

UNITED IN A BLEAK OUTLOOK

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

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ABOUT

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 in different socio-economic situations have experienced the multiple crises of recent years and how these factors shape personal lives and political attitudes.

As the 2024 European Parliamentary (EP) elections approach, the EU faces significant challenges, including foreign policy threats, economic instability, and widespread uncertainty. Amidst multiple past and current crises, European public opinion is under intense scrutiny. 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.

d|part 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 conducted in April 2024 was complemented by in-depth focus groups in Germany and France in January and February 2024. 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.

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.

An extensive report can be found on our website:

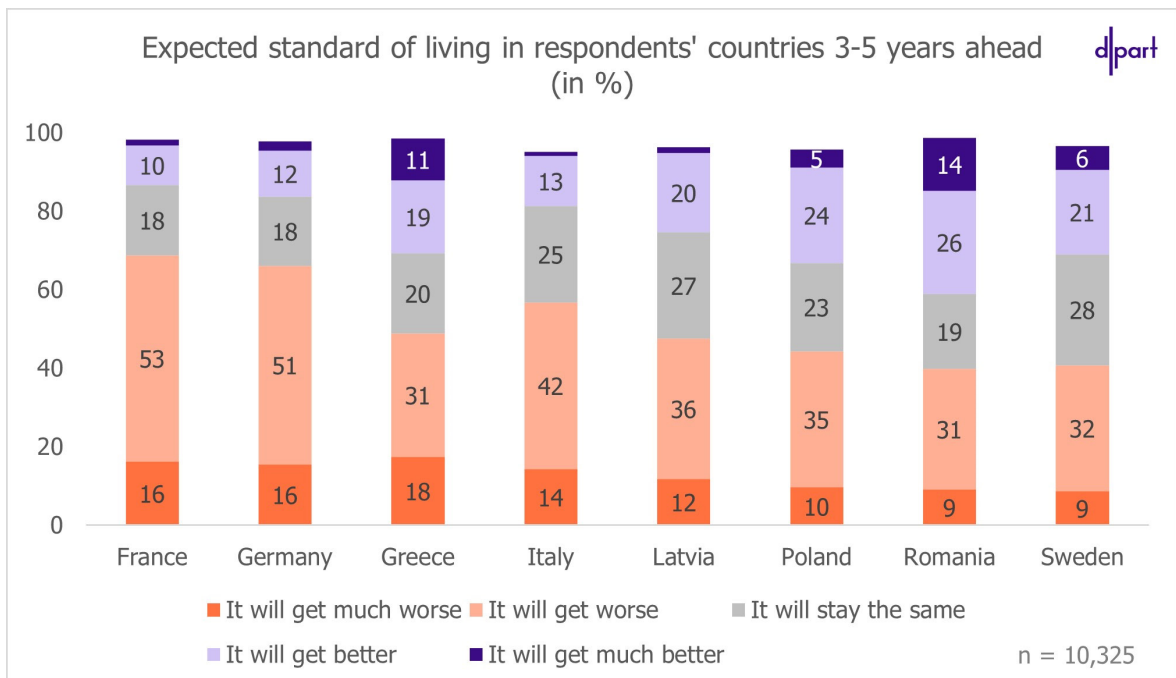
www.dpart.org/en/publications/united-in-a-bleak-outlook-concerns-crises-and-right-wing-views-ahead-of-the-2024-eu-elections

01 Widespread Dissatisfaction about the current political and economic situation – nationally and locally

The findings paint a troubling picture: widespread dissatisfaction with the current state of society and politics, coupled with a bleak outlook on future living standards. Economic and social issues are at the forefront of public concern, with significant discontent regarding how national governments as well as the EU have handled recent crises, particularly the cost-of-living crisis. Across the EU, citizens' political anxieties revolve 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.

02 (Almost) United in a Bleak Outlook

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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?"

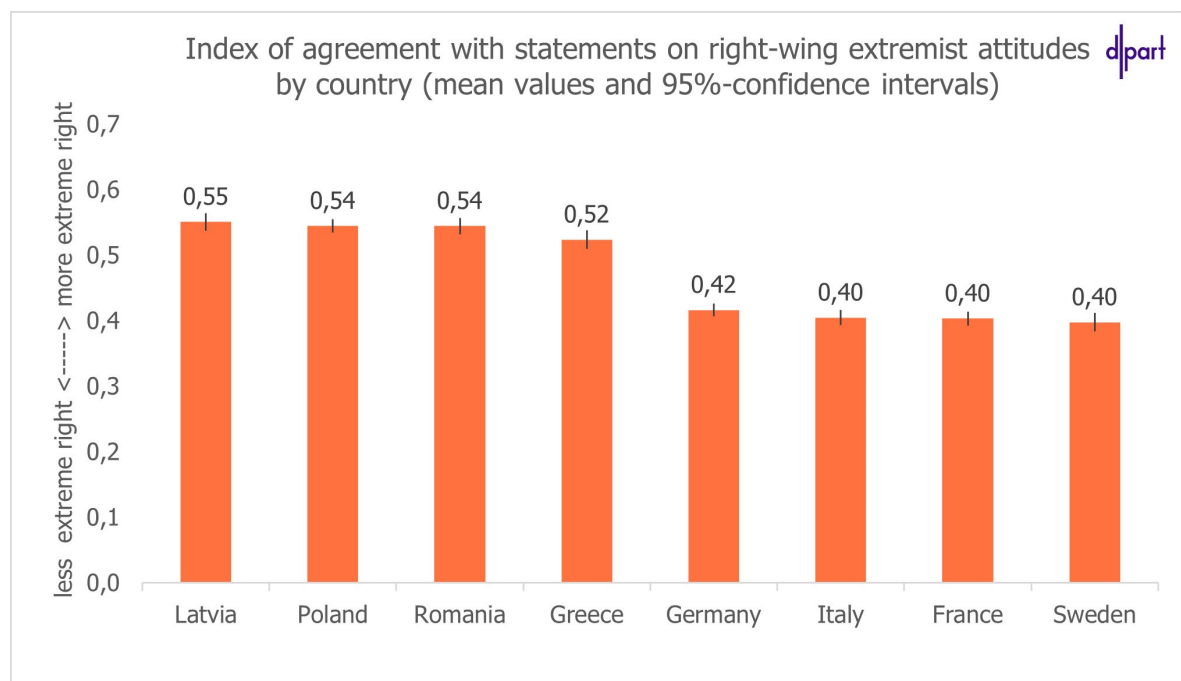
03 Far-right parties benefit from current concerns, but the prevailing bleak outlook amplifies their appeal even further

Far-right supporters, in particular, are deeply pessimistic about the future and disillusioned with past crisis management efforts across the EU. Their growing support is driven not only by current economic hardships and a perception of growing deterioration in immediate neighbourhoods, but also by a pervasive fear of social decline on personal and societal level.

Affinity for far-right parties was rarely only about the assessment of the current personal financial situation or socio-economic positioning; rather, the bleak outlook on the future and fears of social downward mobility played a crucial role for far right support. For democratic parties, merely opposing far-right agendas or defending an unpopular status quo will not suffice. Democratic parties in the EU need to develop and effectively communicate their own constructive narrative for change and offer concrete political solutions, both at the national and EU levels.

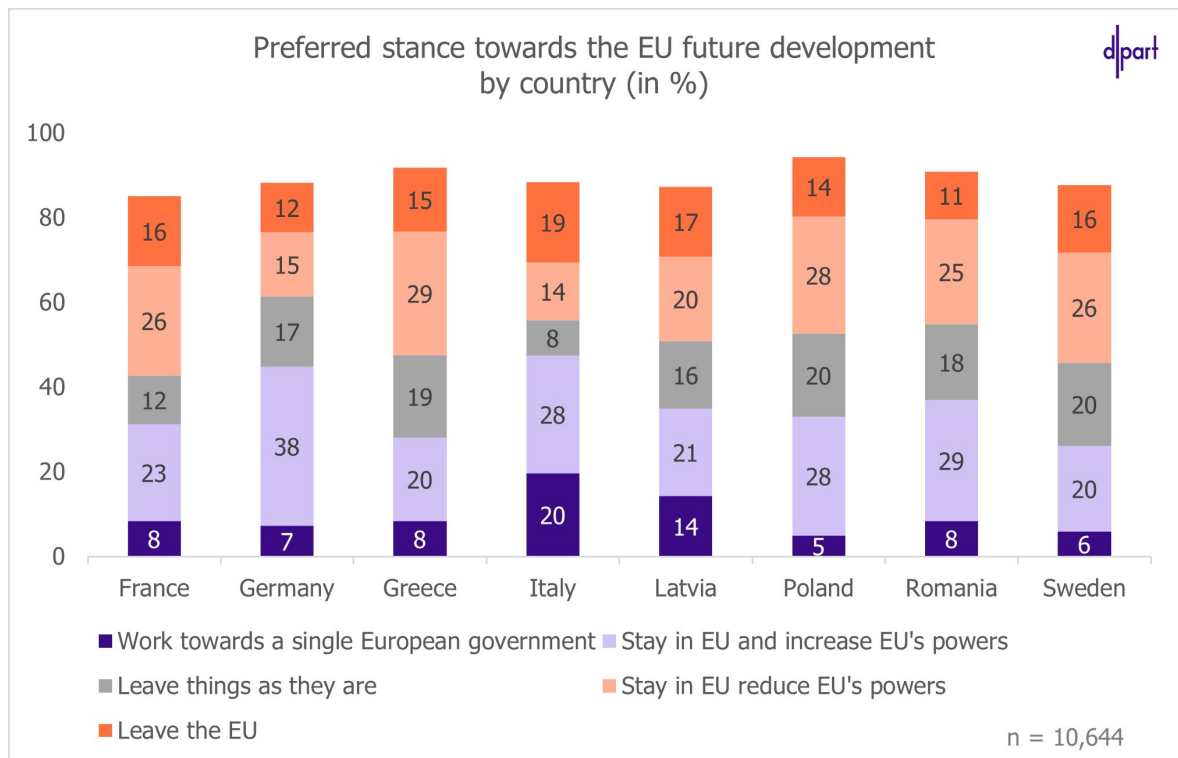
04 Right-wing attitudes are widespread, even among supporters of democratic parties. However, for democratic parties to further normalise them would be a crucial mistake

Even more alarming is the normalisation of anti-democratic sentiments and extreme right positions within European societies, particularly group-focused enmity. These extreme right views are not confined to far-right supporters but have permeated the mainstream, affecting and being shared by supporters of conservative, liberal, and social democratic parties alike. 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, threatening the very fabric of democratic and pluralist societies within the EU.



05 Split perception of the EU: desired development of the EU varies greatly

Public perceptions of the EU itself are divided. While many see the EU as a symbol of unity and diversity, others regard it as redundant or unnecessary. Overall, the perception of the EU was not as negative as often portrayed in public debates. 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.



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

06 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. Notably, supporters of far-right parties perceived the EP elections as marginally less significant compared to backers of other political factions. 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.

METHOD NOTE

SHORT VERSION

Our research commenced with qualitative small group interviews in France and Germany conducted in January and February 2024, to explore and reflect on how publics actually talked about and engaged with current social, economic and political debates and what perspectives they had 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 representative survey was conducted only from 10 April to 2 May 2024 with a total sample size of 10.664 qualifying respondents.

Focus groups

The focus group discussions were designed to learn how people with different socio-economic situations engaged in discussions about the EU as well as social, economic and political debates at this moment. We conducted eight explorative focus groups; four in each of Germany and France. Each focus group consisted of 7 to 8 participants mixed in terms of socio-demographics, socio-economic positioning and party preferences. 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 the 22 and 23 January 2024 and administered in cooperation with Herzog + Glaser Teststudio Leipzig GmbH. Focus Groups in France were held in Lyon on the 07 and 08 February 2024 and were conducted in French in cooperation with Swiss Knife - Market Research Fieldwork.

Survey

The survey was developed using insights from the focus groups and existing literature in the field. It consisted of 66 questions and took on average 20 minutes to complete. The sampling strategy aimed at achieving representativeness to the 18- to 80-year-olds in each country. 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 detailed stratification variables aimed at achieving an accurate representation of the respective population of adults in the different survey countries (based on recent Eurostat statistics). 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 education. Moreover, to ensure distributions were balanced in the sample, complex cross-quotas were applied. To compensate for minor overrepresentation and underrepresentation of some groups and to ensure that results were representative of the national population additionally weighting was carried out.

CONTRIBUTORS



NEELE EILERS

Project Lead and Research Fellow

Neele is a Research Fellow at d|part, leading the current research project on political attitudes of European publics ahead of the 2024 European Parliament elections. Her research focuses on issues of inequality, democracy, pluralistic societies, and anti-democratic attitudes, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Neele studied Political Science, Sociology, and International Relations in Berlin and London (MA) and Bonn (BA). She has gained significant experience through her work in public service, academia, and international foundations.



TOBIAS SPÖRI

Senior Research Fellow

Tobias conducts research on democracy, political participation, and political attitudes, specializing in European politics and the current challenges facing the European Union.

He received his PhD from the University of Vienna, focusing on political participation and generations in Central and Eastern Europe. Tobias studied political science in Vienna (MA) and Frankfurt am Main (BA). Following his studies, he was a PhD student in the Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna and served as a research fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) in Vienna and the German Marshall Fund of the United States in Washington, DC.



JAN EICHHORN

Research Director

Jan co-founded d|part and is a partner and research director of the think tank. In his research, Jan works with both large representative survey data and qualitative methods such as focus groups, small group interviews and expert interviews. He often does this in comparative projects across several countries and with the following focal points: Youth participation, economic understandings and dissonances between elite and popular perspectives.

In addition to his work at d|part, Jan is also a Senior Lecturer in Social Policy at the University of Edinburgh. He holds a Bachelor in Integrated Social Science from Jacobs University Bremen and a PhD in Sociology from the University of Edinburgh.

**d | part is a non-profit,
independent and non-
partisan think tank.
The focus of our work is
to research and support
different forms of political
participation.**

With our research, we seek to contribute to a democratic society in which all people can voice their opinion as well as participate and contribute to political processes. Thus, we need to better understand, strengthen, and enhance political participation.

In our work, we use evidence-based research and scientific expertise to gain new insights to inform policy and social debates and to actively disseminate to different target groups. These include state institutions, politicians, and political parties as well as civil society organisations, the media, and public administrations. Especially, we want to engage with and advocate with our research for social groups that are otherwise reached less frequently or with greater difficulty by “the politics”.

We have particular expertise in working on the participation of social groups that are often politically underrepresented. As such, we focus on addressing and enhancing the political participation of young people, people with migration biographies, and people with lower socio-economic status.

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