

# Basic Human Values and Preferences for an EU-Wide Social Benefit Scheme

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## Abstract

Previous explanations regarding transnational solidarity in the European Union (EU) have mainly focussed on factors including left–right self-placement, support for European integration and European identity. We expand this model by considering deeper psychological determinants of transnational solidarity: values, operationalised as Schwartz’s basic human values of universalism and security. We expect them to exert (1) direct effects on transnational solidarity – measured as support for pan-European social benefits – and (2) indirect effects via the three aforementioned factors. We test and find evidence to support our theoretical framework using multigroup structural equation modelling and data from the European Social Survey. We further show that the effect size of the value of universalism on preferences for an EU social benefit scheme in each country is positively moderated by that country’s net contribution to the EU budget, highlighting the interaction between material interests and psychological value motivations.

**Keywords:** EU social benefit scheme; basic human values; EU identity; EU integration; political orientation

## Introduction

To effectively address global concerns such as worldwide economic crises, refugee flows or health disasters, approaches transcending national borders are essential. Moreover, international co-operation based on reciprocal commitments between nation-states and their citizens are arguably needed to address such transnational problems. Literature so far has investigated when and under which circumstances individuals want to act in support of solidarity (policies) towards fellow European Union (EU) citizens and member countries.

Most of these studies focused on analysing crisis-specific solidarity measures (e.g., Cicchi et al. 2020; Katsanidou et al. 2022). In more recent times, however, attention has also turned to other forms of solidarity focusing on longer term redistribution policies within the community (Reinl 2022). One example for this is the study of preferences towards the introduction of an EU-wide social benefit scheme directed towards the poor (Baute and Meuleman 2020; Roosma and van Oorschot 2021). An EU-wide social benefit scheme could be an important policy instrument in times of acute crisis and beyond. Hence, the study of citizens’ preferences for this type of policy is particularly important for the future shape of the EU. Such a scheme could assume various forms though would likely include the minimum characteristics of guaranteeing a minimum standard of living for all EU citizens whilst – at the same time – reflecting the costs of living in local contexts.

[Correction added on 4 August 2023, after first online publication: The placement of figures 3 and 4 in the PDF have been corrected in this version.]

In previous research, Baute and Meuleman (2020) and Roosma and van Oorschot (2021) investigated the impact of more general attitudes on citizens' willingness to support the introduction of an EU-wide social benefit system, in addition to the effects of country features and people's socio-demographic characteristics. Their findings indicate that when people feel closely connected to Europe and have more egalitarian, left-wing attitudes, they are more willing to embrace the introduction of EU-wide basic needs coverage. These studies made an important contribution to the literature because understanding why people support or object to solidarity measures in Europe is crucial for informed European policy-making in such a politically contested field.

To the best of our knowledge, however, no study so far has examined systematically whether *basic human values* also play a role in explaining variation in preferences to EU solidarity. This is despite the fact that the political psychology literature has produced consistent findings on the interplay between human values, political attitudes and behaviour (Dennison et al. 2020, 2021; Schwartz 2016; Swedlow 2008). Basic human values may provide a complementary explanation for people's support or objection to solidarity measures in Europe. Basic human values are defined by Schwartz (1992) as abstract, transsituational goals, varying in importance, that shape attitudes and individual behaviour (Schwartz 1992). Previous studies have demonstrated that human values have paramount importance for understanding why people think or behave the way they do (see, e.g., Davidov et al. 2012). Given these various strands of research, the current study examines whether basic human values can complement extant explanations of sources of EU solidarity. This assumption seems even more plausible considering that politicians repeatedly appeal to (citizens') values when discussing the introduction of (EU) solidarity policies (e.g., Miró 2022).

In this article, we therefore take a theoretical step forward to identify the psychological mechanisms explaining support for EU solidarity as well as its antecedents of left–right self-placement, European identity and support for European integration. More specifically, to examine public solidarity preferences, we focus on support for the establishment of an *EU-wide social benefit scheme* – a policy instrument that might be relevant for EU countries and citizens, regardless of any acute crisis. We draw on data from the 2016/2017 European Social Survey to perform multigroup structural equation modelling over 18 countries.

This article proceeds as follows. We start with our theoretical background followed by a set of hypotheses. Next, we present the data, operationalisation and the results of our analyses. The final section concludes with a summary of the findings, reflecting on our hypotheses and implications considering the EU's current and future challenges.

## I. Public Preferences for EU Solidarity Policies

With the emergence of the Euro crisis and the associated need to bail out highly indebted states of the Euro community, the tasks and competences of the EU have shifted significantly. Whereas previously only redistribution policies for economically weaker regions played a role throughout the EU, at this time, risk-sharing was actively demanded. The so-called refugee crisis, which reached the EU a few years later, and the recent migration

inflow from Ukraine have once again demanded solidarity between member states, which has not always been met by all states. In addition, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has confronted EU countries with a situation of intra-EU risk-sharing, calling on countries to jointly find solutions which at least mitigate the viral load (such as NextGenerationEU).

This article focusses on public preferences for such intra-EU solidarity policies. To be more precise, we take a closer look at what others call *transnational solidarity*, putting the people of the EU in the spotlight and studying their support for solidarity policies across national borders within the EU (Sangiovanni 2013; Reintl 2020). Prior research on transnational solidarity within the EU community often focussed on crisis-related assistance policies (Katsanidou et al. 2022; Koos and Leuffen 2020). On rare occasions, backing for more general redistribution policies within the EU – like the introduction of a European welfare state (Reintl 2022), EU level unemployment insurance (Kuhn et al. 2020; Burgoon et al. 2022) or a common social benefit scheme for the poor – have been studied. The latter aspect is a typical solidarity policy, which is relevant in times of acute crisis and beyond. The idea of such a scheme is to guarantee a minimum standard of living for all people living in the EU. For that reason, the article at hand is specifically devoted to this policy instrument.

Literature so far discovered that people from Eastern and Southern EU member countries are more willing to back an EU-wide social benefit scheme, even though support seems to be quite high across the board. In addition, the likelihood of favouring such a policy is higher amongst young people and those with low levels of education, whereas it decreases with a higher household income (Baute and Meuleman 2020; Cardone 2021; Roosma and van Oorschot 2021). Next to correlations at the national level and people's sociodemographic characteristics, Baute and Meuleman (2020), as well as Roosma and van Oorschot (2021), also highlight the effects of more general attitudes on citizens' willingness to support the introduction of an EU-wide social benefit scheme. If people feel closely attached to Europe and hold more egalitarian, left-wing attitudes, they are more likely to support the introduction of pan-EU basic need coverage.

The study at hand builds on these earlier findings and extends them with an additional dimension which remained unexplored by previous research to date: the role of psychological predispositions and more specifically *basic human values*. We test whether public support for the EU-wide establishment of a social welfare scheme depends not only on political attitudes but also on the more fundamental basic human values of the respondents. The relevance of such human values has already been established for other fields of policy preferences (Davidov et al. 2012; Dennison et al. 2020, 2021; Schwartz 2016; Sedig and Davidov 2018; Swedlow 2008; Rajzman et al. 2022).

Basic human values are theoretically formed at an early age and rarely change over the course of a person's life. Thus, they lay the basis upon which more specific attitudes and preferences and, ultimately, behaviours are developed. For the formation of preferences towards the establishment of an EU-wide social benefit scheme, those basic human values dedicated towards fellow human beings and living in a community appear to be particularly relevant.

The following section introduces Schwartz's human values in more detail before we continue formulating specific hypotheses.

## II. Schwartz's Basic Human Values

Schwartz (Schwartz 1994, p. 21; see also Schwartz et al. 2012) defines basic human values as 'transsituational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity'. Basic human values have been used to explain a plethora of attitudes such as those towards immigrants (Becker et al. 2022; Davidov and Meuleman 2012), pro-environmental policies (referenced de Groot and Thøgersen 2018), European integration (Dennison et al. 2020, 2021) or as forming and giving content to political ideology (Pioro et al. 2011), just to name a few. Following from that, basic human values are likely to play a role in the formation of preferences towards a social benefit scheme in Europe, too.

Table 1 lists the values and their underlying motivations and main goals. For example, the main motivations underlying universalism values are understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection of all people and the nature. The main goals underlying the value of security are attributing high importance to safety, harmony and stability of the society, relationships, and self.

The theory suggests that values can be conceptualised by placing them in a circle whereby neighbouring values share similar motivations and opposing values reflect contradictory motivations (Schwartz 1992). They can be divided into more specific or more general value dimensions, depending on the researcher's interests (see Figure 1). One of the general value dimensions reflects self-transcendence, including universalism and benevolence, and opposes the self-enhancement higher order value dimension, which includes power and achievement. The other value dimension, conservation, includes the values tradition, conformity and security. It opposes openness to change, which includes self-direction and stimulation values. The theory also differentiates between social values (self-transcendence and conservation values) and individual values (self-enhancement and openness to change).

Since support for social benefit schemes is most likely motivated by consideration of others, we expect the social values of self-transcendence and conservation to be of relevance for the formation of such preferences and in particular universalism and security values as explained in the following section.

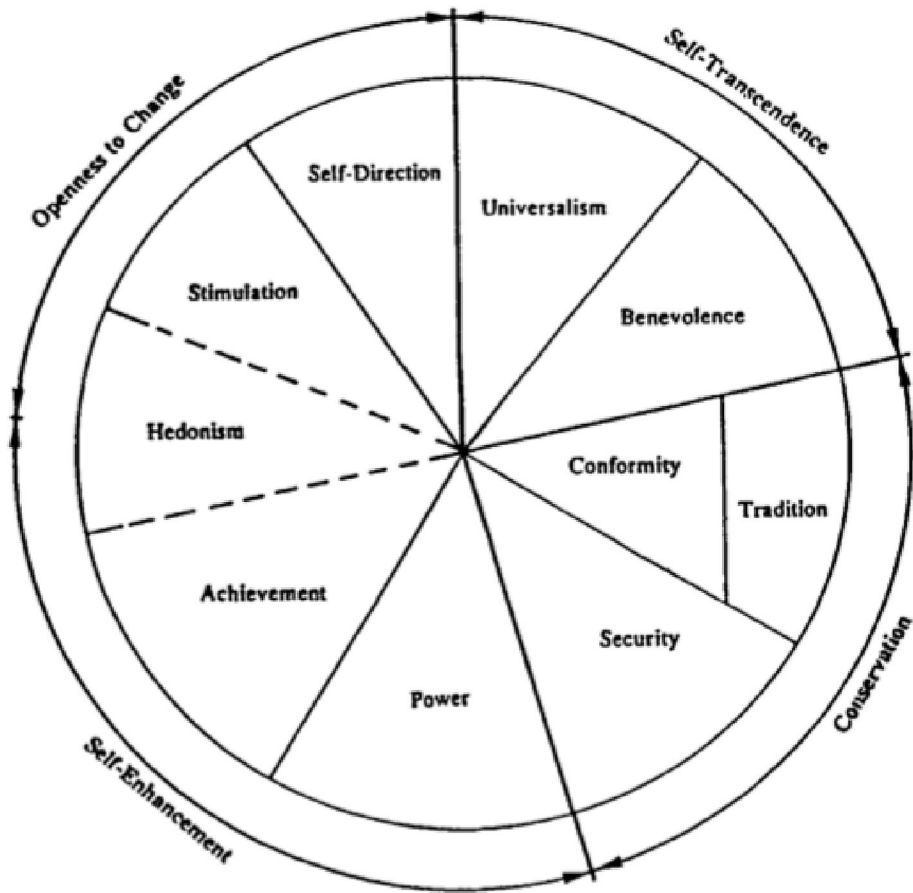
Table 1: The Motivations Underlying Basic Human Values and Their Main Goals.

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POWER: Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources
ACHIEVEMENT: Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards
HEDONISM: Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself
STIMULATION: Excitement, novelty and challenge in life
SELF-DIRECTION: Independent thought and action-choosing, creating and exploring
UNIVERSALISM: Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature
BENEVOLENCE: Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact
TRADITION: Respect, commitment and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide the self
CONFORMITY: Restraint of actions, inclinations and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms
SECURITY: Safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships and of self

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Note: Adopted from Sagiv and Schwartz (1995).

Figure 1: Schwartz's Basic Human Values. *Notes:* Figure taken from Schwartz (1994).

### III. Values, Political Attitudes and Preferences for an EU Social Benefit Scheme

Broader political attitudes, such as left–right orientation or general favourability to issues such as redistribution, law and order or European integration, tend to be more stable than preferences towards specific policies, such as support for an EU-wide social benefit scheme, which can change and be shaped more easily (Dalton 2000). Reinl and Giebler (2021) have broadly discussed and empirically tested this argument regarding political elites and their preferences for EU-wide crisis policies. With a view to public opinion, it seems that, amongst other factors, people's self-positioning on the left–right dimension (Kleider and Stoeckel 2019), their support for further EU integration (Baute et al. 2019) and their degree of European identity (Kuhn and Kamm 2019; Nicoli et al. 2020; Verhaegen 2018) determine the level of transnational solidarity (Katsanidou et al. 2022). Consequently, the literature in the field of transnational solidarity research so far has made particular use of theories considering people's more general support for state intervention (left–right placement; redistribution preferences) or focussed on the European component of such solidarity (EU support; European identity).

This link is also likely to apply to public support for an EU-wide social benefit scheme directed towards the poor (see also Baute and Meuleman 2020; Roosma and van Oorschot 2021). As one would assume about national welfare state policies, people who are politically more left-wing, have egalitarian outlooks and stand to benefit in terms of self-interest should be in favour of EU-wide social policies (Armingeon and Weisstanner 2022; Baute and Meuleman 2020; Jaeger 2008). Furthermore, favouring further EU integration should also increase support for such a scheme. Endorsing concrete EU policies presupposes agreeing to an expansion of its competencies as an initial step. In addition, identifying with Europe should matter. If people feel emotionally connected to the continent, they should also be more willing to support common social policies rather than, for example, those only having a strong national identity, because those who identify as European will see beneficiaries of the scheme as fellow members of their in-group (Carl et al. 2019). The latter relationship has already been tested and empirically supported (Baute and Meuleman 2020).

Even if specific preferences for individual policies or policy fields are already more volatile as compared to general political attitudes (see Dalton 2000), the latter are by no means stable and also continue to develop over the course of a person's life whereas values should be stable from an early age, which then interact with external stimuli to produce attitudes and behaviours (Döring et al. 2015). Put it differently, values are more fundamental behavioural motivations on which political attitudes and preferences (amongst others) may be based (Gouveia et al. 2002).<sup>1</sup>

People who highly value universalism are likely to consider helping those outside of their supposed in-group as an important goal (Davidov et al. 2020; Davidov and Meuleman 2012; Uitto and Saloranta 2010). Consequently, we expect individuals scoring high on universalism values to support EU social benefit schemes. Universalism is likely to be more relevant for the explanation than benevolence, since according to the theory, whereas benevolence places high priority for helping people with whom one is in frequent social contact, universalism attributes high importance to the protection of *all* people. By way of contrast, valuing security entails attributing high importance to the safety and stability of society and of the self (Davidov and Meuleman 2012; see also Table 1 and Sagiv and Schwartz 1995). If social benefit schemes imply that more money is given to people or groups other than oneself or those belonging to one's group or nation, then valuing security highly may result in objecting to such policies. After all, paying outgroups and giving up money for such schemes may weaken the economic security of the own nation or the self. These considerations lead us to the following hypotheses:

*H1a:* The effect of an individual valuing universalism highly is an increase in support for an EU social benefit scheme.

*H1b:* The effect of an individual valuing security highly is a decrease in support for an EU social benefit scheme.

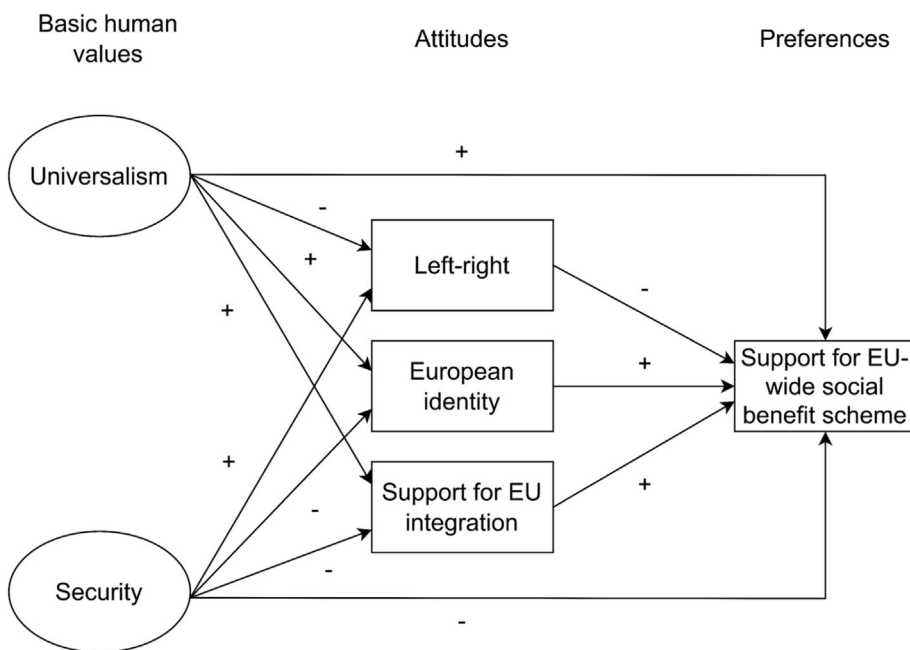
<sup>1</sup>It could be argued that also identities and identification are formed in early age. At the same time, previous studies have shown that universalism is formed and activated as early as in early school age (e.g., Becker et al. 2022) whereas European identity is still in formation. Whether and to what extent values are formed earlier than more complex identities such as identification with Europe may be a topic for future research. Therefore, we refer below particularly to the link between values and identification with Europe as an association rather than as a causal relation.

Since values are probably more general and stable than attitudes – even relatively profound ones such as political orientation, identification with Europe or support for European integration – the latter are likely to (fully or partially) mediate the effects of universalism and security on more specific preferences for EU social benefits. In other words, the model operates from the more general level of basic human values to the more specific level of preferences for social benefits whilst political orientation, identification with Europe and attitudes towards EU integration are in-between. Previous studies have demonstrated that individuals valuing universalism are more likely and individuals valuing security values are less likely to locate themselves on the left side of the political orientation scale (Pioro et al. 2011), to identify with Europe (Dennison et al. 2020, 2021) and to support EU integration (Dennison et al. 2021). This leads us to the following hypothesis:

*H2:* The effects of values on support for an EU-wide social benefit scheme are mediated by individuals’ political orientation, identification with Europe and support for EU integration.

Since we have no reasons to expect the mediation to operate fully, we examine a model where the value effects are only partially mediated by the latter, as illustrated in Figure 2. Furthermore, since we cannot determine with the data at hand whether the theoretical causal chain is supported, we refer to our tested mechanisms as associations rather than as causal in a strict sense.

Figure 2: Theoretical Argument. *Notes:* Ellipses are latent variables and rectangles are observed variables.



Finally, whereas we try to generalise the findings by investigating them in different countries separately, we expect differences in the aforementioned mechanisms according to the net contribution per capita to the EU budget of one's country. Such mechanisms based on a country's economic performance have already been detected – even though with partly contradicting results – regarding peoples' preferences for other aspects of EU solidarity (for instance, Gerhards et al. 2020; Reinl and Giebler 2021; Vasilopoulou and Talving 2020).

As for universalism, we expected a positive relationship because, in countries that are net *recipients* from the EU budget, all citizens and the country more broadly would financially benefit from an EU-wide social benefit scheme, so that values are unlikely to be either manifested or threatened by such a scheme. By way of contrast, in countries that are net *contributors*, citizens are more likely to be divided according to their value motivations: Those who value universalism will see such a scheme as appealing because it would help them to realise their values. At the same time, those who value security would likely see such a scheme as a threat because it distributes national wealth away and diminishes their country's (and consequently their) relative security in economic terms. Whereas security would not be activated in a net-recipient country, it is likely to be more strongly activated in a net contributor country. In other words, both values are expected to be activated more strongly in net contributor countries. Therefore, we expect:

*H3a:* The total effects of universalism values on support for an EU-wide social benefit scheme are stronger in countries with a higher net per capita contribution to the EU budget.

*H3b:* The total effects of security values on support for an EU-wide social benefit scheme are stronger in countries with a higher net per capita contribution to the EU budget.

#### IV. Data and Operationalisation

##### *Dataset*

To empirically test our theoretical assumptions, we rely on data from the eighth round of the European Social Survey (ESS) (European Social Survey ERIC 2017) collected in 2016–2017. The ESS covers a wide range of countries, but for the purpose of our work, we draw on EU member states only. Our analyses thus include 18 countries (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, United Kingdom, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, and Slovenia) and 35,450 survey respondents. The ESS data are, to the best of our knowledge, the most appropriate data for the purpose of this article. In addition to high data quality, the outlined dependent and independent variables are also satisfactorily covered. Even if the dataset does not include all EU countries and interesting cases such as Greece are missing, the selection of countries is diverse enough to allow more general statements to be deduced about the EU.

##### *Dependent Variable*

In contrast to many other studies investigating EU-wide solidarity preferences, this article focusses on a very specific solidarity policy: *the introduction of an EU-wide social benefit*



*scheme for poor people.* The ESS measure begins by providing respondents with a detailed description of the social benefit scheme. Consequently, respondents are well-informed about the policy, and they understand that it implies a redistribution of budgets across EU countries and higher costs for richer states.<sup>2</sup>

This policy description is followed by a question inquiring whether respondents are in favour of this policy on a 4-point scale (1: *strongly against* to 4: *strongly in favour*).

### *Independent Variables*

To measure the presumed association of the human values universalism and security as well as the link of political attitudes like more general political orientation, European identity and support for EU integration with support for an EU-wide social benefit scheme, we employ a series of survey items. With view to Schwartz's human values, the ESS has designed a set of questions for this purpose (Cieciuch and Davidov 2012; Cieciuch et al. 2018). Since we are specifically interested in the values *universalism* and *security* in our analyses, we use the three survey items that measured universalism and the two that measure security. The questions describe a person and ask individuals to indicate on a scale ranging from 1 to 6 (*not like me at all* to *very much like me*) how similar they are to this person. To tap into general EU support, we look at participants' views on whether integration efforts should continue on a response scale from 0 to 10, with higher numbers indicating higher agreement. Both European identity and positioning on the left–right axis are captured by a 10-point scale. Table S1 lists the (recoded) question items of the independent variables.

### *Analysis Strategy*

We begin our analysis by estimating correlations between the values (specified as latent variables), preferences for an EU-wide social benefit scheme and the mediators in the entire ESS sample. This allows us to assess if any associations are present in the data.

Next, we use structural equation modelling (SEM) and a multigroup SEM (Bollen 1989) to test the hypothesised relationships. This analysis step proceeds in five sequential phases.

First, we test the hypothesised associations in a single model using the full ESS dataset to gain an impression of how the relationships unfold in the full sample taken together. Second, we estimate separate SEMs for each country to test if the hypothesised model converges and produces meaningful results everywhere. Third, we estimate a multigroup SEM to assess simultaneously whether the structural effects are the same or different across countries. We examine whether the effects of the two human values – universalism and security – on EU-wide social benefit scheme preferences and their mediation via political orientation, European identity, and support for EU integration operate in a similar way across countries in the ESS. Fourth, we estimate the same multigroup SEM

<sup>2</sup>Variable text: 'It has been proposed that there should be a European Union-wide social benefit scheme for all poor people. In a moment I will ask you to tell me whether you are against or in favour of this scheme. First, look at the highlighted box at the top of this card, which shows the main features of the scheme. A European Union-wide social benefit scheme includes all of the following:

- The purpose is to guarantee a minimum standard of living for all poor people in the European Union.
- The level of social benefit people receive will be adjusted to reflect the cost of living in their country.
- The scheme would require richer European Union countries to pay more into such a scheme than poorer European Union countries'.

controlling for gender (male vs. female), age (mean centred), education (tertiary education vs. below tertiary), household income, subjective feeling about income (low vs. high), unemployment (no vs. yes) and retirement (no vs. yes) to examine if the findings remain when controlling for various social demographic groups and characteristics. We also test for measurement invariance of the constructs that are measured by multiple items (universalism and security) to guarantee that the value effects in the model are comparable across countries. Metric measurement invariance is a prerequisite for comparing relationships amongst variables across countries (Billiet et al. 2015; Davidov et al. 2014; Leitgoeb et al. 2022; Meredith 1993; Meuleman et al. 2018a, 2018b, 2022; van de Vijver et al. 2019). We assess the fit of all estimated models to the data by inspecting standard SEM model fit indices (West et al. 2012) such as chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ), the comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and the standardised root mean residual (SRMR). However,  $\chi^2$  may excessively reject useful models when the sample size is large as in our study. Therefore, our decisions are largely based on the alternative indices. Model fit is considered acceptable when the CFI is close to or above 0.95 and the RMSEA and SRMR are close to or below 0.08. Model estimation is performed using the lavaan package in R (Rosseel 2012). We use a maximum likelihood estimator with robust standard errors and test statistics (mlr; Satorra and Bentler 1994; Yuan and Bentler 2000) and treat missing values using full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation. We present the annotated R code and output at the end of our supporting information.

Finally, we want to assess if the hypothesised relationships vary according to national level indicators. Therefore, we correlate the total predicted effect of the values with the nation-wide net contribution to the EU budget using EU spending and revenue data from 2014 to 2020 (European Commission 2020).

## V. Results

### *Correlations*

The correlations between preferences for an EU-wide social benefit scheme and the values universalism (0.101) and security (0.114) reveal weak association.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the values correlate with the intervening variables. Universalism correlates with European identity (0.176) and left–right positioning (−0.138) and security correlates with support for EU integration (−0.154).<sup>4</sup> All other correlations are below 0.1. In the next model, we examine whether these associations retain in the full structural equation model.

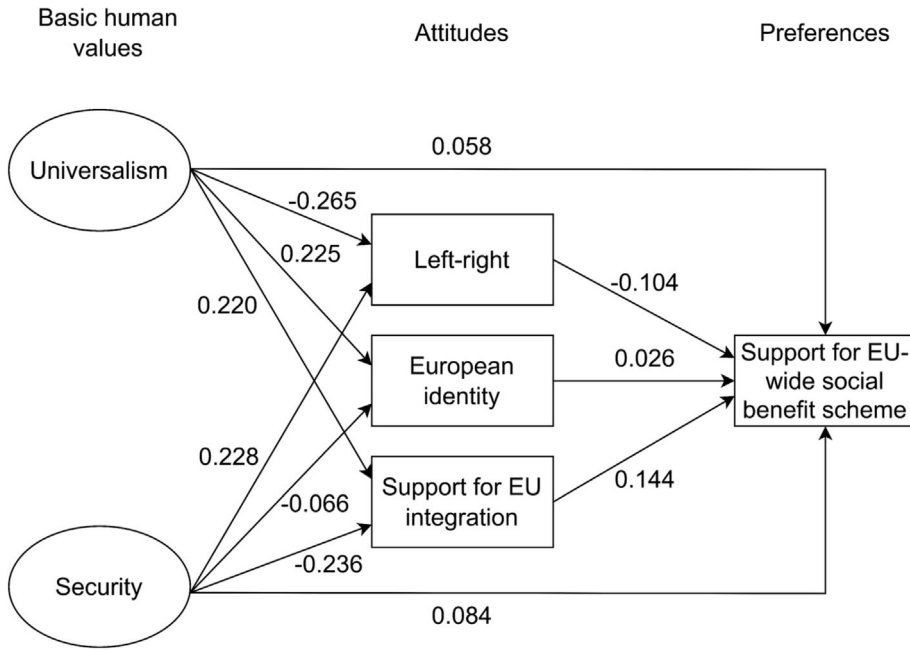
### *SEM*

First, we test the hypothesised model for all countries in the sample simultaneously (Figure 3). The model fit is good ( $\chi^2 = 1065.549$ ,  $df = 17$ , CFI = 0.962, RMSEA = 0.044,

<sup>3</sup>A CFA to assess correlations between the values ( $\chi^2 = 15414.129$ ,  $df = 153$ , CFA = 0.905, RMSEA = 0.058, SRMR = 0.051) showed some very high correlations indicating that in the current data some values are empirically inseparable, such as universalism and benevolence (0.927), tradition and conformity (1.058) or power and achievement (0.977). Nevertheless, we have retained the strict separation of the values according to theory, since the values (also the highly correlated ones) had different correlations with preferences for an EU-wide social benefit scheme.

<sup>4</sup>A third value that was correlated with EU-wide solidarity preferences was tradition ( $r = 0.133$ ). Since we, however, have no theoretical ground to assume that this value is relevant for our research and this value also highly correlates with universalism and security (in some countries), we omitted tradition from further calculations.

Figure 3: SEM Estimates for All Countries, Standardised Effects ( $n = 35,426$ ). Notes: Ellipses are latent variables and rectangles are observed variables.



SRMR = 0.022), and due to the large sample size, all estimates are significant. Standardised factor loadings of the value items are rather substantial, ranging between 0.564 and 0.679. We find effects of support for EU integration and political orientation on preferences for the introduction of an EU-wide social benefit scheme (standardised effects are 0.144 and  $-0.104$ , respectively). Although these effects are not strong, they suggest that individuals more in favour of further EU integration and positioning themselves on the political left are more likely to support an EU-wide social benefit scheme. European identity is, however, not substantially related to EU-wide social benefit scheme preferences (0.026). In addition, we find weak direct effects of universalism and security on the willingness to introduce a common scheme (standardised effects are 0.058 and 0.084, respectively). We also find mainly moderate effects of universalism and security on support for EU integration (0.220 and  $-0.236$ ), political orientation ( $-0.265$  and 0.228) and European identity (0.225 and  $-0.066$ ) lending support to the mediation hypothesis H2. The total effect (i.e., direct plus indirect effects) of universalism values on support for an EU-wide social benefit scheme is 0.123, suggesting that in total, Europeans attributing higher importance to universalism values are also more supportive of an EU social benefit scheme. At the same time, the total effect of security on support for an EU-wide social benefit scheme is also positive but weak (0.025). Thus, whilst H1a on the effect of universalism on respondents' preferences is supported by the data, H1b on the effect of security values is not. It remains to be examined whether this pattern is

similar across the EU countries in our sample, or whether differences could be observed, and whether their variation could be explained by the country's net contribution to the EU budget.

### *Multigroup SEM*

Next, we estimate, with separate SEMs for each country if the hypothesised model converges and produces meaningful results in each country to see if the proposed model structure holds in all countries. This is the case in all but one country. In Estonia, the estimation does not converge, producing unreliable estimates. This may be related to the extreme correlation of universalism and security values in this country ( $r > 1.0$ ). In other words, there is lack of discriminant validity for the two values universalism and security in Estonia rendering the modelling impossible to compute in this country (see also Steinmetz 2012 and Davidov et al. 2008 for the lack of discriminant validity between some values especially in East Europe when measured with ESS data, due to the limited number of items to measure the values). We therefore decided to omit Estonia from further analysis. Follow-up studies could take a closer look at Estonia and identify possible reasons for the deviant pattern observed there. In all other country-specific models, model fit is acceptable and factor loadings of the items measuring universalism and security are sufficiently high (see supporting information for further details).

Based on this, in a third step, we test with a multigroup SEM whether the effects of universalism and security on preferences for an EU-wide social benefit scheme and their mediation via political attitudes are similar across countries. To compare the value effects across states, we assessed metric measurement invariance of the universalism and security measures, which is supported by the data (see supporting information for further details). The full multigroup SEM fits the data well ( $\chi^2 = 1458.531$ ,  $df = 322$ ,  $CFI = 0.961$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.046$ ,  $SRMR = 0.028$ ).<sup>5</sup>

Overall, the direct effects of respondents' attitudes on their policy preferences are small. The effect of attitudes towards EU integration is not significant for Hungary, Italy, Spain and Slovenia. By way of contrast, European identity only reveals significant and positive effects in four countries, namely, in Belgium, France, Lithuania and the United Kingdom. Left–right self-placement seems to play no role especially in the Eastern and Southern areas of the EU.

When it comes to the basic human values, universalism has a positive direct effect on respondents' preferences for a common social benefit scheme in most of the countries under investigation. This effect is, however, more visible in the Western and Southern EU member states in the sample, whereas we rarely find an effect in the east of the EU. As for security, in most of the Western EU countries, it has a negative total influence on social policy preferences. In other words, individuals endorsing security

<sup>5</sup>All of the findings reported above essentially remained the same when controlling for gender, age, education, household income, subjective feeling about income, unemployment and retirement. Another robustness test assessed if the results are sensitive towards replacing political orientation (left–right self-placement) by attitudes to redistribution ('the government should reduce income differences'). The findings remained the same (see supporting information).

in these countries are less supportive of a common benefit scheme in the EU. In Eastern Europe, the influence is mostly insignificant, and in some cases, like the Czech Republic and Finland, we even find an effect with the opposite sign. This explains the nearly zero finding for the effect of security when analysing the total sample. It seems that EU countries vary considerably in the direct effect of this value across a west–east divide. Following from that, we only find support for hypotheses H1a and H1b in some of the countries in the survey (for a detailed report of the effects, see Tables S2 and S3).

Turning to the total effects of the basic human values, universalism has an overall positive impact on respondents' preferences for the introduction of an EU-wide social benefit scheme with the exceptions of the Czech Republic (negative effect) and Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and Slovenia (not significant). The unstandardised coefficients vary between 0.512 in Austria and 0.078 in Ireland. Hence, we can conclude that universalism has a positive total effect on EU social benefit scheme preferences in most countries in the study. In some cases, this effect is quite strong. However, the assumed mechanism is more evident in the countries of Western Europe. Security values are less powerful. We find a negative total effect of security to support our expectations only in 8 of our 17 countries, and this effect is also much weaker than in the case of universalism. In other countries, the total effect is either insignificant or in the opposite sign.

Following from that, we can only provide partial support to hypotheses H1a, H1b and H2. For this reason, in the next and final step of the analysis, we turn to the exploration of potential causes of these country patterns.

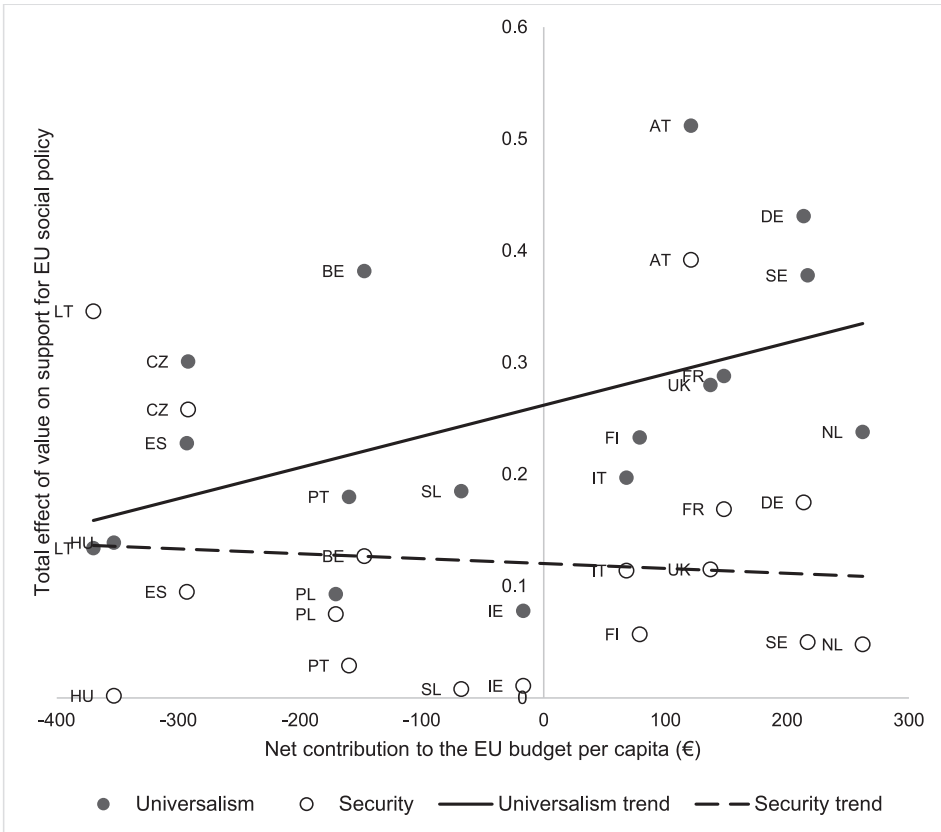
### *Country-Level Patterns of the Predictive Power of Values*

In the last step, we test whether the effect sizes of values on support for an EU-wide social benefit scheme are associated with national net contribution per capita to the EU budget.

To test this supposition, we correlate the total effect sizes from our national models of universalism and security respectively (Table S4) with the countries' net contribution to the EU per capita (EU spending and revenue, 2014–2020). We display this relationship in Figure 4.

As we can see, there is a fairly strong and positive Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ), around 0.49, between the (absolute) effect size of universalism and national EU budget contribution per capita. This suggests that, indeed, the more a country contributes to the EU budget, the more are its citizens divided on the issue according to the extent that they valued universalism. Interestingly, we find only a weak Pearson's correlation ( $-0.08$ ) for the country effects of security on support for such a scheme. This suggests that it is the opportunity to fulfil one's universalistic values (or lack of) that interacts with material concerns about such a scheme, whereas the potential threat to security of such a scheme is not in (national-level) material terms. In short, only those with strong universalistic values are willing to 'give away' their country's money via such a scheme, yet those with high security values in countries likely to gain from

Figure 4: Country Patterns.



such a scheme are just as reticent about such a scheme as those in countries likely to lose out.

### Conclusion and Discussion

Explaining variation in feelings of solidarity is both substantially important – as a possible prerequisite of a functioning EU with a single ‘demos’ – and scientifically interesting because the causes of feelings of solidarity remain contested. Previous explanations regarding transnational solidarity in the EU have highlighted factors including left–right self-placement and attitudes to redistribution, support for European integration, European identity and self-interest. In the current study, we expanded this model by considering deeper psychological determinants of transnational solidarity – values. More specifically, we explored the extent to which basic human values play a role in explaining people’s preferences for European social policies by examining whether Schwartz’s human values have a positive or negative impact on the approval of the establishment of an EU-wide

social benefit scheme directed towards the poor. For this purpose, we consulted survey data from the ESS 2016/2017 and compared patterns across EU countries. Our analyses provide three key findings.

Our findings suggest that, first, the values universalism and security only have a rather small direct effect on people's willingness to support social policies within the EU. However, when these effects are compared with each other, the effect is higher for universalism. People with higher universalism values are more likely to support poorer people at the EU level. This effect is mainly found in Western and Southern EU countries, but not in the Eastern EU countries.

Second, we also find that values influence support for an EU social benefit scheme indirectly through political attitudes such as left–right positioning, support for more EU integration and one's European identity. These indirect effects are again more profound in Western EU countries.

Third, the overall effect of universalism values depends on structural country characteristics. The more a country contributes to the total EU budget, the greater the influence of universalism values on public support for an EU social welfare scheme is. In poorer EU countries, contributing less to the EU budget, values are not as relevant. This may be because in countries that are net *recipients* from the EU budget, all citizens and the country more broadly would financially benefit from an EU-wide social benefit scheme, so that values are unlikely to be either manifested or threatened by such a scheme. By way of contrast, in countries that are net contributors, citizens are more likely to be divided according to their value preferences.

Due to the large country sample studied, the results of our article should also provide informative insights beyond the cases analysed.

However, our study is not without limitations. Our study covers neither the more recent COVID-19 pandemic nor the invasion of Ukraine and the related energy crisis in Europe, nor important case studies such as Greece. For both these current challenges, basic human values could be decisive for citizens' preferences for or against stronger EU-wide co-operation.

Notwithstanding these limitations, our work bears relevant implications beyond the years under consideration. It shows that values play an important role in supporting EU solidarity policies, but this is not the case in the Eastern states of the EU. Thus, if politicians try to activate universalism values of people to gain political support for their plans, this strategy will probably be less fruitful in the east. Moreover, sociotropic self-interest seems to outweigh other considerations in poorer countries.

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### Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

### Data S1. Supporting Information.