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## **CHANGING VALUES. THE RISE IN CONSERVATISM IN THE CORONA CRISIS**

How do people's values and attitudes change over the course of a pandemic? Salzburg sociologists have played a major role in a worldwide longitudinal study on this matter. A year on, findings depict an increase of conservatism in Austria.

The Values in Crisis (VIC) survey, carried out internationally, consists of 21 portraits to assess basic values, as well as some 300 other questions on political and social attitudes. A special feature of the study is its longitudinal design, which includes three waves of data collection in all participating countries. "The same participants are surveyed every year to determine potential changes in values during the crisis. The second survey is currently being conducted in many countries, covering the phase in which the crisis seems to be nearing an end. A third and final survey is planned for 2022, when the economic and social consequences of the crisis are expected to have been resolved," explains Wolfgang Aschauer.

### **Salzburg has brought the processing of global data to Austria**

17 countries are participating in the VIC study: seven countries in Europe (Germany, Austria, UK, Sweden, Poland, Italy, Greece), two Latin American countries (Brazil, Colombia), five countries from Asia (Japan, China, Hong Kong, South Korea, the Maldives) and three countries from the CIS countries (Russia, Kazakhstan, Georgia).

The Salzburg sociologists, who are working closely with the Austrian Social Science Data Archive AUSSDA (Otto Bodi-Fernandez and Manfred Herzog), have brought the data processing of the worldwide survey to Austria. Alexander Seymer: "We consider it a great success that a survey on the social impact of the pandemic in a global comparison is now publicly available for analysis. The data can be accessed by the global scientific community of value researchers in the Austrian data archive".

## **Austria was the "world champion for confidence" at the beginning of the pandemic**

A remarkable result from the country comparison: in May 2020, Austria was the country with the least worries about health and economic consequences. During this first phase of the pandemic, no other country expressed a lower level of fear of the disease. Fears of economic consequences were also kept to a minimum. In this category, Austria shared first place with Sweden, closely followed by Germany. For the top countries, residents seemed to believe that the consequences of the economic crisis could be mitigated by comprehensive welfare state measures," explains Wolfgang Aschauer. In terms of overall satisfaction with the state's crisis management, Austria performs well in the initial phase – but only in this phase.

## **Austria after a year of Corona: Conservative values continue to rise**

While the second survey is still making its rounds internationally, in Austria it was completed in April 2021. More than 2000 people took part in the survey. 1200 of these participants also took part in the first survey, which made it possible to directly compare shifts in values after one year of the pandemic.

The results showed that values concerning the maintenance of order, for example, gained in importance. Values oriented towards independence and hedonism were seen to become less important. "Conformity has become stronger among the population," summarises Aschauer. In terms of hopes for the future, there is a slight sense of resignation, and fears of health consequences have increased significantly. These fears are distributed relatively evenly among different age groups and those with differing educational backgrounds.

Concerns about economic consequences, on the other hand, are unevenly distributed: this is particularly noticeable among the low-skilled participants, both young and middle-aged. There has been a strong increase in dissatisfaction with the government and hardly any evidence of increased solidarity among peers. "In May 2020, the sentiment in Austria was a positive one; our country had come through the pandemic well. However, due to the difficult winter period, this line is starting to mirror the opinions of other countries. There is a clear pandemic fatigue," concludes Aschauer.

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The [Values in Crisis Austria study \[1\]](#) was initiated by the German political scientist and values researcher Christian Welzel, who published a [global call](#) for participation in the comparative survey in March 2020. In Austria, the project is led by the methodological team from the Division of Sociology at the University of Salzburg, headed by Wolfgang Aschauer and Alexander Seymer, and in cooperation with sociologists from the University of Graz and University of Linz ([team of the Social Survey Austria](#)).



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