

Young Europeans losing faith in democracy, poll finds

Deborah Cole

Only half of young people in [France](#) and Spain believe that democracy is the best form of government, with support even lower among their Polish counterparts, a study has found.

A majority from Europe's generation Z – 57% – prefer democracy to any other form of government. Rates of support varied significantly, however, reaching just 48% in Poland and only about 51-52% in Spain and France, with [Germany](#) highest at 71%.

More than one in five – 21% – would favour authoritarian rule under certain, unspecified circumstances. This was highest in [Italy](#) at 24% and lowest in Germany with 15%. In France, Spain and Poland the figure was 23%.

Nearly one in 10 across the nations said they did not care whether their government was democratic or not, while another 14% did not know or did not answer.

Thorsten Faas, a political scientist at Berlin's Free University, who worked on the study, said: "Among people who see themselves as politically to the right of centre and feel economically disadvantaged, their support of democracy sinks to just one in three.

"Democracy is under pressure, from within and without."

The study was carried out in April and May. More than 6,700 people between the ages of 16 and 26 in Britain, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Greece and Poland responded to [the ninth annual survey by the YouGov institute for the Tui Foundation](#), which funds projects dedicated to youth in Europe.

Forty-eight per cent worry that the democratic system in their own country is endangered, including 61% in Germany, where the economy – Europe's biggest – is ailing and the far right has made significant inroads, [fuelled in part by increased backing from young voters](#).

The return of Donald Trump to the White House, the rise of China, and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine have shifted power away from [Europe](#) in the respondents' perception, with just 42% counting the EU among the top three global players.

Despite – or perhaps because of – [Brexit](#), the figure was highest among Britons at 50%. Of those surveyed in the UK, 73% wanted a return to the EU, while nearly half of young Europeans (47%) sought stronger ties between the EU and Britain.

The US was seen by 83% as part of the power trio, followed by China with 75% and Russia on 57%.

Rising polarisation is also driving young Europeans to the ideological fringes along with their elders, but [a notable gender divide has emerged in the process](#).

Nearly one in five – 19% – described themselves as politically right of centre, up from 14% in 2021, while 33% called themselves centrists, 32% as leftist and 16% without any designation.

Women in Germany, France and Italy identified as progressive in higher numbers than four years ago, while young men in Poland and Greece have grown more conservative in the same period.

Support for tougher restrictions on migration has grown across the board since 2021, to 38% from 26%.

Most young Europeans expressed hope in the EU's potential, and two in three overwhelmingly supported their country remaining in the bloc if it still was. But 39% described the EU as not particularly democratic and just 6% said their own national governments worked well, with little need for significant changes.

More than half – 53% – felt the EU was too focused on details and trivial matters. They would like the bloc to tackle the high cost of living, bolster defence against external threats and create better conditions for companies to improve the economy.

Elke Hlawatschek, the head of the Tui Foundation, said: "The European project, which has brought us peace, freedom of movement and economic progress for decades, is seen as unwieldy."

Greek people see the strongest need for fundamental overhaul of their political system and are most sceptical about the EU, which Faas described as rooted in enduring trauma of the eurozone debt crisis that drove their country's economy to the brink.

Despite stronger support for climate protection among young Europeans, just one in three said it should take priority over economic growth. The figure has slipped from 44% in 2021.