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THE CIVILISATION OF SECURITY OR THE CERTAINTY OF FEAR? A SOCIO-SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

An interdisciplinary understanding of social metabolism not only offers the greatest chance of objectivity but also fulfils the conditions for an in-depth analysis. Of course, there is always at least one interpretative framework for the realities subjected to critical scrutiny, but this lends coherence to the approach itself and crystallises the results obtained. We have sought to capture the dynamics of those factors that play the greatest role in shaping society (with varying emphases, ranging from the collective to the individual) and their degree of convergence with people's values, opinions, priorities and beliefs. At the same time, the analysis aims to validate or invalidate certain contemporary theses, such as the relationship between well-being and religiosity, the opposition between traditionalism and self-assertion, social security and fear, egolatry and alternative forms of response to religious need, etc. Furthermore, we sought to demonstrate that the interdependence of different social spheres does not always operate along exclusive lines but, through the solutions it demands, involves unequivocal symbiotic manifestations. The social universe often takes shape as a vast paradox; yet the solution, more often than not, is a personal and even spiritual one.

Keywords: *Cultural map; values; security; fear; virtue; passion; society; anthropology;*

INTRODUCTION

Cultural divides are nothing new, and the criteria by which they draw their theoretical lines of demarcation come as no surprise to anyone. The great themes of existence are all social themes, and this opens up an extremely vast field of debate in the political, economic, geopolitical, anthropological and, no less importantly, religious spheres. These involve definitions of identity, inner motivations, stakes with varying impacts, and consequences at both the personal and collective levels. A classic example of such an analysis, in the wake of the above, can be found in Samuel P. Huntington's famous work from the 1990s, *The Clash of Civilisations*. Setting aside opinions for or against it, what we wish to highlight is precisely the fact that identity captures a multifaceted reality, and its analysis reveals the inner dynamics of a living geography.

The starting point is the cultural map produced by the two researchers affiliated with the World Value Survey, supplemented by sociological studies carried out by the Pew Research Centre. This conceptual framework aims to provide a social snapshot of our civilisation, focusing on several key areas: values, beliefs, the economy, religion, politics, threats, fears and unpredictability. The overall picture also calls for potential solutions, and in this regard we have put forward arguments and proposed solutions of a personal and spiritual nature; this is precisely one of the much-sought-after elements of novelty.

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1. THE INGLEHART-WELZEL CULTURAL MAP AND THE SOCIAL DIFFUSION OF VALUES

'We would rather be ruined than change.
We'd rather die in our fear
Than to climb the cross of the moment
And let our illusions fade away"[1]
Wystan Hugh Auden

According to the World Values Survey (WVS), „people's beliefs play an essential role in economic development, in the emergence and flourishing of democratic institutions"[2], but also in many other areas, as we shall see from an analysis of what is already recognised as *the Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map.*

The map is named after the two Western researchers: Ronald Inglehart, an American academic specialising in comparative politics, and Christian Welzel, a German researcher and director at the WVS. The model we are analysing was drawn up in 2005, although versions bearing a single author's name circulated both before and after that date. *The Inglehart-Welzel cultural map* is laid out along two axes, vertical and horizontal, which in turn represent two cultural registers or dimensions; all of these are based on ten measurable indicators. The axes polarise two pairs of values: *Traditional vs Secular-rational*, on the one hand, and *Survival* values *vs Self-expression,* on the other. We also note that the values in each pair are antagonistically reflexive, so that the indicators must be interpreted in a manner opposite to that of the paired value. These are as follows[3]:

I. Traditional values emphasise the following aspects (in contrast to secular-rational values):
   a. God is very important;
   b. It is far more important for a child to learn obedience and religious faith than independence and self-determination;
   c. Abortion is never justified[4];
   d. A strong sense of national pride;
   e. Greater respect for authority.

II. Survival values refer to (as opposed to values relating to self-expression):
   a. Economic and psychological security take precedence over quality of life and self-expression;
   b. Respondents describe themselves as 'not very happy';
   c. Homosexuality is never justified;
   d. Respondents have not signed, nor will they sign, any petition;
   e. One must be very cautious when it comes to trusting people.

The dynamics of the map unfold diagonally, from the bottom-left corner (the strongly traditional periphery, with an emphasis on survival values) towards the top-right corner (a cultural zone characterised by liberal values, through self-expression and secular-rational thinking). The curve of the map also delineates the separation between the world's poor and wealthy regions, which

[1] Wystan Hugh Auden, in: Paul Kingsnorth, *Mai putem salva lumea? Confesiunile unui ecologist convertit la Ortodoxie*, Școala Ardeleană Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2023, p. 360.
[2] World Value Survey, https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp?CMSID=findings (13.10.2026).
[3] World Value Survey, https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp?CMSID=findings (13.10.2026).
[4] C.S. Lewis offers us an argument that is both common-sense and of high intellectual calibre: „The power of past generations over those yet to come. Through contraception alone, future generations are denied existence without having given their consent. The momentary preferences of a single generation, guided by its own reasons, are thus manifested", in: Clive Staples Lewis, *Desființarea omului (The Abolition of Man),* Humanitas, Bucharest, 2023, pp. 52–53.

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are directly influenced by their axiological positioning along these two axes. It is clear from the text that this transition implies an interdependence between the two pairs of values; that is to say, the wealthier a society is, the more its shared values align with those of secularism and self-expression; similarly, the more traditional a society is, the more precarious its economic well-being becomes and the lower people's level of happiness is. Hence the concrete need for economic and psychological security.

However, the *confusion* that the analysis creates rather than fully clarifying revolves around questions such as: which forces have a greater determining influence on people's socio-economic and political conditions?

Those relating to external factors (God, authority, society, the legal framework, the political system, geopolitical advantage) or those relating to personal choices and values (morality, family, identity, religion)? Furthermore, what guarantees are there that an ethic of self-expression cannot lead to extreme individualism and, by extension, to a weakening of the social fabric and to alienation? Could free choice, without a moral framework to guide it and in the absence of a vision of personal fulfilment that transcends the rule of whatever takes my fancy, hit-et-nunc, prove catastrophic, given the consequences it entails? Similarly, can the logical reduction - that happiness is possible only under conditions of economic prosperity - be applied honestly and objectively? What proven guarantees are there that economic prosperity in itself acts as an inexorable source of inevitable happiness? Finally, are societies really so homogeneous, and can their inner workings be simplified to such an extent that we can make absolute claims, such as that there is a radical incompatibility between religious beliefs and democracy/freedom, prosperity and happiness?

It has been proven that the absence of faith does not automatically promote economic growth, as there is no mutually exclusive relationship between the two; however, economic independence may result in a decline in faith, as it encourages certain patterns of behaviour, such as: „the radical intensification of individualism or consumerism"[5].

What is the basis for the assumption that these latter two are, by definition, good? The idea that individualism and consumerism are closely linked to the possibility of happiness is far-fetched: „The impact of economic development on religious identity is difficult to predict. ... However, it should not be taken for granted that all countries will follow a European model in which religious disaffiliation increases as a result of advanced economic development"[6]. Furthermore, the map's conclusion – namely that „poverty, exacerbated by physical, social and economic insecurity, drives people to seek refuge in the religious realm of beliefs about the afterlife"[7] – is, to say the least, tenuous.

We might suspect certain left-wing ideological biases; however, setting these aside, the merit of the map in question is evident and lies in its ability to identify some of the interacting factors that produce measurable social effects, which are decisive for the evolution of society and, to a certain extent, relevant to our field of analysis. As a map, it delineates certain cultural typologies, shifting along the axes and indicators that make it up. One obvious feature of the map is that it shows Eastern Europe to be shaped by values centred on survival, with a low degree of self-assertion, whilst the

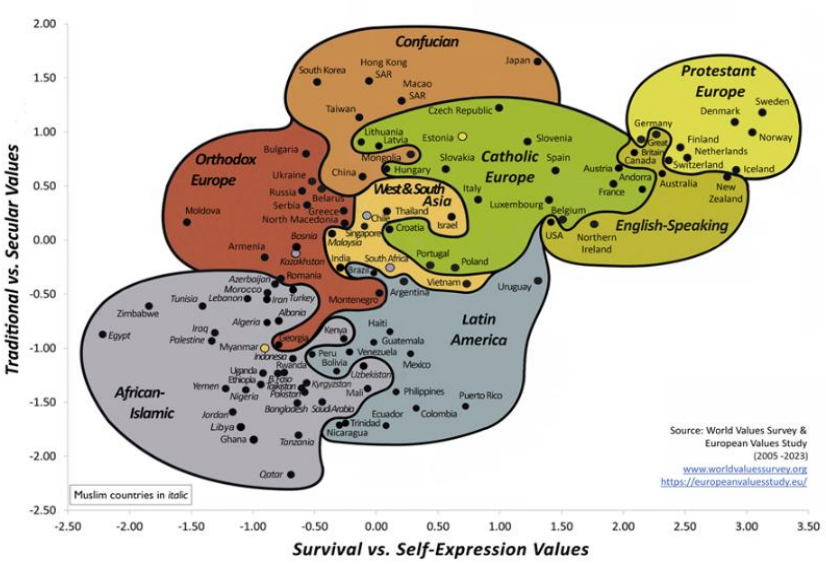
[5] Brett C. Hoover, „Evaluating the Moral Framing of Disaffiliation: Sociological and Pastoral Perspectives of the Rise of the «Nones»", in „Religions" 2021, 12 (6), 386, p. 4, https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/12/6/386 (13.10.2026).
[6] Conrad Hackett, Marcin Jan Stonawski, Michaela Potančoková, Brian J. Grim, Vegard Skirbekk, „The future size of religiously affiliated and unaffiliated populations", în „Demographic Research, A peer-reviewed, open-acces journal of population science", Volume 32, Article 27, p. 838, https://www.demographic-research.org/volumes/vol32/27/ (13.10.2026).
[7] Nicu Gavriluță, *Secularizarea și camuflările sacrului,* Polirom, Iași, 2025, p. 45.

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west of the continent is characterised by a set of libertarian values, with a strong sense of autonomy and self-assertion, based on a secular-rationalist system of thought. An attempt is thus made to re-establish the equation: progress = secularisation / religiosity = cultural stagnation. We are dealing with *two theses* favoured by the apostles of modernity, disenchanted by religion; one tells us that „Modernity, … from the Renaissance to the Age of Enlightenment, and beyond, is defined on the basis of human self-assertion”[8], whilst the other asserts that the weakening of ecclesiastical power and the dispossession, through plunder, of the Church's assets opened the gates of history to progress - a spurious justification wrapped up in the guise of modernisation[9]. One of the key conclusions of the map tells us that *„socio-economic development is strongly linked to the fundamental cultural values of society”*[10]. As of 2023, based on data collected between 2017 and 2022, the map appears as shown in the image below[11].

The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map 2023



Another important aspect highlighted by the map relates to *„intergenerational exchange”*[12]. In the following pages, we shall see that there are certain generational divides regarding the values shared by different generations, as well as opinions on major issues of interest – in other words, „people's view of the world”[13]. Just as economic prosperity facilitates a certain behaviour that may conflict with - though not necessarily be dictated by - religious identity, so too can we say that democracy, alongside economic prosperity, fosters a *humanist ethos*: „When survival is uncertain, cultural diversity appears to be under threat … [as people seek] to increase *predictability in a world full of uncertainties*. Conversely, when survival begins to be taken for granted, … *diversity* is not only tolerated but becomes *a value in itself* because it is regarded as interesting and stimulating”[14]. Similarly, „free will and autonomy are universal human aspirations, but they are not top priorities when people grow up with the feeling that survival is uncertain”[15]. One of the key ideas behind these cultural transformations concerns *the distribution of social roles*

[8] Remi Brague, *Propriul omului. O legitimitate contestată*, Galaxia Gutenberg, Târgu Lăpuș, 2022, p. 175.
[9] Remi Brague, *Modern cu moderație. Timpurile moderne sau inventarea unei înșelăciuni,* Spandugino, Bucharest, 2022, pp. 124–128.
[10] WVS, https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp?CMSID=findings (13.10.2026).
[11] The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map – World Values Survey 7 (2023). Source: http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/ (13.10.2026).
[12] World Value Survey, https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp (13 October 2026).
[13] Michael Dimock, „Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins”, în *Pew Research Center,* 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/ (13.10.2026).
[14] WVS, source cited.
[15] WVS, source cited.

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between men and women. As the balance shifts towards equilibrium, society as a whole is considered to be at a higher stage of development.

The map identifies a historical trajectory marking key stages in society's cultural evolution. The economic indicator („high-income" vs „low-income" societies) is not the only one relevant to our analysis. The authors of the study themselves pose the rhetorical question: „Do the Protestant societies of Europe share common values simply because they are wealthy? The answer is no"[16]. The changes that *the nature of work* has undergone over time make it possible to trace the progress defined by the map, shaping societies. We therefore have three broad typologies, arranged chronologically: *agrarian society, industrial society and post-industrial society*. The shift from traditional values to secular-rational ones would correspond to „the transition from agrarian to industrial society … [but] industrialisation does not promote the rise of values related to self-assertion [but, only] the streamlining of authority"[17]. It is only with the third phase - the rise of the „service-based economy" - that the „ethos of emancipation" emerges, manifested, first and foremost, as *„emancipation from* authority"[18]. Only now, the authors argue, can we speak of the rise of „civil society, political freedoms, good governance, gender equality and the development of democracy"[19].

Two factors relating to the historical trajectory are also brought into the discussion: *the religious traditions* of societies and their relationship with *colonialism*:

Traditionally Protestant societies rank higher on the survival/self-expression values dimension than Roman Catholic ones. By contrast, all societies in the former Soviet space rank lower on this axis. Historically Orthodox Christian societies form a coherent group within the wider post-Soviet space, with the exception of Greece, an Orthodox society that did not experience communism and ranks much higher on the survival/self-expression values axis than the other Orthodox societies. ... Communism has left a clear mark on the value system of those who lived under this regime. All societies that have experienced communism are situated in the lower-left quadrant of the map[20].

As a consequence of colonialism, the cultural zone of Latin America[21] is shaped, strongly influenced by the Hispanic colonial system and the Roman Catholic Church.

The United States of America can be classified as an atypical case, indeed a deviant one[22], recording high scores on indicators of traditional cultural values, with strong patriotic and religious sentiments.

Another key conclusion of the study, beyond the „litmus test" indicators used, tells us that „culture is pattern-dependent"[23]. The Protestant ethic[24], forged in the crucible of Protestant religion, is an example of this. Furthermore, the indicators measured reveal the existence of *forces* that act both as detractors and as promoters of cultural change. As for globalisation, this should not be understood as a convergence of values, a sort of global consensus metaphorically referred to as the

[16] WVS, source cited.
[17] WVS, source cited.
[18] WVS, source cited.
[19] WVS, source cited.
[20] WVS, source cited.
[21] WVS, source cited.
[22] WVS, source cited.
[23] WVS, source cited.
[24] For a broader understanding of the concept, see Max Weber's book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.*

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„McDonaldisation of the world"[25] but rather as a parallel, simultaneous, non-convergent trajectory of societies moving in the same direction.

It can, however, be observed that the map is influenced *by a „civilisational narcissism"*[26] specific to Western Europe, a narcissism based precisely on the values it now regards as traditional and at odds with its recent developments. Among these values we might mention „Christian love, … the cult of liberty, the pursuit of social justice and the concept *of the* human *person*, endowed with universal rights, … whilst the Protestant world and, above all, Anglo-Saxon Puritanism - which underpins the American ethos - have regressed towards an Old -testamentary mindset, relying exclusively on the theme of the new «chosen people» (the Americans), who have finally arrived in the new Promised Land (the United States)"[27]. We shall continue our analysis from here, focusing on American socio-economic messianism, to see that issues relating to economic and psychological security are in close competition, in the hierarchy of people's concerns, with those pertaining to quality of life and self-expression. Let us recall one of the map's theses, namely that „when survival is uncertain, cultural diversity appears to be under threat … [because people seek] to increase *predictability in a world full of uncertainties".* We shall see that *the certainty of survival is relative* even in the flagship nation of abundance and democracy, and that *uncertainties become a way of life which takes no account - except, apparently, of economic mechanisms. Rather, they are linked to issues concerning traditional values, particularly religious ones*. Interpreted obliquely, the map suggests, on the one hand, that traditional values are incompatible with happiness, with people feeling threatened and constrained by authority; and, on the other hand, that happiness and well-being naturally and inevitably dispel authority in any form, including moral and transcendent authority.

2. ANXIETY AND INSECURITY

„Nothing hardens the human mind against the Enemy [i.e. God] quite like uncertainty and anxiety. … Obsessive fear and blind trust are both profitable states of mind"[28]

The relevance of religiously-based public morality - namely, social and personal legitimisation in God as an unchang[29] e reference point - is an ambivalent subject for the secular-rational cultural paradigm, the variations of which are directly influenced, beyond religious affiliation, by other indicators such as age, race, level of education and political views. This is also the case in American society, where the overwhelming majority say that *it is not necessary to believe in God to be moral.* This assertion appears to be confirmed by numerous surveys, including one carried out by the Pew Research Centre in September 2019. Of those interviewed, 63% said that „It is not necessary to believe in God to be moral"[30], whilst 36% stated that belief in God is necessary for that purpose. In terms of racial background, white people and Hispanics prove to be the most secularised, whilst in terms of biological age, the group most distanced from religious morality is aged between 18 and 49. That is to say, a proportion of Millennials and Generation Z. Another criterion cited in the survey is that of educational attainment. Curiously, those who are most educated, in institutional terms, also turn out to be the least adherent to religious morality. 78% of

[25] WVS, cited source.
[26] Teodor Baconschi, in: Jean-Loup Bonnamy, *Occidentul debusolat,* Spandugino, Bucharest, 2025, p.11.
[27] T. Baconschi, in: Jean-Loup Bonnamy, *Occidentul debusolat,* p. 12.
[28] Clive Staples Lewis, *Sfaturile unui diavol bătrân către unul mai tânăr,* Humanitas, Bucharest, 2021, pp. 34; 77.
[29] R. Brague, *Modern with Moderation*, p. 25.
[30] Pew Research Centre, December, 2019, „In a Politically Polarized Era, Sharp Divides in Both Partisan Coalitions", p. 72.

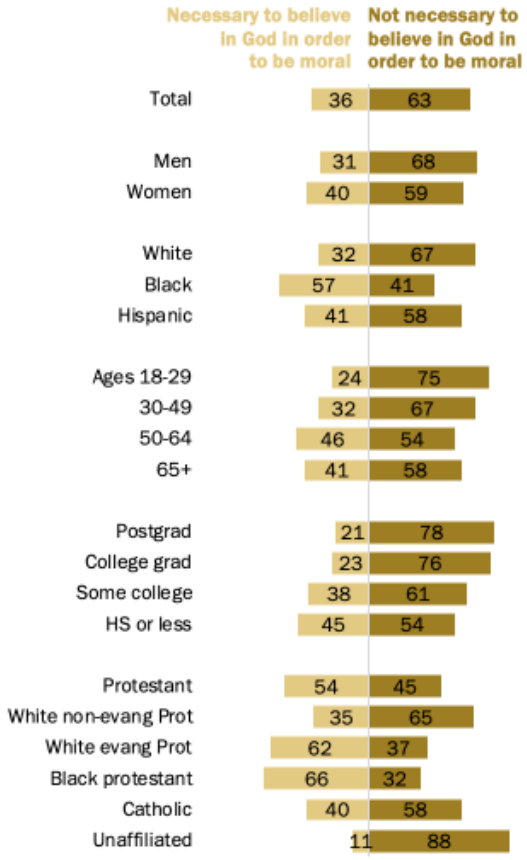
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postgraduate graduates reject the need for faith, whilst 76% of those with a bachelor's degree do so. The survey also breaks down the data by denomination. It is not surprising that 88% of those with no religious affiliation reject the need for faith as a component of morality, but even amongst members of Catholic and Protestant Christian communities, the dividing line lies roughly in the middle of the scale. Political convictions also give rise to differences of opinion, such as the fact that the conservative wing of both American political parties is far more inclined than the liberal wing to assert the indissoluble link between faith and morality[31]. Similarly, when comparing Republicans and Democrats, the latter align with the secular-progressive camp, largely sharing the belief that faith is unnecessary for developing good morals - 73%, compared with 53% of Republicans[32].

Majority of Americans say belief in God is not necessary in order to be moral

% who say it is ...



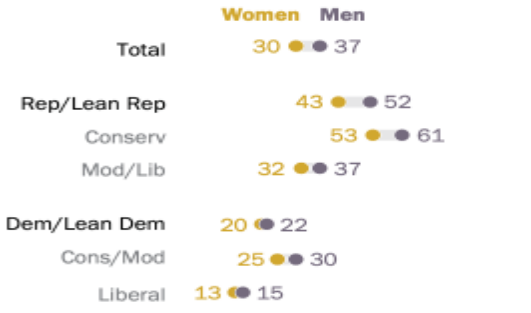
Notes: No answer responses not shown. Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 3-15, 2019.

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The spectrum of secular-rational values, with an emphasis on self-affirmation, is also reflected in the role that *the family* and *birth rates* should play in the lives of societies and individuals. We might say that „moral concerns are driven by biology"[33] rather than by spiritual pursuits. For them, society would function better if *the institution of marriage and childbearing* were stripped of the priority attention currently accorded to them.

Views on importance of marriage and children vary more by ideology than gender

% who say society is better off if people make marriage and having children a priority



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 3-15, 2019.

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The dividing line between views for and against marriage and the birth rate follows an ideological curve rather than one based on gender differences. We observe that 37% of men and 30% of women agree that society would function better if the family and the birth rate were a priority in social policy. Whilst there is a rough

[31] Pew Research Centre, December, 2019, „In a Politically Polarized Era...", p. 73.
[32] Pew Research Centre, December, 2019, „In a Politically Polarized Era...", p. 67.
[33] David Berlinski, *Diavolul și amăgirile sale. Ateismul și pretențiile sale științifice,* Ratio et Revelatio, Oradea, 2023, p. 37.

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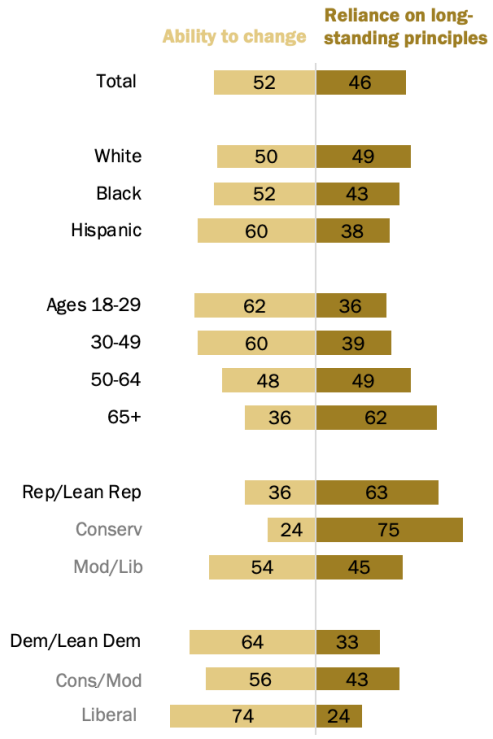
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balance here, major differences can be seen along the ideological spectrum, where Republicans (the conservative wing) support both as beneficial to society (61% of men and 53% of women), whilst Democrats (the moderate wing) support them to a much lesser extent (30% of men and 25% of women)[34]. *We note the strong emphasis on individualism and self-assertion, even though the arguments in their favour boil down to personal and momentary preferences, transforming the latter into absolute, taboo-like values - a life equation in which rights are decoupled from responsibilities and responsibilities are reduced to clichés*.

When asked about the proper functioning of society, specifically whether „it would be much better for people to set priorities other than marriage and having children", 85% of Liberal Democrats agree[35].

Partisans differ widely in views of *why* the U.S. has been successful

% who say the United States has been successful more because of its ...



Notes: No answer responses not shown. Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 3-15, 2019.

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Our analysis goes a step further by referring to *the hierarchy and dynamics of values*. What emerges as evident beyond the figures and words is that the value systems underpinning these choices are, to varying degrees, different. For one group of people, feelings of security, continuity and relevance depend on a firm *grounding in values*; for others, however, the key lies in *the ability to adapt*. The generational divide between the younger generations (Generation Z and Millennials) and previous generations is particularly significant. For them, the ability to adapt and change is of paramount importance. Around 60% rely on change, compared with approximately 36–39% who remain faithful to established values[36].

To gain an overview of the American axiological, social and religious landscape, and to understand in greater depth the mechanism governing choices and beliefs, we have at our disposal a graph that could not be clearer. I should point out that we are using American society as a case study because it is relevant on a large scale and can be extrapolated, with the necessary nuances, to other cultural and geographical areas. The data refer to supporters of the American Democratic Party's ideology, that is, to the segment of those affiliated with left-wing ideas. Another distinction is found on the basis of race (Black Democrats versus white Democrats); however, we can observe that the white population with left-wing views is more radical in its convictions than the Black population, situated on the same ideological spectrum. The reference to the need for faith as a source of moral legitimacy is just one of the indicators. We can see that the left-wing axis - of secularist-rational values and self-affirmation - rises quite sharply, encompassing all the detailed elements that give it its identity. If God is not

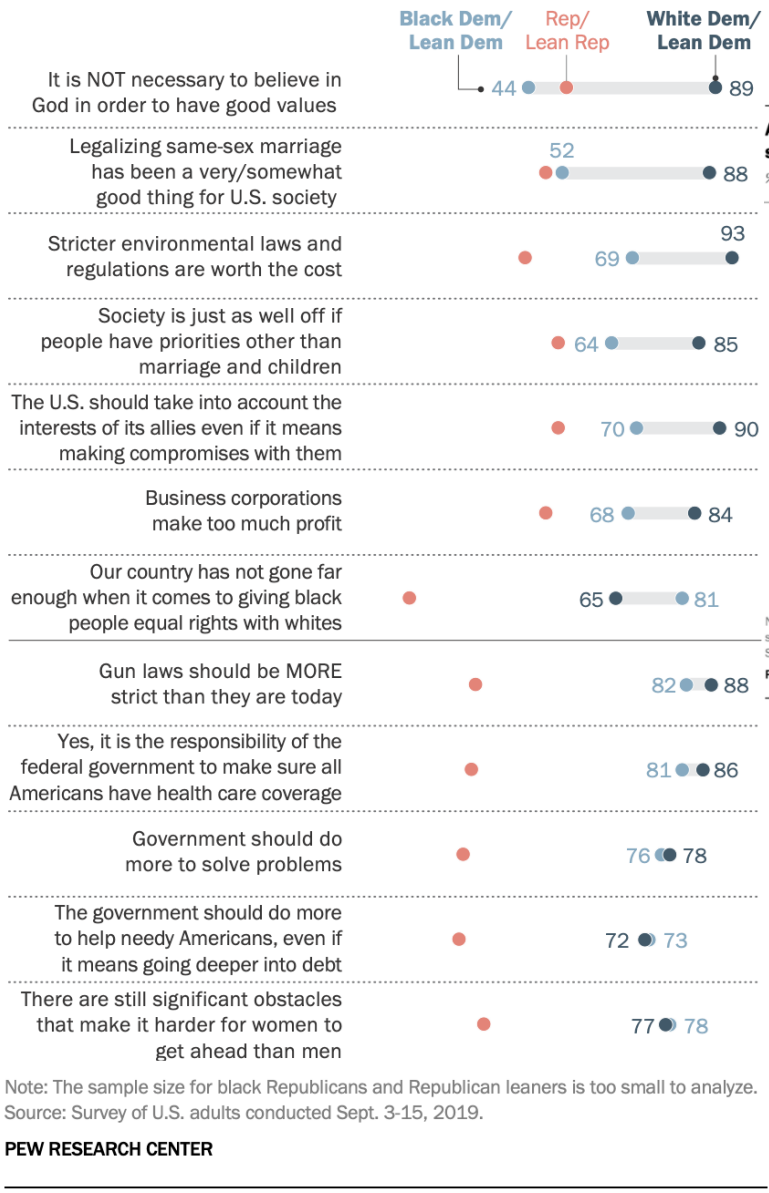
[34] Pew Research Centre, December, 2019, „In a Politically Polarized Era...", p. 67.
[35] Pew Research Centre, December, 2019, „In a Politically Polarized Era...", p. 66.
[36] Pew Research Centre, December 2019, „In a Politically Polarized Era...", p. 27.

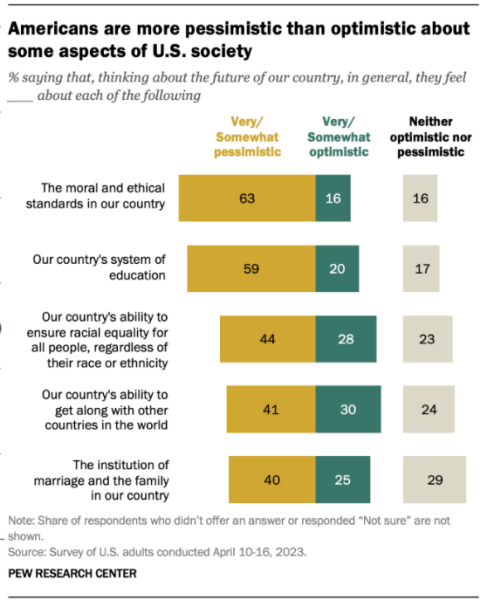
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necessary for human morality and the institution of marriage, linked to the birth rate, is not strictly necessary either, then the legalisation of same-sex marriage is seen as a beneficial and, in this instance, necessary development. We also find the *„woke"* ideas about equality and discrimination, as well as the need for greater government involvement in *delivering that common good to its rightful beneficiaries*[37].

However, the following point, noted by John Adams, is overlooked: „We have no government with enough power to be able to restrain human passions unrestrained by morality and religion. Our Constitution is made for a moral and religious people. It is wholly unsuited to govern any other sort of people"[38].





The accompanying chart highlights some of the themes we have already mentioned, whilst providing further, highly useful insights. These include: the political and security role of the United States as a global actor; equal rights and the elimination of discrimination against citizens; gun control; government accountability for societal issues; and the public's need for security,

[37] Pew Research Centre, December 2019, „In a Politically Polarized Era...", p. 9.
[38] Edited by William S. Lind, Andrei Dîrlău and Irina Bazon, *Corectitudinea politică. „Religia" marxistă a moii ordini mondiale,* Rost Publishing House, Bucharest, 2015, p. 298.

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which must be met even at the cost of government borrowing. It is very curious that, according to the data, Americans' sentiments regarding the social climate of tomorrow are on a *pessimistic* note. Among the issues causing concern and, by extension, fuelling pessimism about the future, are „moral and ethical standards [as well as] the education system"[39]. Whilst these two are the main sources of concern, there are other items on the public social agenda which, even if they do not carry the same weight, nevertheless manage to garner majority support: „the government's ability to ensure inter-racial equality, to negotiate with other countries, … the institution of marriage and the family"[40].



This pessimism is fuelled by public dissatisfaction, felt specifically regarding certain social issues of concern. These include: „the economic situation, the importance of the United States as a global actor, political divisions and the radical polarisation between rich and poor"[41]. The rate of those who are dissatisfied, standing at 80%, is significantly higher than that of those who say they are satisfied with the social climate. Similarly, this dissatisfaction fosters a clear sense of mistrust regarding the future, over a 27-year timeframe, which the evaluators consider to be relevant and tangible.

Although Americans' general perception of their own country, as regards the near future, is one of decline, the country's current image confers upon it international hegemony. The United States of America is regarded as the world leader in terms of the economy and defence. 54% of respondents believe that their country is the world's economic leader, whilst 72% share the view that the US leads in defence and global military power. In this context, Americans' views on the need for their country's global involvement differ. For example, 57% say that the United States should focus on *domestic issues* and let others manage their own affairs.

To rephrase the question, 41% say that their country is too involved in trying *to solve other countries' problems*. Furthermore, 44% of citizens view US involvement in *the global economy* as a good thing. Fourthly, 70% of Americans expect the President to focus on *domestic policy*[42]. There was a single exception to this rule or expectation, with opinions split at the time into two fairly evenly distributed camps: „In January 2007, after President George W. Bush announced that he

[39] Alexandra Cahn, Kiley Hurst, „Americans are more pessimistic than optimistic about many aspects of the country's future", in: *Pew Research Center,* 18 septembrie 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/09/18/americans-are-more-pessimistic-than-optimistic-about-many-aspects-of-the-countrys-future/ (13.10.2026).
[40] A. Cahn, K. Hurst, „Americans are more pessimistic than optimistic about...".
[41] Andrew Daniller, „Americans take a dim view of the nation's future, look more positively at the past", in: *Pew Research Center,* 24 aprilie 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/04/24/americans-take-a-dim-view-of-the-nations-future-look-more-positively-at-the-past/ (13.10.2026).
[42] Pew Research Centre, April 2016, „Public Uncertain, Divided over America's Place in the World", https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2016/05/05/public-uncertain-divided-over-americas-place-in-the-world/ (13.10.2026).

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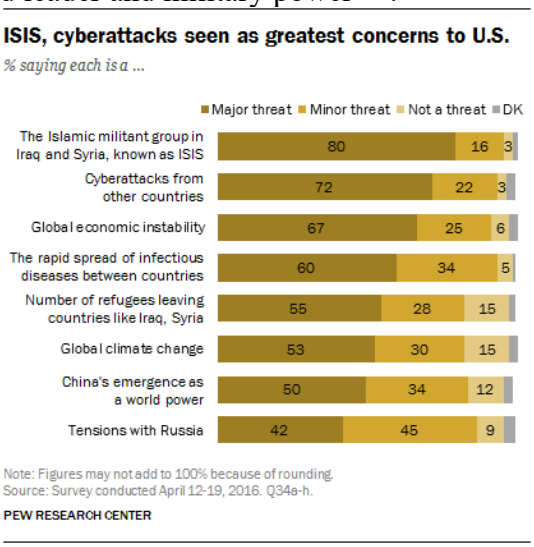
would send more troops to Iraq, 40% said that Bush should focus primarily on foreign policy, whilst 39% argued that he should prioritise domestic policy"[43] . However, American pessimism can be identified, once again, amongst Millennials and Generation Z, and through the lens of their reluctance towards the pension system: „50% of Generation Z and 51% of Millennials believe they will not benefit at all from the social security system when they retire … [a worrying development, given that these services constitute] an intergenerational transfer of health"[44].

Despite the consensus regarding the United States' global hegemony, reaching a consensus on the domestic agenda is more difficult, as opinions on this are quite divided, depending on the subject under discussion. This difficulty betrays certain weaknesses in the American social fabric, weaknesses which inevitably lead to or reveal the fears and threats that lie close at hand. This explains why, „for the first time in more than a decade, a significant proportion of Americans – 35% – support *an increase in the defence* budget", marking an upward trend. If we place this in a broader context, we can see that this trend runs counter to the *woke* paradigm of streamlining activities by cutting budgets[45]. The author observes that the tendency of the wealthy strata of society to show off – once through luxury goods that were largely inaccessible to others – has shifted towards unconventional ideas and preferences, which are having a devastating social impact on the lower classes. One such idea is that „the police should be underfunded", a notion that has gained traction particularly following the George Floyd incident.

This approach is counterproductive, especially in troubled areas or if it is treated as a one-size-fits-all solution. This has been demonstrated, amongst other places, by the city of Portland, where the homicide rate rose by 83% in just one year. At the same time, „many Americans believe that their country has seen a decline in its status as a world leader and military power"[46].

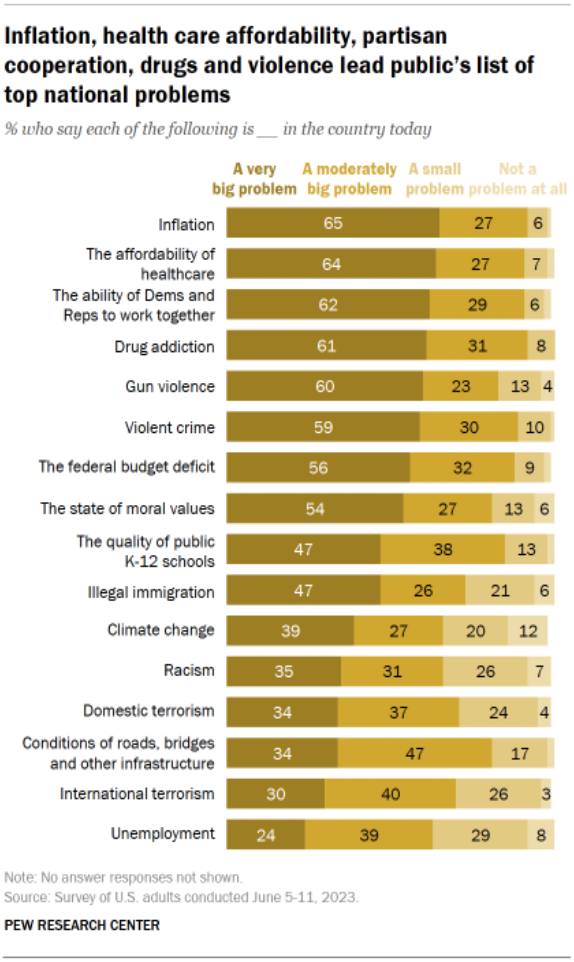
What are the threats perceived by American society, a society which, by all accounts, should enjoy the privileges afforded by a developed economy, military strength and a mature democracy – that is, the values of self-assertion and secular rationality?

The threats are clearly defined and stem from forces acting from both within and without. Externally, the top three threats, in descending order, are: ISIS-style Islamic terrorism, cyber-attacks and global economic instability. Added to these, in turn, are the spread of disease, refugees from Iraq and Syria, climate change, China's global economic rise and tensions with Russia[47]. Among the threats facing American society



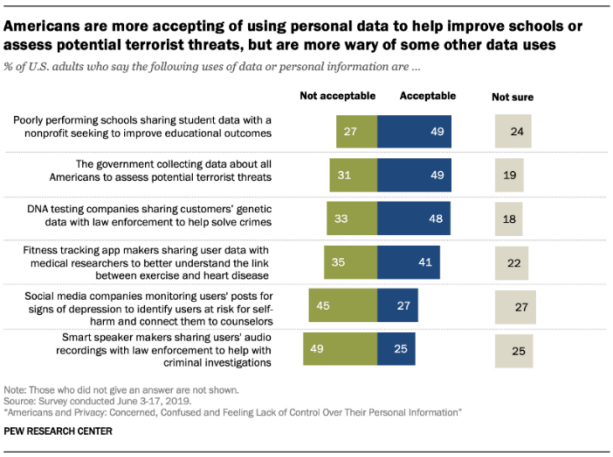
[43] Pew Research Centre, April 2016, „Public Uncertain, Divided over America's Place in the World", p. 15.
[44] Drew DeSilver, „5 facts about Social Security", in: *Pew Research Center*, 18 august 2015, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2015/08/18/5-facts-about-social-security/ (13.10.2026).
[45] Jean-Francois Braunstein, *Religia Woke. Cum a căzut pradă occidentul unei mișcări iraționale,* Humanitas, Bucharest, 2024, p. 42.
[46] Pew Research Centre, April 2016, „Public Uncertain, Divided over America's Place in the World", p. 4.
[47] Pew Research Centre, April 2016, „Public Uncertain, Divided over America's Place in the World", p. 23.

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internally, the image below provides a general, objective overview. Eight out of sixteen social issues are classified as „very serious problems”[48].

The status of moral values ranks eighth amongst the issues of greatest importance, halfway down the overall list. Other matters of concern include: healthcare services, political conflicts, drug addiction, gun violence, crime, the federal budget deficit, the quality of state education, illegal



immigration, climate change, racism, domestic violence/terrorism, the state of infrastructure, international terrorism and unemployment. The proportion of issues rated as „very serious” has increased year on year, whilst positions 12 - 16 are assessed as „at least serious” issues. *Intergenerational* differences are evident across all areas, with the trend being that younger generations within the aforementioned age range are much more relaxed regarding all indicators, except on environmental issues, where young people appear more concerned than their elders: “around half of adults aged between 18 and 29 (48%) say that climate change is a very big problem, whilst 38% of adults over 65 say the same”[49]. Another cause for concern for Americans today is the intrusion of corporations and the government into their private lives through access to personal information, because, beyond the usual understanding of privacy (the right to be left in peace, the ability to control one’s identity), these days it also encompasses „digital privacy”[50]. People are far more willing to accept the idea of their personal information being used for purposes such as improving education or assessing potential terrorist attacks than for anticipating people’s potential for depression and, by extension, self-harm.

[48] Pew Research Centre, June 2023, “Inflation, Health Costs, Partisan Cooperation Among the Nation’s Top Problems”, p. 9, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/06/21/inflation-health-costs-partisan-cooperation-among-the-nations-top-problems/ (13.10.2026).
[49] Pew Research Centre, June 2023, “Inflation, Health Costs, Partisan Cooperation Among the Nation’s Top Problems”, p. 10.
[50] Pew Research Centre, November 2019, “Americans and Privacy: Concerned, Confused and Feeling Lack of Control Over Their Personal Information”, p. 8, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2019/11/15/americans-and-privacy-concerned-confused-and-feeling-lack-of-control-over-their-personal-information/ (13.10.2026).

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3. FREEDOM AND EQUALITY OR SECURITY?

We begin this subchapter by examining *the general perception* amongst the populations of very different countries regarding the social climate and the broad functioning of institutions and support systems. This attitude refers specifically to what the study's authors have defined as *„Different typologies of attitudes towards society"*[51] , and is captured through a set of specific questions, which highlight both the respondents' dissatisfaction and their concerns.

The survey poses the following question: *„Of the three attitudes listed below regarding the society in which we live, which one is closest to your own view?*". The countries included in our analysis are: Romania, the United States of America, Greece and Germany. This selection is not random but, to a certain extent, follows the Inglehart-Welzel cultural map. Romania and Greece are Orthodox countries with differing relationships to totalitarianism, shaped by their distinct historical experiences. The other two are situated in the top right-hand corner of the map, that is, societies that share secular-rationalist and self-affirming values. The data are taken from Wave 7 of the WVS, covering the period 2017 - 2022. It is worth noting that the 16–29 age group is the most convinced that society must be radically changed through revolutionary action (Greece 25.4%; United States 23.4%; Romania 17.6%; Germany 7.3%). The most uncertain group consists of those aged over 50, a significant proportion of whom believe that society must be defended against subversive forces (Greece 15.5%; United States 23.7%; Romania 14.6%; Germany 19.8%).

World Values Survey Wave 7: 2017–2022

Basic types of attitudes concerning society

	TOTAL	**ISO 3166-1 numeric country code**			
		Germany	**Greece**	**Romania**	**United States**
The whole way in which our society is organised must be radically changed through revolutionary action	**13.1% (865)**	6.5	16.3	17.7	13.4
Our society needs to be gradually improved through reforms	**68.5% (4,505)**	77.8	62.9	62.2	68.5
Our current society must be courageously defended against all subversive forces	**14.6% (963)**	12.5	16.1	14	15.5
I don't know	**2.2% (142)**	2.4	2.8	5.3	0.2
No answer	**1.6% (107)**	0.8	2	0.8	2.4
(N)	**6581**	**1528**	**1200**	**1257**	**2596**

[51]Haerpfer, C., Inglehart, R., Moreno, A., Welzel, C., Kizilova, K., Diez-Medrano, J., Lagos, M., Norris, P., Ponarin, E. & Puranen, B. (2022): World Values Survey Wave 7 (2017-2022) Cross-National Data-Set. Version: 4.0.0. World Values Survey Association. DOI: doi.org/10.14281/18241.18 , https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSOnline.jsp (13.10.2026).

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Whilst in the previous chapter we considered issues relating to citizens' privacy, here we have turned our attention to a fundamental question concerning the feelings of security or insecurity that a person might experience. *„In general, how satisfied are you with your household's financial situation? Have you felt unsafe at home because of crime?"*[52]. This is the flagship question of the survey below, which analyses data from the same WVS Wave 7.

World Values Survey Wave 7: 2017–2022

Frequency you/family (last 12 months): Felt unsafe from crime in your own home

	TOTAL	ISO 3166-1 numeric country code			
		Germany	Greece	Romania	United States
Des	**3.2% (213)**	1.4	7.8	3.1	2.3
Sometimes	**9.8% (646)**	6.7	15.6	6.6	10.5
Rarely	**19.0% (1,252)**	13.2	19.9	13.8	24.6
Never	**67.5% (4,443)**	78.7	56.3	75.9	62
Don't know	**0.1% (9)**	0.1	0.2	0.4	0
No answer	**0.3% (19)**	0	0.1	0.2	0.6
(N)	**6581**	**1528**	**1200**	**1257**	**2596**

We tried breaking the data down by age group, gender, educational attainment and marital status, but the responses did not reveal any significant differences.

Beyond this, if people were faced with a choice between just two options, in which they would have to make a radical choice between *freedom and safety*, the responses would, without a doubt, favour personal security/safety.

The deprivation of liberty, whether as part of a totalitarian political system or through institutionalisation in a detention centre, even if it involves the deprivation of certain fundamental rights, does not completely nullify the individual, and the threat remains diffuse. In contrast, when faced with a direct threat, people are willing to seek shelter, even at the cost of sacrificing their freedom if necessary[53].

If we were asked to use our imagination and envisage such a scenario, I believe a situation of war - in which one would have to make a radical choice between being killed or taken prisoner - would be sufficiently illustrative. The survey question is as follows: *„Most people consider both freedom and safety to be important. However, if you had to choose between them, which would be more important?"*.

[52] Haerpfer, C., et al: World Values Survey Wave 7 (2017–2022), https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSOnline.jsp (13.10.2026).
[53] Haerpfer, C., et al: World Values Survey Wave 7 (2017–2022), https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSOnline.jsp (13.10.2026).

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World Values Survey Wave 7: 2017–2022

Freedom and security – Which is more important?

	TOTAL	ISO 3166-1 numeric country code			
		Germany	Greece	Romania	United States
Libertatea	**52.1% (3,427)**	43.2	44.9	33.8	69.5
Safety	**45.9% (3,018)**	53.4	54.8	64.5	28.3
Don't know	**0.9% (60)**	2.4	0.3	1.5	0
No answer	**1.1% (75)**	1	0	0.2	2.2
(N)	**6581**	**1528**	**1200**	**1257**	**2596**

We observe atypical behaviour amongst the American population, and a potential explanation can be found in the previous chapter; as long as your country is the world leader in defence, even if external threats exist, you consider yourself so protected that the scenario of being threatened seems like a utopian and absurd narrative.

Even so, whilst recent history shows us that there can be security breaches which malicious groups can exploit (9/11), these breaches merely confirm the rule. In this sense, safety is not a real concern for Americans, as it is taken for granted, whilst freedom is the defining feature of the fundamental needs of American society.

A final aspect we set out to analyse highlights another set of choices, this time between *security and equality*. The survey question is: *„Which is more important, equality or security?"*[54]. Unfortunately, for this survey we only have data from Mexico. Nevertheless, the result speaks for itself.

The majority consider security to be far more important than equality. This finding is all the more relevant given that it comes from a country where polarisation and social inequalities are well known and, therefore, the need for equality would be keenly felt. It is likely that rising crime rates stimulate the instinct for self-preservation, but the breakdown across three age groups confirms our hypothesis.

Regardless of socio-economic, political and cultural conditions, people's need for security is a constant which, in a hierarchy of priorities, ranks among the top. The way in which threats are managed is linked to people's deep-seated identity and to the genuine values in which it is rooted. Identity fluidity and moral relativism are not, in themselves, „reservoirs of meaning"[55] generous enough to give a person the sense that they are sheltered by realities beyond the tangible surface of this world; a „return to religion"[56], on the other hand, may constitute such a reservoir.

[54] Haerpfer, C., et al: World Values Survey Wave 7 (2017–2022), https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSOnline.jsp (13.10. 2026).
[55] R. Brague, *Modern cu moderație*, p. 46.
[56] J.L. Bonnamy, *Occidentul debusolat*, p. 47.

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World Values Survey Wave 7: 2017–2022

Between equality and security, which is more important?

	TOTAL	**Age recoded (3 intervals)**			
		16–29 years	**30–49 years**	**50 years and over**	**No answer**
Equality	**31.9% (555)**	38.3	30.4	28	0
Security	**67.7% (1,178)**	61.7	69.3	70.9	100
Don't know	**0.5% (8)**	0	0.3	1.1	0
(N)	**1,741**	**497**	**699**	**543**	**2**

4. A SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE THROUGH ANTHROPOLOGICAL REDUCTION

„A brother asked him one day: «Ava, if something terrible were to happen all of a sudden, would you be afraid?» The elder replied: «Even if heaven and earth were to be turned upside down, Theodoros would not be afraid». Because he had prayed to the Lord to remove the weakness of his heart" *Apophthegm 48*

„The elders used to say: «If temptation arises against you in the place where you live, do not leave that place at the time of temptation; otherwise, wherever you go, you will find the very thing from which you fled. Instead, be patient until the temptation passes, so that your departure may not be a stumbling block»" *Apophthegm 65*

„It is said at Sketys concerning Abba Daniel that, when the barbarians came, the brothers fled and the elder said: «If God does not look after me, then why should I go on living?» Then he passed through the midst of the barbarians, and they did not see him. The elder said: «Behold, God has taken care of me and I have not died, so do as other men do and flee like the other fathers»" *Apophthegm 86*[57]

The aphorisms above emblematically express not only the spiritual maturity of the protagonists but also the inner world of the human person, who may feel threatened in various life situations. We are presented with a synthesis of inner experiences, as well as a solution for managing these experiences or states. On the one hand, we understand that climate change and any danger deemed imminent can induce a state of fear which, in turn, fuels *anxiety* on a massive scale. The individual imperceptibly enters a vicious circle in which their attention is consumed by the urgent need for life-saving solutions which subsequently overwhelm their individual capacity for action. Within this cycle of uncertainty, fear regenerates itself. In fact, such a state betrays what Aphorism 48 calls „the weakness of the heart". This weakness demands certainties, and the need for certainties becomes an obsession: „We allow *our hearts to be prey to anxieties*, because *fear arises from our pursuit of certainties* [and thus, obsessed with certainties, we give rise to fears]"[58]. The solution is

[57] Apoftegmele părinților Deșertului. Versiunea coptă sahidică sau Patericul Copt, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2021, pp. 71; 83; 97.
[58] Pr. Dr. Ioan-Tănase Chiș, *Anamneză și update. Instantanee dintr-o pastorație urbană,* Renașterea Publishing House, 2022, p. 39.

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an anthropological one, not a political or military one: *„the unplundered work of the heart"*[59]. The second aphorism suggests that the practice *of virtues* is vital in the face of this threat. Without Christian heroism, the individual is deprived of the essential tools for the success of such an endeavour. The Christian knows that the stakes of his struggle lie beyond human reckoning: „It is a flight from God when the world detaches itself from the place where it struggles. … You can never truly free yourself except when you fight, when you are present on the cross"[60]. With this awareness, you are already equipped to face social conditions that are so relative and changeable; this could be one of the conclusions of apophthegm 86.

It is clear that fear is one of our daily constants. On the one hand, it proves beneficial when it prompts us to behave responsibly, guided by an objective assessment of risks. When, however, it paralyses our ability to think and act, it becomes our most intimate enemy. In simple terms, fear can be regarded as an emotion, and emotions, by their very nature, help us to: „build a relationship, consolidate a state, and affirm an attitude"[61]. Depending on the consequences it brings about, fear can be both „a virtue and a passion"[62]. Through the concept of *fear,* the Church Fathers define a diverse range of emotions: „fear, dread, terror, panic, but also anxiety, anguish and despair"[63]. This is why contemporary psychology identifies „four typical shock emotions: fear (terror); anger; sadness in its acute form (despair); and explosive joy"[64].

We have been able to identify some of the specific sources of fear in the sociological studies mentioned above, but we can also summarise them here from a dual perspective: spiritual and psychological. Firstly, its source can be identified in the existence of „an imminent, unforeseen and uncontrollable danger, … [but it can also be triggered by] pain or the danger of destruction. … In many cases, (anxiety) gives rise to behavioural or mental disorders with a lasting impact on the human personality"[65]. This is what the Orthodox specialist literature captures, with the utmost clarity and depth, when it describes the source of fear as *„a repulsion towards non-existence"*[66]. Beyond this, the process of maturing, in itself, involves certain states synonymous with fear. Thus, around the age of 10–14, the „fear of defeat and the fear of contempt"[67] emerge. We shall not discuss here the fear of God, which is legitimate and is defined within the realm of virtues, being „a grace"[68] bestowed upon the virtuous person, through which „the awareness of our eternal destiny is manifested"[69].

In the volume *Orthodox Spirituality – Asceticism and Mysticism,* the Holy Confessor Priest Dumitru Stăniloae distils the truths of fear into three points. We may regard these as its universal characteristics: „firstly, that man's earthly life is inevitably accompanied by fear; secondly, that through this fear the human being has been given a shield against the danger of being overwhelmed

[59] Sf. Ioan Scărarul, in: *Filocalia sfintelor nevoințe ale desăvârșirii*, vol. 9, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2011, p. 344.
[60] *Ne vorbește părintele Arsenie,* vol. 3, edited by Archimandrite Ioanichie Bălan, Sihăstria Monastery Publishing House, Vânători, 2004, vol. 3, p. 30.
[61] Conf. Univ. Dr. Psiholog Maria Dorina Pașca, Arhim. Prof. Univ. Dr. Abil. Teofil Tia, *Psihologie pastorală aplicată. Structura elementară a demersului terapeutic în areal religios,* Renașterea Publishing House, 2021, p. 76.
[62] Jean-Claude Larchet, *Terapeutica bolilor spirituale*, Sophia Publishing House, Bucharest, 2001, p. 186.
[63] J.C. Larchet, *Terapeutica bolilor spirituale*, p. 186.
[64] Conf. Univ. Dr. Psiholog M.D. Pașca, Arhim. Prof. Univ. Dr. Abil. T. Tia, *Psihologie pastorală aplicată,* p. 77.
[65] Conf. Univ. Dr. Psiholog M.D. Pașca, Arhim. Prof. Univ. Dr. Abil. T. Tia, *Psihologie pastorală aplicată,* pp. 77–78.
[66] J.C. Larchet, *Terapeutica bolilor spirituale*, p. 186.
[67] Conf. Univ. Dr. Psiholog M.D. Pașca, Arhim. Prof. Univ. Dr. Abil. T. Tia, *Psihologie pastorală aplicată,* p. 86.
[68] Ierot. Mitropolit al Nafpaktosului, *Psihoterapia ortodoxă*, Sophia Publishing House, Bucharest, 2021, p. 218.
[69] Rev. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality: Asceticism and Mysticism,* EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1992, p. 101.

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by the world; thirdly, that man has perverted this fear, which is meant to guard him from the world and bind him to God, the source of authentic existence, concentrated in the intimacy of the spirit, transforming it into a fear of somehow being deprived of the world, … of living as a spiritual being"[70]. Fear is contrary to nature, which is why it can be classified as irrational. As we have observed from reading the apophthegms, fear produces a dynamic in the mind and heart that catalyses a person's spiritual metabolism, to the extent that man becomes captive to a *logic of fear*. One escapes this logic through the liberating effect of faith, which gives birth to virtue:

„He who has become a servant of the Lord will fear none but his Master. But he who does not yet fear Him fears even his own shadow. The body is terrified when a spirit stands unseen beside us; but when the soul rejoices in humility, an angel stands before it. Therefore, recognising his presence through his work, let us hasten to prayer, for our good guardian has come to pray with us. He who has overcome cowardly fear has clearly surrendered his life and soul to God"[71].

To explain how the whole mechanism of fear works, we should refer to the Christian anthropological view and the inner structure of the person. A good understanding of the concepts of *the heart, the mind* and the relationship between them sheds light on the spectrum of these experiences, as well as on how a remedy can be found where necessary. In a nutshell, we say that „it is the mind that nourishes the heart"[72]. In these circumstances, the health of the mind becomes a spiritual and all-encompassing priority. *Saint Isaac the Syrian* assures us: „The purity of the mind is one thing, and that of the heart another. The mind is one of the faculties of the soul. And it is the heart that encompasses and holds together the inner faculties"[73]. Strictly speaking, the unity of the person is conferred by a sound spiritual disposition of the heart (see Apophthegm 48), and the state of this inner disposition depends on an irreproachable condition of the mind. On this subject, *Saint Evagrius of Pontus* teaches us that we are dealing with eight evil thoughts, thoughts which act specifically upon the structure or constitution of the human being[74], which proves to be, in his view, tripartite: „One active, *the intellect* (νοθσ), through which one is united in knowledge with God.… and two passive-passionate ones, through which one is bound to the material world both by an enslaving attachment to it in *lust* or desire, and by a passionate detachment from it through *irascibility* or violence"[75]. It is also the saints who tell us that the source of thoughts can manifest itself in four forms. The first refers to thought as a natural function of the body. The second involves memory and imagination, which can be stimulated by the senses. Next, consideration is given to the habits a person has formed and the direction they have imprinted upon their inner being; these are the means through which they seek to fulfil their need for meaning. Fourthly, and no less importantly, thoughts come as attacks disguised as suggestions[76]. With regard to these attacks, the specialist literature provides us with frameworks or strategies designed to facilitate a deeper understanding of such realities and the adoption of an appropriate attitude. Spiritual warfare does

[70] Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, *Spiritualitatea ortodoxă,* p. 101.
[71] Sfântul Ioan Scărarul, in: *Filocalia sfintelor nevoințe ale desăvârșirii,* vol. 9, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2011, p. 239.
[72] Ierotheos, Mitropolit al Nafpaktosului, *Psihoterapia ortodoxă. Calea tămăduirii după Sfinții Părinți,* Sophia Publishing House, Bucharest, 2021, p. 209.
[73] Sfântul Isaac Sirul,: *Filocalia sfintelor nevoințe ale desăvârșirii,* vol. 10, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2008, pp. 372–373.
[74] For a detailed examination of the „inner man" from the perspective of Orthodox theology, we recommend the book *Father Arsenie Papacioc – The Inner Man. The Architecture of a Continuous Presence (Părintele Arsenie Papacioc – omul lăuntric. Arhitectura unei prezențe continue),* Renașterea Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2023. This constitutes the undersigned's doctoral thesis.
[75] Avva Evagrie Ponticul, *În luptă cu gândurile. Despre cele opt gânduri ale răutății și Replici împotriva lor,* Deisis, Sibiu, 2006, p. 13.
[76] Ierotheos, *Psihoterapia ortodoxă,* p. 205.

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not involve superficial aspects of reality but its deepest elements, unfolding on the spiritual plane. To probe them, we need the virtue *of vigilance*. Here is what *Isihius of Sinai* tells us*:* „First comes the bait (the attack); second, the pursuit…; third, the consent (approval) of the mind…; fourth is the deed. … If the mind is attentive through vigilance, … it will put the illusion of the bait to flight the moment it arises"[77]. We can see that the process is a gradual one and that the success rate increases as our ability to detect the attack develops; consequently, we will be able to repel the attack in its infancy. In the age of communications, the discipline of vigilance or of guarding the mind is as necessary as it is difficult to implement. This is yet another argument in favour of a *social theology for the wider public*. *Saint John of Damascus* describes, with subtle differences, the same type of strategy. The aspects we wish to emphasise - those which provide further insight beyond the outline above - relate to passion, struggle and enslavement. Regarding the latter, we read: „Enslavement is the forced and willing submission of the heart, dominated by *prejudice* and long-standing habit"[78]. For the postmodern individual, captive to a *„self-made"* paradigm*,* it is precisely prejudice and habit that are the vectors of identity to which they cling most dearly. *Habit, as a personal definition based on the criterion of a pseudo-self-fulfilment, and the prejudice of believing that one is free from prejudice.*

People create idols for themselves, but this is by no means a recent phenomenon; the tendency has persisted, whilst its variations are constantly being reinvented. Sin itself can become an idol, which „not only enslaves the mind but also sickens it"[79]. The question naturally arises: How can the mind be healed? The remedy we propose is of a religious nature, drawn from Orthodox spirituality, and it involves the following steps: „Guardianship of the mind (vigilance), hesychia (stillness) through the Jesus Prayer, fortitude (resolve), observance of the Gospel commandments, love and self-restraint"[80].

Until healing is achieved, however, it is necessary to understand how fear manifests itself. Initially, fear may be perceived as a disturbance caused by a specific situation or by a thought that has arisen in the mind. The disturbance may degenerate into worry, which already tends to become a permanent state, because it is the „driving force behind fear". As projections into *the future*, both worry and hope are *„future-oriented"*[81]; however, whilst the former is experienced against a backdrop of certainty and confidence, the latter is felt as uncertainty and tension. Such a person becomes anxious, or rather remains in a state of alert, with a „constant focus on risks: vigilance towards anything that might take an unpleasant turn, in order to control even low-risk situations"[82].

As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, it is not an obsession with certainties that shields us from worries – on the contrary; it is not a *social environment free from unpredictability* that protects us from them*,* but the state of the heart; „it *is not courage but peace that is the opposite of fear"*[83]. Orthodox clinicians propose several courses of action, several existential strategies that people can adopt to neutralise any kind of fear, whether social or of another nature. In their view, the following are important and should be sought: „Self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, control (competence), meaning and purpose in life, personal development"[84].

[77] Isihie Sinaitul, in: *Filocalia sfintelor nevoințe ale desăvârșirii,* vol. 4, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2009, p. 53.
[78] Sfântul Ioan Damaschin, in: *Filocalia,* vol. 4, p. 173.
[79] Ierotheos, *Psihoterapia ortodoxă,* p. 123.
[80] Ierotheos, *Psihoterapia ortodoxă,* p. 129.
[81] Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, *Spiritualitatea ortodoxă,* p. 144.
[82] Conf. Univ. Dr. Psiholog M.D. Pașca, Arhim. Prof. Univ. Dr. Abil. T. Tia, *Psihologie pastorală aplicată,* p. 96.
[83] Pr. Dr. I.T. Chiș, *Anamneză și update,* p. 39.
[84] Conf. Univ. Dr. Psiholog M.D. Pașca, Arhim. Prof. Univ. Dr. Abil. T. Tia, *Psihologie pastorală aplicată,* p. 194.

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We are drawing to the close of this subchapter and shall conclude the topic under discussion with a profoundly spiritual note. I have selected excerpts from two psalms and a testimony. The latter belongs to one of the most important witnesses to Orthodoxy in the 20th century, Father Arsenie Papacioc.

PSALM 45, verses 1–7
Our God is our refuge and strength,
a help in the troubles that come upon us with great force.
Therefore we shall not fear when the earth is shaken,
nor when the mountains are carried into the heart of the seas.
Their waters roared and raged,
and by His might the mountains have quaked.
The surging waters gladden the city of God;
the Most High has sanctified His dwelling place.
God is in her midst; she shall not be moved;
God will help it at the break of day.
Nations have been thrown into turmoil, kingdoms have bowed down;
The Most High has raised His voice; the earth has trembled.
The Lord of hosts is with us,
He is our protector, the God of Jacob.

PSALM 90
He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
and abides under the shelter of the God of heaven.
He will say to the Lord: 'You are my protector and my refuge';
He is my God, and in Him I will put my trust.
For He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the word of the oppressor.
He will shelter you with His back
and under His wings you will find refuge;
His faithfulness will surround you like a shield.
You will not fear the terrors of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the thing that prowls in the darkness,
from misfortune or the demon of midday.
A thousand shall fall at your side,
and ten thousand on your right,
but they shall not come near you.
With your own eyes you shall see
and see the punishment of the wicked.

For You, O Lord, are my hope;
you have made the Most High your refuge.
No evil shall come near you,
and no scourge shall come near your dwelling.
For He will command His angels concerning you

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to guard you in all your ways;
they will lift you up in their hands,
lest you strike your foot against a stone;
you shall tread upon the asp and the basilisk,
and tread upon the lion and the dragon.
'For he has set his trust in Me, and I will deliver him;
I will shelter him, for he has known My name.
He will call upon Me, and I will answer him;
I am with him in trouble
and I will rescue him and honour him;
I will fill him with long life
and I will show him My salvation'.

Father Arsenie Papacioc:

„I was put in a cold cell. In that agony I wandered about, I prayed, but I could feel myself growing cold… how my soul was leaving me and rising up…; in the prayer I was offering to God, I cried out within myself: «Lord, it is for You that I am here and am coming to an end; take heed, Lord, to me!» And suddenly, beside me, in divine light and warmth, the Saviour Christ appeared. He was beside me, suffering just as I was – he was dressed in a prisoner's uniform, in a straitjacket, and was enduring – my suffering. It was then that I realised that time is not measured in the same way with God as it is with people, for it all seemed to me to have lasted but a moment... And without my realising it, time passed, the cell door opened, and the guards who came to lift my frozen body did not find it as such, for I was warmed by Grace, by the Gift of God"[85].

CONCLUSION

What exactly determines the moral characteristics of a people? What are the cultural elements that shape communities, determining their economic, civic, religious and political behaviour? How is the hierarchy of values that a society embraces established, and what is the intergenerational resilience of these axiological pillars? We hope that we have identified, at the very least, the starting points for some potential answers, which may provide a coherent understanding of profound and enduring social phenomena. Society has its own dynamism, yet the currents it generates have effects at the individual level. Subject to social forces, people may act in accordance with certain patterns of behaviour. A cultural map can reveal a significant part of the social landscape, and its interpretative keys help us to understand important phenomena. The health of a society is not defined solely by its political system, quality of life and economic well-being, but, inevitably, by the moral values that confer identity and underpin a social fabric in which humanity is not compromised. This is why the overview I have provided necessarily and naturally concludes with a religious solution. As I mentioned in the abstract of this paper, the social universe often takes the form of a vast paradox; yet the solution, more often than not, is a personal, spiritual one.

[85] *Părintele Arsenie Papacioc. 1914-2014. O sută de ani de la naştere,* Basilica, Bucharest, 2014 , p. 89.

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