
According to the BBVA Foundation International Study on University Students

EUROPEAN STUDENTS ARE INTERESTED IN POLITICS BUT DISTRUST POLITICIANS

- University students express a greater interest in political issues than the general public and feel that they have some influence over what happens in their respective countries
- The way they relate to “the public space” differs from one country to another. While Britons and Swedes lean more towards membership of associations, the Spanish favour other routes, such as signing petitions
- Interest in political issues coexists with a low level of trust in politicians, who fail to reach even 5 on a scale from 0 to 10 in any of the survey countries. The lowest score of all – 2.9 points – is awarded in Spain

Madrid, 23 December 2010.- The data that follow are drawn from the “**BBVA Foundation International Study on University Students**” by the Foundation's Department of Social Studies and Public Opinion. This social research project is based on a broad-ranging survey undertaken in six European countries (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom). Around 3,000 face-to-face interviews were conducted in each country (around 18,000 interviewees in all) with students who have completed at least two years of studies belonging to Category 5A of the ISCED classification (UNESCO)¹. Fieldwork was conducted by research institute Ipsos between March and June 2010.

The study examines students' interest in political issues, their ideological self-identification, and the specific ways in which they interact with the public space through association membership and other activities. It also analyses the trust felt in groups and institutions as a core component of social relations.

INTEREST IN POLITICAL ISSUES

Medium-to-high interest in political issues

University students declare an interest in political issues in the medium-to-high interval, with average scores on a 0-to-10 scale (with 10 being a great deal of interest) exceeding the halfway mark (5) in all countries. German students express the most interest (6.6), followed at a one-point distance (5.6) by the Spanish and Swedes.

¹ Category 5A comprises tertiary-level programmes which are largely theory-based and are designed to provide sufficient qualifications for accessing advanced research programmes and professions with high skill requirements

The full distribution of scores shows that those with an interest outnumber those who indicate little or no interest across all survey countries. The largest difference between these two groups appears in Germany (see table 1).

In comparison with the general population², university students show a greater interest in political issues. In almost all countries, the average declared interest of the student segment is almost a full point ahead of that of the public at large. Only in Sweden is interest in political issues the same among students and the wider population.

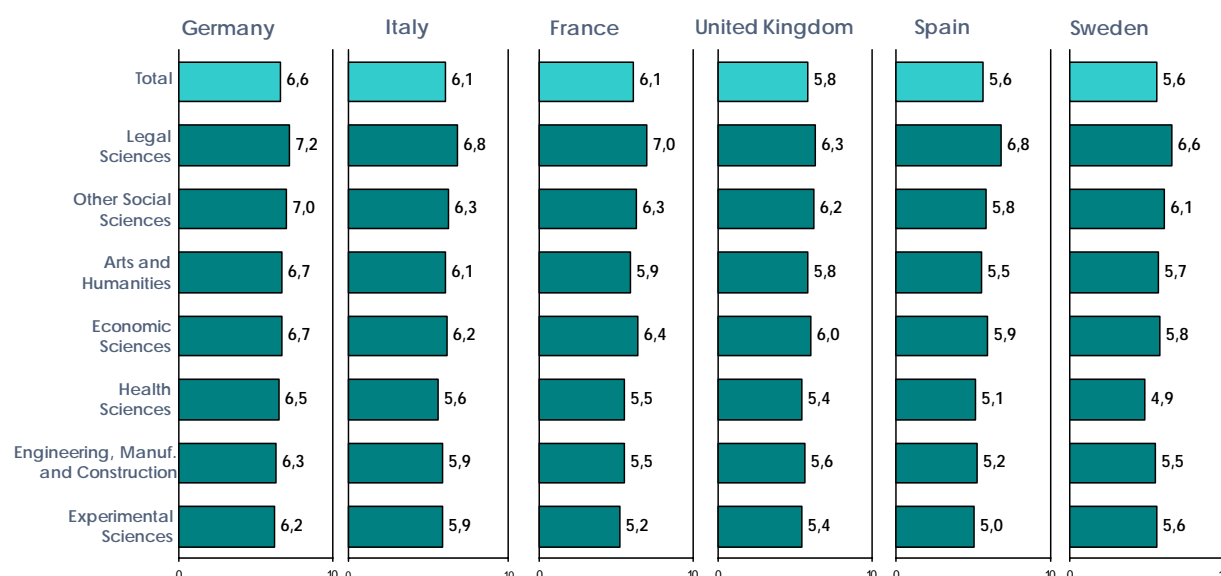
Table1: Every day there is a great deal of news about a wide variety of issues. I would like you to tell me how much interest you take in political issues

Base: all cases. Percentage distribution and average score and on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means you have absolutely no interest and 10 means you have a great deal of interest

	Germany	Italy	France	United Kingdom	Spain	Sweden
Low interest (0-4)	17.3	19.8	22.3	26.0	29.5	30.6
Medium interest (5)	10.9	11.3	13.1	14.6	13.8	14.4
High interest (6-10)	71.2	67.6	61.1	58.3	56.6	53.7
NA	0.6	1.3	3.5	1.1	0.1	1.3
Average score university students	6.6	6.1	6.1	5.8	5.6	5.6
Average score (general population) (Source: European Mindset)	5.7	5.3	5.0	4.8	4.6	5.6

Although medium-to-high interest in political issues predominates in almost all segments, the intensity of such interest varies from one branch of study to the next. Legal science students are the most interested in politics in all survey countries, followed usually by students of other social sciences and economic sciences. Interest in political issues is lowest in a majority of countries among students of experimental and health sciences (see figure 2).

Figure 2: Every day there is a great deal of news about a wide variety of issues. I would like you to rate your level of interest in political issues. Base: total interviews. Average score on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means you have absolutely no interest, and 10 means you have a great deal of interest in these issues.



² European Mindset: BBVA Foundation Study on the Identity and Values of Europeans. April, 2010.

<http://www.fbbva.es/TLFU/tlfu/SPA/areas/econosoc/investigacion/fichainves/index.jsp?codigo=369>

IDEOLOGICAL SELF-IDENTIFICATION

University students position themselves on the centre-left

Asked to rate themselves ideologically on a scale from 0 to 10 (where 0 means extreme left and 10 extreme right), students in the six European countries opted for intermediate values broadly equivalent to the political centre, with a slight leftwards skew. As table 3 shows, the distance from the lowest average score, corresponding to Germans (4.4), to the highest, that of the Italians (5.1), was only seven decimal points. Spanish higher education students fall between these two countries with an average of 4.6.

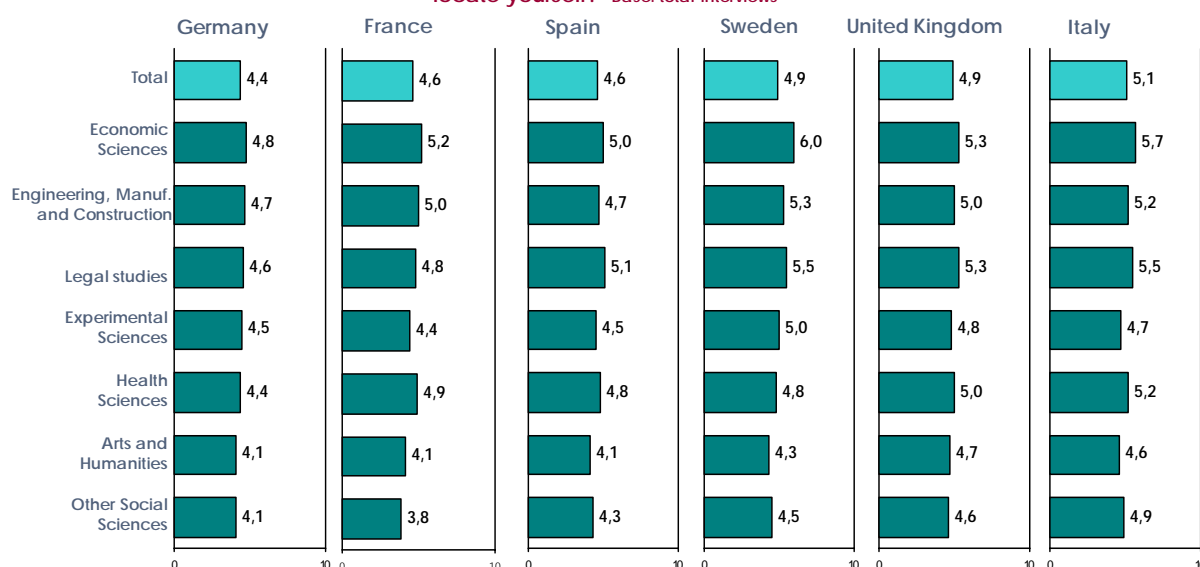
Looking at the response distribution in full, we find that in Germany, France, Spain and Sweden, over 40% of students locate themselves on the left of the political spectrum, dropping to just 30% in the United Kingdom and Italy. In Italy and Sweden, over a third consider themselves on the right, while Germany is the country with the lowest percentage of avowedly right-leaning students (19%).

Table 3: When talking about politics, we tend to use the expressions left and right. Imagine a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 corresponds to the extreme left and 10 to the extreme right. Where would you locate yourself? Base: all cases.

	Average score	Ideological distribution (%)			
		Left (0-4)	Centre (5)	Right (6-10)	DK-NA
Germany	4.4	43.3	29.7	18.5	8.6
France	4.6	40.7	22.3	25.8	11.1
Spain	4.6	41.1	28.4	27.3	3.2
Sweden	4.9	39.8	16.4	36.1	7.7
United Kingdom	4.9	30.2	31.4	28.2	10.2
Italy	5.1	31.1	15.2	36.7	17.0

In all countries, students in arts and humanities and other social sciences tend to lean more to the left, while the centre is most popular with social science specialties such as economics and law (see figure 4).

Figure 4: When talking about politics, we tend to use the expressions left and right. Average score on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 corresponds to the extreme left and 10 to the extreme right. Where would you locate yourself? Base: total interviews



Ability to influence national decisions

Degree of interest in politics may correlate with how much each individual feels they can personally influence decisions affecting the common good.

From this standpoint, students in a majority of countries believe they have at least some influence on the decisions that affect their country (average of around 5 on a scale from 0 to 10), except the Germans (4.7) and the French (4.0). Swedish students stand out as feeling considerably more empowered (7.3).

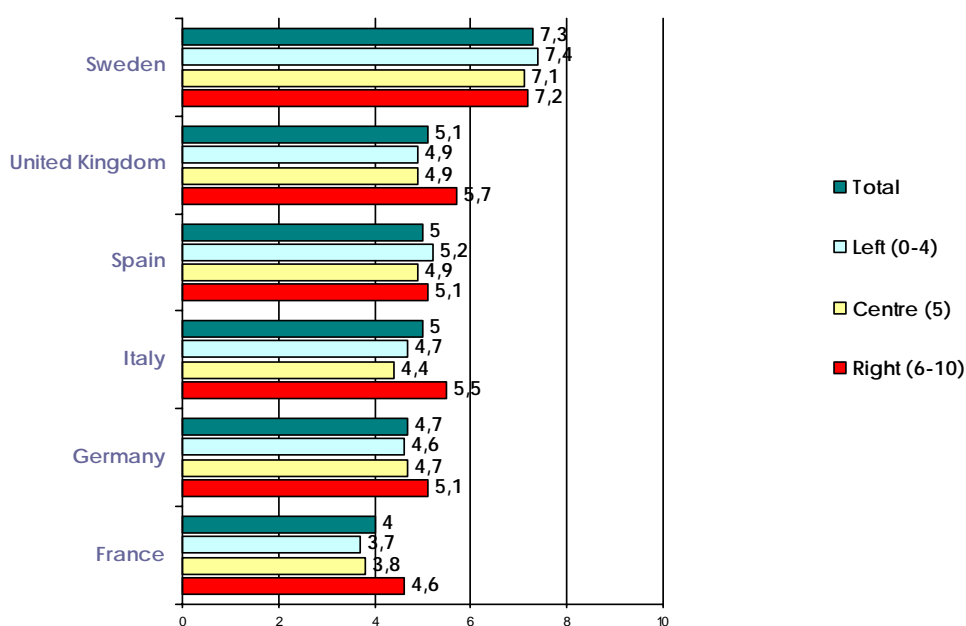
Analysis of the full distribution of the influence scale confirms that Swedish students are at a distance from the rest, with a vast majority (almost 80%) believing in their power to influence the decisions affecting their country (scores from 6 to 10). In the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy those who feel they have some influence (6-10) outnumber their more sceptical peers (0-4), while in Germany both groups have a similar weight, and in France, a majority tend to feel disenfranchised (0-4)(see table 5).

Table 5. To what extent do you think people like you have influence over the decisions that affect this country? Base: all cases. Percentage distribution and average on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means no influence at all, and 10 means a great deal of influence

	Sweden	United Kingdom	Spain	Italy	Germany	France
0-4	7.6	34.9	36.7	35.6	43.3	53.0
5	11.6	15.7	15.8	14.4	160.0	15.5
6-10	78.3	47.7	47.4	45.8	38.6	27.8
DK-NA	2.5	1.8	0.2	4.2	2.1	3.7
Average	7.3	5.1	5.0	5.0	4.7	4.0

In the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany and France, students who locate themselves on the right of the political spectrum tend to feel they have more say than those on the left. In Sweden and Spain, however, ideological leanings make no appreciable difference.

Figure 6. To what extent do you think people like you have influence over the decisions that affect this country? According to ideological self-identification. Base: total interviews. Average on a scale from 0 to 10, from 0 to 10, where 0 means it had no influence at all and 10 that it had a great deal of influence.



Membership of associations varies across the sample

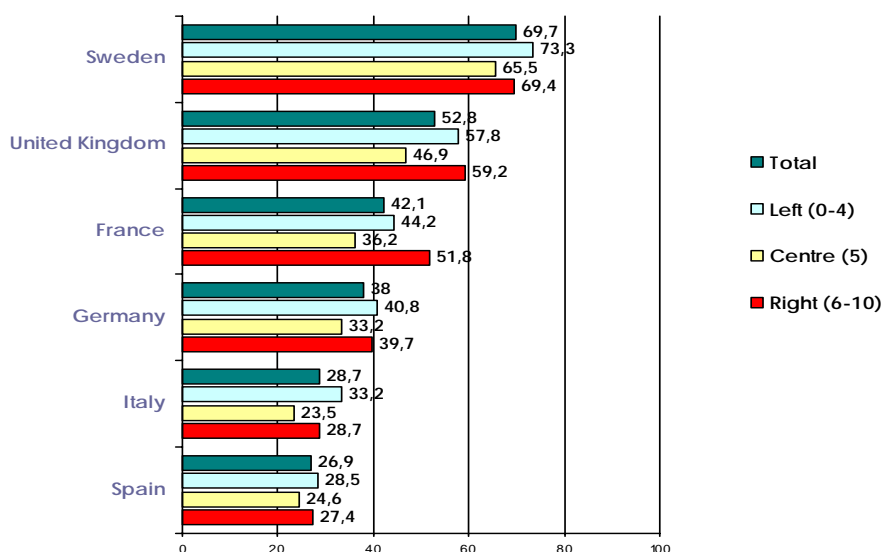
Membership of associations, viewed as an expression of civic involvement and pluralist democracy, that is, as a mediating structure between individual and collective action, tends to be higher among students in the north of Europe (Sweden and, secondly, the United Kingdom) and lower in the south (Spain and Italy). Swedish students are the most eager joiners (70% belong to some kind of association), followed by the British (53%), with French and Germans occupying a midway position (42% and 38% respectively) and Italians and Spanish in the rear (fewer than 30% admit to belonging to some organisation).

Students are likelier to belong to an association outside the university than one within in all countries except the United Kingdom (see table 7).

Table 7: Do you belong to any university associations or organisations? Do you belong to any associations or organisations outside the university? Base: all cases. Percentage distribution.						
	Sweden	United Kingdom	France	Germany	Italy	Spain
Belong to some university association	41.6	39.8	26.6	14.5	9.8	10.5
Belong to some non university association	53.9	32.4	27.0	30.8	24.2	21.7
Total belonging to some association	69.6	52.8	42.1	38.0	28.6	26.9

The relationship between ideological self-identification and association membership varies by country and has more than one reading. In almost all cases, association membership is slightly lower among those opting for the centre than those on the right or left. In France, it is clearly higher among right-leaning students, whereas in Sweden and Italy, it increases slightly among those on the left. In the United Kingdom, Germany and Spain, conversely, there are no material differences between the groups defining themselves clearly as left or right.

Figure 8. Do you belong to any university associations or organisations? And do you belong to any associations or organisations outside the university? According to ideological self-identification. Base: total interviews. Percentage distribution.



Students' association membership in the six survey countries is largely centred on a small number of causes or interests: mainly sports or recreational associations, and, in some countries, charities (Italy, Spain, United Kingdom) or cultural groups (France and Italy). Remaining organizations are a lot less popular, with membership at the low end of the scale (see table 9).

Table 9: Which associations or groups do you belong to?

Base: All who belong to an association or group. Percentage distribution.

	Sweden	United Kingdom	France	Germany	Italy	Spain
Sports associations or groups	36.1	43.9	27	39.7	20.6	21
Special interest or hobby club	22.4	31.6	18.4	24.3	6.5	15.6
Charity or aid organisations	18.2	19.3	16.8	11.3	23.4	19.5
Education or research associations	10.1	11.9	5.8	9	5.8	9.8
Environmental, nature conservation or animal defence groups	9.3	6.5	6.8	9.8	7.4	7.1
Artistic or cultural groups	9.2	13.8	26.8	8.9	25.5	18.4
Associations for the protection of human rights	8.6	5.4	3.2	6	2.4	4.3
Religious societies or associations	8	10.1	3.2	7.5	13.9	6
Political parties	7.8	5.4	7.1	9.5	13	11.7
Student associations	5.2	0.6	3	2.4	1.4	4.4
Civil rights associations	4.8	3.4	4.7	3.9	3.1	2.1
Health-related associations	3.3	6.6	2.1	1.7	6.1	2.8
International cooperation associations	3.1	4.3	2.8	2.3	2	6.3
Other associations or groups	3.4	1.8	5.9	1.6	3.6	1.8
NA	12.2	5	6.3	6.4	8	2.3

CIVIC INVOLVEMENT

Signing petitions is the most common form of activism among university students

A basic indicator of people's engagement with the public space is political and social involvement. To gauge the extent of such involvement, students were asked whether in the past 12 months they had done such things as signing a petition, taking part in a demonstration or getting in touch with a politician or some authority or official to draw their attention to a problem.

In the majority of countries, the most widely reported action was the signing of petitions for some campaign. Demonstrations were the least often mentioned, with Spanish, French and Italian students the likeliest to have attended one in the reference period: around 30% against just 10% in Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Getting in touch with a politician or some authority or official to draw their attention to a problem was a little used recourse in all survey countries.

Spanish students are more likely than their European peers to have signed petitions or attended demonstrations (see table 10).

Table10: There are different ways of trying to improve things in (COUNTRY) or at least of helping prevent things from getting worse. In the last 12 months, have you done out any of the following?

Base: all cases

% responding affirmatively

	Germany	France	Spain	Italy	Sweden	United Kingdom
Signed a petition in a signature collection campaign	39.5	42.0	55.0	35.8	48.5	40.8
Taken part in demonstrations	29.7	29.1	32.0	22.6	12.0	8.8
Got in contact with a politician or some authority or official to draw their attention to a problem	11.8	15.9	13.5	18.8	15.9	13.8

The extent of students' activism not only varies widely from one country to the next but also according to branch of knowledge, with those in arts and humanities and social scientists as the likeliest participants (see table 11).

In effect, involvement in signing petitions is highest among arts and humanities and other social science students in France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom. Spain departs from the norm here, with experimental science students most frequently reporting this kind of action.

Students in arts and humanities and social sciences (specifically other social sciences and law) are also the likeliest to be involved in the remaining activities (taking part in demonstrations or contacting some authority to draw their attention to a problem).

Table11: There are different ways of trying to improve things in (COUNTRY) or at least of helping prevent things from getting worse. In the last 12 months, have you done out any of the following?

Base: All cases

% responding affirmatively

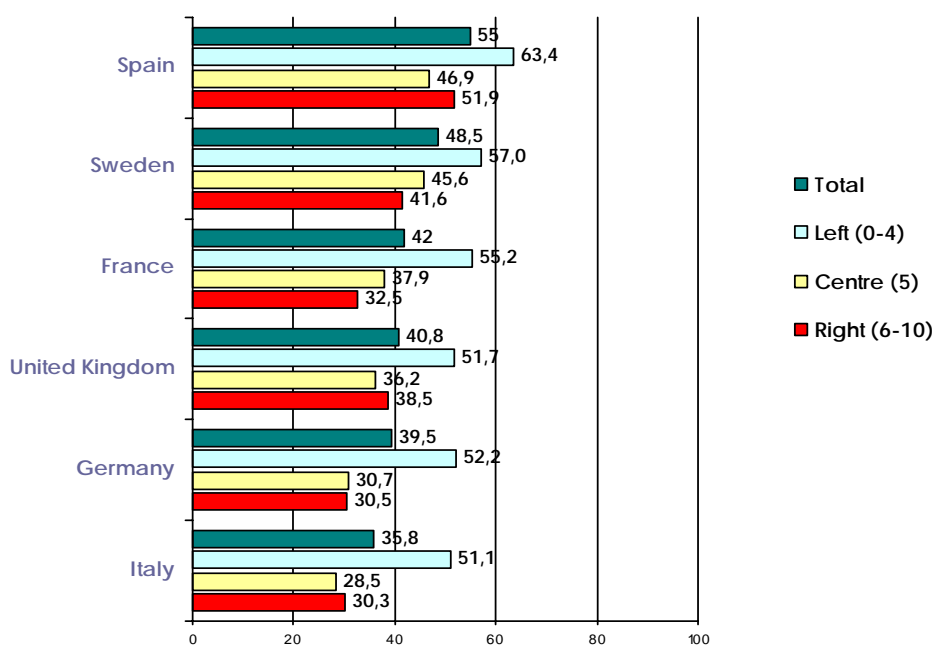
	Total	Arts and humanities	Social sciences			Experi- mental sciences	Health sciences	Engineering, manufac- turing and construction
			Legal sciences	Economic sciences	Other social sciences			
Signed a petition in a signature collection campaign								
France	42.0	53.3	40.5	33.9	50.1	41.7	27.6	34.0
Germany	39.5	50.0	28.9	31.0	47.6	38.9	42.5	27.3
Italy	35.8	41.1	39.7	28.4	43.3	39.3	32.6	28.3
Spain	55.0	57.3	54.8	44.1	58.7	63.8	59.5	54.4
Sweden	48.5	49.7	52.2	39.5	54.5	48.4	51.5	41.1
United Kingdom	40.8	47.5	43.7	33.9	49.0	39.1	33.7	36.0
Taken part in demonstrations								
France	29.1	42.1	26.6	17.3	41.1	32.9	15.2	17.1
Germany	29.7	38.9	18.8	20.0	40.0	26.1	29.3	22.4
Italy	22.5	26.3	22.7	19.2	29.8	22.6	18.8	18.8
Spain	32.0	43.1	33.0	20.6	36.5	32.6	29.7	33.2
Sweden	12.0	18.6	7.5	9.0	16.0	10.5	9.0	8.4
United Kingdom	8.8	9.5	8.8	7.7	13.0	6.8	6.4	6.3
Got in contact with a politician or a national, regional or local authority or official to draw their attention to some problem								
France	15.8	16.6	19.7	15.1	17.1	14.2	11.4	13.4
Germany	11.8	11.8	18.8	12.7	15.0	10.2	11.6	8.7
Italy	18.5	15.1	22.7	22.5	24.3	13.7	14.3	16.6

Spain	13.5	14.9	15.9	12.5	15.9	10.5	13.2	12.2
Sweden	15.9	16.8	16.4	11.0	19.0	18.3	14.4	14.5
United Kingdom	13.8	13.4	14.4	11.9	19.2	13.0	9.1	13.6

Ideological orientation is also a factor for civic involvement. Self-defined left leaning students are more likely to have signed a petition or attended a demonstration in the previous twelve months than those defining themselves as centre or right (see figure 12).

Figure 12. There are different ways of trying to improve things in the (COUNTRY) or at least of helping prevent things from getting worse. In the last 12 months, have you done out any of the following?
Base: total interviews. Percentage that responds affirmatively and according to ideological self-identification.

Signed a petition in a signature collection campaign



TRUST IN PROFESSIONAL GROUPS AND INSTITUTIONS

Trust in professional groups in the knowledge sphere

The degree of credibility and trust extended to institutions and social groups is an important dimension of collective life. In this section, we look at the trust students place in some of the professional groups most prominent in our society (see table 13).

- **Groups accorded a high level of trust:** doctors, scientists, university professors and engineers, segments clearly associated with the worlds of knowledge and education, attract the highest scores. Judges, ecologists, the police and artists are also favourably regarded in this respect.
- **Groups accorded different levels of trust by country:** opinions on the trust merited by military personnel, journalists, businessmen/women, politicians and the clergy vary both between and within countries.
 - Trust in military personnel stands above the midpoint on the scale in the United Kingdom, Italy, Sweden and France but below it in Germany and Spain.
 - Journalists and businessmen/women merit a low degree of trust. The former only clamber above the halfway mark in Italy and the latter in the United Kingdom.
 - Politicians and members of the clergy occupy the lowermost reaches of the trust map. Only in Sweden does trust in the clergy exceed the midpoint on the scale.

Table13: Overall, how much do you currently feel you can trust the following groups and professions? Base: all cases. Average on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means you feel you cannot trust them at all, and 10 means you feel you can trust them a great deal

	United Kingdom	Spain	Italy	Sweden	France	Germany
Doctors	7.9	7.6	7.4	7.4	7.2	7.0
Scientists	7.4	7.6	7.6	7.0	6.9	7.0
University professors	7.5	6.8	6.4	7.1	6.8	7.2
Engineers	7.0	7.3	6.8	7.2	6.6	7.0
Judges	6.5	5.6	5.6	6.9	5.9	6.7
The police	6.4	5.3	5.9	6.6	4.9	6.2
Military personnel	6.4	4.8	5.8	5.6	5.0	4.3
Ecologists	6.2	5.7	6.2	6.5	5.7	6.3
Artists	6.0	5.7	6.4	5.4	5.8	5.7
Businessmen/women	5.1	4.7	4.6	4.9	4.3	4.3
Clergy	4.6	2.8	3.3	5.1	3.2	3.9
Journalists	3.8	4.6	5.2	4.0	4.7	4.9
Politicians	3.8	2.9	3.0	4.3	3.6	3.8

How students rate certain professional groups is independent of their political leanings. This is the case, for instance, with university professors, whose high trust scores cut all the way across the political spectrum. Views on other professional groups tend to vary more with ideological orientation, particularly ecologists, politicians and businessmen/women.

In the six countries surveyed, trust in ecologists is higher among left-leaning students, while politicians and businessmen/women tend to have more credibility among those defining themselves as on the right (see table 14).

Table 14: Overall, how much do you currently feel you can trust the following groups and professions?

Base: all cases. Average on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means you feel you cannot trust them at all, and 10 means you feel you can trust them a great deal

Ideological self-identification				
	Total	Left (0-4)	Centre (5)	Right (6-10)
University professors				
France	6.8	6.8	6.7	6.8
Germany	7.2	7.2	7.3	7.2
Italy	6.4	6.5	6.3	6.5
Spain	6.8	6.8	6.7	6.9
Sweden	7.1	7.0	7.0	7.3
United Kingdom	7.5	7.6	7.4	7.6
Ecologists				
France	5.7	5.9	5.6	5.4
Germany	6.3	6.7	6.2	5.8
Italy	6.2	6.6	6.2	5.8
Spain	5.7	6.3	5.8	4.9
Sweden	6.5	6.7	6.4	6.4
United Kingdom	6.2	6.4	6.1	6.2
Politicians				
France	3.6	3.1	3.5	4.7
Germany	3.8	3.5	3.8	4.5
Italy	3.0	2.3	2.4	3.9
Spain	2.9	3.0	2.8	2.8
Sweden	4.3	4.1	4.2	4.6
United Kingdom	3.8	3.9	3.7	4.1
Businessmen/women				
France	4.3	3.6	4.4	5.2
Germany	4.3	3.9	4.5	5.0
Italy	4.6	4.0	4.5	5.2
Spain	4.7	4.1	5.0	5.6
Sweden	4.9	4.3	5.2	5.5
United Kingdom	5.1	4.7	5.1	5.3

Swedish students express the highest level of institutional trust

It is also important to measure the trust students place in the different components of our societies' institutional architecture. Overall, the institutions mentioned were assigned intermediate values on the trust scale.

The most trusted institutions are the universities with scores of between 6 and 7 points on the 0-to-10 scale in all survey countries.

Next come the courts of justice, albeit with slightly lower scores across the sample: between 6 and 7 points in the more northern European countries (Sweden, United Kingdom and Germany) and between 5 and 6 among those to the south (Spain, Italy and France).

The United Nations, national companies and NGOs also earn 5 to 6 scores in all countries.

The national government only gets a vote of trust from Swedish students, while the British, Germans, French and, above all, Spanish and Italians, prefer to be sceptical.

Local government too tends to be distrusted by the British, Germans, Italians and Spanish, and only merits a pass mark from the Swedish and French.

The European Commission earns a positive trust score in all survey countries except the United Kingdom, where it comes in at 4.9.

The church, mass media and multinational companies are the least trustworthy institutions in the minds of European university students: in not one of the countries analysed did these institutions obtain an average score above the five-point mark (see table 15).

Table15: Overall, how much do you currently feel you can trust the following institutions? Base: all cases. Average on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means you feel you cannot trust them at all, and 10 means you feel you can trust them a great deal

	Sweden	United Kingdom	Germany	Spain	Italy	France
Universities	7.0	6.9	6.9	6.8	6.4	6.3
The (NATIONALITY) courts of justice	6.7	6.3	6.5	5.6	5.8	5.8
The United Nations	6.2	5.7	5.5	5.6	5.8	5.2
(NATIONALITY) companies	5.9	5.8	5.4	5.5	5.8	5.1
NGOs	5.6	5.8	5.7	5.9	6.0	5.9
The (NATIONALITY) government	5.6	4.6	4.8	3.7	3.6	4.1
Local government	5.3	4.8	4.9	4.0	4.5	5.3
The European Commission	5.2	4.9	5.3	5.2	5.7	5.2
The church	4.4	4.5	3.6	2.8	4.1	3.4
The mass media	4.0	3.7	4.5	4.6	4.3	4.4
Multinational companies	4.2	4.6	4.4	4.6	4.6	4.2

ANNEX. TECHNICAL NOTES

Universe: students who have completed at least two years of higher education studies belonging to Category 5A of UNESCO's International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), segmented by branch of study and type of institution.

Method: administered face-to-face survey in study centres.

Sample size and distribution: 3,000 valid cases per country stratified according to region, type of centre and branch of study. The final unit was arrived at by random selection in the frame of the above stratification. The sample included from 35 to 50 universities in each country.

BRANCH	Kinds of subjects
Economic Sciences	Business and management studies, Finance and accounting, Marketing, etc.
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	Civil engineering, Mechanical engineering, Electronic & electrical engineering. Production & manufacturing engineering, Chemical, process & energy engineering, Architecture, Building & Planning, etc.
Legal studies	Law and related studies
Experimental Sciences	Biology and Other biological sciences, Chemistry, Physics, Other physical sciences (Materials Science: Astronomy; Geology; etc), Mathematics, Statistics, etc.
Health Sciences	Medicine, Dentistry, Anatomy, physiology & pathology, Pharmacology, toxicology & pharmacy, Nutrition, etc.
Arts and Humanities	History, Archaeology, Philosophy, Languages, etc.
Other Social Sciences	Psychology, Sociology, Social policy, Anthropology, etc.

Sampling error: the estimated sampling error is +/- 1.8% for a confidence level of 95.5% and in the worst-case scenario ($p=q=0.5$).

Fieldwork: coordinated by Ipsos between the months of March and June, 2010

In Italy (5%) and Spain (9%), private university students were oversampled with a view to providing a more robust sample base for this segment. Data were subsequently weighted to re-establish the real weight of each group within the study universe.

In France, 16% of students were attending private institutions. In Germany all the sampled institutions were public; in Sweden most were public (90%) and the remainder mixed. In the UK, all were mixed.

Explanatory note: Fieldwork was conducted during the implementation of the Bologna process. Since not all countries or universities are at the same stage of rollout, and in view of the non standard structure and duration of study cycles (bachelor's, master's, etc.), the criterion applied was to select students in at least the third year of their courses whose studies belonged to category 5A of UNESCO's International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). Category 5A corresponds to tertiary programmes that are largely theory-based and are designed to provide sufficient qualifications for accessing advanced research programmes and professions with high skill requirements. Note that certain degrees are considered to come within the ISCED 5A category in some countries but not in others.