

UNITED IN A BLEAK OUTLOOK

Concerns,
Crises, and
Right-Wing Views
Ahead of the
2024 EU Elections

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the 2024 European Parliamentary (EP) elections approach, the EU faces significant challenges, including foreign policy threats, economic instability, and widespread uncertainty. A major concern is the potential rise of right-wing parties, which could disrupt the coalition of progressive, pro-European parties that have long governed the EU.

Our research team conducted a comprehensive research project, surveying eight EU member states—France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Romania, and Sweden—to understand current political attitudes, concerns, and hopes among EU citizens. The survey was complemented by in-depth focus groups in Germany and France. The study aimed to determine whether EU citizens share similar hopes and fears and to explore how socio-economic experiences influence political attitudes, particularly with the anticipated right-wing surge.

The results indicate widespread dissatisfaction among EU citizens regarding the current state of society and politics, coupled with a pessimistic outlook on future living standards. Economic and social issues are major concerns, with dissatisfaction prevalent regarding national governments' handling of recent crises, especially the cost-of-living crisis. Additionally, there is a normalization of anti-democratic attitudes and extreme right positions within European societies, extending beyond far-right supporters to include those of democratic parties.

Citizens across the EU share political concerns centred around economic instability, rising living costs, unemployment, and deteriorating public services. These material concerns drive overall dissatisfaction with current politics and society. Many EU citizens fear a decline in their standard of living and lack confidence in their governments' ability to manage crises. This pessimism is prevalent even among those who are financially comfortable.

Far-right supporters are particularly pessimistic about the future and dissatisfied with past crisis management. Their support is influenced not only by current economic conditions but also by fears of social decline. Democratic parties must address economic and social concerns seriously and present a hopeful vision for the future. Opposing far-right agendas or defending the often unwanted status quo is insufficient. A positive, constructive narrative for change is essential.

Extreme right positions and anti-democratic attitudes are widespread across European societies. Not only among far-right supporters but also within the mainstream, including supporters of democratic parties, indicating a troubling normalization of these views. Beyond the support for far-right parties, the approval of anti-democratic and extreme right positions also among supporters of conservatives, liberals and social democrats poses a significant challenge to democratic societies in the EU.

Public perception of the EU varies greatly. While many associate the EU with unity and diversity, others view it as unnecessary or superfluous. Opinions on the future development of the EU are split, complicating the task for democratic parties to incorporate a stronger and more integrated EU into their vision.

The EP elections matter to most people, but far-right supporters find them slightly less important compared to other party supporters. If far-right parties underperform in the elections, the underlying issues of dissatisfaction and anti-democratic sentiments will persist. The report emphasizes the need for democratic parties to offer concrete solutions and avoid adopting far-right positions. A hopeful, positive outlook for the future, including economic and social issues in the vision, is crucial to counteracting extreme right-wing attitudes and maintaining pluralistic societies within the EU.

01 Introduction: Context, Key Areas, Methodology

Around the European Parliamentary (EP) elections in June 2024, the political landscape of the European Union (EU) is under intense scrutiny. Compared to the situation ahead of the 2019 EP elections, the EU and its member states face numerous challenges. The post-pandemic EU is now concerned with multiple crises ranging from external foreign policy and geo-economic threats, and prevailing uncertainty. One of these threats is the potential result of the 2024 EP elections itself. Many observers have highlighted that the predicted right-wing surge in the EU Parliament poses a substantive threat to democracy, as it raises concerns that a bolstered Eurosceptic camp could strain the coalition of progressive, pro-European parties that have governed the EU for decades.

At d|part, we conducted a comprehensive comparative research project across eight EU member states to investigate the similarities and differences in political attitudes, concerns, and hopes among EU citizens. Against the backdrop of the multiple crises, we pursued the question of whether EU citizens are united in a bleak outlook. Our main goal, therefore, was to explore how European publics currently perceive the EU and navigate political and economic questions leading up to the elections, examining the extent to which political views are shared across different demographics within the member states.

A special focus was placed on understanding how individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds have experienced the multiple crises of recent years and how these experiences have influenced their political attitudes. In addition to socio-demographic factors, we examine material pressures as well as fears of downward mobility, and analyse how these factors affect anti-democratic societal attitudes. Given the expected right-wing backlash in the EP elections, we aimed to provide an analytical and comparative perspective on who supports far-right parties across the EU and analyse how widespread their positions find resonance in society as a whole.

In our central analysis in this report, we compare the sentiments, concerns, hopes, and political attitudes of far-right supporters with those of individuals who support other political parties across the surveyed countries. We focus on the distinct perspectives of far-right supporters and those who do not feel close to any political party. In many countries, up to one-fifth of respondents do not identify with any party. These groups, often excluded from many analyses, frequently express political dissatisfaction, making a detailed and comparative analysis of their views particularly relevant.

To answer these questions, we employed a mixed-methods approach combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The first phase of our research involved qualitative focus group discussions held in Germany and France in January and February 2024. These discussions aimed to explore how individuals in different socio-economic situations engage with current social, economic, and political debates and their perspectives on the EU. This qualitative approach allowed us to gain in-depth insights into the narratives and discourses that people use when discussing these topics.

Building on these insights, we developed a comprehensive survey to capture current public opinion across a diverse selection of eight EU member states: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Romania, and Sweden. Conducted between April 10 and May 2, 2024, the survey sampled a representative group of 10,644 respondents aged 18 to 80¹. To ensure representativeness, we used a complex quota and cross-quota design based on the latest Eurostat statistics, covering key socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, income, education, and regional distribution. A detailed description of the project's methodological approach can be found at the end of the report.

¹ In Germany, respondents' ages started at 16, marking the first time Germans aged 16 and older can vote in the EP elections.

02 What Are The Profiles Of Far-Right Party Supporters Across The EU?

Firstly, it's worthwhile to take a general overview of the demographics of those who supported far-right parties in each respective country.² A comparison between far-right sympathizers, those without any party affinity, and those who feel close to other parties across the eight surveyed EU member states reveals substantive differences between countries. The proportion of supporters of far-right parties varied between countries on a range of 11 to 36 percent (see Figure 1). In Romania, Germany, Greece, and Latvia, 11 to 15 percent of respondents indicated feeling close to far-right parties, while in Sweden (23%), Italy (24%), and France (27%), substantively more individuals expressed such sentiments. Poland exhibited the highest level of support for far-right parties, with 36 percent of respondents indicating affinity.

The number of relevant far-right parties in Europe varies by country. For instance, the AfD in Germany and the Sweden Democrats in Sweden tend to dominate the far-right segment of the political spectrum, while countries like Greece, Latvia, and Poland have multiple far-right parties.³ In Poland, this variety is evident within the far-right group itself: while PiS (Law and Justice) ticks all the boxes that classify it as a far-right party, Konfederacja (Confederation) is even more extreme. To reduce complexity, however, we decided to group all these far-right parties under one umbrella category (see Pirro 2023).

In this report, we employ the term „far-right“ as a comprehensive category encompassing both (populist) radical right and extreme right manifestations within right-wing politics. This designation reflects the increasing convergence between illiberal-democratic („radical right“) and anti-democratic („extreme right“) entities (see Pirro, 2023). Thus, „far-right“ encompasses both populist radical right parties and extreme right fascist parties. Our party classification adheres to the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) typology, which categorizes parties based on their general stance and position on the GAL/TAN scale of cultural values, ranging from libertarian/postmaterialist (0) to authoritarian/traditional (10). Parties classified within the radical right family and/or scoring 7.5 or higher on the GAL/TAN scale are considered far right in this report.⁴

2 Given the complexity of evaluating voting behaviour, particularly within the context of European elections where voter turnout tends to be lower and individuals may gravitate towards smaller or fringe parties (see Plescia et al. 2020), respondents were asked in the survey to identify the political party with which they feel closest to. This approach aims to provide a more nuanced and accurate insight into the party preferences of respondents.

3 This list features the bigger parties of the far-right group per country and their respective share within the group:

Germany: AfD (95%);

Greece: Greek Solution (43%), Democratic Patriotic Movement "Victory" (27%), Spartans (18%), Popular Orthodox Rally (7%);

France: Rassemblement National (83%), Reconquête (9%), Debout la France (6%);

Italy: Fratelli d'Italia (73%), Lega (24%);

Latvia: National Alliance (49%), Latvia First (48%);

Poland: PiS (63%), Konfederacja (22%), Kukiz' 15 (6%), Sovereign Poland (5%);

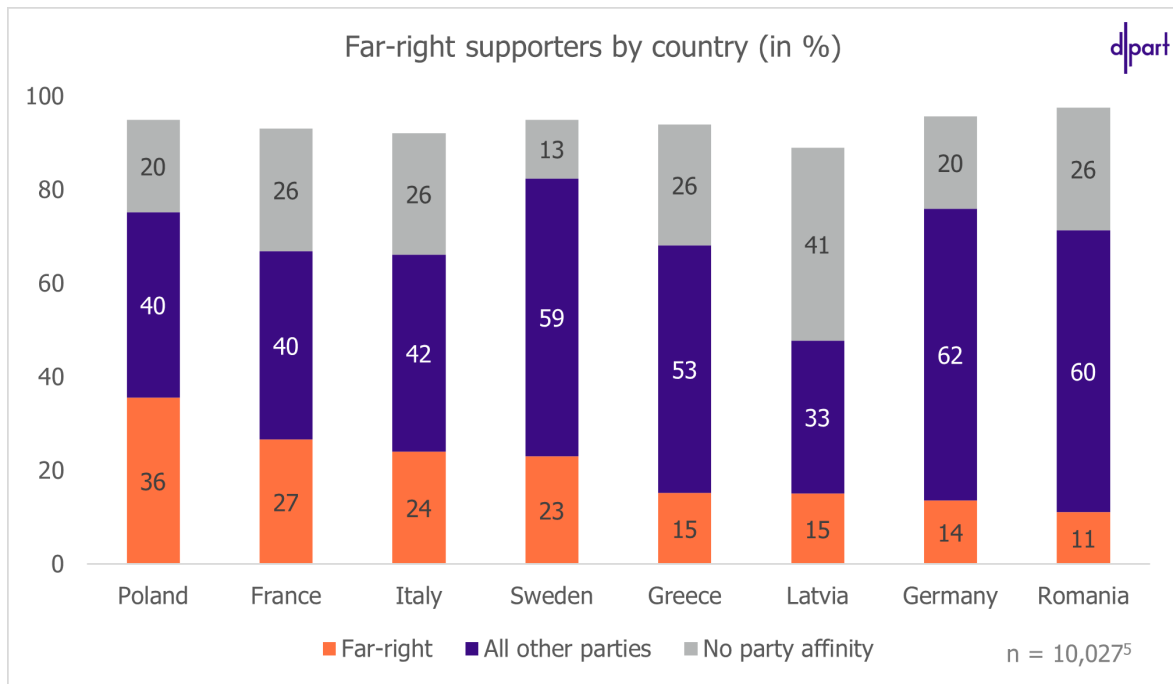
Romania: Alliance for the Union of Romanians (65%), S.O.S. Romania (14%);

Sweden: Sweden Democrats (93%), Alternative for Sweden (5%)

For a more detailed explanation of how the assignment of parties to party families, specifically the far right here, was carried out, see the method note at the end.

4 Further details regarding party classification can be found in the methodological notes provided in this report.

Figure 1



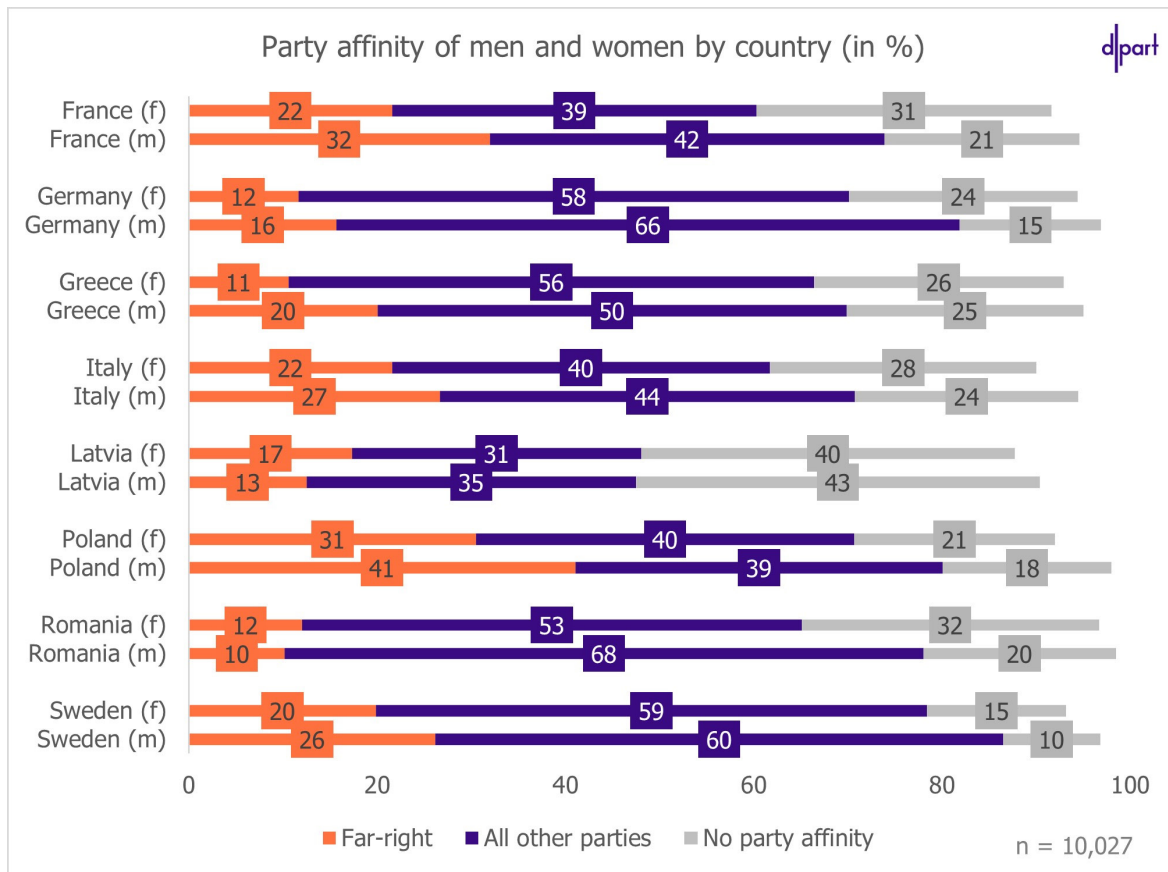
Additionally, it is worth exploring individuals who did not identify with any political party, as their presence was notable across the surveyed countries, albeit with differing magnitudes. The proportion of respondents expressing no affiliation with any political party ranged from 13 percent in Sweden to 41 percent in Latvia. In Germany and Poland, 20 percent of respondents reported no party affiliation, while in Greece, France, Italy, and Romania, 26 percent of respondents each expressed no affinity towards any political party.

Furthermore, a breakdown by gender⁶ gives valuable insights. Generally, there was a greater tendency for men to support far-right parties. Especially notable in Poland and France, the contrast was stark, with ten percentage points more men supporting far-right parties than women (Figure 2). However, there was also an increase in men indicating a preference for far-right parties in Greece (+9%), Sweden (+6%), Italy (+5%), and Germany (+4%). In Latvia and Romania, there was a somewhat different pattern, with slightly more women indicating support for far-right parties.

⁵ The sample numbers represent the unweighted counts from the entire sample, excluding those respondents who answered “don’t know” to the respective questions.

⁶ In the survey, we asked people about their gender and offered the response options: male, female, and other. For the analysis here, we are simplifying to binary categories, recognizing that this reduction may reproduce rigid and exclusionary gender realities.

Figure 2

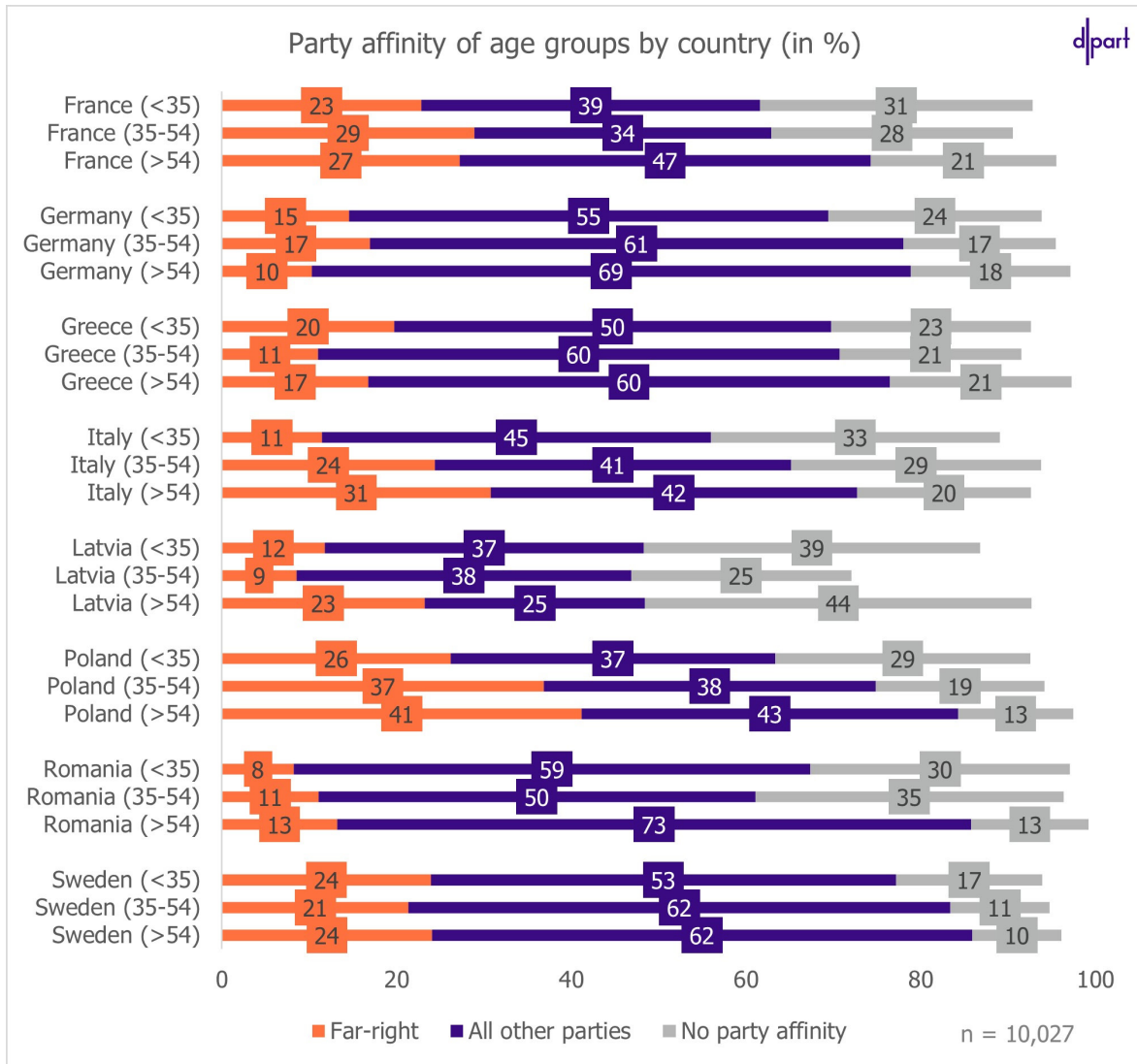


It is also worth looking at the proportions of respondents who did not feel close to any political party from a gendered perspective. In Romania and France, the difference was stark with more than ten percentage points more women than men who felt no affinity towards any party. But differences were also notable in Germany (+9%), Sweden (+5%), and Italy (+4%). In Poland, Latvia, and Greece, those without party affinity were more or less similarly represented among men and women.

Similar to gender, age distributions of party preferences showed substantive differences between countries (Figure 3). It is notable that in the eastern EU member states of Poland, Romania, and Latvia, as well as in Italy⁷, those aged over 55 years, comprised the highest proportion of far-right party supporters. This effect was particularly pronounced in Poland and Italy. Conversely, in Sweden and Greece, a very slight U-shaped pattern was evident, where both the oldest and youngest age groups exhibited a slightly higher tendency to support far-right parties. In Germany and France, however, a reversed U-shaped pattern emerged. Here, it was the middle age groups, between 35 and 54 years old, that demonstrated the strongest support for far-right parties.

⁷ In the survey, we differentiated between eight age groups (or nine groups in Germany, including 16-18 year-olds), which we subsequently aggregated into three groups for the purpose of this presentation.

Figure 3



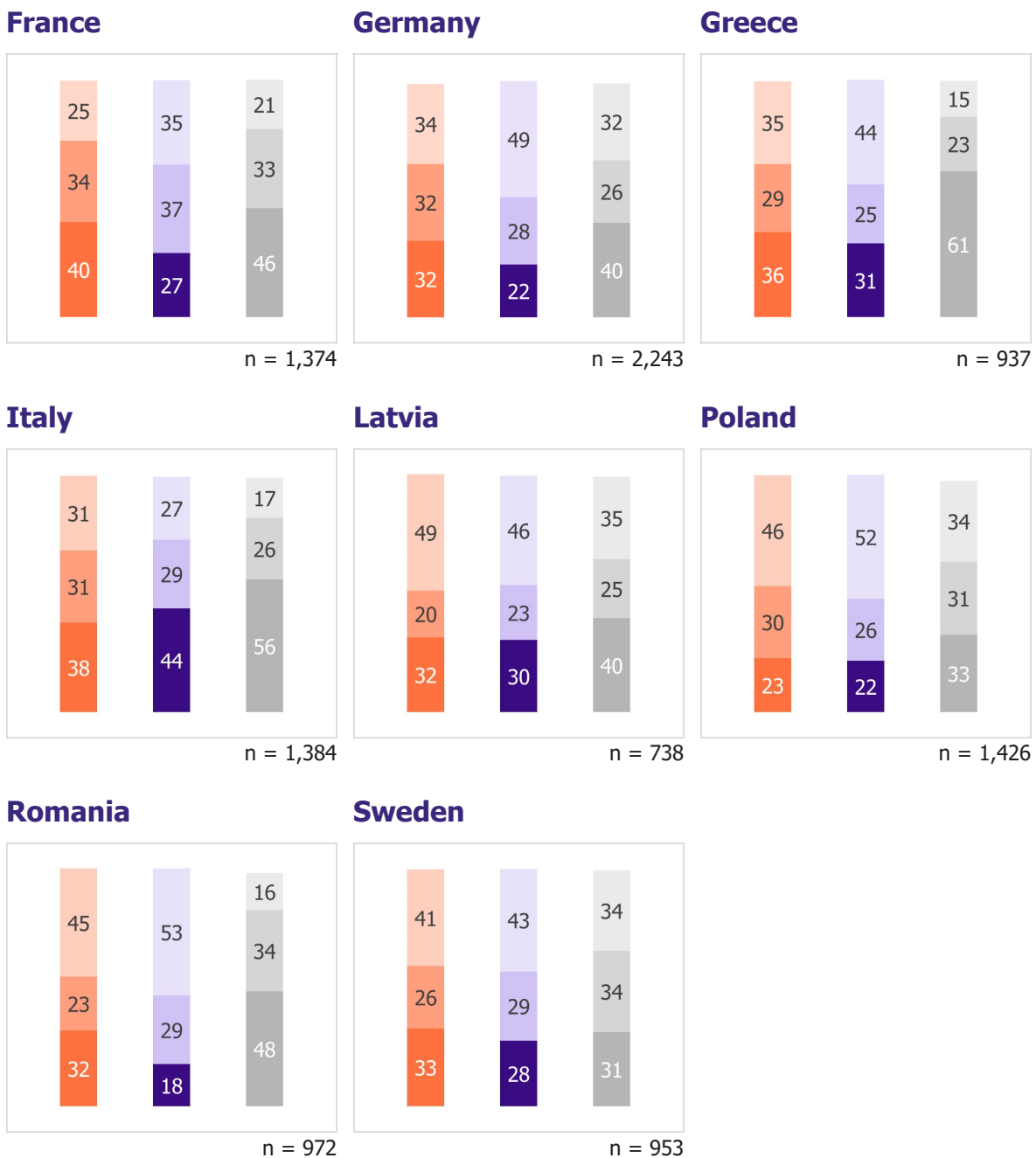
Across all countries, there was a higher proportion of respondents among the youngest⁸, but also middle age groups, who did not feel affiliated with any political party. Conversely, it was the oldest age group, those over 55 years old, who were least likely to lack party affinity. Interestingly, in Poland and Italy, where far-right supporters were most prevalent among the oldest age groups and least prevalent among the youngest, the opposite trend was observed: These countries exhibited the highest proportions of young people who did not feel aligned with any political party.

Relevant differences also emerged concerning the financial situation of respondents in relation to their party preferences. To assess the socio-economic situation of respondents, we asked respondents, among other things, to self-evaluate their current financial situation. We then aggregated these responses into three groups: “comfortably financially or better”, “occasionally cautious at the end of the month”, and “precarious or poor”⁹.

⁸ The finding that young people tend to feel less close to political parties compared to other age groups is well established in the academic literature (see Dahl et al. 2020; Kitanova 2020).

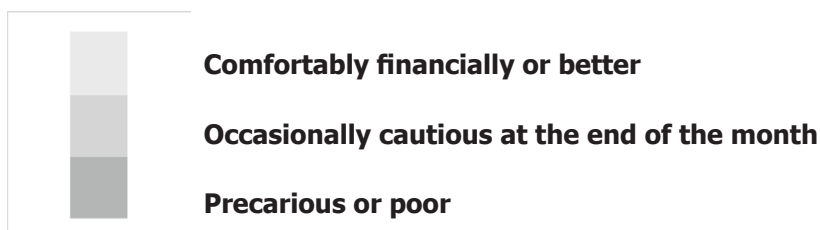
⁹ We used the survey question “What best describes your current financial situation?” to assess respondents’ self-evaluation of their financial status. The category “comfortably financially or better” includes three answer options: “I am rich”, “I’m very comfortable financially”, and “I’m not rich, but don’t have to pay much attention to my spending”. The second category, “occasionally cautious at the end of the month”, consists of respondents who selected “I have to be careful from time to time at the end of the month”. Finally, the category “precarious or poor” comprises those who chose either “I have to be very careful with expenses all the time” or “I’m poor or close to poverty”.

Figure 4: Self-Evaluation of the Current Financial Situation by Party Affinity and Country (in %)



In this graphs (Figure 4), each country is represented by three columns, showing how these groups are distributed among **far-right supporters**, **supporters of any other parties** and **individuals with no party affinity**

The shading shows the self-evaluation of the current financial situation



Although there were differences between the countries, it became evident that far-right supporters were represented in all financial segments of society at relatively high proportions. With slight variations across countries, roughly about one-third of far-right supporters fell into each of the three categories of financial situations.

In France, the proportion of far-right supporters who considered themselves in a precarious financial situation was comparatively higher at 40 percent, aligning with a slightly higher overall number of people reporting being in a deprived situation. On contrary, in Poland, Latvia, Romania, and Sweden, within the group of far-right supporters the proportion of those who described themselves as financially comfortable was slightly higher, each over 40 percent. In these countries, the group of people who considered themselves poor still made up about one-third of far-right supporters, except in Poland, where fewer far-right supporters reported being in a precarious financial situation.

However, compared to supporters of all other parties, it is particularly evident in Romania (+14%), Germany (+10%), and France (+13%), and to a lesser degree in Greece (+5%) and Sweden (+5%), that the proportion of individuals who felt in a precarious situation was substantively higher among far-right supporters.

Moreover, it also became clear that the proportion of people who self-assessed their financial situation as poor or precarious was substantively higher among the no party affinity group. This suggests that poorer individuals were more likely to feel unaffiliated with any political party. Conversely, the proportion of people who considered themselves financially comfortable was much lower among those who did not feel close to any party.

03 Economic and Political Uncertainties: Key Concerns Ahead of the 2024 Elections

Understanding the foremost concerns of EU citizens is critical as the EP elections approach. Exploring the primary political, economic, and social issues that resonate with individuals provides invaluable insights into the prevailing sentiments shaping the political landscape across the EU. In many studies focusing on key topics and significant issues ahead of an election, the standard method entails presenting respondents with a variety of issues to choose from. However, this approach can result in a skewed portrayal, as respondents may select an issue merely because it was presented to them, regardless of whether they had previously considered it. While they care about a particular topic, the way it is phrased may not be in terms that are intuitive to them, so they might end up not prioritising something that they would have raised as most salient in their own words.

To engage with those concerns, our survey asked people to write openly what currently was on their mind when thinking about the situation in their respective countries. After receiving those responses, they were coded into themes.¹⁰ We asked them:

“When you think of the overall political, economic and societal situation in [COUNTRY]¹¹, what are you most concerned about?”

The responses across our sample were illuminating (see Table 1): 47 percent mentioned issues to deal with the economy – but with different emphases. While some framed their concerns in terms of economic instability, others focussed specifically on inflation or rising costs. Furthermore, some perspectives looked at the issue through a labour market lens, emphasizing concerns such as unemployment or low wages and pensions.

Other topics also had significant prominence, with more than one in eight respondents explicitly highlighting their dissatisfaction with politics and governments as a key concern. One in five highlighted foreign policy issues involving relations with other countries, such as war and conflicts or migration. Other issues that concerned at least five percent of respondents involved domestic issues, such as crime and violence, health care, social inequality or injustice.

Table 1: Primary areas of concern voiced by respondents (N=10,644)

TOPIC	%
Political Dissatisfaction	14.4
Economic Instability	13.1
War/Conflicts	11.9
Inflation	11.3
Rising Costs/Prices	9.8
Immigration	9.2
Unemployment	8.6
Crime and Violence	8.2
Health Care Policy	6.3
Social Inequality/Injustice	5.5
Low Wages/Pensions	4.8

¹⁰ This was accomplished with the assistance of an AI tool. Respondents could mention multiple issues and be coded as having selected multiple themes.

¹¹ The respondent’s country name was entered here.

These results strongly reflected the discussions in the qualitative focus groups in France and Germany. Similarly, participants were openly asked about their primary concerns at the present time. Here as well, discussions often centred on economic and social issues, with participants frequently sharing personal insights about current material strains and concerns. A participant in a lower socio-economic focus group in Germany said:

“The financial situation is bad, inflation is high, anyone who goes shopping can confirm this, whether it’s groceries or gasoline, heating, electricity, water, or rent—everything. It’s bad. I am not very optimistic; I can’t find anything positive. I have hope that something will change for me personally, that I will get a raise, but I’ll believe it only when it’s in my account. Honestly, I am not very positive.”

(Irina¹², female, 52 years old, lower socio-economic groups, Germany)

Similarly concerns around the overall economic situation and social inequalities were shared in the focus groups in France, as for example this participant complained:

“People are being squeezed like lemons. Look at wages they haven’t increased. They’ve increased the minimum wage, but how about the wages that are just above it?”

(René, male, 65 years old, lower socio-economic groups, France)

Overall, specifically the topic of inflation and rising costs was discussed and brought up by many participants. In this context one participant in Germany shared their concern about the war in Ukraine:

“I am unsettled because of the prices; they rise every day, well, not every day, but you can never be sure what, for example, bread will cost. This uncertainty, especially with the potential of having a war at our doorstep soon, bothers me the most.”

(Anke, female, 45 years old, lower socio-economic group, Germany)

This gives us an insight into what the publics thought about when being asked to consider the overall situation in their countries (and what they did not raise in turn)¹³. In the subsequent sections, we will dig deeper into those issues to examine to what extent those views cohere or differ across countries and to whether they relate to people’s party preferences, especially those of the far-right.

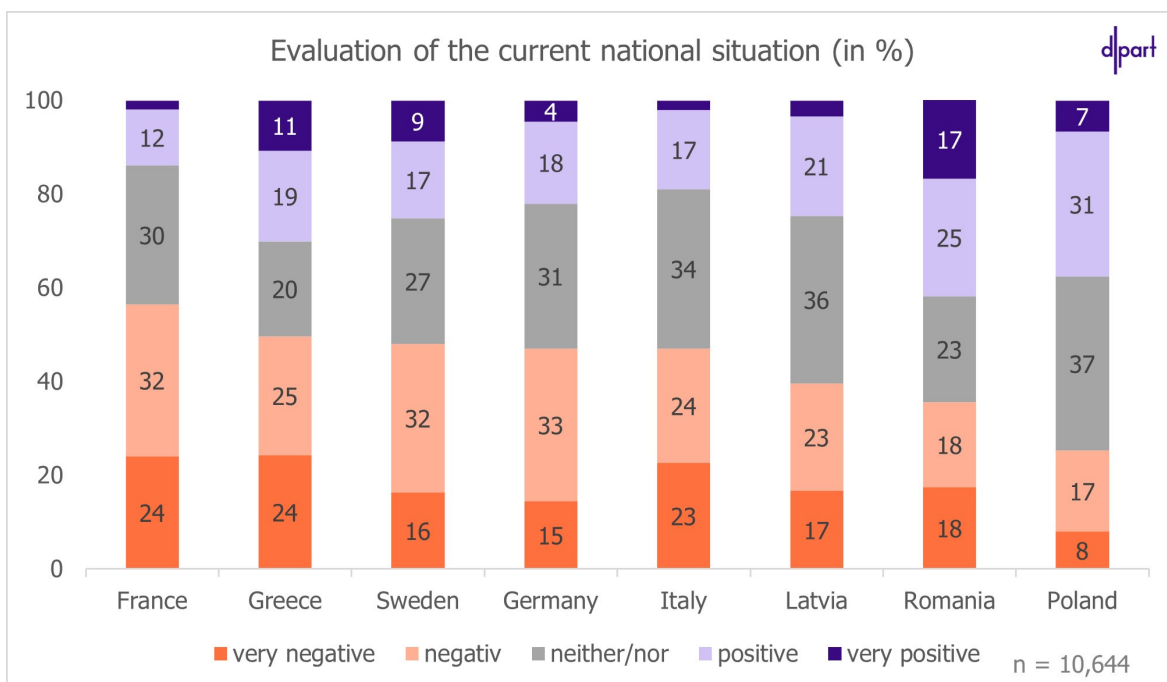
12 All names have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

13 There were notable differences between the countries. In Germany, migration was mentioned more frequently at 19 percent, compared to under five percent in other countries. Additionally, the Russian war in Ukraine was more prevalent in the eastern EU member states and Germany. Crime was more frequently cited in Sweden, but this may also be attributed to recent discussions surrounding shootings. Political dissatisfaction was also slightly higher in Germany, with mentions of the government but also concerns of backlash of right-wing movements.

04 General Discontent Prevails: Non-Partisans and Far-Right Supporters Are Most Pessimistic

Having seen the range of key concerns people raised, it is unsurprising that for many people, their overall view of the current situation in terms of politics, economy and society in their countries was not particularly positive (Figure 5). The general sentiment varied greatly between countries, however. French respondents most commonly expressed a negative view (56%), followed closely by Greeks (49%), Swedes and Germans (48%) as well as Italians (47%). At the other end of the spectrum, only one in four Polish respondents held such negative views, while 38 percent actually expressed a positive sentiment.

Figure 5

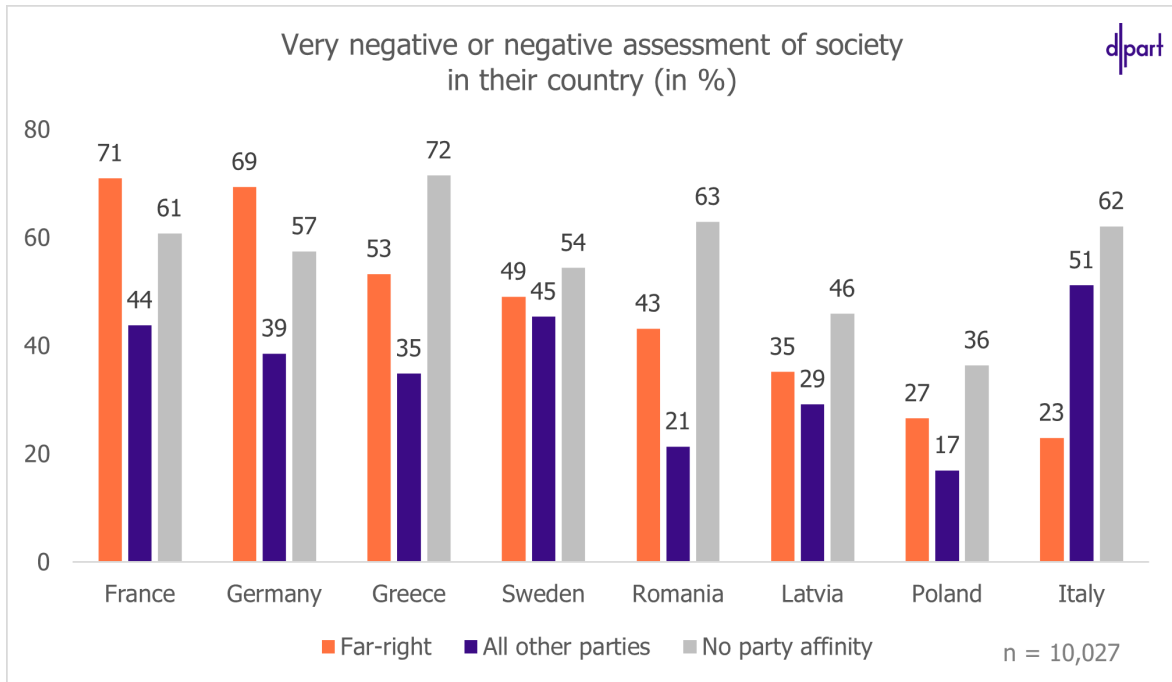


Graph is based on the survey question: "In general, when you think of the overall political, economic and societal situation in your country, how would you rate the current state of society?"

Crucially, these views were not shared homogeneously across populations, but differed substantially according to party political preferences (Figure 6). The association between party affinity and assessments of society were not uniform across countries, however. In Germany and France, sympathisers of far-right parties were distinctively the most likely to express discontent. In Greece, Romania, Latvia, and, to a lesser extent, Italy, Poland and Sweden, people who said that they did not feel close to any political party, were the ones showing the most negative sentiments.

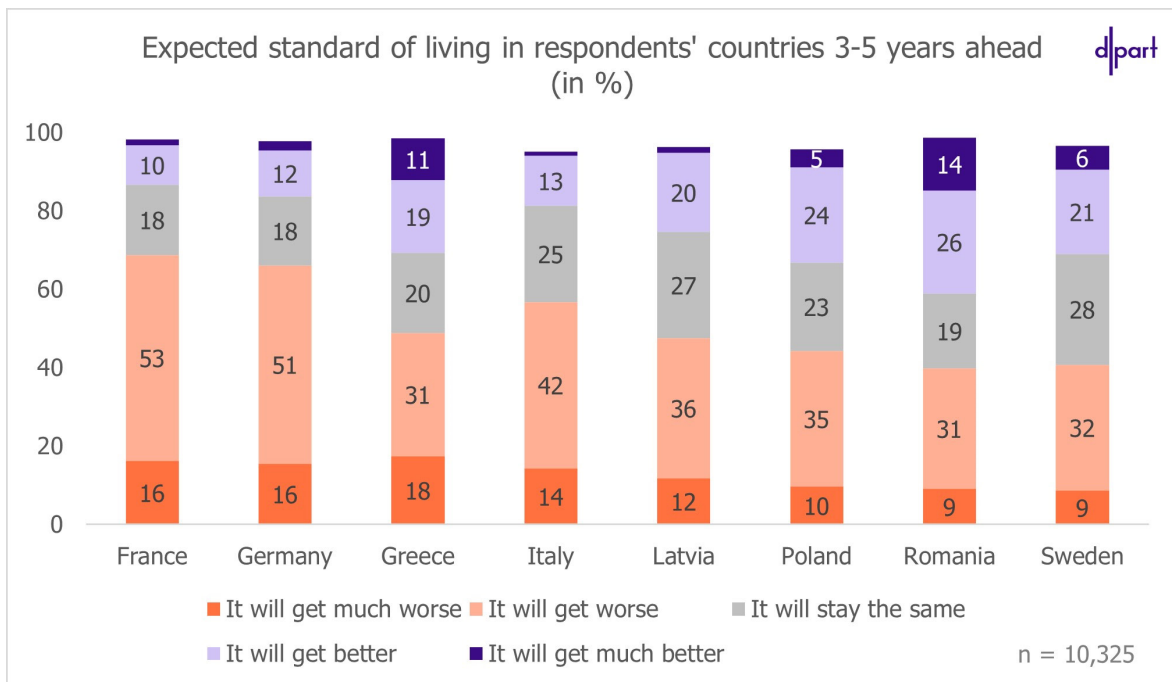
Differences in how supporters of far-right parties perceive society vary strongly across countries. For instance, in Italy, where far-right parties hold governmental positions, their supporters exhibited notably more positive perceptions of Italian society compared to those backing other parties. Conversely, supporters aligned with non-far-right parties tended to express fewer negative sentiments elsewhere. However, the disparity, both with far-right party supporters and those lacking affinity to any political party, was relatively narrow in certain countries, notably Sweden. These findings underscore the importance of considering country-specific contexts, cautioning against assuming uniform dispositions among far-right supporters across the EU.

Figure 6



Given the salience of economic concerns and standards of living for many individuals, it is unsurprising to observe a correlation between general discontent and people's economic outlooks. Respondents in Germany and France largely (over two thirds) expected that the standard of living in their respective countries would decline over the next three to five years (Figure 7). In contrast, in Sweden and Romania only about four in ten people held the same view. This indicates that the prevailing discontent observed in Sweden might be attributed to factors beyond economic concerns, such as public safety, as highlighted in subsequent sections of the report.

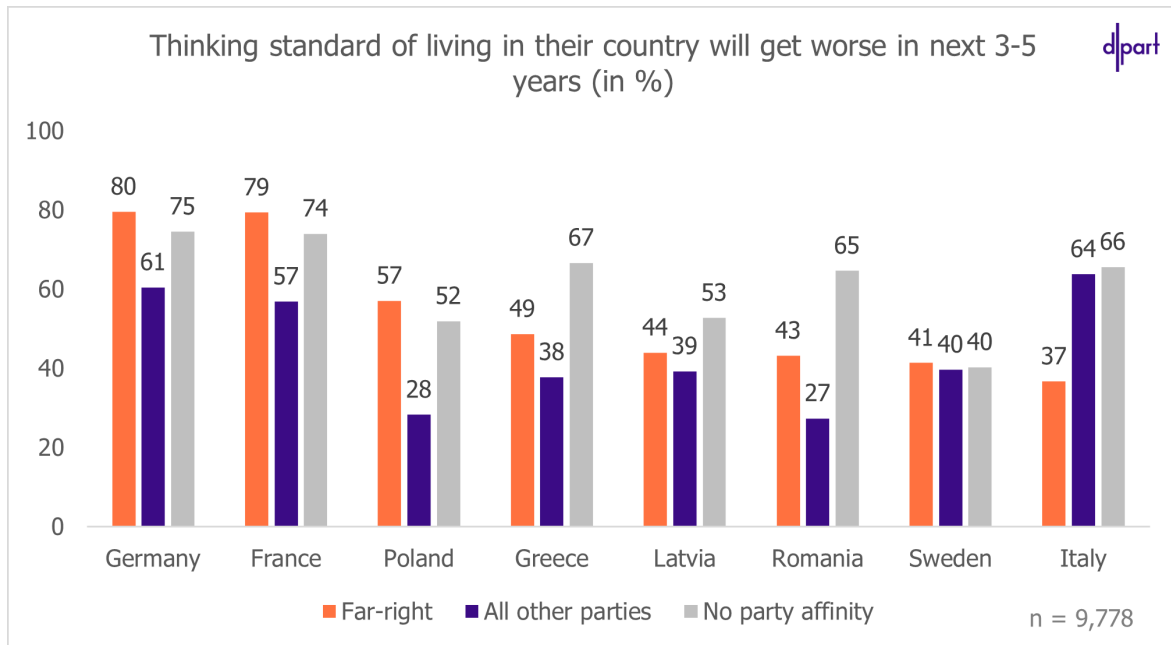
Figure 7



Graph is based on the survey question: "In your opinion, how do you think the overall standard of living in your country will develop over the next 3-5 years?"

Differences in economic outlooks are once again evident across party preferences (see Figure 8). While far-right supporters exhibited the highest levels of economic pessimism in Germany and France, the disparity compared to those with no political affiliation was much narrower than that observed in the general societal assessment. Otherwise, attitude profiles remained fairly consistent. Notably, Sweden emerges as an exception: While variations existed among sympathizers of non-far-right parties, overall, both far-right party supporters and those with no political affiliation showed similar average economic expectations compared to those supporting non-far-right parties collectively.

Figure 8



Importantly, expectations of future economic prospects must not be equated with the current financial situation of respondents. Overall, people in more financially precarious households were less optimistic about the economic future of their respective countries. But in countries with negative outlooks overall, those were also shared by many people who described themselves as financially comfortable.

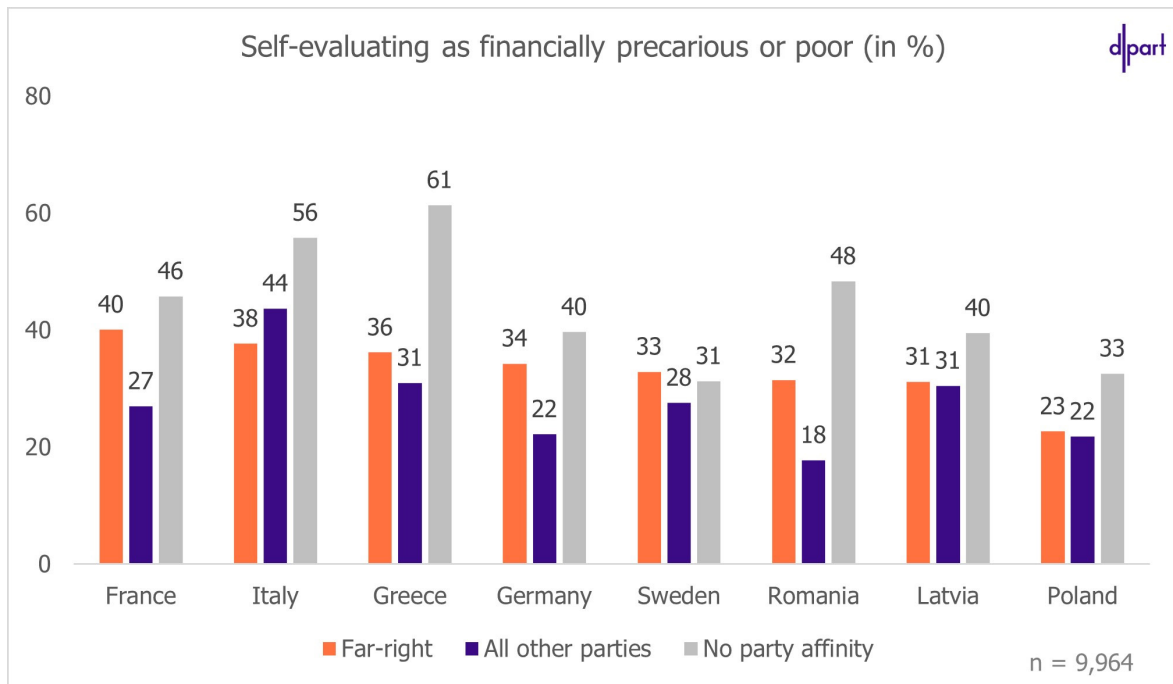
For instance, the quote from a participant in the higher socio-economic focus groups in Germany exemplifies this strongly pessimistic outlook:

“The issue of pensions is also difficult. You do worry whether you’ll even get one at all. When I look at my pension statement, it seems unlikely, and you do start to worry about why you’re even working. Old-age poverty is definitely an issue that already concerns me greatly at the age of 30. [...] In the past, you could go to work and buy a house, build a garage, have two cars, and support three children. That is no longer possible.”

(Marina, female, 33 years old, higher socio-economic group, Germany)

Germany stands out in this regard. While standard of living prospects were seen very pessimistically, German respondents were amongst those most commonly saying that they were rather well-off (economically very comfortable or at least saying they did not need to worry about their spending). Crucially, party affinities do not match what we have seen before (Figure 9). While German far-right supporters were much more likely to have a negative view of the current situation and future prospects, they were slightly less likely to be from economically precarious households than those who say they do not feel close to any political party. A similar image emerges for France. Furthermore, compared to expectations about future standards of living, the gap between far-right sympathisers and supporters of non-far-right parties was much smaller for their actual financial situation in most countries (most notably in Italy and Poland).

Figure 9



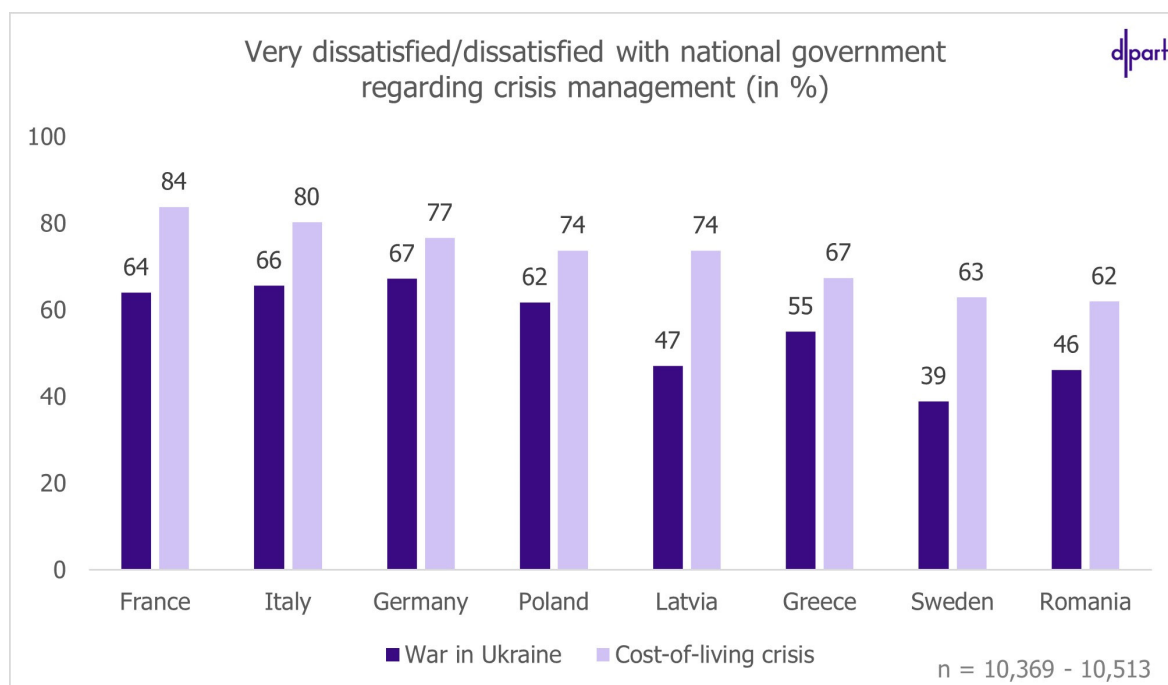
Graph is based on the survey question: "What best describes your current financial situation?".

While individuals' current financial situations played a role in shaping their party affinity, expectations regarding the future emerged as a more substantive differentiator among party profiles across most countries. Therefore, support for far-right parties cannot be solely attributed to current socio-economic factors but also necessitates an understanding of individuals' future expectations. To effectively analyse this, it is crucial to consider country-specific contextual differences, as party affinity profiles are not uniform. In certain countries, individuals who do not align with any political party express particular concern. If this discontent is mobilized by political parties, it could strongly impact voting patterns. One example of this is the AfD's success in Germany, where they have effectively capitalized on such discontent (see Hövermann 2023; Schulte-Cloos & Leiniger 2022).

05 Multiple Crises and Local Deterioration: Seeds of Political Discontent

Multiple crises, such as the Russian war in Ukraine, the cost-of-living crisis, and rising inflation, have substantively shaken European politics. These overlapping challenges have intensified economic hardships and social tensions across the continent, leading to a surge in political discontent and fueling the rise of populist and far-right movements. While economic concerns dominated the topics people raised initially, there was also a substantive amount of expressing broader political discontent. Economic worries were experienced through the cost-of-living crisis by many and the dominant foreign policy issue mentioned was the ongoing war in Ukraine after the Russian invasion in 2022. Respondents in the survey differed greatly in how they viewed their national governments responses to these crises (Figure 10).

Figure 10

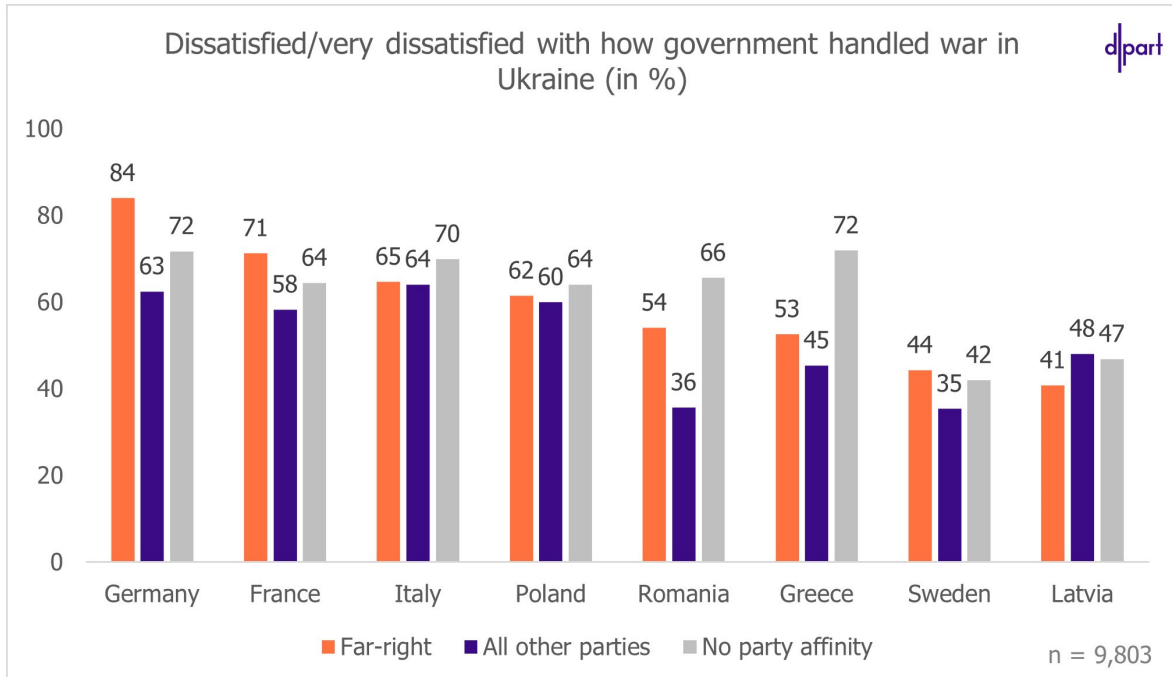


Graph is based on the survey question: "How satisfied or dissatisfied were or are you with the management of each of the following crises by the national government?"

In all countries surveyed, people were less satisfied with the handling of the cost-of-living crisis than the war in Ukraine. The degree of dissatisfaction with the cost-of-living crisis ranged from just over 60 percent in Romania and Sweden to 80 percent and above in Italy and France. But the difference to people’s views about how their respective governments addressed the war in Ukraine was even more substantial in some countries. In Sweden, Romania and Latvia, less than half of the people expressed discontent on that matter. This is in stark contrast to Germany, Italy, France and Poland where around two thirds of the population assessed their governments’ engagement with the war negatively.

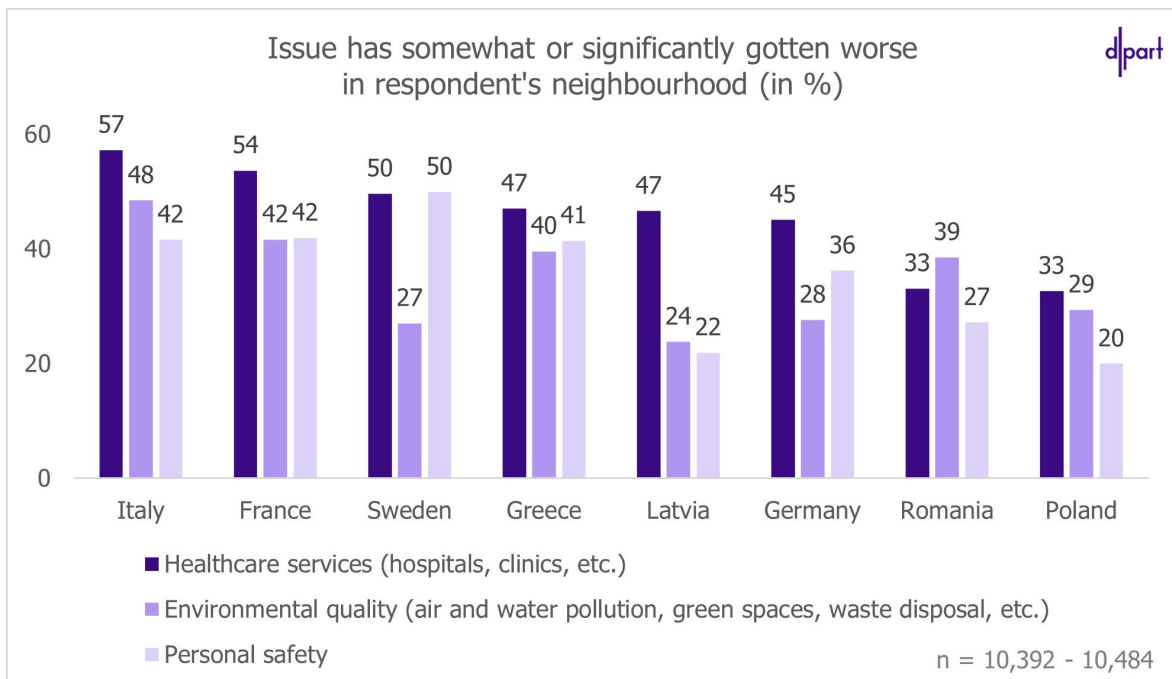
In some countries, there was variation by party affinity in the evaluation of government engagement with the war in Ukraine (Figure 11). Germany stands out as the only country where those supporting the far-right were substantially more likely to be dissatisfied compared to those supporting other parties or those with no party affiliation. In Greece and Romania, individuals who did not feel close to any political party were much more likely to show dissatisfaction than either of the other groups.

Figure 11



Feelings of dissatisfaction are not only felt about national-level issues or crises of an even larger scope. Changes in the local environment matter politically to people as they directly impact their daily lives, shaping their perceptions of governance and influencing their political attitudes and choices (see Lago 2022). This is particularly pronounced in Italy and France (Figure 12). More than half of the respondents there said that key aspects of life, such as healthcare services and environmental quality in their neighbourhood, had worsened in the last five years. At the other end of the spectrum, only about a third of people in Poland felt the same way about those changes in their neighbourhoods. In some countries, people have also perceived a deterioration in their perception of personal safety in their surroundings. This is most pronounced in Sweden where half of the population felt their neighbourhoods were less safe now than five years ago.

Figure 12



Graph is based on the survey question: „Please now think about the neighbourhood you live in and how it has or has not changed over the last five years. Regarding each of the following, has the area you live in gotten better, worse or stayed the same?“

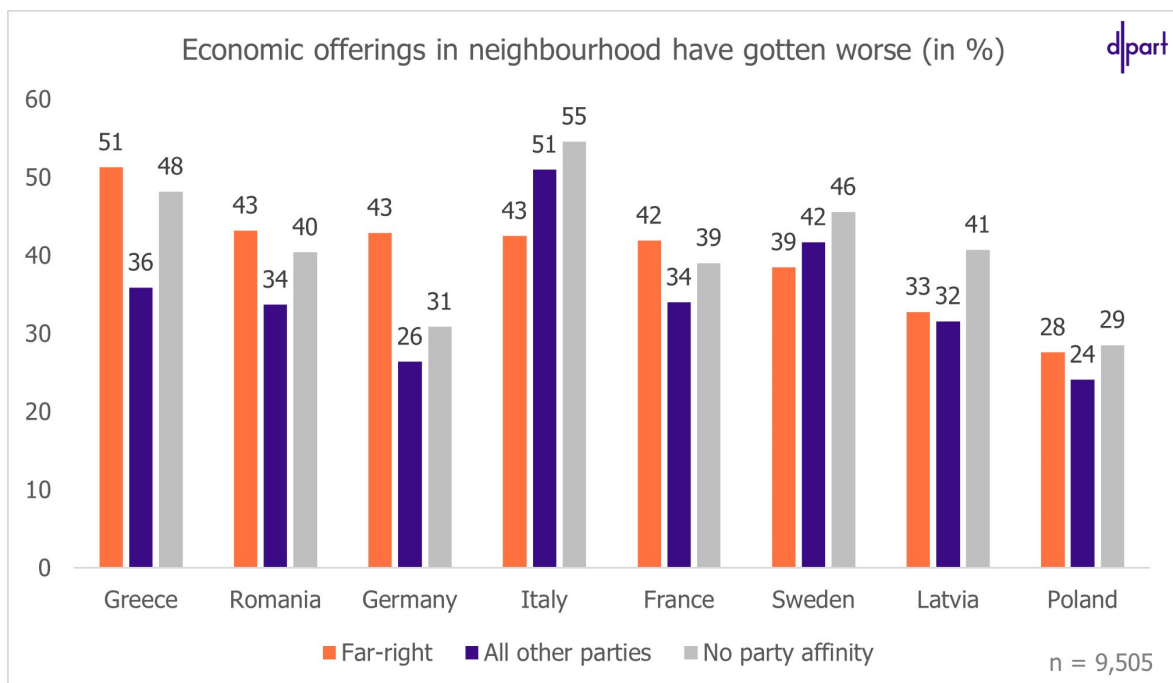
In the focus groups, participants similarly mentioned changes and dissatisfaction with health care services. A German participant shared:

“What bothers me are many things in the healthcare system. For example, I need an appointment for a gastroscopy, and it took over half a year. [...] I am in very poor physical health and unfortunately live alone. This presents a problem for me, finding someone to help around here, and this has been the case for many, many years, honestly, and it is not getting any better.”

(Susanne, female, 61 years old, lower socio-economic groups, Germany)

In some countries, especially Germany and Greece, far-right supporters are particularly likely to consider their neighbourhood to have worsened economically (Figure 13). This suggests that their pessimistic outlook on the future may be influenced by their evaluation of past changes and personal negative experiences.

Figure 13



In summary, people are largely concerned with their government’s handling of the recent big crises. Especially in terms of the handling of the cost-of-living crisis, many people are dissatisfied. However, to only focus on the apparent grand issues of the idea would overshadow that for many people their concerns are also viewed through a local lens.

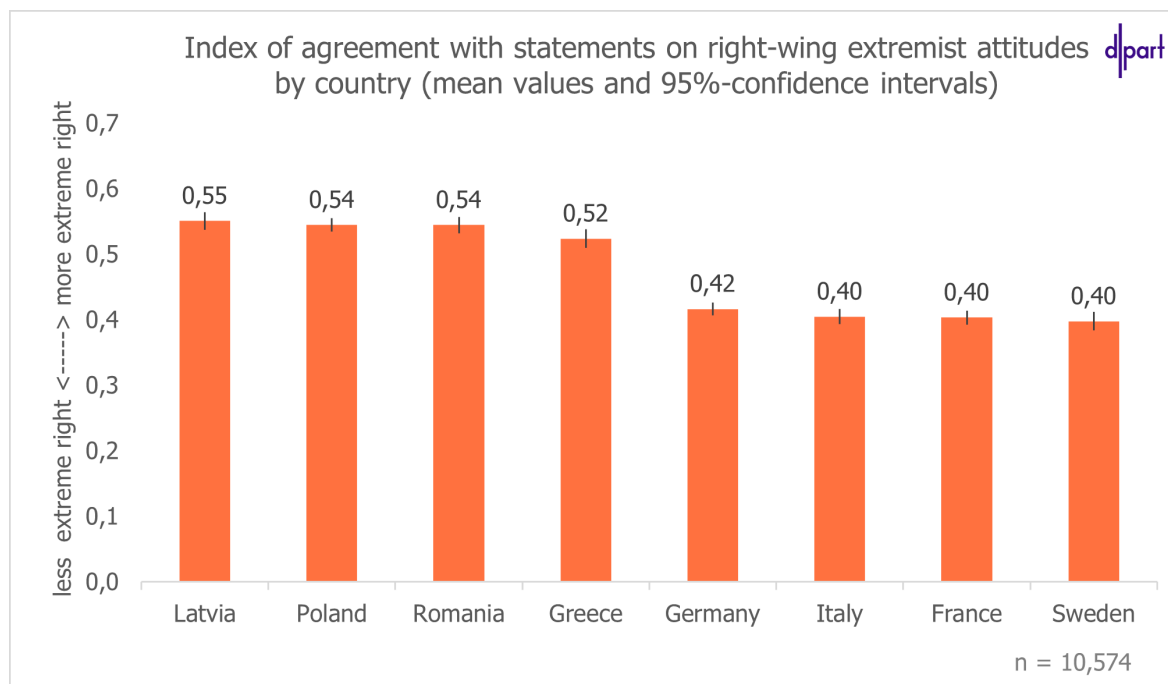
In addition to being worried about the future, many people observe negative changes in their neighbourhoods. To reach the public, focussing on big, international politics issues should not come at the expense of ignoring how people’s lived environments are developing. Otherwise, there is a substantive lever that could result in increasing resentment, if people feel that their communities are getting worse.

06 Internal Erosion of European Values: Extrem Right Attitudes Extend Beyond the Far-Right

Regarding the high levels of political dissatisfaction and resentment specifically among supporters of far-right parties, we aimed to investigate how widely extreme-right attitudes are collectively shared among different groups within the EU. Overall, as our results show, anti-democratic attitudes are not solely confined to the far-right supporters but are relatively widespread at the centre of European societies, also among supporters of democratic parties.

To investigate the societal spread of right-wing extremist attitudes, we asked respondents about their approval or disapproval of various extreme-right statements across different domains: Group-focused enmity such as racism and antisemitism, national chauvinism and authoritarianism, and gender conservatism.¹⁴ By taking the approval rates of eight surveyed statements across these domains together, we created an index showing the mean approval rates of extreme-right attitudes. This index can be understood as a score, from 0 = no approval of extreme-right attitudes to 1= full approval of all extreme-right statements. Figure 14 displays the index indicating the mean approval of extreme right attitudes for each country.

Figure 14



As the figure shows, approval ratings for extreme right attitudes varied by country, yet remained relatively high across all surveyed countries. Respondents in Greece, Latvia, Poland and Romania scored higher on average, showing greater extreme right attitudes overall. Although in Germany, France, Italy and Sweden, the mean values were lower at around 0.4 the approval of extreme right views was still prominent.

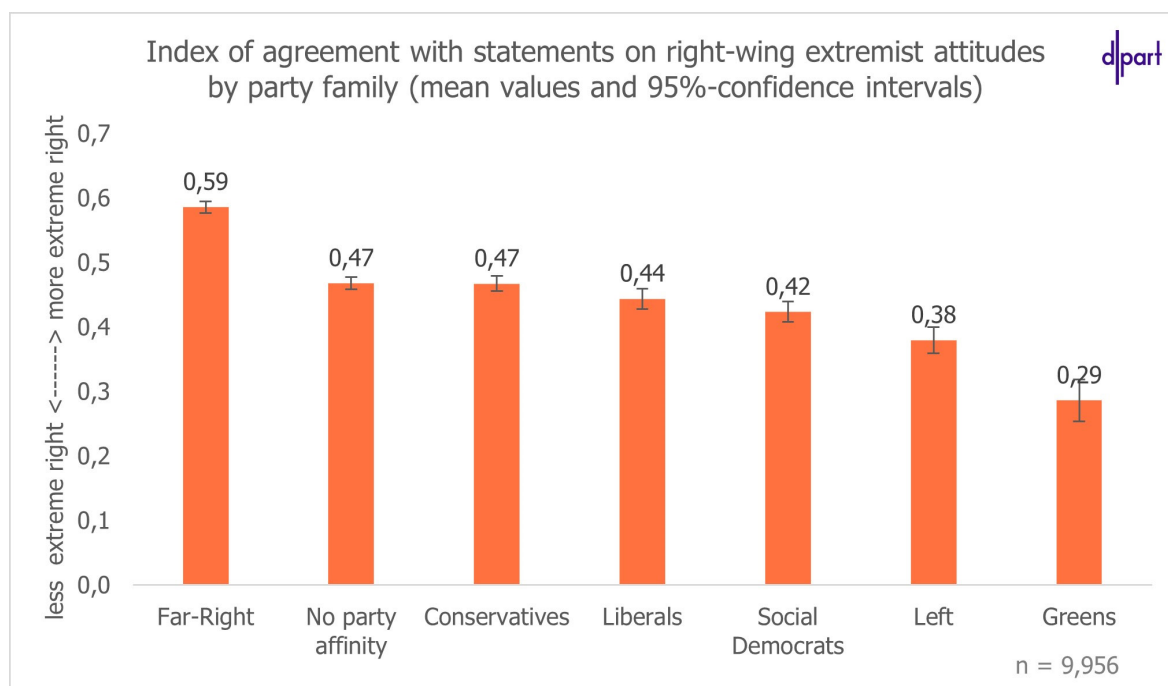
The differences among countries became evident in their areas of approval: in Poland, Romania, Latvia, and Greece, particularly the approval rates for gender conservatism, antisemitic statements, and the endorsement of a dictatorship were higher than in the other four surveyed countries. At the same time, approval rates of extreme right statements regarding cultural racism and group-focused

14 For the statements and questions regarding right-wing extremist attitudes and anti-democratic sentiments, we oriented ourselves towards existing reputable instruments and formulations specifically from the FES Mitte Study (Zick et al. 2023) to establish comparability in this area.

enmity, particularly towards migrants, was high across all countries. These findings underlined a concerning trend: anti-democratic views and extreme-right narratives, specifically racist discourses on migration, find acceptance within European societies to a larger extent, and seem to be becoming somewhat normalised and integrated into mainstream views across countries. This pattern is consistent with other studies that record an increase and normalisation in right-wing extremist attitudes in the middle of society (Zick et al. 2023).

Moreover, anti-democratic attitudes were not only shared among far-right supporters but also found widespread approval among supporters of democratic parties across countries, albeit to varying extent. Observing the index disaggregated by party families across all countries in figure 15, it becomes evident, that supporters of far-right parties, unsurprisingly, demonstrated the highest approval rates for extreme-right statements with a score of 0.59.¹⁵

Figure 15



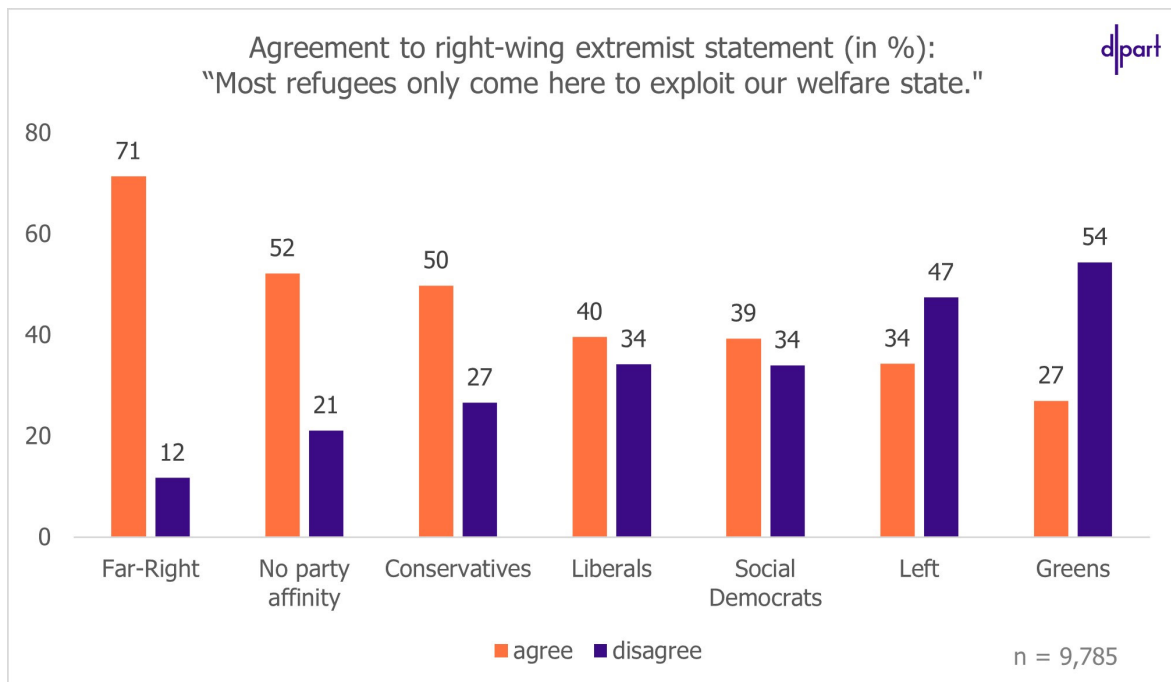
However, notably high scores on the index of approval of extreme right attitudes also emerged among supporters across the democratic party families. Specifically, supporters of conservative parties, along with individuals without party affiliation, demonstrated relatively elevated scores of approvals of extreme right attitudes, averaging 0.47. Also, liberals, with an average score of 0.44, and social democrats, with an average of 0.42, both ranked relatively high. This suggests that a substantive portion of their supporters aligned with numerous extreme right statements. With 0.29 supporters of Green parties distinctively demonstrated the lowest level of approval of extreme right attitudes. These results again underline what other studies (see Abou-Chadi et al. 2020; Brown et al. 2020) have shown repeatedly, that extreme right attitudes are also, to varying extent and with increasing tendency, widespread across supporters of democratic parties.

Again, particularly when it comes to the approval of statements regarding cultural racism and group-focused enmity, approval rates among supporters of democratic party families across the surveyed EU member states were particularly high. For example, figure 16 shows the approval to the racist and classist statement “Most refugees only come here to exploit the welfare state” across the different party families. While the approval rate among far-right supporters was by far the highest, with 70 percent of respondents, the xenophobic statement was also shared by a majority of conservatives

¹⁵ Within the party family of far-right parties, particularly supporters of the far right in Greece (0.65), Poland (0.65), Germany (0.63), and Latvia (0.63) scored highest in extreme right attitude profiles with an index value over 0.6. Far right supporters in Italy (0.52), France (0.53) and Sweden (0.53) appeared to have, compared to far-right supporters in other surveyed countries, slightly less extreme right attitude profiles with mean index values around 0.5.

and individuals without party affinity. Particularly, among supporters of conservatives, liberals and social democrats, as well as individuals without party affinity, a larger number of people agreed with the racist statement than those who rejected it.

Figure 16



This diffusion of extreme-right ideologies into the mainstream, specifically regarding cultural racism, is particularly alarming. This normalization of far-right narratives and ideas suggests a rightward shift in public discourse, altering the boundaries of what is acceptable to express.

Thus, mainstream conservative, liberal, and social democratic parties are running the risk of their supporters falling for and adopting extreme-right and anti-democratic ideas. This trend poses a serious challenge to the cohesion and stability of pluralist democratic societies in the EU (see Bale & Kaltwasser 2021; Mondon & Winter 2020). The erosion of democratic norms and values and the spread of extreme right ideologies among the general populace, and also supporters of democratic parties, signals a threat to liberal and open societies in Europe and to and to those affected by racist and right-wing violence, as well as minorities.

07 EU: More or Less? Split Desires for EU Development

To understand public perceptions of the EU, our survey invited respondents to share what came to mind when thinking about the EU in an open question. The written responses were then categorized into themes. The results (Table 2) show a range of views on the EU. We asked:

“When you think of the European Union, what words, if any, come to mind?”

The most frequently mentioned themes were “unity, community, and multiculturalism”, with 16 percent of respondents across all countries highlighting these aspects. This suggests that a substantive proportion of the public saw the EU through the lens of fostering unity and embracing diversity. However, 8.5 percent of respondents viewed the EU as rather “unnecessary or superfluous”, indicating a notable level of scepticism or disapproval. At the same time, 6.9 percent of all respondents across the countries described the EU instead as “necessary, reliable, or competent”, underscoring a recognition of its value and effectiveness. This suggests a rather divided public opinion when it comes to what people associated with the EU and its functioning.

Table 2: Most commonly associated terms with the EU (N=10,644)

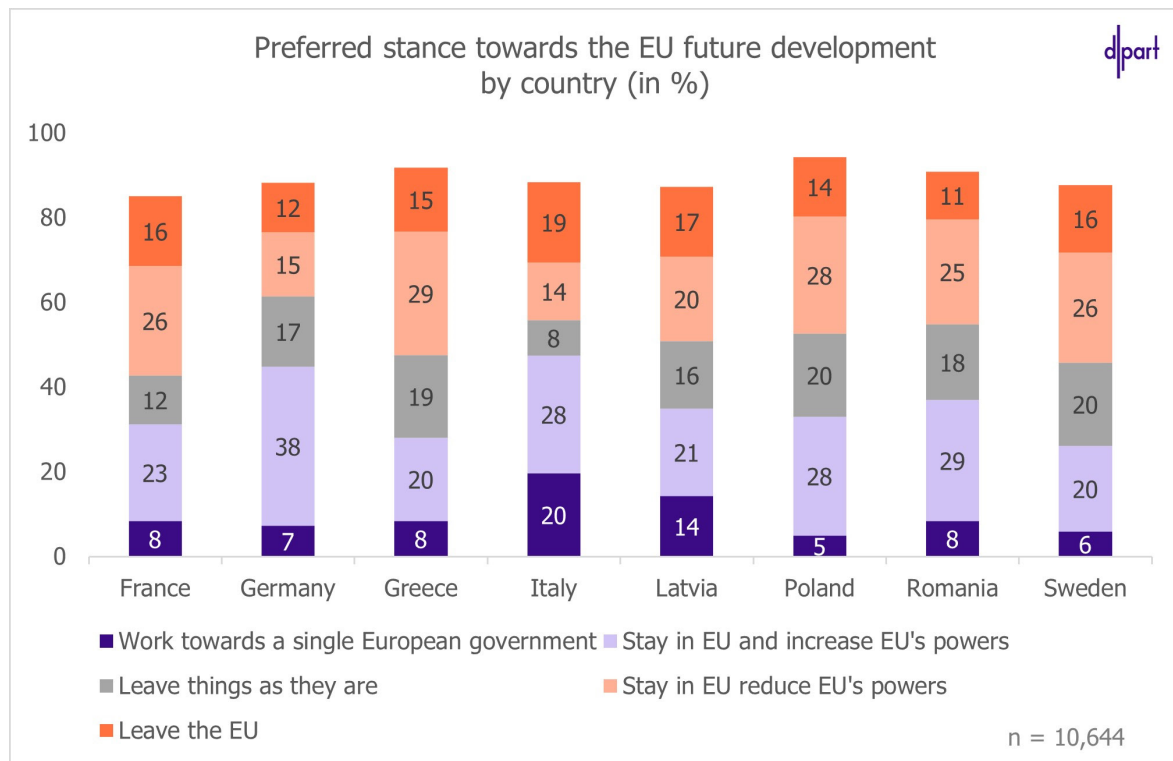
Terms associated with the EU	%
unity / community / multiculturalism	16.0
unnecessary / not good / superfluous	8.5
necessary / good / reliable / competent	6.9
security / peace / hope / protection	6.4
economic / political / military power	5.9
corruption / not trustworthy / no transparency	5.4
inefficient / too much talk / slow / weak	5.3

Moreover, aspects related to specific policy areas were mentioned, specifically around topics of foreign relations: 6.4 percent of respondent wrote they associate the EU with “security, peace, hope, or protection”, reflecting concerns or hopes related to the EU’s role in maintaining security and stability for its citizens. Meanwhile, 5.9 percent associated the EU with “economic, political, or military power”, underlining its influence as an entity on the global stage. Another topic, that was brought up by more than five percent of respondents were concerns about corruption and a lack of transparency within the EU as raised by 5.4 percent of respondents, while 5.3 percent criticized the EU for being “inefficient, too slow, or weak”.

These responses illustrate the diverse and polarized views people held about the EU, with associations ranging from positive to negative. However, the overall image was not as negative as sometimes portrayed publicly. It was interesting to note which topics were mentioned when asked openly and which were rather brought up less. As the results indicate, people centred more on the EU as an entity rather than specific policies. Stereotypical buzzwords like „bureaucracy“ or „Brussels“ that are supposedly often associated in public discourse with the EU were not mentioned frequently. Instead, issues related to foreign policy and the EU’s relations within and beyond its borders became more prominent. This suggests that while there were criticisms, at the same time there was also a recognition of the EU’s broader role in the global context.

Overall views about the EU varied greatly between countries though (Figure 17). If given a range of options, only a minority of people would definitely like their country to leave the EU. On average, around 15 percent preferred an exit, with Italy leading at almost one in five seeking an „Italexit.“ However, in many countries, a significant proportion of respondents preferred to remain in the EU but advocated for repatriating powers to the member states, comprising an average of 23 percent. More than a quarter of people shared that view in Greece, Poland, France, Sweden and Romania. A minority, nearly one in six respondents, expressed a preference to maintain the status quo within the EU. On average, approximately 27 percent of respondents favoured deepening EU integration by increasing EU powers, while close to ten percent wished for a single European government. The largest number of Europhiles could be found in Italy and Germany with 48 and 45 percent respectively wanting to expand the powers of the EU.

Figure 17



Graph is based on the survey question: "Do you think [COUNTRY]'s long-term policy should be to...?"

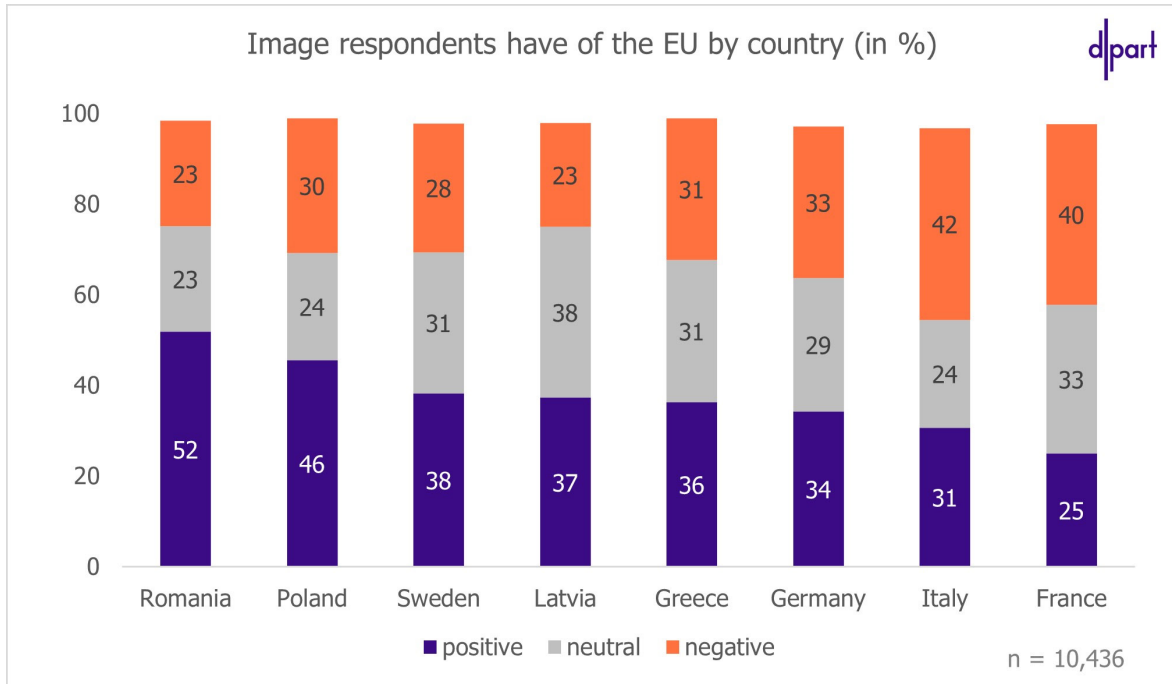
Yet, when asked about the overall image of the EU, the perspective shifts somewhat (Figure 18). In terms of general sentiment, respondents in Romania and Poland exhibited the most positive views, while Italian and French respondents (approximately four in ten) were more likely to express negative sentiments. This suggests that individuals may differentiate to some extent between their general feelings toward the EU and their pragmatic assessment of their country's position within it."

A participant in the French higher socio-economic focus groups expressed disbelief in the EU and the future outlook:

"As far as I'm concerned, considering what's going on in the world, when there are conflicts, there's no single voice in Europe. Europe just relies on the market. And I have the feeling that in the coming years – well that's how I see the world, and how things will happen – we're powerless, unable to face up challenges ahead."

(Bernard, male, 51 years old higher socio-economic groups, France)

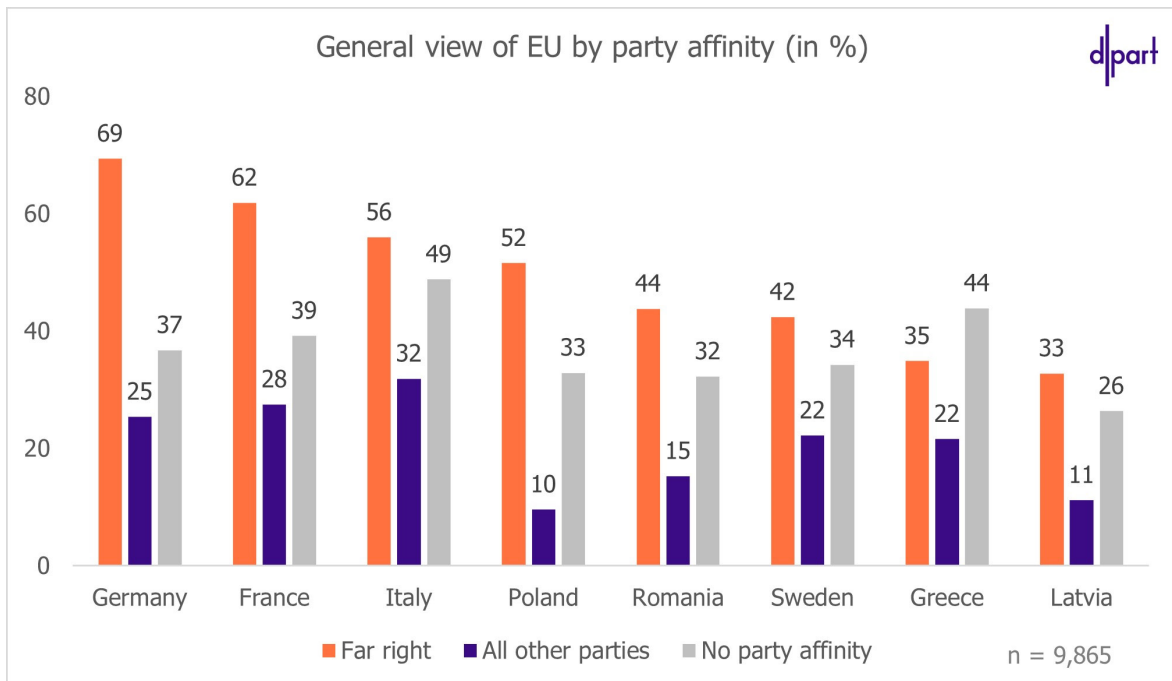
Figure 18



Graph is based on the survey question: "What image do you personally have of the European Union?"

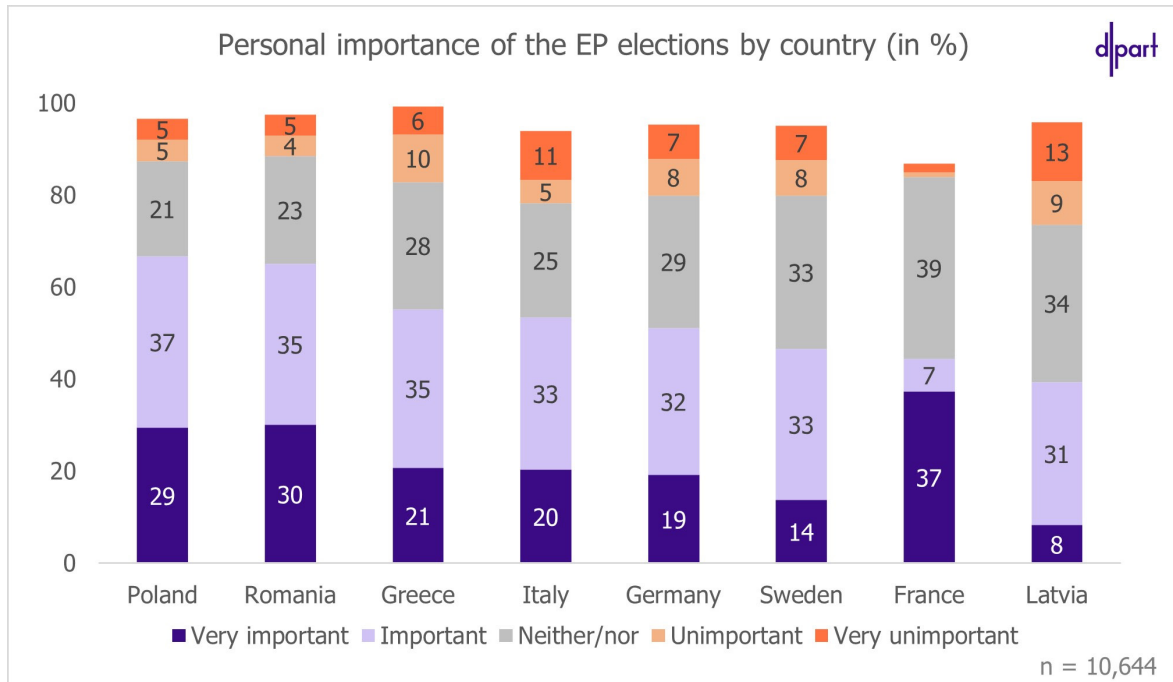
To what extent a negative image of the EU is associated with party affinity varies by country. Overall, people who sympathise with far-right parties were much more likely to dislike the EU, particularly in Germany, France or Poland. However, there were exceptions. In Greece, those with no party affinity were most likely to say they had a negative image and the gap to other parties also was not as big there.

Figure 19



The perception of the EU is also likely to influence voter mobilisation for the upcoming EU parliamentary elections. Overall, about half of the respondents stated that the 2024 EU elections are very important or important to them personally. Although such questions are likely to be prone to over-reporting due to social desirability bias, the data shows substantive differences between countries, potentially indicating varying turnout levels.

Figure 20

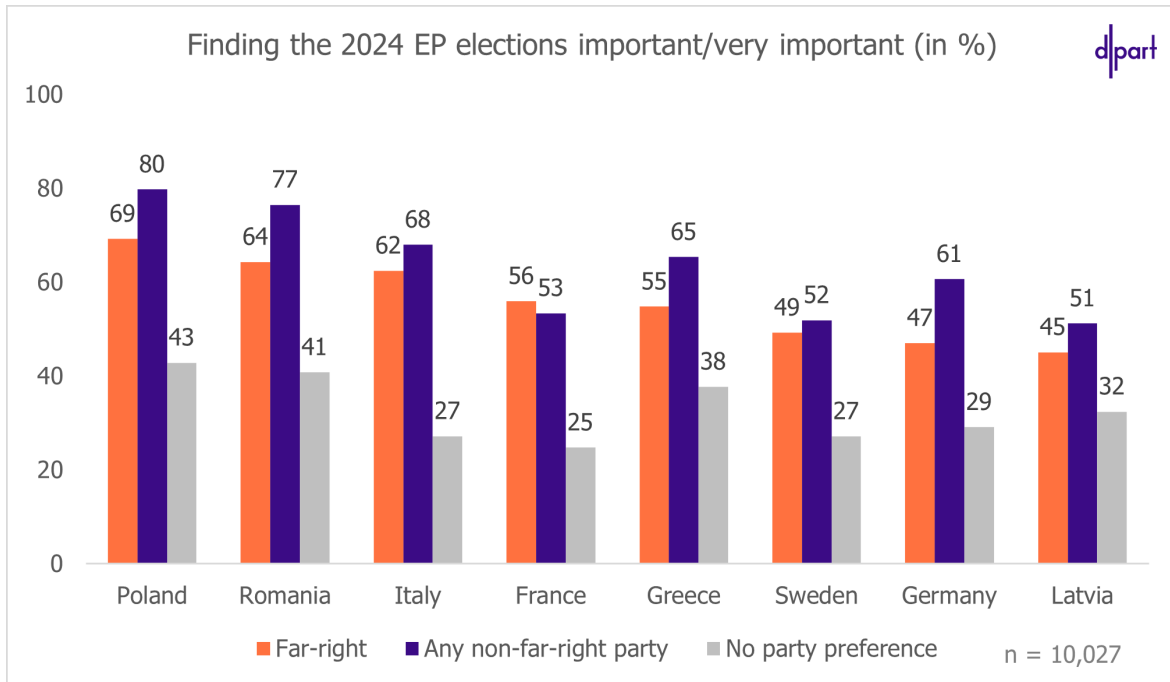


Greece (56%), Italy (53%), Germany (51%) and to a lesser degree Sweden (47%), show relatively similar shares of respondents who considered the elections important. France stands out, with over a third of the population (37%) finding the EP elections very important, followed by Romania (30%) and Poland (29%). Notably, France also has the largest share of respondents who were neutral towards the elections (39%) and the lowest share who believed the EP elections do not matter to them personally (3%).

In contrast, Poland and Romania had the most positive assessments of the elections' importance, with roughly two-thirds of their populations considering the elections very important or important. On the other end of the spectrum, Latvia showed the lowest share of respondents finding the elections important. Additionally, over 20% of Latvians thought the elections do not matter to them personally, the highest share among all countries surveyed (22%).

A comparison between far-right sympathizers, those who feel close to other parties, and those without any party affinity revealed substantive differences between countries. In all eight countries surveyed, individuals who do not feel aligned with any political party exhibited the lowest national scores in terms of perceiving the EU elections as important, suggesting that mobilising this group for the election could pose challenges.

Figure 21



The data further shows that, in most countries, those who sympathize with far-right parties were less likely to find the EP elections important compared to supporters of other parties. This was particularly evident in Germany (-14% difference), Romania (-13%), Poland (-11%), and Greece (-10%). This suggests that far-right parties might face more challenges in mobilising their voters. This effect was also present in Italy (-6%), Latvia (-6%), and Sweden (-3%), but to a much lesser extent. France stands out as an exception: it is the only country where far-right sympathizers were more likely to find the EP elections important compared to supporters of other parties (+3%).

08 Conclusion: (Almost) United in a Bleak Outlook

Urgency for a Democratic and Inspiring Future European Union Vision

European public opinion is under intense scrutiny as the 2024 European Parliament Elections approach amidst multiple past and current crises. Far-right forces are likely to benefit from this, with projections predicting a shift to the right with increasing influence of anti-democratic and Eurosceptic forces in the next European Parliament.

This research report aimed to comprehensively understand the prevailing political attitudes, material strains, and significant themes for European citizens across the EU in anticipation of the elections. Across eight diverse EU member states (France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Romania, and Sweden), the central analysis of the report closely examined and highlighted the varying attitudes of far-right supporters, supporters of other parties, and individuals without party affiliation.

Overall, our results have indicated widespread dissatisfaction among EU citizens regarding the current state of society and politics, coupled with a pessimistic outlook on the future development of standard of living in their respective countries. Moreover, people across the EU are largely concerned about economic and social issues. Dissatisfaction with how national governments have handled recent crises, especially the cost-of-living crisis, is prevalent across all surveyed EU member states. Additionally, our results indicate a widespread normalization of anti-democratic attitudes and extreme right positions within European societies, beyond far-right supporters and also among supporters of democratic parties.

To conclude, we would like to highlight and reiterate the most important key findings:

1. Most people are concerned about the current political and economic situation – nationally and locally

Citizens across the EU shared similar political concerns, primarily centred around current economic and social policies. Issues such as economic instability, rising living costs, unemployment, and the functioning of healthcare and pension systems were of paramount importance. These concerns highlight that people are strongly concerned about material aspects of economic and social issues that directly affect their daily lives and are rooted in lived realities.

A substantive portion of the respondents perceived negative changes in their immediate local neighbourhoods, including deteriorations in public services like healthcare and environmental quality. These perceived negative changes at the local level coupled with concerns about economic and social issues drive overall dissatisfaction with current politics and society.

2. (Almost) United in a bleak outlook

It is not only the current political and economic situation that EU citizens were concerned about. There was also a pervasive pessimistic outlook on the future, with many European citizens fearing a decline in their standard of living in the upcoming years. Many citizens lacked confidence in their governments' responses to past and ongoing crises and rarely trusted politics to provide solutions for the future.

Importantly, expectations of future economic prospects must not be equated with the current financial situation of respondents. While overall people in more financially precarious households were less optimistic about the economic future of their respective countries, in countries with negative outlooks overall, often those were also shared by many people who described themselves as financially comfortable.

3. Far-right parties benefit from current concerns, but the prevailing bleak outlook amplifies their appeal even further

Far-right supporters across the countries had a tendency to feel particularly pessimistic overall, especially regarding the future development of their country's standard of living, albeit to varying extent. They felt distinctly dissatisfied with how past crises have been politically managed and perceived more strongly that various aspects of their immediate environment have deteriorated recently in comparison to supporters of any other party family. Affinity for far-right parties was rarely only about the assessment of the current personal financial situation or socio-economic positioning; rather, the additional outlook on the future and fears of social downward mobility played a crucial role across the surveyed countries. Examining support for far-right parties thus requires drawing attention to people's future expectations and fears of social decline and considering country-specific context differences.

4. It is not enough for democratic parties to take the concerns around economic and social issues seriously; they also need to present a positive outlook for the future

Concerns about the current political and economic situation, as well as bleak outlooks, can also be found among supporters of democratic parties and the often overlooked group of people without any party affinity. Particularly, those who feel no affinity to any political party expressed substantial political dissatisfaction. In many countries, it was primarily economically disadvantaged individuals who do not feel close to any political party.

Democratic parties in the EU need to develop and effectively communicate their own constructive narrative for change, both at the national and EU levels. It is insufficient to merely oppose the agenda of extreme right-wing parties or to defend the current state of affairs. Many individuals in the EU are dissatisfied with various aspects of the status quo, spanning economics, social cohesion, and infrastructure, among others. This requires the presentation of a hopeful vision for the future and avoiding the perception of persistently defending an unpopular status quo. Regardless of the specific form this vision takes, it is crucial not to overlook economic and social policy in this vision.

5. Right-wing attitudes are widespread. However, it would be a crucial mistake for democratic parties to adopt these positions

Extreme right attitudes are widespread and shared across the centre of society, including among supporters of democratic parties. The normalization of anti-democratic sentiments, particularly group-focused enmity, is alarming. While anti-democratic attitudes were most strongly held by supporters of far-right parties, they were also present among conservative, liberal, and social democratic supporters, albeit to varying extents across countries. Beyond potential gains for far-right parties in the EP elections, a central challenge lies in the anti-democratic and extreme-right potential and its mainstreaming within European society. Even without a substantive rightward shift, anti-democratic attitudes remain widespread.

Countering these developments is a long-term task for all democratic forces in the EU. For democratic parties, it is crucial, in a first step, to avoid adopting the positions and narratives as well as playing into the discourses of the far-right, as this further normalizes those views. In a second step, democratic parties must articulate a compelling and optimistic vision, disrupting the status quo while steering clear of extreme-right

rhetoric. If the far-right emerges as the predominant force disrupting the status quo or as the loudest advocate for solutions among a sizable portion of society, irrespective of their viability, it presents a formidable challenge to democratic principles and facilitates the mainstreaming of extremist narratives.

6. The perception of the EU and the desired development of the EU vary greatly

Overall, the perception of the EU was not as negative as often portrayed in public debates. When asking people openly about what they associate with the EU, the most mentioned themes were “unity, community, and multiculturalism,” indicating that people recognize the European community and its diversity. The second and third most mentioned categories were “unnecessary/superfluous” and “necessary/good,” reflecting a certain degree of polarization regarding the public assessment of the EU.

When questioned about the future trajectory of the EU, merely a small minority opts to uphold the present status quo or remains undecided. The overwhelming majority divides into two roughly equal factions: those advocating for greater EU authority and those seeking reduced EU influence, even entertaining extreme scenarios such as their country's exit or the establishment of a single European government. These findings underscore that most individuals are disinclined to maintain the EU's current state. However, a substantive divergence exists concerning the desired direction for the EU, further complicating the task for democratic parties to incorporate a more robust and integrated EU into their imperative positive and optimistic vision for the future.

7. EP elections matter to people, but somewhat less so for far-right supporters. If far-right parties underperform in the EP elections, the underlying problems still prevail

The EP elections held personal importance for the majority of individuals, with only a small minority deeming them unimportant. However, among the frequently overlooked demographic of individuals lacking party affinity, merely one-third regarded the EP elections as consequential, signifying their challenge in mobilisation. Notably, supporters of far-right parties perceived the EP elections as marginally less significant compared to backers of other political factions. This contrast was particularly stark when excluding France, where far-right supporters uniquely viewed the EP elections with greater importance than adherents of other parties.

Hence, even if far-right parties fail to meet expectations in the EP elections, the underlying issues will persist. This emphasizes the imperative for democratic parties to present compelling and optimistic visions for the future. Furthermore, combating extreme right-wing ideologies and anti-democratic sentiments within society is essential for upholding pluralistic values within the EU. Even in the absence of a projected rightward shift in the European Parliament elections, anti-democratic beliefs and extreme right-wing stances have gained traction in mainstream European societies. Therefore, it is paramount for democratic parties and governments to refrain from perpetuating right-wing narratives and to propose tangible political solutions in economic and social policies.

GENERAL METHOD NOTE

Our comparative research project in eight EU Member States aims to explore commonalities in political attitudes, material strains, concerns and hopes of EU citizens ahead of the 2024 European Parliament elections. We closely examine how individuals from different socio-economic situations and material conditions have experienced the multiple crises of recent years and how these factors shape personal lives and political attitudes. In addition to socio-demographic factors, we look at individual and societal fears of decline as well as material strains and analyse how these affect democratic and anti-democratic positions. We also examine people's perceptions of the EU and their attitudes towards key issues such as economic and financial policy, the climate crisis, migration and EU enlargement. Overall, this research project explores the extent to which attitudes are shared among diverse publics across member states, aiming to uncover commonalities that transcends national boundaries.

For this, our research commenced with qualitative focus groups in France and Germany in January and February 2024, to explore and reflect on how publics actually talk about and engage with current social, economic and political debates and what perspectives they have on the EU. The insights from these focus groups formed the basis for an in-depth quantitative survey in eight EU Member States, including Germany, France, Poland, and Italy, as well as Greece, Romania, Latvia and Sweden. The online survey was designed to sample a representative group of people in each of the eight countries and was conducted from 10 April to 2 May 2024. We deliberately chose to collect data in the run-up to the EP elections on 6-9 June 2024, to ensure our data could reflect current public attitudes and debates around the elections.

Focus groups

The focus group discussions were designed to learn how people in different socio-economic situations engage in discussions about the EU and social, economic and political debates more generally at this moment. Special emphasis was placed on understanding which narratives and discourses were intuitively addressed and which themes were particularly prominent, as well as how salient they were felt in the discussions. Additionally, it was crucial to consider how people with various socio-economic backgrounds and self-perceptions discussed these topics differently.

Therefore, we conducted eight explorative focus groups, four in Germany and France respectively. Each focus group consisted of 7 to 8 participants mixed by age, gender, education, income, party preference, and urban/rural residence. Participants were recruited by telephone and sorted into one of four groups according to answers to socio-demographic questions and attitudes. In each country, two groups were composed of individuals with higher socio-economic backgrounds, and two groups with lower socio-economic backgrounds, while the participants within each group were as heterogeneous as possible in all other characteristics. A total of 61 people participated across the eight focus group discussions. Discussions lasted 90 minutes each.

Focus groups in Germany were held in Leipzig on 22 and 23 January 2024 and administered in cooperation with the Herzog + Glaser Teststudio Leipzig GmbH. The focus groups were held in German and moderated by d|part team members. Focus groups in France were held in Lyon on 7 and 8 February 2024 and were conducted in French in cooperation with Swiss Knife - Market Research Fieldwork and an independent moderator. The focus groups were simultaneously translated into English.

Survey

The survey development was informed by insights gathered from the focus groups, and existing research in the field. It consisted of 66 questions and took around 20 minutes to complete on average. The survey was programmed and administered in cooperation with SAGO-Germany HQ.

The data was collected through a large online panel utilising a complex quota design and aimed at achieving an accurate representation of the respective population of adults in the different survey

countries. A total of 10,644 respondents were included in the final sample.

Questionnaire design

The survey questionnaire was designed through iterative rounds of collaboration within the d|part team, building on the analysis of the focus groups. It also incorporated an extensive literature review and relevant existing studies on political and economic attitudes, democratic value systems, and EU perceptions. Some questions were adapted from existing projects while others were specifically designed for this project.

For the statements and questions regarding right-wing extremist attitudes and anti-democratic sentiments, we oriented ourselves towards existing reputable instruments and formulations specifically from the FES Mitte Study to establish comparability in this area.

For the list of political parties in each country and a typology of their political positioning for later analysis, we relied on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) trend file and the Comparative Manifestos Project. The classification of parties was based on CHES's categorization into ideological party families and the GAL/TAN scale for the position of parties in terms of their views on social and cultural values ranging from libertarian/postmaterialist (=0) to authoritarian/traditional (=10) programs. All parties classified within the Radical Right party family and/ or scoring 7.5 or higher on the GAL/TAN scale were considered Far Right parties. Newer parties that were not included in the CHES data set were classified by own research and reviewed by country experts. Our final party classification was confirmed with country experts.

The master questionnaire was created in English and subsequently translated by professional interpreters commissioned by SAGO to German, Greek, French, Italian, Latvian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Swedish (In Latvia, we provided the option to complete the survey in both Latvian or Russian to ensure inclusivity for the Russian minority population). The translations were then checked by native speaker researchers from the respective countries to ensure the wordings reflected the original questions accurately, while being understandable for general audiences in each country context.

Programming and piloting

The questionnaire was programmed by SAGO using instructions by d|part to ensure the questionnaire could be accessed through a range of devices and browsers. Correctness and user friendliness were checked on desktop computers, laptops, mobile phones and tablets and for Windows, Apple and Android systems respectively (where appropriate). After preparation of the master programming, the approved translations were used to create country-specific versions, which were checked again before commencing data collection. Initially, a soft launch pilot with 50-80 participants in each country was conducted to check response times and any potential problems. After making small adjustments, the full data collection was carried out. The median completion time for the survey was 20 minutes and 40 seconds.

Sampling and data collection

All responses were collected online through SAGO between 10 April and 02 May 2024. The age range of respondents was 18 to 80 years old, except for Germany, where 16- and 17-year olds were also included to reflect the voting age of 16 for the upcoming EP elections in the country. To ensure comparability across countries, the same upper age limit was used. Reflecting the size of the population and survey feasibility, in France, Poland, and Italy, a target of 1500 respondents was aimed for, while in Greece, Sweden, Latvia, and Romania, 1000 survey participants were targeted each. In Germany, the target sample size was 2000 persons, with an additional boost of 400 persons in the eastern German states (to ensure a substantial sample size for East-German specific analyses, especially in light of the upcoming state elections in the fall 2024), resulting in an overall sample size goal of 2400 persons for Germany.

The final sample size per country was as follows:

Germany: Age range: 16–80; Sample size: 2344
France: Age range: 18–80; Sample size: 1480
Poland: Age range: 18–80; Sample size: 1499
Italy: Age range: 18–80; Sample size: 1496
Greece: Age range: 18–80; Sample size: 1000
Latvia: Age range: 18–80; Sample size: 825
Sweden: Age range: 18–80; Sample size: 1000
Romania: Age range: 18–80; Sample size: 1000

The sampling strategy aimed at achieving representativeness for the overall population of 18- to 80 - year olds in each country. To do this, quotas were set in each country to reflect general population characteristics in demography and socio-economic status including gender, age groups, regions (NUTS 1), income ranges and levels of educational attainment. Moreover, to ensure distributions were balanced in the sample, complex cross-quotas were applied for age groups and gender, age groups and education levels as well as education levels and region groups. The data for the quotas and cross-targets were taken from the latest official records of Eurostat population statistics (2020-2023) for the respective surveyed countries and adjusted to fit our sample size.

To make sure that respondents were recruited as balanced as possible, quotas and cross quotas were applied comprehensively for as long as feasible and invitations to survey participants were staggered over a period of 21 days. Where specific cross-quotas could not be filled perfectly, those restrictions were only relaxed gradually in a targeted way towards the end of the data collection process. If further recruitment was evaluated to increase sample biases after relaxing quotas towards the end of the process, we concluded data collection, even if target sample sizes were not reached completely (to minimize the need for weighting).

To ensure survey quality, we incorporated speeder tests, as well as straightliner tests and attention tests. All respondents who failed the quality assurance checks were iteratively disqualified from the data during the survey collection process.

Within this setup of stratification objectives, sampling was random from within the panel to approximate representativeness meaningfully and reduce biases. To compensate for minor overrepresentation and underrepresentation of some groups and to ensure that results were representative of the national population in terms of demographics and geography, additional weighting was carried out. After data cleaning, 10.644 respondents were included in the sample used for the survey analysis.

Weighting and quality checks

After completing the data collection, deviations from population characteristics for the quotas on gender, age, education and region as well as the cross-quota linking age and gender were assessed. Overall, the distributions were in many instances very close to population characteristics. To account for deviations, however, raking weights were calculated that corrected for deviations from population parameters on those for each country. In the analyses used in the reports those raking weights are applied throughout. For Germany, we additionally computed a set of weights that does not scale down the East German respondents to nationally representative figures, but instead uses the full boost sample. Using that weight makes the data proportional for West and East Germany respectively and is used for any analyses comparing the two.

Further information

Further details about the methodology, in terms of questionnaire design, sampling and analysis can be obtained upon request from d|part.

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