EU and Eurasian alternatives. Some of these countries and Russia itself, initially partnered with the West but after a process of "disillusionment" and several breakdowns in mutual trust turned more decidedly anti-Western at both the elite and population levels (Sokolov et al., 2018). Moreover, Russia's geostrategic efforts revolve around building a

regional bloc in the post-Soviet space to rival the EU and offer an alternative for Eastern European and Central Asian countries (Orenstein, 2015). Though this may be an embodiment of Russia's nationalistic agenda to restore its previous global power status, this project is consequential for other countries and finds strong support in most post-Soviet republics when juxtaposed to EU membership, including pre-Maidan Ukraine (Eurasian Monitor, 2008). As Ukraine's case exemplifies, the two integrationist projects are mutually exclusive and compete for the countries' geopolitical allegiance.

In line with the exclusionary aspect of Western social identity (Rosenmann, 2016), Huntington (1996) predicts that Muslim societies would not be allowed membership in the EU. Turkey applied for membership several decades ago, but efforts thus far seem futile. Since Kemal's revolution in the early 1920s, the Turkish political elite has been decisively pro-Western, and most Turkish people favor EU membership. Thus, two of Huntington's conditions for civilizational shift are present; however, the acceptance by the West is doubtful. As the Turkish President Erdoğan famously remarked, "Europe, you don't want us because the majority of our population are Muslim . . . We knew it but we tried to show our sincerity." (Tattersall & Taylor, 2016). Survey research, indeed, shows overwhelming distrust against Turkey among EU societies, and most Europeans believe Turkey is too different culturally to be accepted into the EU (Gerhards & Hans, 2011). Facing opposition from EU members, Turkey has been losing momentum for negotiations and drifting in an increasingly authoritarian direction and repositioned itself from the West to the Muslim world (Rosenmann et al., 2016), which further diminishes its chance of EU membership.

Security threats and fears of Western expansionism eastward via NATO and EU membership, nongovernmental organizations, media, and other means have triggered a counter reaction in countries like Russia, to protect the homeland from foreign influence and interference (Gaufman, 2017). The promotion of European values is perceived as cultural imperialism—a twofold threat to Russia's existential security: (1) it pulls Eastern European countries into the West's orbit of influence and away from Russia; (2) it is seen as corrupting Russian and other Orthodox societies' "spiritual bonds." Sexual liberalization (e.g., the acceptance of homosexuality) is specifically perceived as alien to Russia's "cultural code" and a threat to the nation's reproductive capacity (Gaufman, 2017), thus facing stark resistance by the government and public alike.

Furthermore, emancipative values may be in decline in non-Western societies due to intentional efforts of authoritarian leaders concerned about consolidating their political power. This process is well-described by Gerber and Zavisca (2016, p. 79):

The Russian government has stepped up efforts to promote a narrative regarding the faults of the United States and the West; the dangers of institutions associated with democracy, such as protests and NGOs; and the superiority of Russian values and institutions. This narrative comes from official statements, diffuses via government-orchestrated Russian mass media as well as innovations such as internet "troll farms," and is directed at both domestic and international audiences. Domestically, the arguments seek to legitimize the Putin regime, garner support for its policies, and demonize its critics. Internationally, they are part of a larger effort to project Russian "soft power," sow doubts and uncertainty within the NATO alliance . . . and solidify the



allegiances of Russia's allies in former Soviet republics whom Russia considers part of its natural sphere of influence.

Russian media ventures aim to control public opinion domestically and within a claimed sphere of influence in order to erode the West's cultural attractiveness, to strengthen the legitimacy of Putin's regime, and to revive the Kremlin's geopolitical hegemony.

The Eurasian integration project initiated in 1994 has been pushed by Russia (Krickovic, 2014). As of 2019, the newly created EEU includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia, with other former Soviet republics treated as potential candidates. Though still an "actor in the making" (Moldashev & Hassan, 2017), the key geostrategic goal of Russia is to advance it as "one of the poles in a multipolar world" (Putin, 2011), which emphasizes its own unique Eurasian values (Lo, 2015). Russia, the dominating member of the EEU, aspires to normative leadership and proclaims itself a defender of traditional values, especially in relation to family, religion, and sexuality (Edenborg, 2017; Gaufman, 2017; Orenstein, 2015). These values have become a marker of civilizational identity for an alliance of countries engaged in a joint geopolitical positioning in more or less open opposition to the EU and the West (Orenstein, 2015). As stated by Edenborg (2018, p. 70):

Russia's recent (re)turn to "traditional values" is a boundary-making move, delineating Russia from the West and seeking to restore Russia's place in world politics by positioning the country as a leader in a transnational conservative alliance. This effort must be seen against the background of the ways in which sexual politics have emerged as a symbolic battlefield in an imagined clash of civilizations and competing conceptions of modernity.

Russia's goal of creating an authoritarian alliance (Orenstein, 2015) implies also providing (dis)informational assistance to fellow autocratic regimes (Gerber & Zavisca, 2016). By controlling education and mass media, authoritarian governments possess the two most powerful tools to manipulate public opinion. An obedient society that respects authority, demands strong leaders, and rejects equality and individual freedoms (as low emancipative and high authoritarian values imply) is presumably preferred by autocrats as their regimes would be less likely threatened by insurgence. Thus, their investment in media manipulations to promote authoritarian values would potentially pay off in terms of power consolidation. Following these arguments, we formulate our second hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2: Orthodox and Muslim countries that remain outside of the Western European integration process, especially EEU members, either slew down or decreased their emphasis on emancipative values since the end of the Cold War.*

## **Data and Methods**

### *Dependent Variable*

Our focus of interest is emancipative values. They are depicted in human empowerment theory—a humanistic re-formulation of modernization theory—as a mobilizing force triggered

by economic prosperity, existential security, cognitive mobilization and multiplying life options, which precondition democratic institutions and effective governance (Welzel, 2013).

Using other operationalizations of cultural values is certainly possible; however, our choice was dictated by several factors. First, we want to use a well-established measure of values and, therefore, be able to relate to a broad literature with a focus on emancipative values. Second, we aim to capture the general concept of European values promoted by the EU, which have become increasingly contested in the geopolitical arena. Arguably, among all established measures of value orientations, emancipative values come closest to the EU's officially promoted values. Lastly, emancipative values are related to the values of individualism and are rooted in Enlightenment philosophy, which Huntington underlines as defining the West. In a nutshell, among various conceptualizations of values, emancipative values associate most clearly with a Western cultural identity. For this reason, precisely these values provide the most suitable test case for our claim of a growing "identitarian" divide between East and West: if anywhere, this divide should be visible in a growing divergence on emancipative values.

The index of emancipative values consists of four components (sub-indices): *autonomy* refers to independence, imagination and non-obedience as important qualities for children; *equality* refers to equal opportunities between genders in education, jobs and politics; *choice* refers to sexual liberalization, including acceptance of homosexuality, abortion, and divorce; and *voice* refers to valuing freedom of speech and a popular vote over collective decisions. Each of the four components were originally measured by three items, however, due to too many missing data, we computed the equality and voice components using only one item (see Appendix for a description of the items used). Nevertheless, each of the four components were weighted equally in the total index of emancipative values.

Welzel (2013) demonstrated that the within-societal distribution of these values is in all countries bell-shaped and single-peaked, for which reason the sample mean is a valid representative of a country's central tendency in emancipative values. Also, the between-country differences in emancipative values greatly outsize the within-country differences reflecting cleavages such as age, gender, education, rural/urban residency, occupation, and income. This confirms that national-level cultural values are meaningful constructs that indicate a country's cultural gravity point on matters of emancipation.

Minkov & Hofstede (2012, 2014a, 2014b) defend the concept of national culture by demonstrating that nationality generates stronger commonalities in values than other cultural markers, including religion, ethnicity and subnational regions. Even authors such as Fischer & Schwartz (2011), who take the opposite position in claiming that value diversity is larger within than between countries,<sup>3</sup> still support the concept of national culture. Indeed, Fischer & Schwartz (2011) and Schwartz (2014) describe national culture as something external to individuals that has a life of its own in exposing all residents of a country to the same normative pressures in the aggregate. National culture is, thus, regarded as "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, p. 1140). Moreover, Fischer & Schwartz (2011, p. 1140) argue that even small differences in nationally

aggregated values are indicative of corresponding between-country differences in institutions and policies, which “may generate substantial intergroup and international conflict.”

Our unit of analysis are countries. Therefore, existing individual-level differences in emancipative values are entirely beyond the focus of our study. Accordingly, our measurement of emancipative values operates solely at the country level, using the sample means in these values as the indication of a national culture’s gravity center. The country-level scores are validated by their powerful correlations with dozens of other indicators of fundamental societal differences, including religious traditions, socioeconomic development, sociodemographic modernity, levels and the effectiveness of democracy, civil society strength and government quality (Welzel, 2013, p. 83). Even though Aleman & Woods (2016) and Sokolov (2018) claim that emancipative values have deficient measurement quality, their deficiency analysis operates solely at the *individual* level *within* countries. Thus, Welzel & Inglehart (2016) and Welzel et al. (2019) point out that this deficiency study operates at the wrong level of analysis and is therefore inconclusive. In support of this point, Welzel et al. (2019) demonstrate empirically that emancipative values’ strong cross-country linkages to other indicators of national difference are insensitive to individual level measurement features. We conclude that country-level scores of emancipative values are a cultural marker of substantive societal differences.

We obtained data on this index from a combined European Values Study (EVS, 2011) and World Values Survey (WVS) (Inglehart et al., 2014) data set, which covers a time span from 1989 until 2014. This integrated data set consists of nationally representative samples from 46 European and former-Soviet countries measured at least twice in the analyzed period. To ease numerical intuition, we transformed the emancipative values index into a percentage scale with a theoretical minimum of 0 (strongest authoritarian values) to a maximum of 100 (strongest emancipative values). When we analyzed the change in emancipative values, we computed the difference in the country score between the first year it was surveyed after 1989 and the latest year, subtracting the earliest from the latest value score. Appendix-Table A1 documents the specific years for each country. As change periods vary in temporal length between countries, we standardize the measure by calculating the yearly change. The temporal length of the change period by country correlates positively but weakly with the amount of change in emancipative values; since controlling for this effect does not alter the results of the regressions, while consuming degrees of freedom, we report results without the temporal length of the change period as an additional control.

### *Independent Variables*

By referring to *religion*, we mean the country’s historically predominant religious denomination. We follow a convention in distinguishing Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim countries as in previous studies (e.g., Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Welzel, 2013). Although Huntington makes no distinction between Protestant and Catholic countries as concerns their belongingness to Western civilization, we put his assumption to the test by analyzing the two religious traditions separately.

For *EU membership*, we use information provided by the official website of the EU ([www.europa.eu](http://www.europa.eu)) as of 2019. In order to capture the distinction between different levels of integration with the West, we create the following categories: (1) Old EU or Schengen Area members, (2) New member states—joined after 1995, (3) official EU candidates, and (4) countries that have not applied or have not been granted candidacy status. We collapse the two groups of countries in the first category because all Schengen Area non-EU members decided not to be an official part of the community in national referendums, instead of being rejected as members by the EU institutions or member states. Additionally, we also use information on *EEU membership* from its official website ([www.eaeunion.org](http://www.eaeunion.org)).

To control for the effect of *socio-economic modernization*, we chose the Human Development Index (HDI) as it is more encompassing than other measures of development. It includes three subcomponents—education, health, and prosperity, measured by average years of schooling, life expectancy, and the Gross Domestic Product per capita, respectively. We obtain the data from the Quality of Government Institute (Teorell et al., 2018). We calculate the average score for each country for the period between 1992 and 2011 which corresponds with the approximate time coverage for most countries (we did not use data before 1992 because they were missing for many countries).

Additionally, we control for the level of emancipative values at the first survey. Thus, we control for all other differences between countries that have determined the level of emancipative values at the beginning of the period. Doing so also controls for any self-reinforcing effect of emancipative values. None of the countries was close to the hypothetical maximum of 100 at the beginning of the period and therefore, we regard the possibility of any “ceiling effect,” where countries run out of range for increase from an initial high level, as invalid. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics on emancipative values and the HDI. Appendix-Table A1 documents data on all aforementioned variables for each country and time point.

A reliable measure of shared *Western identity* that covers all countries in the dataset is hard to find. Therefore, we rely on different measures that allow making inferences for the whole sample. First, we retrieve data on the level of *trust* that the populations of the EU founder states expressed toward other EU members and candidates in the European Election Study of 2004 (Schmitt et al., 2009). Unfortunately, this variable only includes 28 countries which were either members or official candidates at the time. The second measure is the *foreign political orientation* of post-Soviet countries, which we obtain from the Eurasian Monitor (2008). In this survey respondents were asked to choose between mutually exclusive choices for integration: EU, EEU, CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), a revival of the USSR, or remaining independent. In addition, we also use data from referenda for support of EU membership in newly accessed member states from the European Council on Foreign Relations (Pardijs, 2017).

## *Methods*

To test our hypotheses about divergent trends of change in emancipative values between different groups of countries, we treat our dependent variable as continuous. Ideally, we would have liked to compare the relative explanatory power of various factors while controlling for everything else. However, a conventional multiple regression or a more sophisticated structural equation model would require a much larger sample size than the one we have, even though we use data from almost all European countries. An additional issue is the high correlation between potential explanatory variables, which produces biased estimates due to multicollinearity. To resolve these two issues, we select the minimum number of explanatory variables and run regressions without and then with a few most important control variables. We also use plots to visualize the clustering of the countries regarding their emphasis and patterns of change in emancipative values.

## **Findings**

Figure 1 plots the countries' average emancipative values at around the end of the Cold War on the x-axis and at the latest observation (around 2010) on the y-axis. Countries above the isoline increased their emancipative values, while those below decreased them between the earliest and the latest observation. Evidently, countries with different religious backgrounds differ in both the starting position on emancipative values and their change over time. On average, the Protestant countries have already been at the highest level of emancipative values at the earliest observation. Nevertheless, all of them, except Finland, subsequently increased to even higher levels at the latest observation. Catholic—both Western European and former communist—countries started from a lower position but changed in the same direction.

In contrast, Orthodox countries not only started out, on average, at a low level of emancipative values but subsequently mostly remained at that level as indicated by their close position to the isoline. Muslim countries, for their part, started out at the lowest level of emancipative values and subsequently dropped down even lower, except for Albania. This evidence suggests that religious legacies place societies on divergent path-dependent trajectories, as suggested by our theoretical framework.

The ideological rivalry during the Cold War supposedly divided Europe into two opposing value blocs, given the fundamental opposition of the capitalist/democratic and communist/autocratic organization of society. Russia was already less emancipatory at the first measurement than core Western countries such as Germany, Great Britain and France. However, many Western societies emphasized emancipative values just as little as some former communist societies. At the end of the Cold War, Russia and Belgium—symbolically homes of the capitals of the Eastern and Western Blocs—apparently embraced emancipative values in an equally weak fashion. Belarusian society was more liberal in its values than the French or Italian populations at that time, and Latvians and Slovenians even more so than the British. Prospective EU members seem no closer culturally to the core EU than were non-candidates; Malta, for example, was by far the least emancipatory society in Europe, while Poland was less

in line with European values than Turkey and Kyrgyzstan. Thus, we conclude that cultural compatibility was not a requirement for EU membership but rather its consequence, as argued previously by Akaliyski (2019). This evidence supports our claim that the geopolitical contestation in Europe after the Cold War was associated with a value divergence between countries with opposing supranational identities.

If we consider the geopolitical competition between the EU and EEU in a similar vein as the Cold War rivalry, the most recent data depict a culturally much more divided continent. The EU and EEU countries are evidently at opposing ends on the emancipative values scale as of the latest survey. The reason is that all EEU countries have decreased their emphasis on emancipative values while all EU countries, except Finland and Greece, have increased it. The noticeable value gap between the two regional blocs raises the question of whether a new, cultural Iron Curtain divides the European continent today.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics.

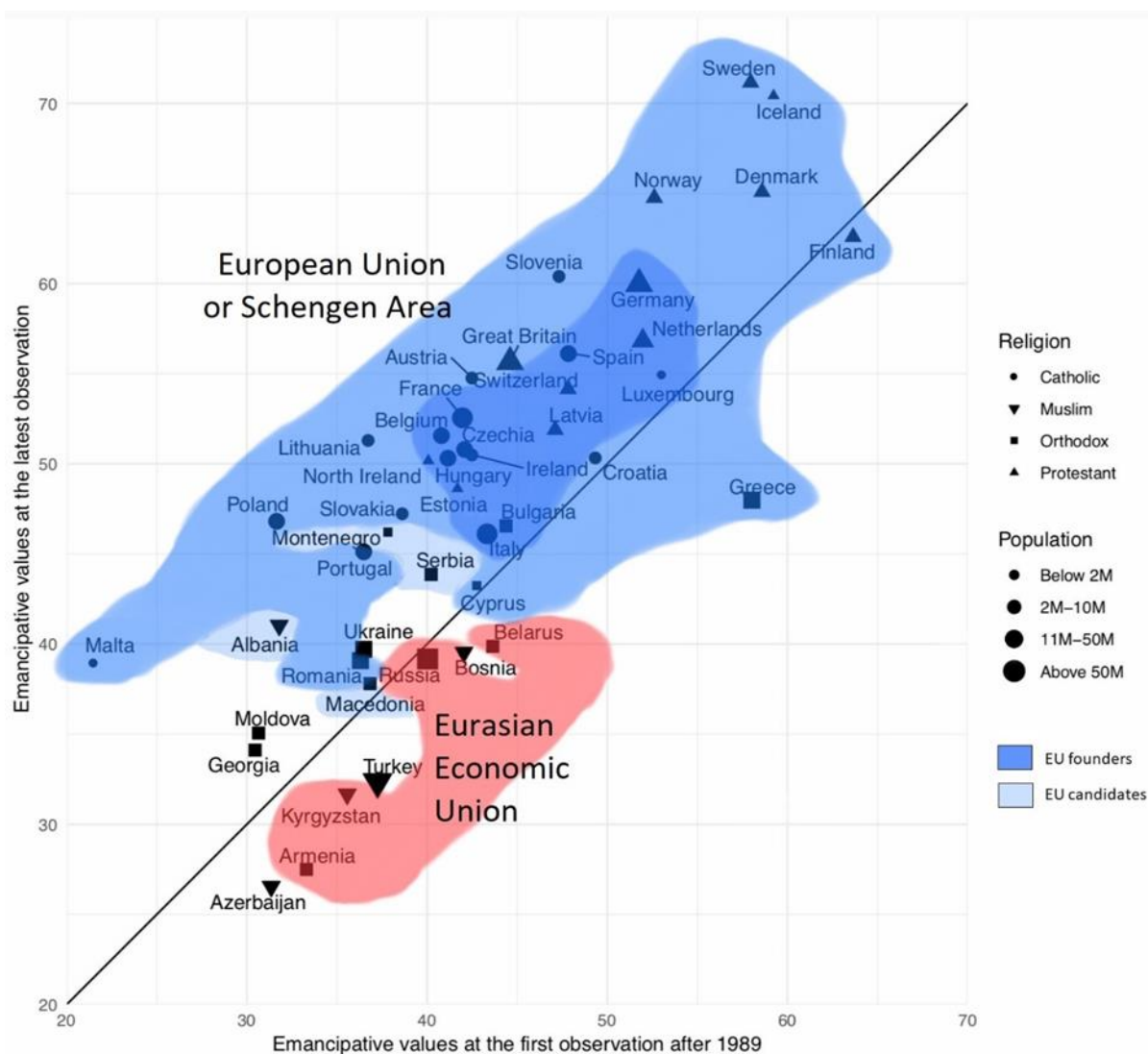
<i>Variable</i>	<i>Obs.</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
Yearly change in Emancipative values	46	.28	.39	-1.00	.95
Emancipative values at first survey	46	42.74	8.77	21.67	63.74
Emancipative values at last survey	46	48.12	10.48	26.54	71.14
HDI	43	.78	.078	.60	.91

*Data source:* WVS and EVS 1990 – 2014.

We continue with formal tests of the differences between groups of countries using linear regressions and controlling for socio-economic modernization. To begin with religion, the first model in Table 2 demonstrates significant differences between Protestant countries, as the reference category, and Orthodox and Muslim countries. Protestant countries increased their emancipative values with a rate of .40 per year (the intercept), which accumulates to an 8-points rise over a 20-years period. Catholic countries followed the same pathway of change with even slightly faster speed (although the difference is not statistically significant). Given the higher starting point of Protestant countries, this essentially means that the countries historically belonging to Western Christianity are converging in their strong emphasis on emancipative values.

The regression coefficient for Orthodox countries is negative and roughly the size of the intercept, which means that these countries have remained at about the same level of emancipative values as at the beginning of the period. The coefficient for Muslim countries is .12 points below the intercept, meaning that these countries have decreased their support for emancipative values over time.

The second model indicates that new member states and candidates have all increased emancipative values with a similar magnitude to that of the old member states and Schengen members (.35 points per year). Non-candidates, however, have decreased emancipative values by .12 points (the difference between the intercept and the regression coefficient).

**Figure 1.** Plot of emancipative values at the first and last measurement after 1989.

Data source: WVS and EVS 1990 – 2014.

In the third model, we combine the effect of religion and EU membership. Seemingly, the two predictors have a suppressing effect on each other, and their explanatory powers are largely independent, as the  $R^2$  increased from .36 and .27 in the separate models to .54 in the combined.

The differences in the rate of change between Western Christianity, on one hand, and Orthodoxy and Islam, on the other, increased almost twofold when we adjust for the countries' EU-status. Taking religious differences into account, however, the differences between countries in different relationship to the EU change substantially. The new member states and candidates would have increased their emancipative values faster than the old EU and Schengen members, if there were no religious differences between them. Similarly, non-candidates would have increased .27 points faster than the Western European countries, although the difference is not statistically significant. The suppressing effect is not surprising given the actual patterns of change per country presented in Figure 1. Greece, for example, is the only Orthodox country among the old member states and it records the steepest decrease in emancipative values. Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Romania, as three Orthodox countries among the

new members, have also experienced much slower increase compared to their Catholic and Protestant counterparts. Candidates, however, have strengthened emancipative values regardless of their religious background, except for Turkey.

Lastly, we test whether EEU members have diverged most sharply from the countries that are oriented toward the West (EU members, candidates, and Schengen Area members). The strong negative coefficient of EEU membership confirms that this is the case. The difference in the yearly rate of change between countries oriented toward the two geopolitical blocs is .66 points. This corresponds to a far from trivial 13.2 points disparity over a 20 years period, which comes on top of the difference that existed beforehand. The EEU countries have decreased their emancipative values by .28 points a year—substantially faster than the other unaffiliated countries, which have retained roughly the same level during the analyzed period (their coefficient is the same magnitude as the intercept but opposite sign).

**Table 2.** Predictors of Yearly Change in Emancipative Values.

Explanatory variable	Religion	EU membership	Religion and EU membership	Eurasian Union
<b>Religion</b>				
Protestant (ref.)				
Catholic	.10 (.12)		.03 (.11)	
Orthodox	-.36 (.13)**		-.67 (.17)***	
Muslim	-.52 (.17)**		-.95 (.24)***	
<b>EU membership</b>				
Old EU or Schengen (ref.)				
New members		.08 (.12)	.19 (.11)+	
EU candidates		-.01 (.17)	.75 (.21)**	
Non-candidates		-.47 (.14)**	.27 (.20)	
<b>EEU membership</b>				
EU, cand. & Schengen (ref.)				
EEU membership				-.66 (.18)**
Other unaffiliated				-.36 (.16)*
Constant	.40 (.09)***	.35 (.08)***	.37 (.08)***	.38 (.05)***
R <sup>2</sup>	.36	.27	.54	.29
Number of observations	46	46	46	46

*Notes.* Unstandardized regression coefficients reported; standard errors in parentheses. Statistical significance: \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; + $p < .1$ . *Data source:* WVS and EVS 1990 – 2014.

The results in Table 2 fully support our two hypotheses. Further, we test whether these differences hold up when we control for alternative factors, namely socio-economic development and a self-reinforcing effect of emancipative values. Our previous conclusions regarding the effect of religion remain largely unchanged by the evidence presented in Table 3. In the first model, the coefficients even increase in magnitude but in the third model, where we add EU membership, they are slightly smaller than in the unadjusted model in Table 1. The effect of membership status almost entirely dissipates when we control for the countries'



development and previous level of emancipative values. The difference between candidates and non-candidates is nevertheless pronounced—.37 in the second and .43 in the third model—although the standard errors are also large.

**Table 3.** Predictors of Yearly Change in Emancipative Values with Controls.

Explanatory variable	Religion	EU membership	Religion and EU membership	Eurasian Union
<b>Religion</b>				
Protestant (ref.)				
Catholic	-.16 (.12)		-.14 (.12)	
Orthodox	-.57 (.16)**		-.61 (.16)**	
Muslim	-.66 (.23)**		-.79 (.24)**	
<b>EU membership</b>				
Old EU or Schengen (ref.)				
New Members		.17 (.15)	.16 (.13)	
EU Candidates		.32 (.28)	.63 (.27)*	
Non-candidates		-.05 (.25)	.20 (.24)	
<b>EEU membership</b>				
EU, cand. & Schengen (ref.)				
EEU membership				-.40 (.18)*
Other unaffiliated				-.24 (.16)
<b>Controls</b>				
Initial emancipative values	-.03 (.01)***	-.028 (.01)***	-.03 (.01)***	-.03 (.01)***
Development	1.85 (1.1)+	4.68 (1.34)**	2.65 (.1.3)*	3.4 (.91)**
Constant	.40 (.81)	-2.22 (1.1)+	-.50 (1.1)	-1.06 (.61)+
R <sup>2</sup>	.62	.57	.70	.56
Number of observations	43	43	43	43

*Notes.* Regression coefficients reported; standard errors in parentheses. *Statistical Notes.* Unstandardized regression coefficients reported; standard errors in parentheses. Statistical significance: \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; + $p < .1$ . *Data source:* WVS and EVS 1990 – 2014.

Finally, the coefficient for EEU membership in the fourth model decreases in size but remains statistically significant. The coefficient of initial emancipative values surprisingly turns negative in the presence of controls, meaning that if we take other factors into consideration, countries with higher emancipative values experienced a slower increase subsequently. The effect of development is also significant in all models (marginally in the first one) suggesting that the level of modernization is also a relevant predictor of the rate of change in emancipative values. Development accounts for some of the effect of the EU and EEU membership, but it acts as a suppressor in the case of religion.

Clearly, the cultural changes in Europe in the last decades followed a civilizational logic in confirmation of our two hypotheses. But do religious legacies indeed represent different supranational identities, or could there be some other factors that explain the relationship between religion and value change? Next, we proceed to demonstrate that religion is indeed

associated with diverging identities both in terms of trust and the foreign policy orientation of countries.

First, in Table 4, we compare the level of trust the populations of the six EU founder states feel toward different groups of countries in order to infer the degree to which these countries accept others as trustworthy members of the Western community—or, with other words, how far the group identity extends. The Protestant countries receive the highest amount of trust—76% of the respondents perceive them as trustworthy (the intercept in the first model). Catholic countries follow with a little less trustworthiness but not statistically different from that of the Protestant countries. This finding confirms Huntington’s thesis that Western Christianity comprises a common civilizational identity. Also in line with his thesis, Orthodox and Muslim countries are perceived as significantly less trustworthy than Protestant and Catholic ones. Orthodox countries are trusted by a minority of 41% of the respondents, while Muslim ones by only 23% (the differences between the regression coefficient and the intercept).

According to the second model, ex-communist societies also receive a penalty in trustworthiness among EU founders: they are trusted 26% less than non-ex-communist ones. Ex-communism and religion complement each other in explanatory power; together they account for the bulk of variation in trustworthiness (81%).

Arguably, the relationship is reciprocal, and trustworthiness increases in the process of European integration, as argued by Klingemann & Weldon (2013). However, data from the Eurobarometer series (1976–1997) and the European Election Study (Schmitt et al., 2009) show that between 1985 and 2004, old member states’ trust in Turkey was consistently low and the trend over time was downward. Meanwhile, the new member states were substantially more trusted since the first survey in 1990 (Klingemann & Weldon, 2013, p. 468). Compared to the prospective membership of Croatia and Switzerland, EU citizens oppose Turkish membership due to a perceived religious threat (Azrout et al., 2013).

**Table 4.** The EU-founding Populations’ Trust in other European Nations 2004.

<i>Explanatory variable</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Ex-communist</i>	<i>Religion. &amp; ex-comm.</i>
Religion			
Protestant (ref.)			
Catholic	-.12 (.07)		-.04 (.04)
Orthodox	-.35** (.09)		-.26** (.05)
Muslim	-.53** (.16)		-.57** (.10)
Ex-communist		-.26** (.06)	-.25** (.03)
Constant	.76	.72	.81
R <sup>2</sup>	.45	.40	.81
Number of observations	28	28	28

*Notes.* Unstandardized regression coefficients reported; standard errors in parentheses. Statistical significance: \*\**p*-value<.01 (two-tailed). *Data source:* European Election Study 2004.

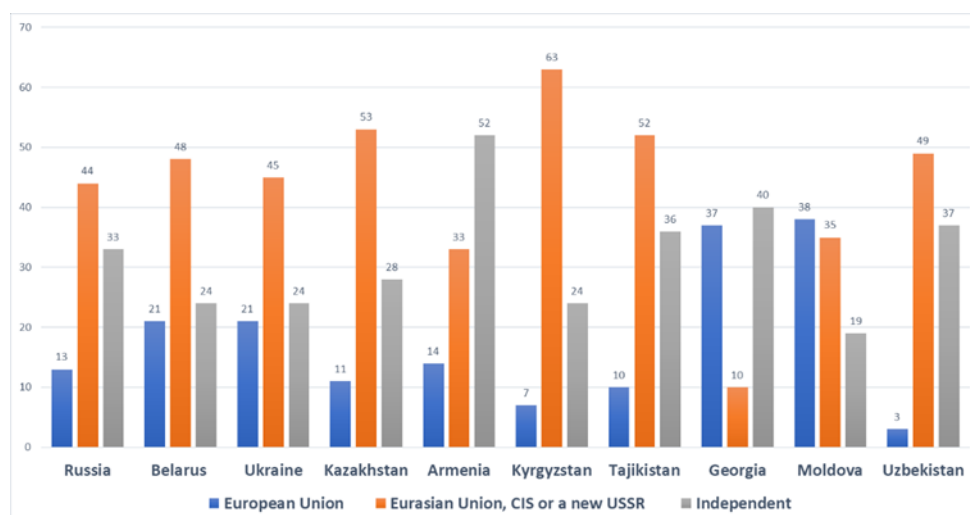
Although we lack data for any other countries outside of the EU, we assume that the level of trust they receive would correspond to their religious traditions, communist past and distance

to Brussels in a geographic and geopolitical sense, which means substantially low for Eastern European nonmembers. For that reason, any conceivable efforts for inclusion in the EU face resistance and few of these countries succeed in even acquiring the candidate status. In contrast, we do not have reasons to assume that Western European, Protestant countries such as Norway, Iceland, and Switzerland, are mistrusted and would be rejected full membership should their governments and populations express a clear desire to join. In contrast to Eastern European countries, for Western European countries EU membership is optional and refraining from being an official member by no means invalidates their sense of belongingness to the same cultural community.

Furthermore, in Figure 2, we demonstrate that even if the EU is willing to expand eastwards, the populations in most countries in the post-Soviet space lack enthusiasm for such a geopolitical orientation. In none of the ten former Soviet countries, the majority prefers their country to be integrated in the EU. Belongingness to the other possible post-Soviet alliances—the EEU, CIS or reviving the USSR—are strongly preferred in eight of the countries, followed (or superseded in Armenia) by a wish to be independent. Only in Georgia and Moldova does a plurality prefer an EU membership over the Eurasian alternatives. This is not surprising for Georgia because, at the time of the survey (2008), the country was involved in a military conflict with Russia, which is the backbone of all three Eurasian formations. Moldova, on its part, is ethnically and linguistically linked to Romania, which is already a member of the EU—even so, the support for EU membership is only 3% higher than that for the three Eurasian geopolitical alternatives and 13% short of being a majority preference.

Unfortunately, data for other Eastern European countries are not available. However, the referenda on joining the EU held in the new member states prior to their accessions indicate a strong support for their geopolitical reorientation. In the three majority Protestant and Catholic former Soviet Union states, for example, the support varied between 66.8% and 67.5% in Estonia and Latvia, which have a significant Russian-speaking minority, and 91% in Lithuania, which does not. The other post-communist new member states also strongly embraced their countries' Western orientation—the rate of approval ranged from 66.7% in Croatia to 93.7% in Slovakia. Therefore, we conclude that the differences between the countries that successfully joined the EU and those that did not, is not only due to their ability to comply with the EU requirements, but also because of the strength of their populations' Western cultural identity.

Considering the requirements for civilizational reorientation outlined by Huntington, none of them is present for most of the countries that remain outside of the EU. Opposition or indecisiveness among Eastern European leaders impedes the chances for EU membership, even if popular support is present (Panke, 2015). But ultimately, we argue that it is the EU that selects and admits candidates, partly based on their perceived trustworthiness. The limited observations presented in this part of the analysis confirm a study by Schimmelfennig & Scholtz (2010, p. 458) who conclude that “the historical legacy of Western civilization makes it easier for the EU to both offer membership and achieve success in Europeanisation.”

**Figure 2.** Foreign political orientation of Former Soviet States, 2008.

Finally, we present a visual illustration of how the cultural map of Europe has transformed in resemblance of Huntington's predictions. As expected, all countries belonging to Western Christianity increased their endorsement of emancipative values. The sole exception is Finland, which recorded a slight decrease, although Finland started off as the most emancipatory country at the beginning of the period and remains in the top group. In contrast, most Orthodox and Muslim countries decreased their support for emancipative values, or they increased it with slower speed. Combined with their lower starting position, the slower speed means that Orthodox and Muslim countries diverged culturally from the Western trend.

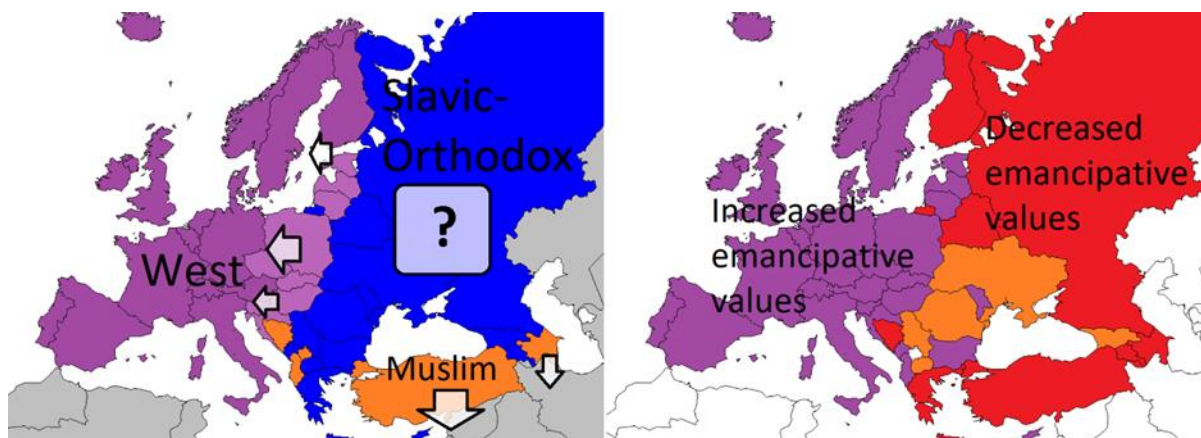
Against determinism, a handful of non-Western countries, however, managed to shorten the cultural distance to Western Europe. These include two new EU member states (i.e., Bulgaria and Cyprus), two candidates (i.e., Montenegro and Albania) as well as Moldova, which we noted as the most Western-oriented among the former Soviet states (aside from the Baltics). In short, the resemblance with the predictions based on Huntington's thesis is striking. However, a civilizational reorientation is possible, both among Orthodox and also majority-Muslim countries such as Albania, which has been granted an official candidate status and has increased its embrace of emancipative values significantly (Figure 3).

## Discussion

The strong association between religion and values is well-documented in numerous cross-cultural studies, but the nature of this relationship has rarely been elaborated. This article evidences that, despite secularization in Europe, religion remains an important variable in explaining cultural values. Evidently, it is associated with different trajectories of development in both cultural and geopolitical terms. We demonstrate that distinct supranational identities associated with European countries' religious traditions continued to shape societal values in past decades. Overall, the analyses depict a polarizing continent: emancipation and (to some extent) unification of Western and Central Europe and divergence among the rest of the continent. These cultural developments support Huntington's prediction that the transformation

of post-Cold War Europe will be guided by religion-based civilizational identities. The quintessence of this article is the argument that culture, at least sized as the support for emancipative values, is malleable and changes to large extent in accordance with the supranational identity of societies.

**Figure 3.** Juxtaposition of Huntington’s Predictions Map (Left) with a Map of Actual Change in Emancipative Values (Right).



*Notes.* Map on the right: purple – increase in emancipative values; red – decrease in emancipative values; orange – increase in emancipative values slower than the average for Europe and initial starting position lower than the European average; white – not surveyed twice or not in the sample.

A pro-Western orientation among the population and elites combined with acceptance in the Western integration structures are the conditions under which emancipative values thrive. The reason is that emancipative values have turned into a key cultural marker of Western identity and became an important source of soft power in geopolitical relationships. For other cultures that define their identity in pronounced juxtaposition or even opposition to the West, moving away from emancipative values thus became a key mechanism to express their distinct identity. A non-Western cultural identity—at the elite and/or popular level—therefore serves as a most powerful shield against the appeal of emancipative values. The positive affirmation in the West and the rejection of these values elsewhere in Europe has led to a cultural polarization of Europe even more salient than that during the Cold War.

The framework proposed in our study complements modernization theory in explaining societal value change. The increasingly enabling living conditions that surface with socioeconomic development indeed associate with an increase in emancipative values, as human empowerment theory predicts. Supposedly, the EU also increased the subjective sense of stability, security, and opportunity, which also fosters emancipation.

However, our study demonstrates that the emancipatory consequences of modernization are conditional: they occur mostly under non-alienating supranational identities, which can allow for the diffusion and growth of emancipative values. Previous studies acknowledge religion as a historical legacy that explains the current differences in cultural values, yet they argue that all societies around the world change their emancipative values as they modernize economically, regardless of their civilizational belonging (e.g., Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Welzel, 2013; Welzel et al., 2003). These studies suppose that cultural zones develop in a

parallel manner, whereby no convergence or divergence is expected unless the living conditions become more similar or different.

In support of Akaliyski (2019), our study evidences the convergence thesis among Catholic and Protestant countries on both sides of the former Iron Curtain. Inglehart & Baker (2000) also note that some former communist states shift in opposite direction to the trend in other countries, but they speculate that this is due to worsening of the living conditions after the collapse of communism. We document this divergence in more detail and argue that it occurred in spite of the economic growth experienced in these, as well as other Muslim societies, in later years. Instead, our study offers a more compelling explanation of this peculiar cultural development by placing a prime emphasis on conflicting supranational identities, which solidify into a geopolitical contestation.

Our results imply that membership in Western international organizations places societies in a powerful gravitational field, although member states are not immune against sliding back into a declining emancipative values spiral. Developments in some new member states, where democratic institutions are still fragile, exemplify how authoritarian populism may attempt to promote conservative values by cracking down on free media, educational institutions, and the independent judiciary system. Despite being Eurosceptic, most populist parties affirm their Western identity and tend to mobilize electoral support by instilling fear of existential threat to Western civilization by culturally alien migrant populations. Northern and Western European populists also operate in a civilizational discourse, whereby Western values such as gender equality, LGBT rights, and freedom of speech are allegedly endangered by a resurgent Islam (Brubaker, 2017). In that sense, the populist and authoritarian parties in the West are a lesser threat to liberal values and there is no evidence that Western societies have experienced a conservative resurgence in terms of emancipative values on a population level.

Our findings are compatible with Norris & Inglehart's (2019) "cultural backlash" theory, according to which the anger of electoral segments who feel left behind by the majority's emancipatory shift drives voters into the arms of populist parties. Indeed, according to our analysis, Hungary and Poland experienced some of the sharpest increases in emancipative values in Europe. This may come at the cost of alienating parts of their populations who struggle to keep up with the pace of change their societies are undergoing. However, in a newer study utilizing the pre-released EVS data up until 2020, we found that the trend towards stronger support for emancipation on a population level has continued throughout the EU (Akaliyski et al., 2020).

From the viewpoint of cultural relativism, all kinds of moral values that a society might enculture are equally legitimate. No culture is morally superior to another; cultures are just different and these differences are not to be normatively judged. Hence, whether a society endorses authoritarian or emancipative values allows for no normative judgment of its prevalent values' moral quality. However, cultural values are, by definition, normatively charged; they are about what is good or bad, moral or immoral, desirable or undesirable in a society—from that society's point of view (Hofstede et al., 2010). According to SIT, they also need to be positively evaluated in order to provide a sense of self-esteem to the group members.

The change toward emancipative values, consequently, is regarded as “moral progress” by those who support it. This evaluation is supposedly the exact opposite—a “moral decay”—from the point of view of societies that deemphasize emancipative values. Gender equality is celebrated in the West, but many people in Eastern Europe—both men and women—reject Western norms of gender equality as unnatural and incompatible with traditional family values and chivalry. Sexual liberalization and LGBT rights may be a triumph of freedom and universal human rights in the West, but they are denigrated in Russia as morally decaying and socially disruptive (Persson, 2015). Instead, traditional, communitarian, sacred, and family values are upheld as morally superior in Russia (Headley, 2015).

From its point of view, Russia does not reject morality or modernity, but it redefines them in accordance with its own traditions, developmental goals, and a desire for cultural distinctiveness and authenticity. Emancipative values may be also incompatible with traditional Muslim culture, but this does not mean that the majority in Muslim societies perceives their culture as ‘backward’ or obstructing their collective wellbeing. Quite the contrary, most Orthodox and Muslim societies reaffirm their cultural values in a positive light as they challenge the moral authority of the West. Survey research even demonstrates that Eastern European countries more often evaluate their culture as superior to others, for example, 69% of respondents in Russia, 89% in Greece, 85% in Georgia and 68% in Bosnia and Herzegovina; compared to an average of 38% in Western Europe (Cooperman et al., 2018).

Evidently, from societal point of view, cultures are not quite devoid of hierarchy. From a scientific point of view, we find the position of cultural relativism problematic when it comes particularly to evaluating emancipative values. We hold that a pretentiously norm-free cultural science is of no value because it denies legitimate and compelling questions, such as which particular set of moral values is more conducive to building a better and fairer society. If the criterion is creating a just, uncorrupt, democratic and sustainable society, the answer is that emancipative values are more suitable to these ends than authoritarian values (Welzel, 2013). The evidence implies that authoritarian and emancipative values are not just different positions on an even moral playing field. Instead, their difference reflects a hierarchy of normative suitability to given ends. The opposite poles of the authoritarian-vs-emancipative value dimension are incompatible: an endorsement of conformity, tradition, obedience, and order implies a weak priority on freedom and equality. Thus, we find it unfortunate for the societies that oppose emancipative values that the basis for civilizational distinction is not a truly neutral cultural characteristic but one that has the potential to be profoundly detrimental for the overall wellbeing of their societies.

Despite our findings, we refrain from asserting that current civilizational boundaries based on religious legacies would provide an eternal source of cultural distinctiveness and confrontation, neither that emancipative values would continue to be the yardstick of this distinction. Just as in the middle of last century Europe was unexpectedly divided on ideological grounds, we may find that the lines of distinction may be redrawn on completely different principles or begin to dissipate in the upcoming decades.

## Acknowledgments

The authors are thankful for valuable feedback and support from Torkild Hovde Lyngstad, Michael Minkov, Michael Harris Bond, Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Ronald Fischer, Rogers Brubaker, Naoko Taniguchi, Eduard Ponarin, Štefan Auer, Nicole Scicluna, two anonymous reviewers, and JCCP's Associate Editor, participants in the PhD seminars at the University of Oslo, Norway, CAGE & IAS Seminar "Culture, Identity and Economic Development", University of Warwick, Coventry, UK, and the 9th LCSR International Workshop "Comparative Social Research" in Moscow, Russia. Participation in LCSR workshop was funded by the Russian Academic Excellence Project "5-100".

## Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online at:

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl/10.1177/0022022120956716>

## Notes

1. Huntington treats values as a permanent objective characteristic, for which he receives considerable criticism. In contrast, we regard values as malleable and subjective characteristic of societies.
2. The categorization of countries is presented in Table A1 in the Appendix.
3. Authors seem to be talking past each other here. Those arguing that cultural variation is larger within than between nations refer to percentages of existing variation: these variance percentages are indeed larger at the individual level within countries than between them. However, 50 and more percent of the individual-level variation is random measurement error (Alwin, 2007). Therefore, the variance in values that is *explained* by inner-national distinctions is smaller than the variance in values explained by national residence.

## References

- Akaliyski, P. (2017). Sources of societal value similarities across Europe: Evidence from dyadic models. *Comparative Sociology*, 16(4), 447–470. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15691330-12341432>
- Akaliyski, P. (2019). United in diversity? The convergence of cultural values among EU member states and candidates. *European Journal of Political Research*, 58(2), 388–411. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12285>
- Akaliyski, P., Welzel, C., & Hien, J. (2020). *A Community of shared values? Dimensions and dynamics of cultural integration in the European Union* [Manuscript submitted for publication]. Graduate School of System Design and Management. Keio University.
- Aleman, J., & Woods, D. (2016). Value orientations from the world values survey: How comparable are they cross-nationally? *Comparative Political Studies*, 49(8), 1039–1067. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414015600458>
- Alwin, D. F. (2007). *Margins of error: A study of reliability in survey measurement*. John Wiley.
- Azrout, R., van Spanje, J., & de Vreese, C. (2013). A threat called Turkey: Perceived religious threat



and support for EU entry of Croatia, Switzerland and Turkey. *Acta Politica*, 48(1), 2–21. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ap.2012.20>

Belot, M., & Ederveen, S. (2012). Cultural barriers in migration between OECD countries. *Journal of Population Economics*, 25(3), 1077–1105. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-011-0356-x>

Beugelsdijk, S., & Welzel, C. (2018). Dimensions and dynamics of national culture: Synthesizing Hofstede with Inglehart. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 49(10), 1469–1505. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022118798505>

Bove, V., & Gokmen, G. (2017). Cultural distance and interstate conflicts. *British Journal of Political Science*, 47(4), 939–949. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123415000551>

Brown, D. (1991). *Human universals*. McGraw Hill.

Brown, R. (2000). Social identity theory: Past achievements, current problems and future challenges. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 30(6), 745–778. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1099-0992\(200011/12\)30:6<745::AID-EJSP24>3.0.CO;2-O](https://doi.org/10.1002/1099-0992(200011/12)30:6<745::AID-EJSP24>3.0.CO;2-O)

Brubaker, R. (2017). Between nationalism and civilizationism: The European populist moment in comparative perspective. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40(8), 1191–1226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1294700>

Cooperman, A., Gardner, S., Sahgal, N., & Schiller, A. (2018). *Eastern and western Europeans differ on importance of religion, views of minorities, and key social issues*. Pew Research Center. Diez, T. (2013). Normative power as hegemony. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 48(2), 194–210. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836713485387>

Edenborg, E. (2017). *Politics of visibility and belonging: From Russia's "homosexual propaganda" laws to the Ukraine war*. Routledge.

Edenborg, E. (2018). Homophobia as geopolitics: 'Traditional values' and the negotiation of Russia's place in the world. In J. Mulholland, N. Montagna, & E. Sanders-McDonagh (Eds.), *Gendering nationalism* (pp. 67–87). Palgrave Macmillan.

Eurasian Monitor. (2008). *Monitoring of social attitudes of the post-Soviet space countries*. <http://eurasiamonitor.org/>

European Union. (2012 [2008]). *Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union*. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDFuri=OJ:C:2008:115:0013:0045:en:PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDFuri=OJ:C:2008:115:0013:0045:en:PDF).

EVS. (2011). *European Values Study longitudinal data file 1981-2008*. GESIS Data Archive. <https://doi.org/10.4232/1.12253>

Fischer, R., & Schwartz, S. (2011). Whence differences in value priorities? Individual, cultural, or artifactual sources. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 42(7), 1127–1144. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022110381429>

Gaufman, E. (2017). *Security threats and public perception: Digital Russia and the Ukraine crisis*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Gerber, T. P., & Zavisca, J. (2016). Does Russian propaganda work? *Washington Quarterly*, 39(2), 79–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2016.1204398>

Gerhards, J. (2007). *Cultural overstretch? Differences between old and new member states of the EU and Turkey*. Routledge.

Gerhards, J. (2008). Free to move? The acceptance of free movement of labour and non discrimination among citizens of Europe. *European Societies*, 10(1), 121–140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616690701536323>

Gerhards, J. (2010). Non-discrimination towards homosexuality: The European Union’s policy and citizens’ attitudes towards homosexuality in 27 European countries. *International Sociology*, 25(1), 5–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580909346704>

Gerhards, J., & Hans, S. (2011). Why not Turkey? Attitudes towards Turkish membership in the EU among citizens in 27 European countries. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 49(4), 741–766. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2010.02155.x>

Guiso, L., Herrera, H., & Morelli, M. (2016). Cultural differences and institutional integration. *Journal of International Economics*, 99, 97–113. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jinteco.2015.11.005>

Guiso, L., Sapienza, P., & Zingales, L. (2009). Cultural biases in economic exchange. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 124(3), 1095–1131. <https://doi.org/10.1162/qjec.2009.124.3.1095>

Habermas, J. (2012). *The crisis of the European Union: A response*. Polity Press.

Headley, J. (2015). Challenging the EU’s claim to moral authority: Russian talk of “double standards.” *Asia Europe Journal*, 13(3), 297–307. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-015-0417-y>

Hien, J. (2019). The religious foundations of the European crisis. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 57(2), 185–204. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12635>

Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.

Huntington, S. P. (1993). The clash of civilizations? *Foreign Affairs*, 72, 22–49.

Huntington, S. P. (1996). *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*. Simon & Schuster.

Inglehart, R. (1997). *Modernization and postmodernization: Cultural, economic and political change in 43 societies*. Princeton University Press.

Inglehart, R., & Baker, W. E. (2000). Modernization, cultural change, and the persistence of traditional values. *American Sociological Review*, 65(1), 19–51. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2657288>

Inglehart, R., Haerpfer, C., Moreno, A., Welzel, C., Kizilova, K., Diez-Medrano, J., Lagos, M., Norris, P., Ponarin, E., & Puranen, B. (2014). *World Values Survey: All Rounds - Country-Pooled Datafile Version*. JD Systems Institute. <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWVL.jsp>

Klingemann, H. D., & Weldon, S. (2013). A crisis of integration? The development of transnational dyadic trust in the European Union, 1954-2004. *European Journal of Political Research*, 52(4), 457–482. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12005>

Krickovic, A. (2014). Imperial nostalgia or prudent geopolitics? Russia’s efforts to reintegrate the post-Soviet space in geopolitical perspective. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 30(6), 503–528. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586x.2014.900975>

Lo, B. (2015). *Russia and the new world disorder*. Chatham House.

- Manners, I. (2002). Normative power Europe: A contradiction in terms? *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40(2), 235–258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00353>
- McMahon, R. (2017). Religion, civilisation, geography: Normative EU studies and eastern enlargement. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 25(3), 307–324. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2017.1351927>
- Minkov, M., & Hofstede, G. (2012). Is national culture a meaningful concept? Cultural values delineate homogeneous national clusters of in-country regions. *Cross-Cultural Research*, 46(2), 133–159. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069397111427262>
- Minkov, M., & Hofstede, G. (2014a). Clustering of 316 European regions on measures of values: Do Europe’s countries have national cultures? *Cross-Cultural Research*, 48(2), 144–176. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069397113510866>
- Minkov, M., & Hofstede, G. (2014b). Nations versus religions: Which has a stronger effect on societal values? *Management International Review*, 54(6), 801–824. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-014-0205-8>
- Moldashev, K., & Hassan, M. A. G. (2017). The Eurasian union: Actor in the making? *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 20(1), 215–237. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jird.2015.6>
- Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2019). *Cultural backlash Trump, Brexit, and the rise of authoritarian populism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Noutcheva, G. (2016). Societal empowerment and Europeanization: Revisiting the EU’s impact on democratization. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 54(3), 691–708. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12322>
- Orenstein, M. A. (2015). Geopolitics of a divided Europe. *East European Politics and Societies*, 29(2), 531–540. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325414559050>
- Oshri, O., Sheaffer, T., & Shenhav, S. R. (2016). A community of values: Democratic identity formation in the European Union. *European Union Politics*, 17(1), 114–137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116515608957>
- Panke, J. (2015). The fallout of the EU’s normative imperialism in the eastern neighborhood. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 62(6), 350–363. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2015.1093773>
- Pardijs, D. (2017). *A potted history of EU referendums*. European Council on Foreign Relations. [https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_a\\_potted\\_history\\_of\\_eu\\_referendums\\_7240](https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_a_potted_history_of_eu_referendums_7240)
- Persson, E. (2015). Banning “homosexual propaganda”: Belonging and visibility in contemporary Russian media. *Sexuality and Culture*, 19(2), 256–274. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-014-9254-1>
- Pop-Eleches, G. (2007). Historical legacies and post-communist regime change. *Journal of Politics*, 69(4), 908–926. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2007.00598.x>
- Putin, V. (2011). Новый интеграционный проект для Евразии — будущее, которое рождается сегодня [New integrational project for Eurasia — future being born today]. *Izvestia*. <https://iz.ru/news/502761?page=2>

- Rosenmann, A. (2016). Alignment with globalized Western culture: Between inclusionary values and an exclusionary social identity. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 46(1), 26–43. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2130>
- Rosenmann, A., Reese, G., & Cameron, J. E. (2016). Social identities in a globalized world: Challenges and opportunities for collective action. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 11(2), 202–221. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691615621272>
- Schimmelfennig, F., & Scholtz, H. (2010). Legacies and leverage: EU political conditionality and democracy promotion in historical perspective. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 62(3), 443–460. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668131003647820>
- Schmitt, H., Bartolini, S., Brug, V., Eijk, C., Franklin, M., Fuchs, D., Toka, G., Marsh, M., & Thomassen, J. (2009). *European Election Study 2004* (2nd edition). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA4566 Data file Version 2.0.0. <https://doi.org/10.4232/1.10086>
- Schwartz, S., & Bardi, A. (1997). Influences of adaptation to communist rule on value priorities in Eastern Europe. *Political Psychology*, 18(2), 385–410. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895x.00062>
- Schwartz, S. H. (2006). A theory of cultural value orientations: Explication and applications. *Comparative Sociology*, 5(2–3), 137–182. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156913306778667357>
- Schwartz, S. H. (2014). Rethinking the concept and measurement of societal culture in light of empirical findings. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 45(1), 5–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022113490830>
- Sokolov, B. (2018). The index of emancipative values: Measurement model misspecifications. *American Political Science Review*, 112(2), 395–408. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055417000624>
- Sokolov, B., Inglehart, R. F., Ponarin, E., Vartanova, I., & Zimmerman, W. (2018). Disillusionment and anti-americanism in Russia: From pro-american to anti-american attitudes, 1993–2009. *International Studies Quarterly*, 62(3), 534–547. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqy013>
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (2004). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In J. T. Jost & J. Sidanius (Eds.), *Political psychology: Key readings* (pp. 276–293). Psychology Press. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203505984-16>
- Tattersall, N., & Taylor, P. (2016). *In Turkey's tussle with the EU, Erdogan thinks he holds the cards*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-turkey/in-turkeys-tussle-with-the-eu-erdogan-thinks-heholds-the-cards-idUSKCN0Z82DA>
- Teorell, J., Dahlberg, S., Holmberg, S., Rothstein, B., Pachon, N. A., & Svensson, R. (2018). *The quality of government standard dataset, version Jan18*. The Quality of Government Institute. <http://www.qog.pol.gu.se>
- Toggenburg, G. N., & Grimheden, J. (2016). Upholding shared values in the EU: What role for the EU agency for fundamental rights? *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 54(5), 1093–1104. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12404>
- Vasilev, G. (2016). LGBT recognition in EU accession states: How identification with Europe enhances the transformative power of discourse. *Review of International Studies*, 42(4), 748–772. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0260210515000522>

Welzel, C. (2013). *Freedom rising: Human empowerment and the quest for emancipation*. Cambridge University Press.

Welzel, C., Brunkert, L., Inglehart, R. F., & Kruse, S. (2019). Measurement equivalence? A tale of false obsessions and a cure. *World Values Research*, 11(3), 54–84.

Welzel, C., & Inglehart, R. F. (2016). Misconceptions of measurement equivalence. *Comparative Political Studies*, 49(8), 1068–1094. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414016628275>

Welzel, C., Inglehart, R., & Klingemann, H.-D. (2003). The theory of human development: A cross-cultural analysis. *European Journal of Political Research*, 42(3), 341–379. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.00086>

Zapryanova, G. M., & Surzhko-Harned, L. (2016). The effect of supranational identity on cultural values in Europe. *European Political Science Review*, 8(4), 547–566. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773915000193>