

Value Endorsement Among Protestants and Catholics Within and Between Countries in Europe: Implications for Individualism

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Protestantism, as opposed to Catholicism, is widely seen as having contributed to the rise of Western individualism. However, little is known about potential value differences between these two branches of Christianity in contemporary Europe. In the current work, we examined patterns of value endorsement among current and former Protestants and Catholics within and between 20 European countries using data from the European Social Survey ($N = 163,586$). Results reveal that within a given country, Protestants are more likely to endorse self-transcendence values than Catholics are, and these findings held when controlling for religiosity, differences in socioeconomic status, and differences in religious de-identification. Surprisingly, differences between Protestants and Catholics in value endorsement were sometimes larger among less (vs. more) religious respondents and were detectable even among former Protestants and Catholics, with former Protestants resembling religious respondents more than former Catholics did. Results also reveal that some Protestant–Catholic differences are consistent across cultures, whereas others—principally on the dimension of openness to change versus conservation—are moderated by which group is the majority heritage. We discuss the possible contribution of Protestantism to Western individualism’s universalistic orientation, considering the association between Protestantism and self-transcendence values.

Keywords: culture, religion, values, individualism

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Protestantism, as opposed to Catholicism, is often seen as a major driver of modern individualism in the West. Contemporary researchers have indeed documented a number of differences between Protestants and Catholics in various psychological domains, including those related to individual-group relations and to morality. For example, compared to Catholics, Protestants score higher in individualism (A. B. Cohen & Hill, 2007; R. Inglehart & Baker, 2000), are more likely to make dispositional attributions (Li et al., 2012), and display less relational concerns in work settings (Sanchez-Burks, 2002). Compared to Catholics, they are more moralistic when it comes to undesirable thoughts (A. B. Cohen & Rozin, 2001), engage in defensive psychological processes against taboo feelings (D. Cohen et al., 2018),

sublimate unwanted affect (Kim & Cohen, 2017; Kim et al., 2013), and hold more austere attitudes about debt, although they carry higher debt loads (D. Cohen et al., 2021).

Surprisingly, however, differences between these two branches of Christianity have yet to be systematically addressed in the domain of values. Despite notable work addressing associations between religiosity and values (Roccas, 2005; Saroglou et al., 2004), as well as work on how religiosity predicts value endorsement (Schwartz & Huismans, 1995), Protestant–Catholic differences in value endorsement have not been tested. This question is consequential given the impact that Protestantism has had in the formation of the modern West. For instance, seven of the 10 most individualist countries on Hofstede’s index have a Protestant heritage (Hofstede et al., 2010), all 10 of the countries highest in self-expression have a Protestant heritage (R. Inglehart & Baker, 2000), and all 10 of the countries highest in emancipative values have a Protestant heritage (Welzel, 2013, 2014). An investigation into Protestant–Catholic differences in value endorsement can pour light on their different overarching motivations and potentially on how Protestantism fostered the modern individualist orientation of the West.

Previous studies have compared Protestants and Catholics within a single country or compared Protestant nations versus Catholic nations. Comparisons within a single country limit the generalizability of the findings to various national contexts, whereas comparisons between Protestant versus Catholic nations are confounded by numerous other cross-national differences, such as standards of living. We investigate Protestant and Catholic differences in the endorsement of personal values both within countries and between countries, maximizing the generalizability of the findings (for a similar approach, see Arruñada, 2010). We anticipate that the resulting patterns will offer important

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insights into the role of Protestantism in fostering an individualist cultural ethos.

Below, we begin by reviewing Schwartz's circumplex model of personal values (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz et al., 2012), with a focus on the 10 lower order values and the two dimensions of the circumplex. Then, we review the different values endorsed in Protestant and Catholic traditions. Finally, we integrate these two parts by formulating predictions regarding how Protestants and Catholics may differ in their endorsement of personal values.

Personal Values

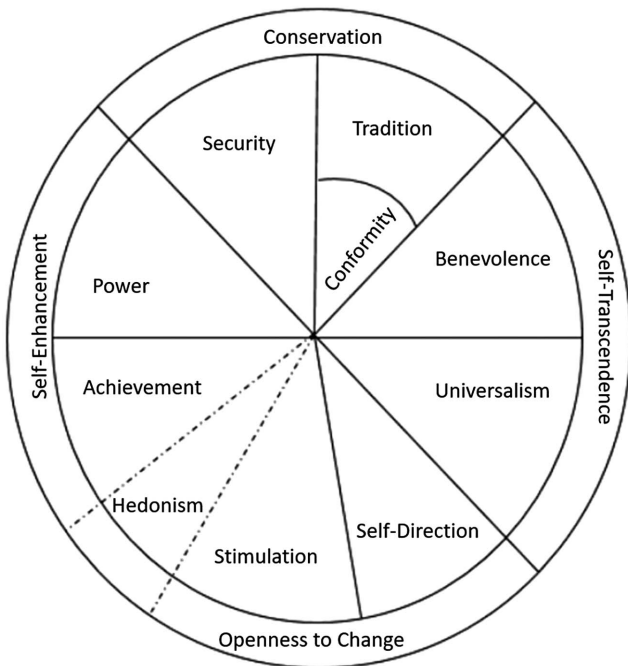
Personal values are individuals' trans-situational goals (Schwartz, 1992) that shape many domains, including people's emotions (Tamir et al., 2016), behaviors (Sagiv & Roccas, 2021), and identity (Hitlin, 2003). In Schwartz's empirically derived model, values are organized in a circumplex according to whether they are positively, negatively, or weakly associated with each other (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz et al., 2012). This circumplex includes 10 value categories. These categories are organized into four higher order values (see Figure 1). These higher order values reveal two bipolar dimensions: conservation versus openness to change, and self-transcendence versus self-enhancement. *Conservation values* prioritize order and the preservation of things as they are, and conformity to rules and social expectations that impose restrictions on the self. Their lower order values include conformity (e.g., being obedient, following rules), tradition (e.g., respecting religion and the social order), and security (e.g., seeking safety for oneself and society). As shown in Figure 1, tradition and conformity occupy the same region in the circumplex

but tradition values are further from the center of the circumplex, which implies they have the same underlying motivation (subordination of the self to social expectations), but tradition values are a more extreme expression of this motivation. Conservation values contrast with *openness-to-change values*, which prioritize the pursuit of new ideas and experiences. *Openness to change* is composed of lower order values of stimulation (e.g., pursuing novel activities) and self-direction (e.g., being autonomous and doing things one's own way).

The second bipolar dimension is equally important. *Self-transcendence values* prioritize prosocial orientations, emphasizing equality among people and unity with nature. Their lower order values include benevolence (e.g., being helpful to close others) and universalism (e.g., pursuing equality and dignity for all as well as care for nature). They contrast with *self-enhancement values*, which prioritize one's advancement and status. The lower order values of self-enhancement include achievement (e.g., being successful and admired by others) and power (e.g., seeking wealth, prestige, and control over other people). We note that the self-enhancement values are fundamentally social in nature, seeking admiration and control over others by, often, increasing wealth or status. A final value, hedonism (e.g., seeking pleasure and "spoiling" oneself), overlaps with self-enhancement and openness-to-change values, as can be seen in Figure 1.

The circumplex structure of human values, illustrated in Figure 1, specifies positive and consistent relationships among adjacent values or negative and opposing relationships among diametrically opposed values. (Schwartz, 1992). For instance, if a construct is associated positively with openness-to-change values, then it will be associated negatively with conservation values and weakly with both self-transcendence values and self-enhancement values.

Figure 1
The Circumplex of Personal Values



Note. Dotted lines around hedonism represent its overlap with both self-enhancement and openness-to-change values.

The Different Values Emphasized in Protestant and Catholic Traditions

Schwartz's circumplex model of personal values offers an important framework to investigate the values emphasized in the Protestant and Catholic traditions. We consider two alternative predictions for how Protestants and Catholics differ in their endorsement of values along these two dimensions. We note that these predictions were not preregistered. According to the first prediction, Protestants will be more likely to endorse openness-to-change values than Catholics and less likely to endorse conservation values than Catholics. According to the alternative prediction, Protestants will be more likely to endorse self-transcendence values than Catholics and less likely to endorse self-enhancement values than Catholics. As described below, these predictions lead to opposing hypotheses about some values and therefore are incompatible with each other.

Protestants Higher in Openness to Change and Lower in Conservation

Protestantism developed as a challenge to the centralized, hierarchical authority of the Catholic Church and advocated for serious reforms (MacCulloch, 2003). These challenges to what was then the status quo included advocating for a direct relationship of the individual with God that is unmediated by the church and its sacraments and encouraging literacy and reading the Bible for oneself rather than holding the Church as the authority on Biblical truth.

Accordingly, there are greater literacy rates in areas with Protestant (vs. Catholic) missionaries (Gallego & Woodberry, 2010) or, in a historical analysis of towns and counties in Prussia, as a function of the number of Protestants or distance from the birthplace of the Protestant Reformation (Becker & Woessmann, 2008). Further, an emphasis on authentic religious belief has led some Protestant denominations, such as Baptists and Anabaptists, to consider the religious practice of baptism as valid only when made as a conscious and noncompulsory choice (Estep, 1996). A hypothesis arising from the role of Protestantism in challenging the necessity of the Church's traditional order and authority, in encouraging individuals to directly access the word of God for themselves, and in favoring noncompulsion is that Protestants will endorse openness-to-change values—and in particular, self-direction—more than Catholics will. Conversely, given the emphasis on subordination to the authority of the Church (Roccas & Schwartz, 1997), Catholics should score higher on conservation values. These predictions are consistent with the relationships between the elements of the values circumplex, in which openness-to-change values and conservation values are directly opposed to each other.

Protestants Higher in Self-Transcendence and Lower in Self-Enhancement

A core belief of Protestantism is that all are equal before God, and there is no need for human intermediaries to communicate with Him (MacCulloch, 2003). As such, Protestant theology opposes church hierarchy and tends to be egalitarian. Corresponding to this egalitarian stance is another key strand of Protestant thought, namely, the idea that universally applied rules are the standards for judging appropriate behavior, rather than preferences applied in a particularistic manner or on the basis of nepotism (Lipset & Lenz, 2000; Weber, 1905/2013). A hypothesis arising from Protestants' belief that all are equal before God and that rules should be universally applied is that Protestants will endorse self-transcendence values—specifically, universalism—more than Catholics will. Conversely, in terms of self-enhancement values, the antihierarchical nature of Protestantism could lead Protestants to reject power over others as a value. This contrasts with Catholicism, whose hierarchical Church structure (Hitchcock, 2012) may legitimize self-enhancement values.

Compatible with these predictions regarding the dimension of self-enhancement versus self-transcendence are predictions regarding hedonism, which is adjacent to self-enhancement, and conformity, which is adjacent to self-transcendence. Regarding hedonism, Weber (1905/2013) saw various branches of Protestantism as moralizing the mundane by valuing self-discipline, thrift, and savings (see also Rozin, 1999, on Protestant moralizations regarding health and temperance; D. Cohen et al., 2021, on Protestant moralizations about debt) and disapproving of pleasure and (if it interfered with one's work) sociability (Sanchez-Burks, 2002; Uhlmann & Sanchez-Burks, 2014). These moralizations may lead Protestants to reject hedonism to a greater degree than Catholicism does.

These two aspects of Protestantism—belief in rules, as well as moralizing the mundane—are also captured in the value of conformity. Indeed, it has been suggested that “the Protestant religious ethos is more conducive to norm-adhering behavior” (Lipset & Lenz, 2000, p. 121). The assessment of conformity in Schwartz's values circumplex¹ emphasizes following rules as well as an abundance of moralization. Thus, Protestants may score higher on conformity.

To summarize, according to this second set of predictions, Protestants will be higher in self-transcendence as well as conformity and will be lower in self-enhancement and hedonism. One might have expected Protestants would score high on achievement, a self-enhancement value, given Weber's argument about the Protestant ethic (see also Schwartz & Huismans, 1995). However, the achievement items as formulated in Schwartz's circumplex are less about accomplishment from diligent work in one's calling and more about the achievement of social status. Given this, we would not expect Protestants to score higher on the achievement of social status as an end in itself on the basis of Weber (1905/2013).

The Present Investigation

A previous investigation has compared the endorsement of values by religiosity and included Protestant and Catholic samples (Schwartz & Huismans, 1995), but that investigation included Protestants from one country and Catholics from another country (Study 1) or both groups from a single country (Study 2) and found no reliable differences in the latter comparison. We overcome limitations of previous work by running within-country comparisons of Protestants and Catholics across 20 different countries. We pose the following questions:

Research Question 1: Are there differences in the endorsement of values between Protestants and Catholics that manifest themselves across countries?

Two plausible predictions are those noted above: (a) Protestants are expected to score higher on openness-to-change values (and self-direction in particular) and lower on conservation values. (b) Protestants are expected to score higher on self-transcendence values (and universalism in particular) and conformity and lower on self-enhancement values and hedonism. We note that the predictions regarding conformity (a conservation value) and hedonism (which overlaps as both a self-enhancement and openness-to-change value) are precisely the opposite between the two accounts, and so they are a key test of these two alternative accounts.

Assuming we do find differences between Protestants and Catholics in the endorsement of values, are they driven by their level of devotion or by the nominal affiliation of Protestants and Catholics? As R. F. Inglehart (1997, p. 99) noted, “there are tremendous differences between Protestant and Catholic societies, but for the most part they do not reflect the direct influence of the Catholic and Protestant churches today” (emphasis added). Thus, there is a question as to whether these differences represent a *devotional* difference that continues to be inculcated among the religions' more observant adherents or an *affiliative* difference found among Protestants and Catholics across all levels of religious devotion. To be clear, we expect more (vs. less) religious Protestants and Catholics to endorse conservation values more and openness-to-change values less (Saroglou et al., 2004). However, the moderation of Protestant–Catholic differences by individuals' religiosity offers a clue as to which core

¹ Items in Schwartz's values scale assessing conformity include the following: “It is important to him always to behave properly. He wants to avoid doing anything people would say is wrong”; “He believes that people should do what they're told. He thinks people should follow rules at all times, even when no one is watching” (Schwartz, 2003).

values depend on the level of personal involvement with these religious traditions versus which depend on the social identity or the secular ways of being Protestant or Catholic. This leads to the second research question:

Research Question 2: Are Protestant–Catholic differences in value endorsement primarily affiliative or primarily devotional?

We consider three likely alternative patterns of findings. First, some differences in value endorsement might be primarily affiliative, which would be reflected in Protestant–Catholic differences irrespective of individuals' level of religiosity. Second, some differences in value endorsement might be primarily devotional, which would be reflected in equal endorsement of values among Protestants and Catholics low in religiosity, but differential endorsement at higher levels of religiosity. Finally, some differences in value endorsement might be both affiliative and devotional, which would be reflected in differences in value endorsement among Protestants and Catholics low in religiosity, which increase at higher levels of religiosity.

Protestant–Catholic differences may not be consistent across cultures. One structural factor that might matter is whether Protestant versus Catholic respondents live in a country where their religion has been the majority. This leads to the third research question:

Research Question 3: Is the endorsement of some values dependent on whether Protestants or Catholics are part of the majority or minority religious heritage of a given country?

Since being a part of the dominant group in society predicts greater endorsement of the status quo (Brandt, 2013; Caricati, 2017), we predicted that participants belonging to the majority religious heritage will be more likely to endorse conservation values, such as security and tradition, as compared to religious minorities, who have less commitment to the existing system. Thus, we would expect both Protestants and Catholics to show greater openness to change when they are in the minority and greater conservation when they are in the majority, above and beyond any finding concerning Research Question 1 about which values one group generally endorses more than the other group.

Our data come from the European Social Survey (ESS). To evaluate which values are endorsed more by Protestants or Catholics (Research Question 1), we tested which set of values Protestants endorse more than Catholics, with Protestants and Catholics nested within 20 countries. We controlled for religiosity because it is a strong predictor of values (Saroglou et al., 2004; Schwartz & Huismans, 1995). Second, to examine whether differences between Protestants and Catholics are a function of individuals' devotion or simply their affiliation (Research Question 2), we tested for the interaction between respondents' religion and religiosity. Additionally, we examined a separate set of de-identified Catholics and Protestants to examine whether differences would emerge in this population as a function of any lingering religious residue (Van Tongeren et al., 2021). Third, to evaluate whether the endorsement of values depends on being the majority or minority religious heritage (Research Question 3), we tested whether the effect of respondents' religion was moderated by their country's religious heritage (historically Protestant, Catholic, or mixed/neither). Finally, we examined the robustness of these findings by testing whether findings hold when controlling for socioeconomic status and when accounting for de-identification from religion.

The control for socioeconomic status is important because, historically, the average level of education is greater in Protestant locales than in Catholic locales (Becker & Woessmann, 2009), and this may also lead to higher socioeconomic status and more employment opportunities for Protestants. The control for de-identification is important because nonreligious Protestants may be more likely to de-identify with their religion than nonreligious Catholics (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2016). Since being Protestant is characterized more by belief than by belonging to a social and communal structure, people who grow up Protestant but are no longer religious may be more likely to no longer identify as Protestant, compared to Catholics. If this proposition is true, the samples of self-identified Protestants and Catholics would not be directly comparable. Supplemental robustness checks also examined Protestant–Catholic differences in their urban or rural environments and whether findings hold when tightening or loosening an inclusion criterion.

Method

Relevant measures were available in Waves 1–9 of the ESS (2002–2018). We used the broadest data set possible by including participants from all rounds. Wave 10 of the ESS was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic and consequently used different survey methods in some countries. These different survey methods render the results noncomparable to the previous waves (see Vishkin & Bkheet, 2025).

Sample

We included countries for which there were at least 80 Protestant respondents and at least 80 Catholic respondents. The rationale for such a cutoff is to ensure sufficiently large samples for the multilevel models to converge, and robustness checks confirmed findings are robust to this arbitrary cutoff. This resulted in a sample of 41,525 Protestants and 95,889 Catholics from 20 countries (see Supplemental Table S1). Of these, no data on values were available for 3,029 respondents, resulting in a final sample of 40,596 Protestants and 93,789 Catholics. A subset of analyses was conducted on an additional set of participants who identify as formerly Protestant ($N = 10,701$; of these, 10,473 have data on values) or formerly Catholic ($N = 18,934$; of these, 18,728 have data on values).

Materials

Values

The ESS uses the Portrait Values Questionnaire (Schwartz, 2003) to measure 10 basic human values. Participants are presented with hypothetical statements about the values of individuals in 21 statements and are asked to indicate how similar they are to that person on a scale from 1 (*very much like me*) to 6 (*not like me at all*). For ease of interpretation, we reverse-coded the scale, such that a higher score indicates greater agreement. Each value is assessed with two items, except for universalism which is assessed with three items.

The various versions of the Schwartz Values Surveys were developed with the purpose of measuring people's prioritization of a given value relative to the other values measured (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz et al., 2012). Consequently, we calculated value prioritization by subtracting each participant's overall mean from his or

her response on every item, which centers scores within participants (Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2012). In order to render intercepts and graphs interpretable, we then followed Schwartz et al. (2012) in adding the overall mean for all respondents, which restores the range of scores to the original scale.

Religion and Religiosity

Respondents self-reported their religious affiliation. They also reported their religiosity, on a scale from 0 (*not at all religious*) to 10 (*very religious*), in response to the following prompt: “Regardless of whether you belong to a particular religion, how religious would you say you are?” ($M = 5.87$, $SD = 2.36$).

Socioeconomic Status

We standardized and averaged across three indicators to create an index of socioeconomic status ($\alpha = .62$). One indicator was years of education completed ($M = 12.01$; $SD = 4.33$). The distribution of this variable was skewed, with values as high as 60. Consequently, values more than 3 SD s from the mean (0.26% of the sample) were winsorized, meaning that these values were assigned the value equivalent to the mean level of education plus 3 SD s ($12.01 + 4.3 \times 3 = 25.0$). A second indicator was a subjective assessment of how one feels about one’s household income, on a scale from 1 (*living comfortably on present income*) to 4 (*finding it very difficult on present income*), reverse-scored. A third indicator was of employment-based social class using a categorization that has been developed and validated on the ESS (Oesch, 2006) and used in several subsequent investigations (e.g., Clench-Aas & Holte, 2017; Ignazi & Tuorto, 2023). Respondents are divided into a 4-point ranking based on 16 categories. These include, for instance, large employers and high-grade managers at the highest ranking, small business owners with employees and lower grade managers at the next ranking, small business owners without employees and skilled service workers at the next ranking, and low-skilled production workers and low-skilled service workers at the lowest ranking.

Statistical Model

Since the hypotheses concern whether differences between Protestants and Catholics manifest themselves across countries, we ran multilevel models on each of the 10 values with participants nested within countries. We used the libraries lme4 (Bates et al., 2015) and lmerTest (Kuznetsova et al., 2017). Religion was coded as $-.5$ for Catholics and $.5$ for Protestants. The predictors included religion (Protestants vs. Catholics), religiosity (centered within countries since it is a Level 1 variable), and their interaction. These were also included as random factors, allowing the intercept and slopes for religion, religiosity, and their interaction to vary in each of the samples. The multilevel model in pseudo-R code was as follows:

$$\text{lmer}(\text{value} \sim \text{religiosity} \times \text{religion} + (\text{religiosity} \times \text{religion} + 1 | \text{country}). \quad (1)$$

If models failed to converge, we removed covariances between random factors. Main analyses include models that converged—either the full multilevel models or (when full models did not converge) models excluding covariances between random factors.

However, some of these models had singular fit issues, which can arise when there are problems with the model’s ability to estimate certain parameters reliably. Each of these models converged when (and usually only when) removing the random slope for the interaction. These models have the disadvantage of having inflated degrees of freedom for the interaction effects. Consequently, in the main analysis, we report the models that converged even if they had singularity issues (reported in Table 1 below) and provide full results in Supplemental Tables S2–S11. Furthermore, for the models with singular fit, we report their equivalent models without a random slope for the interaction in Supplemental Tables S12–S18. We note that findings are consistent across models with and without singular fit—with the exception that, as might be expected given the increase in degrees of freedom, some interactions that were nonsignificant in the main analysis reach significance in the models without a random slope for the interaction.

Transparency and Openness

Analysis code and descriptions of variables are included on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/nwp62>). Data are accessible from the ESS (<https://europeansocialsurvey.org/>). Data were analyzed in the R programming environment, Version 4.2.2 (R Core Team, 2020). The study’s design and analysis were not preregistered.

Results

Table 1 presents the results for each of the fixed effects in predicting the 10 values (for complete results of the multilevel models, see Supplemental Tables S2–S11). First, religiosity was positively associated with conservation and self-transcendence values and negatively associated with self-enhancement and openness-to-change values, replicating previous findings (Saroglou et al., 2004). The one discrepancy relative to previous findings is that in the present sample, religiosity was associated positively with universalism whereas a previous meta-analysis found that religiosity is associated negatively with universalism ($r = -.09$; Saroglou et al., 2004).

Next, to address Research Question 1, we examined which values Protestants (vs. Catholics) endorse more. Protestants were less likely to endorse self-enhancement values, including power, achievement ($p = .051$), and hedonism. Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the circumplex, Protestants were more likely to endorse self-transcendent values, including universalism and benevolence, as well as their adjacent values of self-direction and conformity. No significant differences emerged between Protestants and Catholics for the endorsement of the conservation values of tradition and security, as well as for the value of stimulation on the opposite side of the circumplex. These findings are consistent with the account that Protestantism is associated with greater endorsement of self-transcendence values. Figure 2 presents these findings on a radar plot and illustrates that differences between Protestants and Catholics are driven more by the self-transcendence–self-enhancement axis than the conservation–openness-to-change axis.

Next, to address Research Question 2, we examined the interactions between religiosity and religious affiliation. Three patterns are likely: a main effect of religion with no interaction with religiosity (demonstrating an affiliative effect), an interaction between religion and religiosity such that negligible differences at low levels of religiosity become larger at higher levels of religiosity (demonstrating

Table 1
Religiosity, Religion, and Their Interaction in Predicting Endorsement of Values

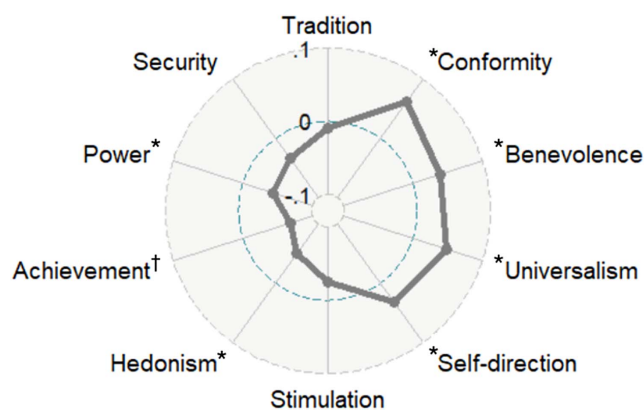
Value	Religiosity			Religion ^a			Religiosity × Religion		
	<i>b</i>	<i>t(df)</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t(df)</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t(df)</i>	<i>p</i>
Conservation									
Conformity	.04	9.52 (15)	<.001	.06	2.14 (17)	.048	-.02	-3.63 (6)	.012
Tradition	.08	23.90 (17)	<.001	-.01	-0.31 (17)	.758	-.02	-6.72 (75)	<.001
Security	.02	7.74 (13)	<.001	-.03	-1.85 (11)	.092	-.02	-5.14 (18)	<.001
Self-enhancement									
Power	-.04	-13.43 (14)	<.001	-.04	-2.28 (10)	.046	.00	0.02 (20)	.986
Achievement	-.03	-9.83 (14)	<.001	-.07	-2.13 (15)	.051	.00	0.80 (9)	.444
Hedonism	-.05	-15.17 (13)	<.001	-.05	-3.24 (7)	.017	.01	3.22 (10)	.010
Openness to change									
Stimulation	-.05	-11.37 (15)	<.001	-.02	-0.70 (17)	.496	.02	3.92 (9)	.004
Self-direction	-.02	-10.13 (17)	<.001	.03	3.09 (10)	.011	.00	0.93 (7)	.384
Self-transcendence									
Universalism	-.02	12.14 (15)	<.001	.05	3.53 (14)	.003	.01	2.70 (18)	.015
Benevolence	.02	14.71 (16)	<.001	.04	2.30 (13)	.039	.00	0.76 (15)	.460

^a Catholics = -.5; Protestants = .5.

a devotional effect), or an effect of religion at all levels of religiosity that is larger at higher levels of religiosity (demonstrating an additive affiliative–devotional effect). Six interactions were significant, mostly on the dimension of conservation–openness to change (conformity, tradition, security, hedonism, stimulation), as well as for universalism. These interactions are presented in Figure 3. Of the seven values whose endorsement differed significantly between Protestants and Catholics, four were not moderated by respondents' religiosity (power, achievement, self-direction, and benevolence), demonstrating an affiliative effect of value endorsement without a devotional effect. A devotional effect emerged for universalism: No Protestant–Catholic differences emerged at low levels of religiosity, but they did emerge at higher levels of religiosity. For the remaining two values whose endorsement differed significantly between Protestants and

Catholics (conformity and hedonism), an unexpected *reverse-devotional effect* emerged: Differences between Protestants and Catholics only began to emerge at lower levels of religiosity. Finally, for all three values with no main effects of religion (tradition, security, and stimulation), unexpected crossover interactions emerged. It is not immediately apparent what is driving the two unexpected patterns for these five interactions, but we note they all have one element in common: The slope for Catholics is always steeper than the slope for Protestants. In other words, religiosity is a weaker predictor of value endorsement for Protestants than for Catholics in these interactions. These findings paint a complex picture regarding the role of adherents' personal religiosity in the manifestation of Protestant–Catholic differences in value endorsement. We discuss the theoretical implications of these findings in the General Discussion section.

Figure 2
Estimated Differences Between Protestants and Catholics in the Endorsement of Values in the Values Circumplex



Note. Scores above the green dashed line (marked with 0) indicate greater endorsement by Protestants, whereas scores below indicate greater endorsement by Catholics. Tradition and conformity are separated into adjacent wedges. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

† *p* = .051. * *p* < .05.

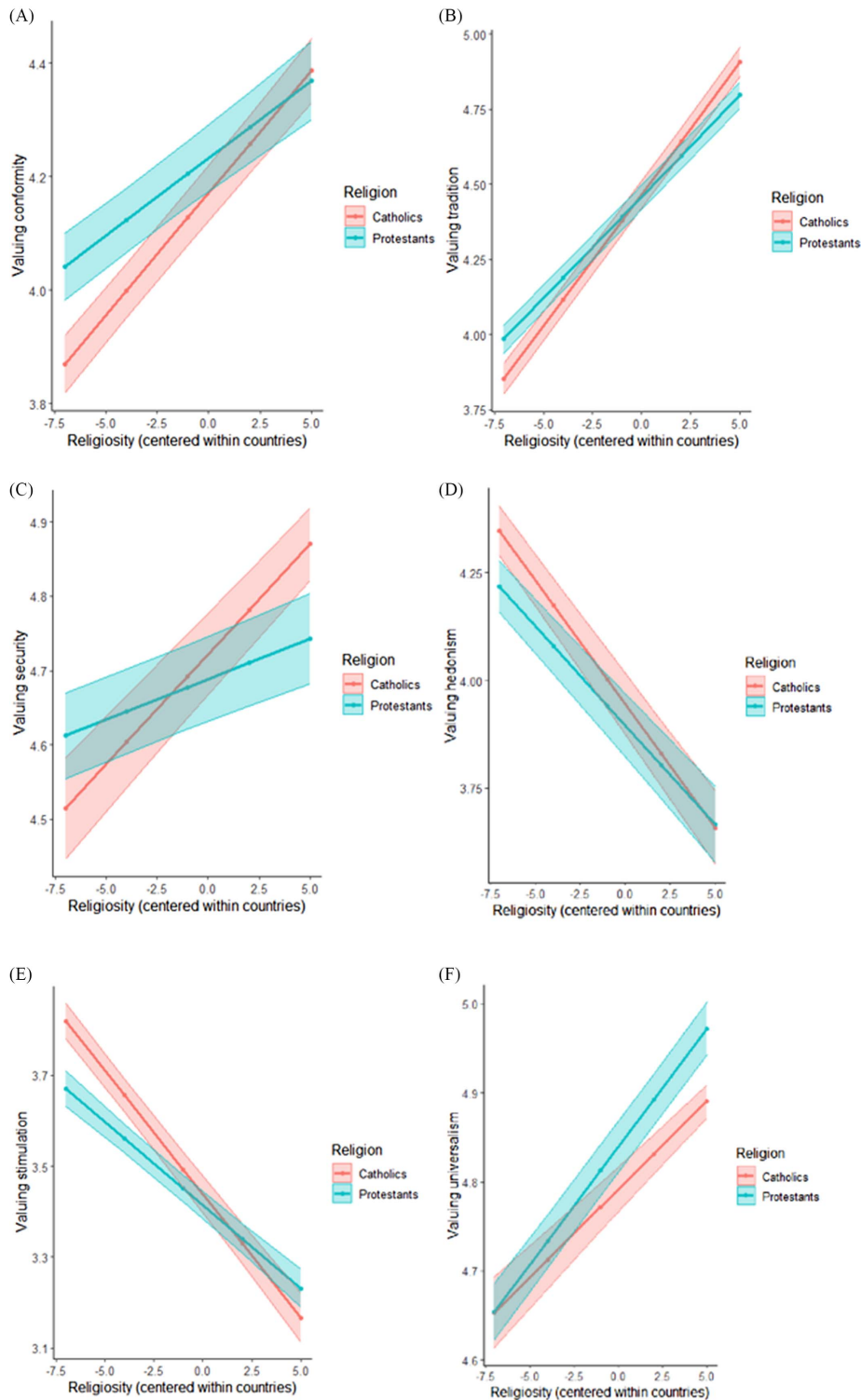
Controlling for Differences in Socioeconomic Status and Further Robustness Checks

In addition to the control of religiosity in the previous analyses, we conducted several analyses to examine the robustness of the findings regarding Protestant–Catholic differences in value endorsement, described in this section and the next. These include Protestant–Catholic differences in socioeconomic status, in urban–rural environment, and in rates of de-identification. In addition, we examined whether results are robust to the arbitrary inclusion criterion of countries with at least 80 Protestants and 80 Catholics.

The Protestant–Catholic differences in prioritizing self-enhancement versus self-transcendence values may be an artifact of different socioeconomic status. To the best of our knowledge, the role of socioeconomic status or education in the endorsement of values in Schwartz's values circumplex has not been investigated since respondents are typically highly educated (Schwartz et al., 2012; Schwartz & Huismans, 1995). Catholics' lower historical literacy (Becker & Woessmann, 2008; Gallego & Woodberry, 2010) may lead to lower socioeconomic status compared to Protestants. Accordingly, it may be hypothesized that individuals lower in socioeconomic status, whose daily pressures require them to look out for their own subsistence, endorse self-enhancement values to a

Figure 3

Interactions Between Religiosity and Religion in Predicting Value Endorsement of Conformity (A), Tradition (B), Security (C), Hedonism (D), Stimulation (E), and Universalism (F)



Note. Bands represent the standard errors. The x-axis is longer than the 10-point scale because religiosity is centered within countries, and countries differ in their mean religiosity. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

greater extent. Therefore, we tested for differences in socioeconomic status as an explanation for our findings. Against this hypothesis, we note that egalitarianism, which is characteristic of self-transcendent values, is actually empirically more likely to be endorsed among individuals from lower social classes (Manstead, 2018).

First, we tested whether Protestants and Catholics differ in their socioeconomic status. As might be expected from prior work, Protestants had higher socioeconomic status ($M = 0.22$, $SD = 0.69$) than Catholics ($M = -0.11$, $SD = 0.77$) when collapsed across countries. This difference emerged as significant in a multilevel model, with religion as a fixed factor and random effects for an intercept and slope of religion nested within countries, $b = .07$, $t(16) = 3.84$, $p = .001$. Consequently, we reran the previous analyses when controlling for socioeconomic status as a fixed effect. To render the results comparable, we ran the same analyses as in Table 1. All models converged, with the exception of hedonism and benevolence, which converged only after removing the random effect of the interaction between religion and religiosity. Like the results in Table 1, some had singular fit issues. Overall, compared to Table 1, results for main effects and interactions remained unchanged when controlling for socioeconomic status (see Supplemental Table S19), with two exceptions: Protestants no longer endorsed self-direction values to a significantly greater extent than Catholics, $b = .02$, $t(9) = 2.11$, $p = .066$, and the interaction between religion and religiosity was significant for benevolence, likely because of the increased degrees of freedom due to the exclusion of the random effect of the interaction in this model. Thus, most Protestant–Catholic differences are not accounted for by differences in socioeconomic status.

Next, robustness checks established that there are no consistent Protestant–Catholic differences regarding living in a more urban or rural environment (see Supplemental Material). Furthermore, results were robust to altering the inclusion criterion of countries with at least 80 Protestants and 80 Catholics, both when making the inclusion criterion stricter and when making it more lenient (see Supplemental Results).

Testing for Differences in De-Identification

To the extent that nonreligious Protestants are more likely than Catholics to de-identify with their religious affiliation, the two samples would not be directly comparable. The ESS includes an item for testing rates of de-identification: Respondents who do not currently identify with any religion were asked if they have ever belonged to a religion. In the 20-country sample used in this investigation, 10,701 people stated they have been Protestant in the past and 18,934 stated they have been Catholic in the past. The proportion of people who grew up as Protestant but no longer identify as such, relative to the number of self-identified Protestants in the sample, is 20.5%, compared to 16.5% for Catholics, suggesting that de-identification is greater among Protestants than among Catholics. However, these numbers are pooled across countries. Therefore, we calculated these proportions for Protestants and Catholics in every country. A paired-samples t test showed no significant difference, $t(19) = -0.18$, $p = .856$, $d = .03$, revealing that when controlling for the nested structure of the data, Protestants are not more likely to de-identify than Catholics are.

Nevertheless, to definitively address this concern, we pooled together respondents who identify as either Protestant or Catholic (i.e., the main sample reported in the article) with respondents who

used to be Protestant or Catholic but no longer identify as such, and reran the multilevel models from Table 1 that predict the endorsement of values from religion, religiosity, and their interaction (see Supplemental Table S20 for results). All models converged, although, as in Table 1, some had singular fit issues. Results remained highly similar, with the exception that the difference between Protestants and Catholics in the endorsement of power values was no longer significant. In conclusion, Protestant–Catholic differences in self-enhancement and self-transcendence are not accounted for by differences in de-identification.

Affiliative, Devotional, and Residue Effects: Analysis of De-Identified Respondents

In the Religion $\times$ Religiosity analyses above, we identified three patterns. (a) There were affiliative values, such that endorsing some values depended on whether one identifies as Protestant versus Catholic, and religious differences emerged on these values regardless of one's level of religiosity. (b) There was a devotional value (universalism), such that Protestants and Catholics did not differ at low levels of religiosity, but as Protestants became more religious, they became more universalistic than their Catholic counterparts did. And (c) there were reverse-devotional effects and crossover interactions, both having in common steeper slopes for religiosity among Catholics as compared to Protestants. If the last pattern of findings is robust, it, and only it, should emerge as religious residue (Van Tongeren et al., 2021) among former Protestants and former Catholics as well. We tested this using multilevel regressions predicting each value from respondent's de-identified religion, with random effects for an intercept and the slope of religion nested within countries (see Table 2).

Consistent with the finding above that the differences between Protestants and Catholics in power, achievement, self-direction, and benevolence are *affiliative*—that is, they come with identifying as either a Protestant or a Catholic—we found no significant differences between de-identified Protestants and de-identified Catholics in these values. It should be noted that de-identified Protestant–Catholic differences on these four values were all directionally similar to the differences among identified Protestants and Catholics, and thus there is some suggestion of religious residue. However, this residue is not enough to produce any significant differences among the de-identified populations.

Table 2
Predicting Values From Religion Among De-Identified Protestants and Catholics

Value	b^a	$t(df)$	p
Conformity	.10	2.73 (18.47)	.014
Tradition	.08	2.52 (15.11)	.024
Security	-.01	-0.33 (16.69)	.743
Power	-.03	-1.06 (3.85)	.351
Achievement	-.05	-2.67 (3.58)	.063
Hedonism	-.06	-2.94 (20.00)	.008
Stimulation	-.07	-2.28 (14.12)	.039
Self-direction	.01	0.24 (16.17)	.815
Universalism	.01	0.35 (7.27)	.735
Benevolence	.02	1.41 (4.34)	.225

^a Catholics = $-.5$; Protestants = $.5$.

Consistent with the finding that differences between Protestants and Catholics in universalism are devotional—that is, differences do not occur at low levels of religiosity but grow as a function of how religious one is—we found no significant differences between de-identified Protestants and Catholics in how universalistic they were.

We did, however, find significant differences between de-identified Protestants and Catholics with respect to two values that showed a reverse-devotional effect (conformity and hedonism) and two of the three values that showed a crossover pattern (tradition and the rejection of stimulation). For all four values, de-identified Protestants seemed to show more religious residue than de-identified Catholics did. That is, de-identified Protestants (vs. de-identified Catholics) gave responses that were more typical of religious people, being more favorable toward conformity and tradition and less favorable toward hedonism and stimulation. These results were not due to differences in religiosity, since former Protestants and Catholics did not differ in their level of religiosity, $b = 0.19$, $t(11) = 1.16$, $p = .268$. In the General Discussion section, we again return to these effects as we discuss the possibilities that Catholicism is more dependent on institutional structures to sustain itself as compared to Protestantism or, alternatively, that de-identified Catholics are more likely to rebel against religious tenets compared to de-identified Protestants.

Consistency Across Countries

Finally, we examined Research Question 3 regarding the consistency of the Protestant–Catholic differences in value endorsement across countries. We examined two related questions: Are Protestant–Catholic differences in value endorsement consistent across countries, and if they are not consistent, are they explained by countries' predominant religious heritage?

Are Protestant–Catholic Differences in Value Endorsement Consistent Across Countries?

To test whether Protestant–Catholic differences in the endorsement of each of the 10 values are consistent or vary across countries, we performed a likelihood ratio test (LRT) on two nested models: the full multilevel model with an interaction between religion and religiosity (as described in the Statistical Model subsection above), and the same model but absent the random slope of respondents' religion. Degrees of freedom in the LRT indicate the additional parameters in the former model relative to the latter model, which include the random effect of religion and covariances between the random effect of religion and the three other random effects. A significant LRT indicates that modeling each country's slope of religion (i.e., the difference between Protestants and Catholics) improves model fit—or in other words, that Protestant–Catholic differences vary by country. Table 3 provides the results of the LRT for each value. LRTs were significant in all instances except for self-direction, indicating that most Protestant–Catholic differences in value endorsement do vary by country.

Do Religious Heritages Explain the Country-Level Variation in Protestant–Catholic Differences?

The finding that Protestant–Catholic differences in value endorsement vary by country might be due to various factors. We tested our a priori prediction for Research Question 3 that each

Table 3

Likelihood Ratio Tests of the By-Country Slope of Respondents' Religion, and Interaction Effects of Respondents' Religion With Countries' Religious Heritage

Value	Likelihood ratio test		Respondent Religion × Country Religious Heritage		
	$\chi^2(df)$	p	b	$t(df)$	p
Conservation					
Conformity	71.14 (4)	<.001	.17	3.18 (16)	.006
Tradition	74.75 (4)	<.001	.20	4.86 (16)	<.001
Security	18.61 (4)	<.001	.09	2.32 (10)	.044
Self-enhancement					
Power	17.94 (4)	.001	-.06	-1.62 (7)	.151
Achievement	52.14 (4)	<.001	-.20	-4.10 (12)	.001
Hedonism	9.86 (4)	.043	-.03	-1.10 (5)	.318
Openness to change					
Stimulation	83.88 (4)	<.001	-.25	-5.07 (17)	<.001
Self-direction	7.29 (4)	.122	-.02	-1.23 (16)	.238
Self-transcendence					
Universalism	24.96 (4)	<.001	.02	0.84 (15)	.413
Benevolence	29.96 (4)	<.001	.11	3.69 (12)	.003

religion will be more likely to endorse conservation (vs. openness) values when they are a part of the dominant or majority group. Possible religious heritages in the current sample of countries include a predominantly Protestant heritage, a predominantly Catholic heritage, neither (i.e., an Orthodox Christian heritage), or mixed. We reran the same models that appear in Table 1, with two additional fixed effects: a main effect for a country's religious heritage and an interaction between respondents' religion and their country's religious heritage. Religious heritage was coded such that countries with a Protestant religious heritage (a total of six countries) were coded as 1, countries with a Catholic religious heritage (a total of 10 countries) were coded as 0, and countries with a different religious heritage (i.e., Orthodox) or a mixed Protestant–Catholic heritage (a total of three countries) were coded as 0.5. Finally, one country with a Protestant–Orthodox religious heritage was coded as 0.75 (see Supplemental Table S1 for a coding of each country's religious heritage).

Results for the effect of the interaction between respondent's religion and their country's religious heritage appear in Table 3. Of the nine values with significant country-level variation in Protestant–Catholic differences, country-level religious heritage was a significant moderator of the effect of respondents' religion for six of the values. Results partially map on to our predictions, with Protestants (vs. Catholics) more likely to endorse conservation values (including conformity, tradition, and security) in Protestant-heritage countries, while Catholics (vs. Protestants) are more likely to endorse one of the openness-to-change values, stimulation, in Protestant-heritage countries. Unexpected findings emerged for achievement and benevolence, which are located on the self-enhancement–self-transcendence dimension: Achievement is endorsed more by Catholics in Protestant-heritage countries, and benevolence is endorsed more by Protestants in Protestant-heritage countries. Finally, we note that the values demonstrating no interaction between respondent's religion and their country's religious heritage lie more on the dimension of self-enhancement versus self-transcendence, including power and hedonism (self-enhancing) as well as universalism (self-transcending) and self-direction (adjacent to universalism). Taken together, these

findings reveal that the effect of religious heritage on Protestant–Catholic differences at the individual level is smaller on the self-enhancement versus self-transcendence dimension and larger on the openness to change versus conservation dimension, as conservation values are more likely to be endorsed when there is congruence between respondents' religion and the religious heritage of their country.

Finally, we also ran multiple regressions in each country for each value, with religiosity, religion, and their interaction predicting a specific value (see [Supplemental Tables S21–S30](#)). A visual examination of how findings vary by country within each value leads to similar conclusions as above.

General Discussion

This investigation sought to address three questions regarding differences in the endorsement of personal values between Protestants and Catholics using a design that enhances the generalizability of findings by including Protestant and Catholic samples both within and between countries. First, we investigated whether there are differences in the endorsement of values between Protestants and Catholics (Research Question 1). Results revealed that Protestants endorse self-transcendence values (universalism and benevolence, and the adjacent values of conformity and self-direction), to a greater extent than Catholics, and endorse self-enhancement values (power, achievement, and hedonism), to a lesser extent. These results were obtained when analyzing Protestants and Catholics within countries, across 20 different countries. They held when controlling for Protestant–Catholic differences in socioeconomic status and when including respondents who have de-identified from their religion. These findings are in line with several observations regarding the core beliefs of Protestantism: that all are equal before God with no need for human intermediaries to communicate with Him and that universally applied rules are the standards for judging appropriate behavior, which may lead Protestants to endorse self-transcendence values and universalism in particular. They are also in line with the antihierarchical nature of Protestantism, which may lead Protestants to reject the value of power, and Protestantism's asceticism, which may lead it to reject hedonism. Finally, they are in line with the Protestant emphasis on moralization and following rules, which may lead Protestants to endorse the value of conformity. Although we were able to formulate an a priori expectation that Protestants will endorse openness-to-change values to a greater extent and conservation values to a lesser extent based on Protestantism's historical position of challenging the authority of the Catholic Church, no consistent Protestant–Catholic differences emerged along this dimension. This might be due to the role that minority versus majority religious status has on the endorsement of values along this dimension, as described below.

Second, we investigated whether Protestant–Catholic differences in the endorsement of values (Research Question 2) are primarily affiliative or primarily devotional by testing whether these differences are moderated by adherents' personal level of religiosity. Results revealed that four Protestant–Catholic differences are affiliative (i.e., they are not moderated by religiosity; power, achievement, self-direction, and benevolence), whereas one Protestant–Catholic difference is devotional (universalism). None of these values differed in their endorsement between *de-identified* Protestants and Catholics, suggesting that any religious residue was not strong enough to produce significant differences on these values after individuals left

their religion. The overall picture on whether Protestant–Catholic differences in value endorsement are affiliative or devotional does not map neatly onto the circumplex, and it is unclear why Protestant–Catholic differences in universalism in particular are devotional. One possibility is that universalism is the value that best corresponds to the core, persisting issue separating Protestant and Catholic religious teachings. That is, the persistent core doctrinal distinction involves Protestantism's principled, egalitarian individualism—that the individual is in direct relation with God, without need for intermediaries or the hierarchy of the Church (see also [A. B. Cohen & Hill, 2007](#), on the individualistic vs. communal or ritualistic nature of Protestantism). And principled, egalitarian individualism—as opposed to more collectivistic or particularistic ideologies—maps perhaps most directly onto Schwartz's value of universalism.

Finally, we investigated whether the endorsement of values depends on whether Protestants or Catholics are part of the majority or minority religious heritage of a given country (Research Question 3). Previous work has examined the moderating role of religious group status on value endorsement, but distinguished between countries with cordial versus antagonistic church–state relations and examined associations between religiosity and values among Catholics rather than Protestant–Catholic differences ([Roccas & Schwartz, 1997](#)). Other work has found that majority or minority group status moderates associations between values and attitudes in a single cultural context ([Grigoryan & Schwartz, 2020](#)). To the best of our knowledge, the present article is the first investigation to directly compare the values of majority and minority religious group members across countries. We found significant variation between countries regarding Protestant–Catholic differences in the endorsement of nine out of 10 values. Furthermore, we hypothesized and found that Protestants (vs. Catholics) are more likely to endorse conservation values in countries with a Protestant heritage, and they are more likely to endorse one openness-to-change value (specifically, stimulation) in countries where they are part of the minority religious heritage. In the long-standing debate about whether low-status or marginalized groups are more likely to justify the status quo ([Jost et al., 2004](#)) or less likely to do so ([Brandt, 2013](#); [Caricati, 2017](#)), our findings are consistent with the latter position.

Unexpected Findings and Broader Theoretical Implications

In the interaction between religion and religiosity when assessing Research Question 2, two unexpected patterns emerged for the five values that demonstrated neither an affiliative effect nor a devotional effect. Two values showed a reverse-devotional effect (conformity and hedonism), and three values showed a crossover effect (tradition, security, and stimulation). One feature common to all these unexpected findings is that the slope of religiosity is steeper among Catholics than among Protestants. Stated differently, Protestants high versus low in religiosity are less different from each other on these five values than Catholics high versus low in religiosity are. Further, in analyses among the *de-identified*, for four of those values, *de-identified* Protestants endorsed values typical of religious participants more than *de-identified* Catholics did, suggesting that ex-Protestants show greater religious residue ([Saroglou et al., 2020](#); [Van Tongeren et al., 2021](#)) than ex-Catholics do.

There are at least two possible interpretations for these findings. One possible explanation is that Catholicism's greater emphasis on

hierarchy and lesser emphasis on self-direction (Hitchcock, 2012) may lead less religious and de-identified Catholics to rebel against religious values to a greater degree. Meanwhile, Protestantism's greater egalitarianism and emphasis on self-direction might not lead to a similar reaction among its de-identified or less religious adherents.

Another possible explanation is that slopes are steeper and effects of being low in religiosity (or being de-identified entirely) are more pronounced for Catholics than for Protestants because Catholicism is institutionalized, communal, and unified to a greater degree than Protestantism, with its many denominations, its more congregational organization, and its emphasis on the individual's interpretation of Scripture (Hitchcock, 2012; Leithart, 2016). Being a Catholic means being part of a Church, more so than being a Protestant. Stated differently, being a devout Catholic in one's privacy, outside the framework of the Church, its sacraments, its official doctrine, and its rituals, is less feasible than being a Protestant outside the framework of a church, and so Catholics low in religiosity become more dissimilar to their highly religious peers than Protestants do.

Both explanations can account for why religiosity is a stronger predictor of value endorsement among Catholics than among Protestants, and can also explain why Catholics low in religiosity have a less religious axiology for some values than Protestants low in religiosity do. Specifically, religiosity is most positively associated with endorsing conformity and tradition and most negatively associated with endorsing hedonism, stimulation, and self-direction (Saroglou et al., 2004). Four of these values (all but self-direction) show these reverse-devotional or crossover effects. Among the de-identified, these same four values are also the only ones that show a significant difference between de-identified Protestants and Catholics, with the former resembling religious participants more than the latter do. In sum, less religious and de-identified Catholics consistently possess the less religious axiology (lower endorsement of conformity and tradition, higher endorsement of hedonism and stimulation), as compared to their less religious and de-identified Protestant peers. According to the first explanation, Catholics low in religiosity may rebel particularly against the values reflecting a religious axiology. According to the second explanation, living outside the institutions, rituals, and doctrines of the Church (vs. within them) may lead to the greatest decrements in these values in particular, since they comprise a general religious axiology that is less accessible to Catholics (vs. Protestants) outside of church institutions. Future work can try to tease apart these two explanations.

Protestantism and Individualism

Coreligionists share similarities across national boundaries (White et al., 2021), and many of the demarcation lines between distinct cultural regions reflect different religious heritages (R. Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Schwartz, 2006). Distinct regions include those with a Protestant heritage or a Catholic heritage. As noted earlier, Protestant countries score among the highest on indices of individualism (Hofstede et al., 2010), self-expression (R. Inglehart & Baker, 2000), and emancipative values (Welzel, 2013, 2014). While researchers have noted the tight correspondence between individualism and Protestantism (e.g., R. Inglehart & Baker, 2000), this correspondence has received limited attention in the cultural psychology literature (for a notable exception, see research by Adam Cohen, e.g., A. B. Cohen et al., 2016). The present findings

suggest which aspect of individualism may be most clearly traced back to Protestantism.

To elucidate the association between individualism as assessed by personal values and individualism as a cultural dimension, we clarify a key distinction in the values literature between personal values and cultural values. Dimensions derived from individual-level and group-level analyses are statistically independent from each other. Consequently, Schwartz derived a different circumplex structure of values at the cultural level than at the individual level, even though the same set of items was used to empirically derive each circumplex (Schwartz, 1994). The values circumplex at the cultural level comprises seven values. Three of these values have strong positive correlations with Hofstede's (1980) measure of individualism, including Affective Autonomy and Intellectual Autonomy (composed of items from the openness-to-change values of self-direction, stimulation, and hedonism), as well as Egalitarian Commitment (composed of items from the self-transcendence values of benevolence and universalism). Meanwhile, our findings showed that Protestants are not more likely to endorse openness-to-change values but are more likely to endorse self-transcendence values. Similarly, more recent work has identified lower levels of nepotism and higher levels of impersonal prosociality (fair and cooperative behavior extended to strangers or to acquaintances outside one's kin group) as a central feature of individualist cultures and of market economies (Henrich, 2020; see also Gächter & Schulz, 2016; Lipset & Lenz, 2000). The present findings that Protestants are more likely to endorse universalism values suggest that the universalistic orientation of Western individualist cultures may have Protestant roots.

Limitations and Future Directions

We endeavored to maximize the generalizability of our findings by including samples of Protestants and Catholics within countries, across 20 different European nations. Our findings can speak to the generalizability of Protestant–Catholic differences across these countries, but only in the context of Europe. It is unclear to what extent these differences between Protestants and Catholics in value endorsement might generalize beyond contemporary Europe. Recent work has found greater literacy rates among Protestants than among Catholics in 19th-century Prussia (Becker & Woessmann, 2008), and this finding has been extended to areas outside Europe missionized by Protestants versus Catholics in Africa (Gallego & Woodberry, 2010). Thus, at least some differences between Protestants and Catholics in Europe generalize to other cultural contexts. Nevertheless, the effects of Protestant missionary activity on investment in education are not uniform (McCleary, 2013). Future work can examine the extent to which Protestant–Catholic differences generalize across various cultural contexts. As an example, one interesting milieu for examining the generalizability of Protestant–Catholic differences is provided by the modern-day replacement of Catholicism by Protestantism in South America (Parker, 2016).

Our findings build on previous work showing that Protestants and Catholics have unique psychological profiles. Focusing on the endorsement of values, we demonstrate that some within-country differences between Protestants and Catholics generalize across countries, particularly regarding the dimension of self-transcendence versus self-enhancement. Even so, significant variation in Protestant–Catholic differences appears between countries, highlighting the need

to establish whether Protestant–Catholic differences that have been demonstrated in one national context generalize to other contexts.

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