



## Article

# Putting Values to the Test in Times of Pandemic

Gabisel Barsallo Alvarado <sup>1,\*</sup>, Elisa Mendoza <sup>2</sup> and Monica Torreiro-Casal <sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup> Faculty of Humanities Research Center (CIFHU), Universidad de Panama, Panama City 0819, Panama<sup>2</sup> Statistics Department, Universidad de Panama, Panama City 0819, Panama<sup>3</sup> Chicana/o Studies Department, University of California, Davis, CA 95616, USA

\* Correspondence: gabisel.barsallo-a@up.ac.pa

**Abstract:** As everyday security becomes more important in society, reflection on scientific evidence obtained in relation to other areas of knowledge is required. The purpose of the article was to explore and analyze social perceptions of values in crisis situations. A correlational hypothesis is proposed, according to which it is demonstrated that, as societies' levels of economic and personal security vary, so do their perceptions of their values and the importance they assign to them. The methodology used was quantitative and correlational, with data obtained through online surveys distributed on social media platforms from June to October 2020, with the participation of 502 adults aged 18 and over. The main results showed that respect was perceived as the most necessary value to face the crisis by women and men and across age groups, while happiness and cultural diversity were the least important in relation to gender and age variables. Schools and households appeared to be the places identified as the most significant foci of values education, not the religious communities to which the participants belonged. However, the results related to religious affiliation revealed that the younger generation (18–30-year-olds), which represented one third of the respondents, did not have any religious beliefs. This may limit the applicability of this conclusion. Findings from this study contribute to the understanding of value-system changes during crises; therefore, further interdisciplinary study of value systems and incidences of values in the Panamanian context are recommended.

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## 1. Introduction

The pandemic derived from SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) resulted in different scenarios of economic, political, social, cultural, technological, and environmental crisis, since not only did it come to transform the ways people had of relating to each other, it also reorganized and deconstructed priorities in relation to the values and desires of individuals (Barreiro Vázquez 2020).

The study of values is not exclusive to the ethical discipline; it is pursued in sociology, psychology, anthropology, law, and economics. However, this article focuses less on comparing theories on measuring values and more on examining how Panamanians perceived values in action at a precise period of time during the pandemic. It emphasizes exploring where Panamanians believe they get their values from through an evaluation of which values they think are needed to confront the crisis and what they have done to help others in need during the crisis period.

Although values are part of cultures, adaptations produced throughout history, or may simply be used to describe individuals, they have an important role. Values are sources of personal motivations, order perceptions, serve as evaluative criteria, feed ideologies, promote the persuasion and mobilization of actors, justify emotions, generate attitudes, and guide behaviors, among other roles. However, most importantly, values help maintain and normalize society in a uniform way. In this way, values transcend time and

its social processes (Sandoval Manríquez 2020) and change for better or worse, contributing to the development or detriment of a society in its constant evolution.

Evidence in the recent literature suggests that human values and how they are used by and communicated between citizens correspond to views on how to face the current health crisis as well as all the aspects inherent to it (i.e., economic, social, cultural, etc.). They play an important role in the dispositions that individuals have to comply with rules, processes, and procedures in relation to desirable and expected behaviors in concrete situations, in areas both public and private and as reflected in their current education, work, family, and community, including social activities in their daily lives (Wolf et al. 2020).

Therefore, researchers in different fields and disciplines have dedicated studies to the consequences and projections of crises. However, the vast majority of these have been oriented to a greater extent to the search for a solution from a medical perspective, as is natural, given that humanitarian and medical care are mostly required during the pandemic that we are experiencing. However, the analysis of economic, cultural, socio-political, and personal factors, including values and their incidences in times of crisis associated with the context of Panama, has not been carried out in sufficient depth (Barsallo Alvarado and Mendoza 2022).

### *1.1. About Values*

Several authors have commented that the use and mention of values dates back to ancient times and comes from Platonic philosophical currents (Prieto Ramírez 2002; Sanchez Hernandez 2005) that are developed in what we now call axiology. Also mentioned are the ancient peoples of India, China, Greece, and Rome, as well as Islam during the Middle Ages; the change in values during the development of capitalism; and the recognition and change in the same during the period of nationalism, among other periods (Mora Anda 2001).

From the sociological perspective, values have been approached as norms that entail what is considered valuable or estimable, which things are so described by their expression. In the same way, values are easily identified as the polar opposites of what a society disapproves and despises (Sandoval Manríquez 2020). As a result, values are those concepts that, by virtue of their existence and operation, maintain social consistency, allow a clear understanding of behaviors, and generate shared beliefs, attitudes, and habits that provide solidity for the functioning of our daily lives.

Values as unreal and objective entities cannot be grasped by reason (Martinez Gomez 2010). In this philosophical sense, a value is any quality that we appreciate in a moral object; that is, it is a quality, not a thing; and it is affirmed in relation to human behavior, which makes that quality evident. Values can be defined as the immaterial set of goods for which a human group considers it worth striving. The measurement of personal values is still a great challenge due to the complex nature of this concept (Danioni et al. 2020).

From the psychological point of view, living beings, in critical situations, always adapt to their environment through culture, which can be material or non-material. These two are not inherent in human genetic evolution, but are created by humans as a means of survival and adaptation to the environment that surrounds them (Díez Nicolás 2013). Ronald Inglehart instructs us regarding changing values in industrial societies: over time, societies have faced situations in which their people have lacked economic and personal security (Inglehart 1971). In this way, situations of scarcity were related to survival values and traditional values cataloged as materialistic and in situations in which there was a welfare state, with values of self-expression and emancipation, and in post-materialist contexts, without leaving out traditional, secular, rational, and legal values.

Change in values occurs as a result of the importance that emerging societies give to quality of life (Inglehart 1977) and also intergenerational cultural change, which emphasizes quality of life and self-expression, accompanied by political, religious, and moral norms and traditional social structures that are liable to deteriorate (Inglehart 2019). Schwartz's recent research demonstrates the universality of fundamental standards. In

other words, while cultures may differ in their assessments of which values are more important than others, the set of fundamental dimensions through which cultures express their values may be universal (Schwartz 1994).

This tells us that, as societies vary their levels of economic and personal security together with their perceptions, the priority they give to their values will also vary, taking into account that the development of perceptions, as first impressions and rational reactions that serve to form understandings of the immediate environment in which the individual interacts, is determined by social, political, and cultural change. These assessments of social practices based on the observation of and participation in events are largely mediated by beliefs and emotions that build the understanding of a specific situation. The establishment of relationships between being, thinking, matter, and consciousness occurs through processes and levels of knowledge that range from the ordinary, popular, and vulgar, through pre-scientific, scientific, and even philosophical knowledge.

Perceptions are configured into a set of ideas that favor knowledge management with the sole purpose of solving real-world problems (Schwartz and Knafo 2003). In this way, the value or values perceived in various life situations are consistent with the same cultural configurations and forms of social acceptance according to which, from a dichotomous perspective, individuals discern and justify what is good and what is bad, what is acceptable and what is not, based on their own values, which are mostly acquired during adolescence (Díez Nicolás 2013), instilled, or adopted according to their convenience; it is thus that people and their situations are also judged by those around them (Páez Gallego 2014). In this way, values model the behavior of people. However, the ways in which people and their situations are judged by others can change in the face of difficulties or inherited beliefs.

However, values have to be renewed (Garita Bonilla 2003) and the priority that a person gives to a value has to change in the course of life, in response to the circumstances that produce changes in their life (Sortheix et al. 2017). Values are broad motivational goals that express what is important to people and influence their decisions and behavior. Although the origin of values may be universal, people may disagree about the importance and priority attributed to them (Schwartz 2006). Robbins states that values account for a person's desire to do good, while balancing these desires with the feeling of duty (Robbins 2015). He proposes that values are not fully shared by people because they are no longer part of the culture but are found in people's examples. Thus, values are used to describe societies and individuals, observe their changes over time, and interpret what motivates their attitudes and behavior (Schwartz 2016).

In contrast to these ideas, Gorodnichenko and Roland (Gorodnichenko and Roland 2017) agree that values, as part of culture, have an effect not only on social norms but also on behavioral and economic decisions. Bisin comments on Morris et al. that, although values are seen as cultural adaptations in the history of humanity, the predominant value system changes according to the current economic center of gravity and that this system of values is determined by the institutions in charge of its own organization (Bisin 2017; Morris et al. 2017).

Additionally, Bello (Bello 2022) considers that religiosity is associated with positive attitudes, while Chan et al. (2020) and Pospíšil and Macháčková (2021) posit that there is a relationship between belonging to a religious community and moral and solidarity attitudes; later, their values will be expressed by these attitudes. In fact, values and religion have strong effects on each other, as they are interrelated.

### *1.2. Transmission of Values across Generations*

A generation typically shares values and viewpoints of the world, and as a new generation comes along, these values and viewpoints change. This means that every generation looks at the world differently. Regardless of the generation a person belongs to, practiced values will be shaped by what the generation experiences. A generation is the collective term for all individuals who were born and are still alive at roughly the same time.

It can also be referred to as the typical time frame—generally thought to be between 20 and 30 years—during which children are born, grow up, mature, and start having children. However, a generation is also a structural term used to describe the parent–child relationship in kinship terminology.

Every person belongs to a generation in a genealogical sense (Daly 2018). This is the generational placement of an individual, meaning the vertical position of an individual within his family. The statistical definition of generation refers to family members (Hantais et al. 2020)—the foundation of human families in all of their diversity, as well as residential groups, such as nuclear and extended family households, rather than cohorts within societies (Alwin and McCammon 2004). A human familial generation is a sophisticated amalgamation of biological generations as well as ideas and customs connected to exclusively human systems of descent (parent–child), marriage, and kinship (Daly 2018). It is based on research in population genetics, demography, anthropological studies of kinship, and genealogical studies of human families. The vertical connection between parents and their children is known as a descent generation. Members of a single descent line form a vertical chain, with time as the vertical dimension, the past at one end and the future at the other, representing a series of generations (Denham 2011).

In population biology and demography, generation time is the average time between two consecutive generations in the lineages of a population. In most cases, mean intervals of 20 or 25 years are used, regardless of the demographic characteristics of the population under study. However, results have shown that a mean value of 30 years is a better estimate of intergenerational interval than the latter (Lee et al. 2010; Tremblay and Vézina 2000).

### *1.3. Values in the Panamanian Context*

Panama is an isthmus with an extension of 75,517 km<sup>2</sup> located in the American continent, connecting Central America with South America. Its estimated population for 2020 was 4,315,000 inhabitants, and the official language is Spanish. Its territory is made up of 10 provinces and 6 indigenous regions (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censo INEC 2020). Given its geographical position, Panama has been the path of constant migratory movements for 500 years after the Spanish colonization, which has resulted in a population composed of mestizos, mulattoes, blacks, whites, indigenous people and, currently, people of various national origins. For this reason, Panama is considered a melting pot due to the plurality of its own indigenous groups and other ethnic groups established in such a small territory.

In Panama, there are levels of inequality represented by social classes or socioeconomic strata, in addition to ethnic–racial conditions and the migratory statuses of its inhabitants (Cecchini et al. 2020). Recently, like other countries, Panama has suffered the ravages of COVID-19 and the crisis situations generated by this event. Thus, in the midst of the crisis and the exacerbation of uncertainty in society, the values of Panamanians were also tested, although, for decades, Panamanian authors have been discussing an incessant crisis in society and the crisis of values that the country is experiencing (Quijano Durán 2012; Delgado 2006; Ayala Nickray 2004; Murillo Ivarguen 2004). Topics such as hope in civic virtue and moral conscience, ethics and morals as reflections of today's society, and the inability to objectively analyze the ethical problems that surround the country, have been discussed, while it has been forgotten that society is a product of the environment. This has become of great importance in Panamanian news, just at this crucial moment in which humanity has been affected by the health crisis caused by COVID-19.

Gonzalez Borelly asserts that, in terms of Panamanian society's values—those values that we prioritize as children to gain parental approval, that we organize as adolescents to gain autonomy, and that as adults guide our lives in terms of personal and social success—there is an alarming dissonance between individual values and collective values (Gonzalez Borelly 2017). In this sense, our society does not advance and leaves a social footprint lacking in harmony, while it is devoid of an education rich in values and worthy

examples to follow. Prosperi (2020) asserts that the loss of values experienced by Panamanians during the pandemic period is not limited to the population at large, as evidenced by public indolence and permissibility, facilitating legal and social impunity and promoting the *Juega Vivo* and opportunism (Barsallo Alvarado 2021), manifested in corruption in the governmental classes, the private sector, and even in the family.

Despite the negative effects that we may have experienced after living and surviving through the pandemic, our objective as a society that wishes to grow and gain an important place within the great conglomerate of developed countries should perhaps begin by aiming at progress in the application of values in the country. The essence of a society should be built through principles that govern our behaviors, the mental environment of the group that determines motivations and decisions. As in any society, to understand the collective mentality of the Panamanian it is necessary to explore historical sources, the legacy of past generations, and the current influences of local and world events.

Panama is a territory of passage, as history shows, and its society has learned to evoke itself at the service of those who pass through it. There is a great importance in satisfying the needs of this society and generating change in the people while integrating learning about the use of values in their lives. We recognize it as a transcendental challenge, but one of great urgency. However, this challenge presents a great opportunity and one of the most important obligations to future generations.

In the 20th century, there were profound changes in the value system of society, which in turn modified the identity references that youth had until then. Thus, the family, school, and churches lost influence over the youth, and the media, television, and advertising massively filled this void and quickly became the main references for the youth in the construction of their identities. In 2002, the Integrated System of Development Indicators (SID 2002) determined the existence of a deterioration in the values of Panamanian society due to the predominance of live games, the challenge being to train future generations using human values and social content.

In 2008, the Panama National Human Development Report (INDHP 2007–2008) asserted that the national culture encouraged sharing principles, values, and norms, but the practices of the people contradicted it. Thus, values and ethics stand out as important qualities to teach. However, in the face of irregular practices observed, such as those that violate values and order, there is lack of action of support or correction to the point that contradictory values and ethical systems are encouraged.

The idiosyncrasy of the Panamanian is distinguished by the general mistrust between people and institutions, which leads to a collective practice that makes it impossible to trust others and therefore allows daily practices to be affected by the seeking after of personal convenience (Barsallo Alvarado and Mendoza 2022) and not the common good, weakening social cohesion. Thus, Panamanian citizens show resistance to organizing themselves according to some collective interests, feeling mistrust of the needs of others. Social corruption excused by social survival stimulates the culture of “juega vivo” as a traditional and informal practice, which reflects a *modus vivendi* of intrinsic and generalized corruption, not only at a personal but also at an institutional level.

As a little-explored field where certainty is becoming increasingly important, the values issue in Panamanian society requires more reflection on scientific evidence obtained in relation to other areas of knowledge. As a result, the purpose of this study is to describe Panamanians’ perceptions of values during times of crisis.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The data collected for this article belong to a dataset from a larger study that is part of the project entitled “Perception of Panamanian Citizens on the Incidence of Values during the Crisis” (Percepcion de los ciudadanos panamenos sobre la incidencia de valores ante la crisis.). This is the second article in this project.

An interdisciplinary approach was used in this study, along with a quantitative approach, fundamentally from the statistical field, to describe the main characteristics of the

study through totals and percentages, as well as by associating some variables to observe the possible relationships among them as an added value of the study, to allow the laying of foundations for future research on this topic. Therefore, the study aims to provide quantifiable descriptions of participant demographics and identify factors related to the topic in a linear representation of the results (Schettini and Cortazzo 2015).

The design of the sample was descriptive in scope and cross-sectional. The target population consisted of Panamanian adults aged 18 or over who agreed to participate in the study and provided informed consent. The data collection was carried out through non-probabilistic sampling, for convenience, using the online survey method, for which a questionnaire-type instrument was designed, which was prepared in a format to be applied with the use of the Internet through an online platform and distributed through social networks (i.e., WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram) during the months of June to October 2020. The online survey method was chosen as the most appropriate due to the lockdown situation in which the country was at that time. The use of this method allowed us to better reach the population to be surveyed and achieve a probabilistic sampling using the snowball technique, in addition to facilitating participant access through the use of their mobile devices. It also allowed a better disposition and social desirability of participation in the survey and avoided ambiguity in answers (Arroyo Menéndez and Finkel 2019; Rocco and Oliari 2007).

The main objective of this study was to analyze the thoughts of Panamanian citizens from their perspectives regarding values and their relationships to those factors that influence their practice in crisis situations. It also took into particular consideration whether social institutions (family, school, and religious community) or religious beliefs have some influence on the instruction and subsequent application of values in daily life.

We therefore hoped to contribute to the construction of a series of recommendations and critical actions that will contribute to reflection on the institutional structures of Panamanian society. This study was guided by a fundamental question and two sub-questions:

1. How do Panamanian citizens perceive the emergence or occurrence of values during crisis situations?

(1.a) What values are necessary to face a crisis?

(1.b) What social institutions affect the acquisition and practice of values?

This study included fundamental demographic variables, such as gender, age, and religion, as well as professed religion and social institutions (schools, families, and religious communities), where values necessary to face the crisis and aid actions could have been imparted to neighbors. The final sample was represented by 502 adults, of whom 32.9% were men and 67.1% were women. The average age of the participants was 33.1 years (32.6 years for men, 33.3 years for women) (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the sample.

Demographic Characteristics	Categories	N = 502	Percent
Gender	Male	165	32.9
	Female	337	67.1
Age	18–30	272	54.2
	31–40	94	18.7
	41–50	92	18.3
	51–60	34	6.8
	61–70	8	1.6
	71+	2	0.4
Religion	Catholic	218	43.4
	Christian	50	10.0
	Evangelical	49	9.8
	Other	27	5.4
	None	137	27.3
	Not specified	21	4.2

The study initially involved a demographic analysis of the sample that included fundamental data, such as gender, age, and religion. Subsequently, an additional analysis included the variables that could be used to estimate the appreciation of the respondents before putting values into action in order to face crisis situations and their possible associations with the demographic variables of gender and age. Finally, respondents provided outlooks on ways in which they personally supported others during the crises they faced. The results of the survey were analyzed with the help of the programs Microsoft Excel and SPSS.

In this study, we did not use any theory about types of values; we provided the respondents with a list of values (personal, social, universal, and moral) sufficiently understandable and well-known to be able to be identified by respondents such that they could be weighted by motivation (in relation to facing the crisis).

The list included personal values, as they define who we are and what we want and how we depict characteristics of individuals (Sagiv and Schwartz 2022; Schwartz 2016; Febres 2007a), and social values, because they are associated with what society considers correct or acceptable. They denote how we connect with others and are reflected throughout our life course, including the value that the economy brings to society (Retolaza and Alzola 2021). Universal values were also included because they encourage spiritual reflection, cultural standards, and tolerance for life experiences (Marín Ibáñez 1976; Vinuesa Vilella 2002; Schwartz 2006; Febres 2007b; Moreno Parra et al. 2003). Some of the values listed may also be considered moral; however, assessment of the certainty of these values' being moral is conditioned by subjective attitudes or feelings (Carr and Landon 2006) and the popular consensuses of ethics and religious beliefs.

This study aimed to observe that, even during the recent crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, individual and collective practices emerged and were adopted due to a possible change in perspectives due to the situation faced. In this way, it is values that test the ways of thinking and socializing with and among people in the same circle in emergency situations such as the recent crisis experienced in Panama and throughout the world. We do not claim to have measured values in this study but rather to provide insights into how respondents perceived values in the survey in action at a specific time during the pandemic.

We started from the need to explore the perceptions and connections, if any, between knowledge, attitudes, and practices in relation to models of socially accepted values, particularly in the recent crisis situation experienced by society. Thus, based on the results, the body of interdisciplinary research (anthropological, social, and psychological) existing on the subject is expanded through the opinions collected from the respondents and demonstrates the importance of maintaining some system of substantial values for dealing with critical situations.

There have been several values-measurement-oriented surveys performed over the last few decades, such as the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) by Schwartz et al. (2001), the GLOBE by House et al. (2004), the Values Survey Module (VSM) by Hofstede and Michael (2013), and the World Value Survey (WVS) by Inglehart et al. (2014), which used theoretically constructed questionnaires to measure values. Unfortunately, Panama has not been included in any of these international studies, such that we do not have a reference of this type. This exploratory study, although the sample included a good number of respondents, does not pretend to achieve representative results (due to its limitations in terms of gender balance, age, and other factors).

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Values Transmission

The family as an institution of great importance in all Latin American countries, and so is work, but there has been a decline in religiosity, despite the fact that the continent is characterized by its faith (UNHCR/ACNUR 2017).

Guiding the next generation and instilling values at a young age is critical because it contributes to the assimilation of social experiences and a whole system of qualities that allow individuals to acquire appropriate behavior patterns and a deep human sense (Luis Bombino and Reinoso Porra 2019). We can certainly say that the analysis of value formation has primarily been undertaken from the perspective of the family, because this is the first institution in which the individual establishes social relationships. Values are transmitted through emotions and examples. As each person's actions serve as a reflection of their values, everything said and done serves as a model for others, as an example to follow or not. Values are also transmitted through emotion, since the people we value the most have the most influence over us. As values are also influenced by the social environment in which a person is raised, in past decades as well as over time, there have been profound changes in the value system of society, which have in turn modified the identity referents (INDHP 2004). Thus, the family, the school, and religious communities have lost influence over the youth, and this void has been massively filled by the media, television, and advertising, which quickly became the main references for the youth in the construction of their identities.

Martí-Vilar et al. (Martí-Vilar et al. 2018) claim that it is common to relate religion to the values that a person possesses. In fact, Shmelev and Pavenkov assert that values, especially moral values, are inseparable from religion (Shmelev and Pavenkov 2017).

To begin our analysis, the sample was analyzed according to the faith with which the respondents identified, and it was observed that almost half of the respondents indicated to profess the Catholic religion (43.4%), while 25.2% were grouped into categories such as Christian (10%), Evangelical (9.8%) and others (5.4%). It should be noted that, of those surveyed, 27.3% indicated that they did not profess any religion (Table 2).

In the group of Catholics, 48.1% were women, while 33.9% were men. In the group of men, there was a higher number who indicated that they did not profess any religion (35.8%). A statistically significant association was found between gender and belonging to the Catholic religion ( $p = 0.002$ ) and between gender and not professing any religion ( $p = 0.0003$ ), revealing extreme decisions related to gender and belonging to the Catholic religion or not belonging to any religion. Regarding age, there was evidence of a significant number of people (35.6%) who did not profess any religion who were between 18 and 30 years old. In all other age groups, the profession of the Catholic faith was predominant. An analysis using contingency tables revealed the existence of a significant association between both variables ( $p = 0.012$ ). Furthermore, among both men and women, Catholicism had a higher rate of religious practice than Christian and/or Evangelical. However, a higher percentage of responses for the practice of no religion (35.8%) stood out in the group of men.

In recent years, there has been a quick change in the thinking of young people due to the impact of a very critical social and political period. Changes and ruptures in the evolution of these people's attitudes and behaviors could be attributed to their age, the younger generation to which they belong, or the times in which we live. Studies on youth suffer from the lack of visualization of the religious factor as an element and an important set of practices for this segment of the population (Pérez Islas 2000). Young people aged 15 to 24 are emerging as a generation that is extremely tolerant and exhibit behaviors that previous generations considered deviant, including behaviors related to spiritual orientation (González-Anleo 2016). In this regard, the emergence of new forms of social identification is more relevant than hereditary associations (Corpus 2013).

Regarding this result, we do not believe that young people are losing faith; rather, they have discovered other practices and forms of socialization in which they share the symbolic goods of salvation or new modalities of youth aggregation through which they find common sense and/or a sense of inclusion.

We inquired further about the values education received in society by questioning the respondents on the subject, considering the possibility that the values they had learned, inherited, or applied derived from social institutions, such as school, family, or



religious community. In addition, the respondents were also asked about the type of education they received in terms of religion, values, and ethics and morals.

Regarding the transmission of values, Gorodnichenko and Roland and Albanese et al. commented on the incidence of cultural transmission of values as they are taught (Gorodnichenko and Roland 2017; Albanese et al. 2016) and as they are taught by and inherited from parents (Morgado Gutiérrez et al. 2015). In this context, values are transmitted to children through education in the family, generation to generation, with the intention that children become individuals who are “psychologically balanced, socially and culturally inserted, ethically responsible, with the ability to build their future, owners of their lives, actors and not mere spectators, active agents and builders of their destiny” (Elzo Imaz 2010, p. 8). Regarding the family, there is also the religion that the family or parents profess. Children may receive a religious education from their family at home or in their parents’ worship communities.

According to Pulla Merchan, the practice of values is a generational issue, since students believe that this practice depends on space, time, and fashion trends (Pulla Merchán 2017). Thus, an individual’s practices will depend on the environments in which they feel comfortable applying their values and in which they allow others to observe how they act; whether it is an appropriate time to act according to their values; and, depending on the situation, whether everyone follows the same practices or not.

As a result, different ages have different perspectives on values, their importance, and how to apply them. Given that the common denominator in society can be the period of school education, Vidal and Araña assure us that the various factors that intervene in the formative process of values at the individual level, such as the quality of the formative process in the study center to which an individual goes on a regular basis, the social context in which they live, the family, and the place they occupy in society, should not be underestimated (Vidal Ledo and Araña Pérez 2014). On the other hand, there are school programs that must conform to pre-established values, either by law or regulation, where values are indoctrinated according to the educator’s criteria (Bustamante et al. 2019).

It should be noted that changes have been made to the school education system (in public and official schools) in terms of the subjects assigned to impart this improved knowledge. In previous decades, we could find religion, morals, and values as part of the school curriculum. This was later shortened to ethics and morals or ethics and values. This is because, as a country that embraces multiple religious communities, Panama does not seek to impose Catholic teachings, which are those that prevail as fundamental guarantees for Panamanians (Constitución Política de La República de Panamá 1972, Articles 35 and 107) and were taught in official schools.

According to the survey results, the different aspects evaluated—values, ethics, and morals—are aspects that are mostly taught and learned during school and in the family, according to the results of the survey. A smaller part is played by religious communities. These findings support the claims of previously mentioned authors (Gorodnichenko and Roland 2017; Albanese et al. 2016; Morgado Gutiérrez et al. 2015; Vidal Ledo and Araña Pérez 2014)

According to the social institution and demographic variables, gender and age, it was not possible to demonstrate the relationship between these and education in values or in ethics and morals. However, regarding age in relation to values education at school and in the family, a possible trend seems to be described with a higher proportion in the younger adult generations, most marked in the family (18–30-year-olds: 93.4% vs. 51–60-year-olds: 68.2%) with respect to the rest of the adults who participated in the study, both in schools and in the family context. The analysis of this variable did not allow us to carry out a correlational hypothesis test because the answers given in the survey were in multiple-selection format and this would have created an important bias.

According to Oviedo et al. (2022), religious beliefs and practices in secularized societies are helpful in promoting the solution of situations of need in the field of social care; since religious practices and spiritual experiences foster, according to their doctrines,

greater sensitivity towards other people (Bello 2022; Chan et al. 2020; Pospíšil and Macháčková 2021), especially responsibility and commitment to others. Pepper et al. (2010) in Martí-Vilar et al. (2018) assert that other authors have found that religiosity is positively related to the value of benevolence but negatively related to the value of universality, understood as protection of the well-being of people in general. Although it is true that the religious community is not a formal educational entity, such as the school and the family, the religious community is a space in which attitudes and actions can also be observed, learned, and imitated. However, the respondents showed little acceptance of the religious community as a place of education in values compared to school or family. This result is also likely to be due to the high percentage of those surveyed who indicated that they did not belong to any religion and therefore to any religious community (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Religion professed by respondents.

Religion	Gender			Age			
	Total	Men	Women	18–30	31–40	41–50	51+
Catholic	218	56	162	93	44	54	27
	43.4%	33.9%	48.1%	34.4%	46.8%	58.7%	58.7%
Christian	50	19	31	27	9	10	4
	10.0%	11.5%	9.2%	10.0%	9.6%	10.9%	8.7%
Evangelic	49	12	37	28	10	8	3
	9.8%	7.3%	11.0%	10.4%	10.6%	8.7%	6.5%
Other	27	11	16	18	2	4	3
	5.4%	6.7%	4.7%	6.7%	2.1%	4.3%	6.5%
None	137	59	78	96	23	12	6
	27.3%	35.8%	23.1%	35.6%	24.5%	13.0%	13.0%
Not specific	21	8	13	8	6	4	3
	4.2%	4.8%	3.9%	3.0%	6.4%	4.3%	6.5%
Total	502	165	337	270	94	92	46
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

\* Regarding religion, a  $p$ -value < 0.012 was obtained, and a significant association was found between religion and age ( $p < 0.001$ ). Results obtained through SPSS.

According to the findings, 94.8 percent of those who received education in religion, values, ethics, and morals during their school years received classes on values, and 95 percent received classes on ethics and morals. Regarding education in this topic within the family, it was determined that 91.8 percent received education in values and 89 percent received education in ethics and morals; whereas, among those who received some education in these in their religious communities, 26.9 percent indicated that they received education in values and 30.9 percent in ethics and morals (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Places in which the formative process of value learning took place.

Social Institution		Gender			Age			
		Total	Men	Women	18–30	31–40	41–50	51–60
Values	School	94.8	94.5	95.0	97.4	97.9	87.0	88.6
	Religious community	26.9	26.1	27.3	26.1	28.7	29.3	18.2
	Family	91.8	91.5	92.0	93.4	97.9	83.7	68.2
Moral and ethics	School	95.0	95.2	95.0	97.8	97.9	88.0	86.4
	Religious community	30.9	29.1	31.8	31.3	28.7	31.5	27.3
	Family	89.0	90.3	88.4	89.7	96.8	82.6	63.6

### 3.2. Values with Power to Face the Crisis

Societies exhibit their own value systems, organized as a set of deeply rooted standards that serve as the foundation of behavior and choices throughout life. In this regard, we provided a comprehensible list of personal, social, and universal values for the respondents to select as useful and needed to succeed during this period, always bearing in mind that their learned core values and personal beliefs could also be inferred from this selection. Respondents had the opportunity to choose 10 values that they considered necessary to face the crisis. Thus, the results obtained were weighted according to the number of hits obtained (Table 4).

Particularly regarding values, it was identified that the value recognized as most necessary to face and manage the crisis was *respect*, according to 79.5% of those surveyed, this being the most prominent in the group of women (80.1%). That is to say, in the group of women, this value was consolidated as one of the most preponderant values for women, this being an essential value for the strengthening of social, family, and human coexistence.

**Table 4.** Values that are necessary to face the crisis.

Values	Total (%)	Gender		Age Range			
		Men	Women	18–30	31–40	41–50	51+
Respect	79.5	↑ 78.2	↑ 80.1	↑ 78.7	↑ 83.0	↑ 75.0	↑ 86.4
Cooperation	77.9	↑ 75.8	↑ 78.9	↑ 82.7	70.2	↑ 72.8	75.0
Responsibility	75.7	73.3	↑ 76.9	↑ 78.7	70.2	71.7	77.3
Honesty	70.9	75.2	68.8	67.6	↑ 71.3	↑ 72.8	↑ 86.4
Social responsibility	70.5	66.1	72.7	71.3	↑ 71.3	67.4	70.5
Tolerance	70.3	66.1	72.4	69.1	70.2	↑ 73.9	70.5
Justice	68.5	↑ 80.6	62.6	68.8	↑ 71.3	59.8	↑ 79.5
Solidarity	66.3	66.7	66.2	68.8	63.8	57.6	75.0
Love for others	65.3	65.5	65.3	62.5	64.9	70.7	72.7
Equality	58.4	57.6	58.8	66.5	44.7	50.0	54.5
Integrity	55.8	63.6	51.9	54.0	53.2	57.6	68.2
Democracy	54.4	58.8	52.2	61.4	53.2	41.3	40.9
Objectivity	50.4	51.5	49.9	48.2	54.3	53.3	50.0
Resilience	40.6	30.3	45.7	37.1	44.7	43.5	47.7
Hope	38.4	37.0	39.2	41.9	33.0	35.9	34.1
Freedom	33.7	42.4	29.4	31.3	30.9	34.8	52.3
Confidence	33.5	39.4	30.6	32.0	30.9	40.2	34.1
Charity	32.7	35.8	31.2	37.9	28.7	22.8	↓ 29.5
Loyalty	29.3	↓ 28.5	29.7	↓ 26.8	29.8	32.6	36.4
Sustainability	28.5	31.5	27.0	29.4	26.6	23.9	36.4
Harmony	28.3	29.1	↓ 27.9	34.9	↓ 19.1	↓ 16.3	31.8
Cultural diversity	22.3	↓ 21.8	↓ 22.6	↓ 23.9	↓ 21.3	↓ 19.6	↓ 20.5
Happiness	17.3	↓ 22.4	↓ 14.8	↓ 19.9	↓ 12.8	↓ 15.2	↓ 15.9

Note: This was a multiple-choice selection. Respondents were able to choose up to 10 items. Therefore, quantities are shown in percentages for the numbers of hits.

Mujica-Johnson and Orellana Arduiz (2021) comment that there has been neglect regarding values education in recent years. However, respect, in particular towards others, is the most important value in the framework of human rights. Nevertheless, in the group of men, the most outstanding value was *justice* (80.6%). In second place, at a general level, the value of *cooperation* (77.9%) was observed, and in third place, the value of *responsibility* (75.7%). Lastly, *happiness* was observed as a value with less relevance, indicating that a balance could not be found that would overcome its conflicts during the present crisis

with a greater concern for coexistence, social relations, and well-being between people (individuals) as opposed to personal well-being (Margot 2011). Even *love for others* reflected a global weight of 65.3%, above *happiness*, which obtained only 17.3% globally—a result that should draw a lot of attention.

Given the increasing rate of immigration to Panama in the last few decades, cultural diversity was included in the list of values. However, this was one of the least selected values. Cultural diversity was one of the values given the lowest weighting by the respondents (22.3%). This result stands out, perhaps due to the lack of knowledge of the concept in relation to attitudes towards immigrants or due to the small importance that the subject has for individuals in their overall schemes of values.

According to Schwarz, there is a dynamic structure in the comparison of common values among culturally diverse groups (Schwartz 2006). This can be due to different communities, societies, ethnic groups, and generations, as demonstrated by the differences in their thinking, as mentioned by Inglehart (Inglehart 2019). It is important to point out that, although the term “generation” is widely used in the humanities and social sciences, it can have various meanings, such as people born around the same time who have similar experiences over their life courses or social groups within a community with differences between them. In this article, we use the term “generation” to refer to a cohort, as we will later refer to age groups.

To demonstrate that there are different appreciations of values with respect to the generations (Inglehart 2019; Bolaños Arias 2020; Pulla Merchán 2017), an analysis of the values identified by the respondents was performed, as well as of the weightings according to three age groups: those from 18 to 30 years of age, those from 31 to 50, and those 51 and over. The findings revealed that, among the values mentioned in the previous list, respect was rated as very important, while cultural diversity and happiness were rated as less important. Respect was also rated as a common denominator among age groups when it came to dealing with a crisis. The perspectives on other values, however, differed.

#### 4. Conclusions

The main objective of this study was to analyze Panamanians’ perspectives regarding values and their relationships to different factors, such as gender, religion, and social institutions, which influenced their practices during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Their exposure to the recent pandemic changed people’s lives, their perceptions and behaviors, and, as a consequence, their value systems were tested.

This study has been undertaken with the idea of revealing that Panamanian society is not exempt from the realities and social changes related to changing behaviors that have emerged from the crisis. From the exploration carried out in this study, we also intend to invite collective reflection on the incidence of values during a period of general crisis, taking into account that what each person does and the ways in which they act always have social repercussions.

People know how to conduct themselves before society in the different circumstances of life. This is due to the internalized system of values that each person possesses. These standards of conduct, approved by society, guarantee the existence of stability and social harmony and contribute to the elimination of insecurity in social relations, thus constituting an instrument of normative social control. Understanding how people sense and observe how values arise in times of crisis offers an unprecedented opportunity to expose behavior in times of crisis and new panoramas for exploring the evolution and development of values in Panamanian society in innovative ways.

As described in the psychological literature, personal values are broad motivational goals reflecting what a person considers to be worthy and desirable (Schwartz 1994). Furthermore, authors working on the psychological theory of values describe them as being usually stable but also adaptive, responding to changes in environmental conditions (Daniel et al. 2021). The pandemic created a crisis in which people prioritized specific values depending on their personal and collective perceptions of the crisis situation.

Contextual factors, such as the country in which a person lives, contribute to shaping priorities in value systems (Vidal Ledo and Araña Pérez 2014). Other aspects are considered relevant, such as religion, value transfer, gender, and generational differences. In this study, Panamanian society and its value system were analyzed in response to our initial inquiries related to how Panamanians perceive their set values during crisis situations as being necessary in order to face the crisis and the identification of factors that affect the acquisition and practice of values.

Quijano Duran affirms that it is common to hear that the cause of the problems of a country is its people, since each person goes through their own crisis of values, and that that is why we are victims of our own suffering (Quijano Durán 2012). At other times, it is argued that the difficulty is not the people but the rulers. Another argument goes that it is not governmental institutions that are to blame, but the fact that those who lead are not suited to leading a good and adequate march towards the future of the nation. In fact, there is a growing concern for the new generations and their upbringing, either because of the education they receive or lack thereof, or because the progressive change in our societies has caused damage to generations to come. This also implies that the values between generations have changed according to our most recent realities.

It is to our understanding that the pandemic, as with any other crisis, has had an effect on the value system in Panamanian society, as a result of which generational and gender differences in the perception of values have emerged. For instance, findings revealed that values such as respect were selected as the most necessary to confront the crisis among women and men and across age groups. Meanwhile, cooperation was also one of the most outstanding values espoused by women and men, followed by justice for men and responsibility for women, in third place. Cultural diversity and happiness were selected as the common denominator values between the lowest choice weights among genders and different generations of respondents.

Further, consistent with the reports of many authors, the participants indicated that school and family were the places identified with greater influences on values education, as against the religious communities to which the respondents belonged (Gorodnichenko and Roland 2017; Albanese et al. 2016; Morgado Gutiérrez et al. 2015; Vidal Ledo and Araña Pérez 2014). However, although the majority of the respondents indicated being Catholic, which accords with the statistical information for the country, one third of the respondents, those aged 18–30 years, indicated that they did not hold to any religious beliefs (Pérez Islas 2000). These results reinforce asseverations by younger generations with new spiritual orientations (González-Anleo 2016). We believe that these responses influenced the final result and the associations detected.

Panamanian society presents systemic inequalities that limit access to resources for an important sector of the population (Cecchini et al. 2020). Indeed, particular contextual characteristics play a role in shaping the value system of each individual. The pandemic brought increased levels of uncertainty for all individuals, but those who suffer from inequalities faced more challenges during the pandemic. The pandemic, as the most recent global crisis, tested the value systems of each individual and societies in general. As noted by Prosperi, the loss of values that Panamanians have experienced in recent years, including during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, also showed the corruption manifested in the governmental classes, the private sector, and even in the family (Prosperi 2020). These findings call into question a unidimensional and monolithic perspective on values, adding new dimensions to Schwartz's universality principles on value across societies (Schwartz 1994). In this study, we stress the relevance of considering the multidimensionality of how values and behaviors are connected to the contextual characteristics of society, taking Panama as an example.

An exemplary society may be the one that, even in the midst of the crisis, achieves the healthy coexistence of its inhabitants, who are the key to its development. However, living in a society that genuinely believes and follows values requires our performance to be morally and ethically incongruent with our reality, or at least with the ideals that we

have been taught to value in these times. New generations with new beliefs will rise, and crises will keep on changing circumstances. Thus, we recommend further disciplinary and interdisciplinary study and analysis of the Panamanian value system and the incidence of values across the Panamanian context.

## 5. Limitations of the Study

This study contributes to a better understanding of Panamanians' observance of values required in times of crisis. However, there are still some limitations to consider.

There has been no previous formal populational values analysis in which Panama has been included.

There were some imbalances found in the sample used in this study. Regarding the respondents' ages, 54% were between 18 and 30 years old, while the other 46% were distributed among the other age ranges. The gender imbalance, with a predominance of female respondents, interferes with the generalizability of the results. Despite the large size of the sample, future research should take into account the contribution of other variables not mentioned in this article.

The survey used for this study was distributed online in the year 2020, during lockdown, as ordered by the Panamanian Government. It is possible that the level of balanced participation would have been higher in other cases.

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