

Lockdown scepticism and Brexit support

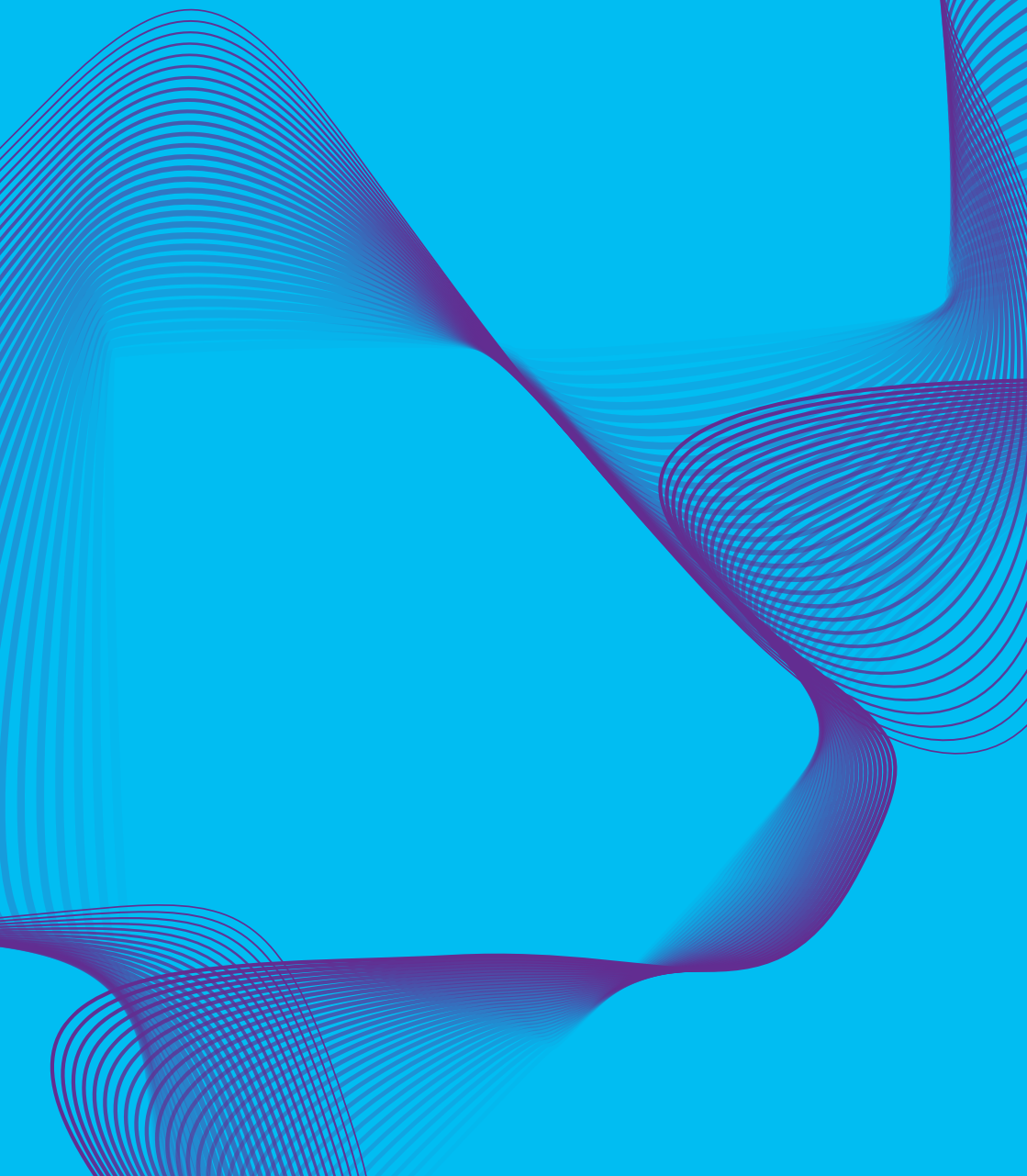
*Products of the same
values divide?*

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Introduction



.. there is a clear link between prominent voices opposing lockdown in the UK and support for Brexit”

The last few months saw a flurry of interest in whether “lockdown scepticism” has a link to broader political identities, and what that might mean for our political future in the UK. It’s understandable why. Most obviously, Reform UK, a new political party launched by Nigel Farage, has this scepticism about coronavirus restrictions as its initial focus. More generally, there is a clear link between prominent voices opposing lockdown in the UK and support for Brexit. As one article put it: “... while by no means all Brexiters are lockdown sceptics, almost all lockdown sceptics are Brexiters.”¹ Others point to the overlap between those supporting Brexit and opposing lockdown among the more libertarian wing of the Conservative party.² And looking beyond the UK, there is some concern that we could follow the US in opening a Covid-19 front in a “culture war”, as the issue increasingly divided Republicans and Democrats in 2020.³

This is important. If our attitudes to compliance with lockdown restrictions become intertwined with political identities, they become harder to shift among segments of the population. But it would also be an important signal of a deeper polarisation, where issues are layered on top of each other to form more distinct identities, in a process known as “conflict extension”.⁴ We can predict an individual’s attitudes and behaviours on more and more issues, just by knowing their political identity.

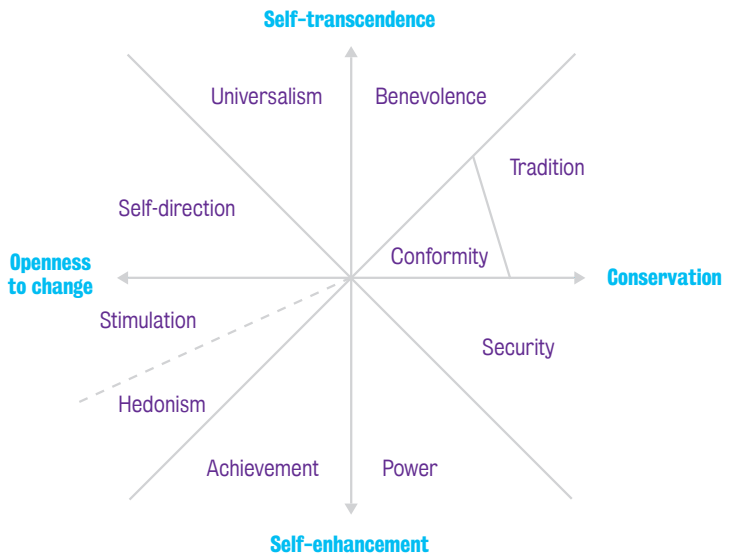
It’s therefore vital to understand how and why individuals vary in their attitudes towards Covid-19 restrictions, what they see as its consequences and their backing for responses, such as vaccines. Central to this is understanding how it is driven by underlying values, and whether these are the same values divides that are driving other key political identities, such as on Brexit.

This analysis attempts to answer these key questions, by using an established psychological model – Schwartz’s theory of basic human values – to examine overlaps with Brexit identities. Overall, this shows that although attitudes to Covid policy are strongly influenced by values, they are *not* the same values that have dictated attitudes to immigration, Brexit and voting for populist parties.

The Schwartz theory of basic human values

Although variation in attitudes towards a given issue can be explained in different ways, we turn to “values”, not in political terms, but in the personal, psychological sense of an individual’s broad motivational goals in life. While psychologists have offered numerous ways to measure such values, we use the 10 basic human values established by Shalom Schwartz, which he found vary in their intensity between individuals but relatively little across cultures or the life-course, suggesting that they are likely to be stable within individuals and quite unmoved by external factors. Researchers have used Schwartz’s 10 values (defined in annex) to explain a large range of attitudes and behaviours, including political ones.

FIGURE 1: Schwartz’s theoretical model of relations among values and their higher-order dimensions



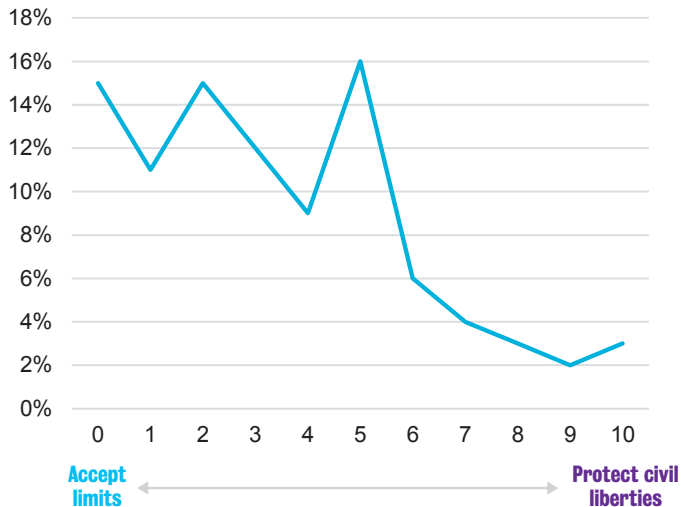
Importantly, it should be noted that none of the 10 theoretical values – arranged in Figure 1 – are morally “right” or “wrong”; they simply evolved to help humans prioritise behaviours, and all humans hold each of the 10 values, just to differing extents.

And this variation across groups does seem to be important. Indeed, a recent study has shown how four of these values – universalism and the three conservation values (tradition, conformity and security) – predicted voting in the UK’s 2016 EU referendum, both directly and via their effect on attitudes to immigration and European identity.⁵

The debate over civil liberties

Perhaps the primary political debate to come out of the Covid-19 crisis is the extent to which limits on civil liberties are acceptable as a means of limiting the spread of the virus. In a July survey with Ipsos MORI, we asked 2,152 Britons to place themselves on a 0-10 scale from believing that “in order to fight coronavirus, we have to accept limits on civil liberties” (0) to “civil liberties are to be protected at all costs” (10).⁶ As we can see in Figure 2, below, most Britons leaned towards accepting limits, with only 20 per cent placing themselves at 6 or higher. However, within the 0-5 range there was significant variation, with the most popular response being in the middle, at 5 exactly.

FIGURE 2:
Attitudes to the protection of civil liberties during the coronavirus crisis



In our July 2020 survey, we also asked individuals 21 questions that measure each of the Schwartz values, from which we created 10 underlying factor variables (see annex). Figure 3 shows the weighted means of each of these 10 values for four respective quarters of the UK population based on whether they believe we should accept limits on civil liberties in order to fight coronavirus or protect civil liberties at all costs.

FIGURE 3: Values profiles of four segments of UK citizens, based on attitudes to accepting limits on civil liberties during the Covid-19 pandemic (weighted means of z-scores)





The values which drove Brexit voting were markedly distinct”

As we can see, the strongest supporters of limits on civil liberties overwhelmingly value security – theoretically defined as “safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships and of one’s self”, reflecting the intuitive threat to this underlying motivation caused by the coronavirus. These individuals are also more likely to disproportionately value universalism (“understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people”), benevolence (“preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact”) and conformity (“restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations and norms”). By contrast, those opposed to lockdowns disproportionately value stimulation, hedonism, power and achievement, again with fairly intuitive theoretical bases.

To what extent does the clear values basis underlying support for lockdown restrictions neatly fit on to the values divide in the UK in recent years that has, to some extent, defined the politics of Brexit?⁷ The short answer is: not at all well.

As shown in Figure 4, over page, those valuing universalism were the strongest supporters of Remain, and those valuing security and tradition were the strongest backers of Leave. But these two groups now find themselves somewhat united in support of lockdowns. Those most concerned about the threat to civil liberties represented by lockdowns, who score high on self-enhancement values of power and achievement, were actually typically ambivalent towards immigration and the UK’s membership of the European Union.

FIGURE 4: Values profiles of Remain and Leave voters (weighted means of z-scores)

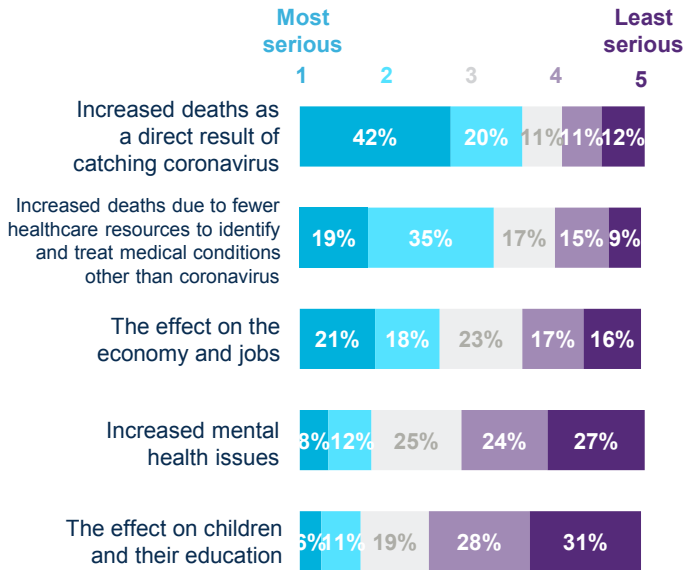


It is therefore no surprise that those who lean towards protecting civil liberties during the crisis (6-10 on the scale) comprise virtually equal proportions of Leave (49 per cent) and Remain voters (51 per cent).

The effects of coronavirus and lockdowns

It is possible to develop a further understanding of why these different values profiles exist by looking at whether different values are related to individuals being more or less concerned about the various effects of curbing liberties and, in particular, lockdowns. We asked individuals to look at five potential effects from the coronavirus crisis and rank them in order of how serious they think each is for the UK:

FIGURE 5: The effects of the coronavirus crisis, ranked by public perceptions of their seriousness



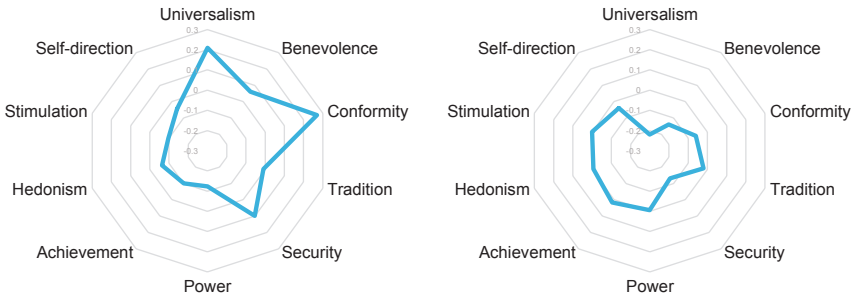
In Figure 6, we show the values orientation of those who rank “Increased deaths as a direct result of catching coronavirus” and “The effect on the economy and jobs” as their top priority, respectively. We again see consistent trends of those who place higher importance on preventing deaths from coronavirus highly valuing universalism, conformity and security, while those who prioritise the

impact of the coronavirus crisis on the economy and jobs disproportionately value universalism and tradition to a much lower degree, suggesting a similar, if less stark, values orientation to those who oppose lockdown restrictions.

FIGURE 6: Values profiles of two segments of UK citizens, according to perceptions of the seriousness of increased deaths caused by Covid-19 and the effect of the crisis on jobs and the economy (weighted means of z-scores)

Increased deaths from coronavirus

Effect on the economy and jobs



Vaccines

Finally, how does this affect what happens next in terms of vaccine take-up? We asked individuals on a six-point scale: “If a vaccine for coronavirus becomes available, how likely or unlikely would you personally be to get the vaccine?”. Most individuals stated that they were likely to take a vaccine with the results as follows:

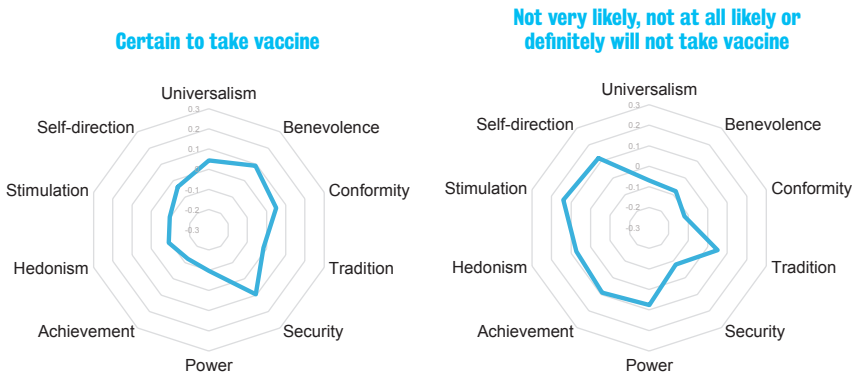


... universalism, benevolence, conformity and security all mean people are more likely to take the vaccine”

- Certain: 30 per cent.
- Very likely: 23 per cent.
- Fairly likely: 20 per cent.
- Not very likely: 9 per cent.
- Not at all likely: 3 per cent.
- Definitely not: 4 per cent.

Does this behavioural variation have the same values basis as the previously shown attitudinal distributions? By and large, we found the same pattern: universalism, benevolence, conformity and security all mean people are more likely to take the vaccine, while the self-enhancement and openness values – self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, power and achievement – mean people are less likely to take it.

FIGURE 7: Values profiles of two segments of UK citizens, according to stated likelihood to take the coronavirus vaccine (weighted means of z-scores)



Conclusion

Perhaps surprisingly then, the values basis of the debate over the coronavirus is more likely to ameliorate existing divides in the UK's nascent "culture wars" than it is to exacerbate them. The values that predicted voting Remain (universalism and benevolence) and Leave (conformity and security), and split the country down the middle, are now uniting individuals in a desire to fight the virus.

This is important. Lockdown scepticism may seem too narrow a niche on which to base a political appeal, given that the majority of the public remain staunch supporters of tough restrictions. However, that does not necessarily reduce the political impact of attempts to capitalise on this divide. As Stephen Bush, writing for the *New Statesman*, has pointed out: "Farage's success has never been in winning enough votes to govern or even to reliably win seats outside of proportional elections, but in taking enough votes to scare the major parties towards him."⁸



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The more important limitation is that the values basis of potential lockdown-sceptic voters would be highly at odds with that of leaders such as Nigel Farage. In the end, the challenge facing anyone trying to build a coalition of concern around Brexit and Covid-19 is not about numbers: the more important barrier to creating a coherent group around these disparate issues in the UK is how different the underlying values positions are.

Annex

Schwartz's 10 basic personal values

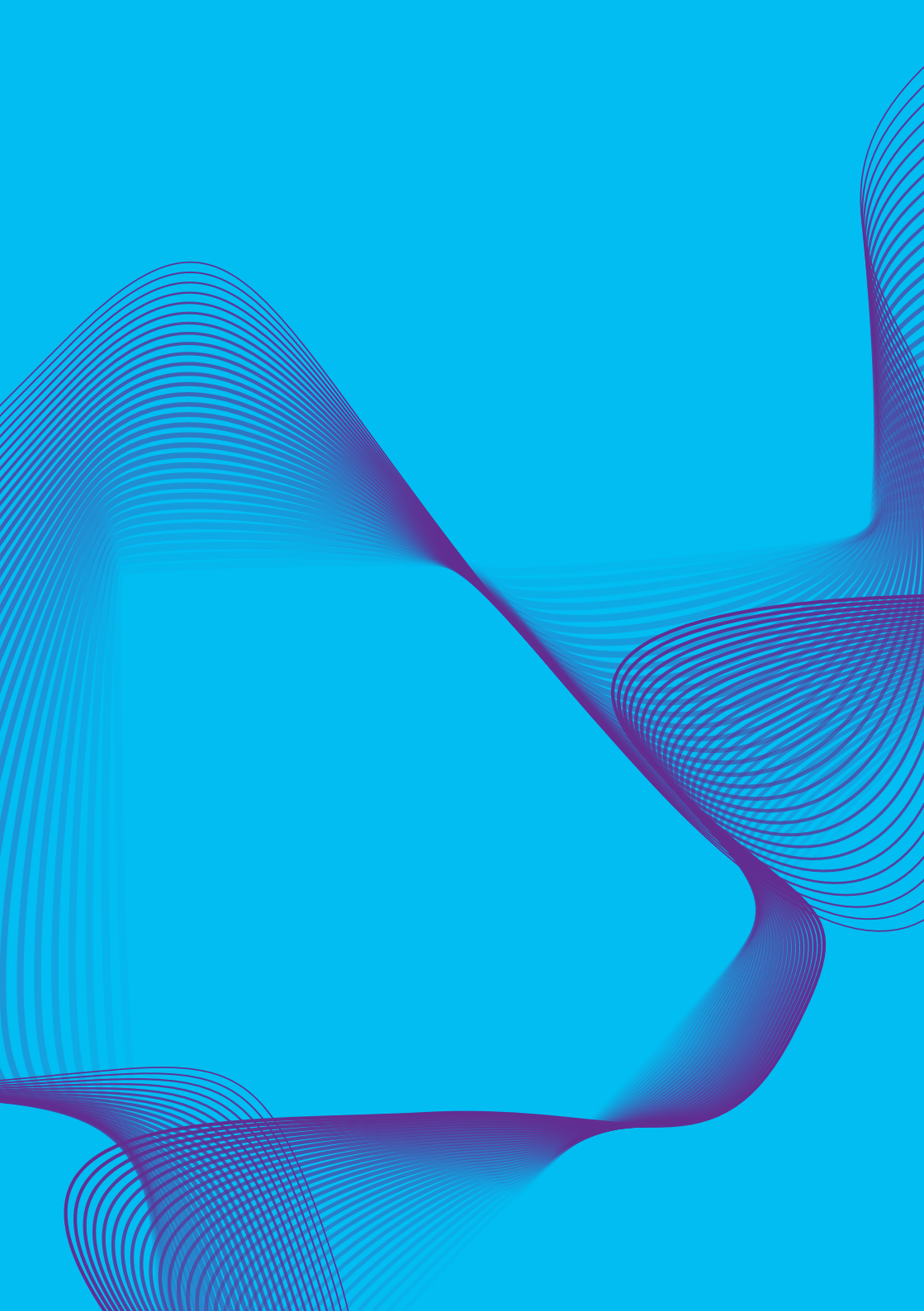
Value	Basic motivational goal	Specific goal examples
Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature	Social justice, inner harmony, equality, broadminded, unity with nature, protecting environment, a world at peace, world of beauty, wisdom
Benevolence	Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact	True friendship, mature love, meaning in life, responsible, loyal, helpful, honest, forgiving, spiritual life
Tradition	Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one's culture or religion impose on the individual	Humble, respect for tradition, moderate, devout, detachment, accepting portion in life
Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations and norms	Obedient, honour parents, self-discipline, politeness
Security	Safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationship and of self	National security, social order, family security, cleanliness, reciprocation of favours, sense of belonging, healthy
Power	Attainment or preservation of a dominant position within the more general social system	Authority, wealth, social power, social recognition, preserving public image
Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards	Successful, ambitious, influential, capable, intelligent
Hedonism	Pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself	Pleasure, enjoying life
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life (a varied life, an exciting life, daring)	Exciting life, varied life, daring
Self-direction	Independent thought and action – choosing, creating, exploring	Independent, freedom, curious, creativity, choosing own goals, self-respect

Schwartz's (1992) 10 values and their ESS operationalisation

Values	Question: "Now I will briefly describe some people. Please listen to each description and tell me how much each person is or is not like you." Responses: (1) Very much like me (2) Like me (3) Somewhat like me (4) A little like me (5) Not like me (6) Not like me at all
1. Universalism	She thinks it is important that every person in the world should be treated equally. She believes everyone should have equal opportunities in life.
	It is important to her to listen to people who are different from her. Even when she disagrees with them, she still wants to understand them.
	She strongly believes that people should care for nature. Looking after the environment is important to her.
2. Benevolence	It's very important to her to help the people around her. She wants to care for their well-being.
	It is important to her to be loyal to her friends. She wants to devote herself to people close to her.
3. Tradition	Tradition is important to her. She tries to follow the customs handed down by her religion or his family.
	It is important to her to be humble and modest. She tries not to draw attention to herself.
4. Conformity	It is important to her always to behave properly. She wants to avoid doing anything people would say is wrong.
	She believes that people should do what they're told. She thinks people should follow rules at all times, even when no-one is watching.
5. Security	It is important to her to live in secure surroundings. She avoids anything that might endanger her safety.
	It is important to her that the government ensures her safety against all threats. She wants the state to be strong so it can defend its citizens.
6. Power	It is important to her to get respect from others. She wants people to do what she says.
	It is important to her to be rich. She wants to have a lot of money and expensive things.
7. Achievement	Being very successful is important to her. She hopes people will recognise her achievements.
	It's important to her to show her abilities. She wants people to admire what she does.
8. Hedonism	Having a good time is important to her. She likes to "spoil" herself.
	She seeks every chance She can to have fun. It is important to her to do things that give her pleasure.
9. Stimulation	She likes surprises and is always looking for new things to do. She thinks it is important to do lots of different things in life.
	She looks for adventures and likes to take risks. She wants to have an exciting life.
10. Self-direction	It is important to her to make her own decisions about what she does. She likes to be free and not depend on others.
	Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to her. She likes to do things in her own original way.

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