

EUROPEAN VALUES STUDY: VALUES AND ATTITUDES IN EUROPE REGARDING THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Europeans trust the state, along with its institutions and professional groups, but not politicians

- **There is widespread trust** in professional groups linked to the State (police, judges, the military and government employees), with the exception of the political class, towards which citizens express a strong disaffection. In almost all countries, trust in politicians falls below the trust threshold (average of 3.2 on a scale of 0 to 10 in Spain against 3.8 across the other four countries)
- **The majority of citizens** express a strong sense of identification and pride of belonging with regard to their own nation-state and its symbols, and clearly recognize the value of the rule of law as a pillar of democracy and core component of civic coexistence
- **Europeans** value political parties as institutions of representative democracy, but take a critical view of the mainstream parties, to the extent that 55% in Spain, 69% in France and 75% in Italy feel that they no longer represent them adequately
- **There is a broad consensus** about the responsibility of the state in the provision of classic welfare state services (health coverage, pensions) and, less markedly, in limiting the operation of market mechanisms with regard to prices, wages and corporate profits. The Spanish population stands out for its greater preference for state responsibility in all areas (welfare state and market)
- **The Spanish** advocate income equality regardless of qualifications: 49% against a 29% average in the other four countries, where most support differences in income according to educational attainment
- **Citizens' connection** with the public sphere (participation, consumption of news media) is stronger in countries like France, the United Kingdom and Germany, and more fragile in Italy and Spain

- **Television** is the medium most widely used by the population in the five countries to keep up with current events. Citizens are more trusting of the information provided by conventional media than that offered by news aggregation websites and social networks, which they see as primarily responsible for the spread of “fake news”
- **In every country**, citizens share the perception that corruption is prevalent. This perception is most strongly held in Spain (average of 8.4 on a scale from 0 to 10 against 6.7 across the other four countries)
- **The majority** see European Union membership as being beneficial for their country. This is especially so in Spain and even, significantly, in a country like the United Kingdom with Brexit in full flow
- **On the United Kingdom’s possible exit** from the European Union, citizens see more negative than positive consequences: over 45% in all societies believe it may encourage other countries to follow suit, and more than 40% that it will weaken the EU’s influence in the world. They are also dubious as to whether Brexit will improve cooperation among the remaining member countries or make the EU stronger overall
- **The Spanish**, who tend more towards the left of the political spectrum vs. the other four countries analyzed, are the most strongly supportive of immigration policies that allow people in provided jobs are available (49% in favor against a European average of 31%)

The BBVA Foundation has presented the first module of its European Values Survey 2019, examining a broad set of values and attitudes held by the adult population of five European countries (Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Spain) in both the public (politics, economics, the media, trust) and private (religion, ethics, science, environment) domains. This press release refers exclusively to the public sphere.

The aim of the study is to capture a broad set of preferences, values and beliefs that inform individual conduct in multiple facets of public and private life, and to examine how these conducts interrelate in the two domains.

Values operate as a kind of “cognitive, normative and emotional GPS” that helps individuals navigate their way around complex issues and situations on which they have limited information, aiding them in their decision-making. They help identify what is “good” (valuable) and “right” (which kind of individual and institutional behaviors are obligatory, permitted or

“forbidden”). The map of cultural “intangibles” – values and attitudes – of the adult population is fairly stable in its main contours, but may be affected or modified as a result of exceptional events (crises) or the emergence of new information of singular importance, visibility and reach. On the individual plane, the universe of internalized values will hold out strongly against any attempt at change based on persuasion or propaganda. And any wholesale shift in public values and attitudes will tend to unfold only slowly, the product of fragmentary and cumulative processes.

The comparative analysis of these values and attitudes conducted in the study identifies commonalities and differences both across and within the five societies by reference to sociodemographic and cultural factors: age, sex, educational level and declared political orientation. The results reflect cross-country commonalities expressive of Europeans’ political culture, as well as divergences around certain values, attitudes and perceptions, and models of engagement with the public sphere.

Main findings

Declared political orientation is a general matrix that captures a major strand of individuals’ social worldview and influences perceptions, attitudes and behaviors in the private and, especially, the public sphere. A majority of Spaniards define themselves as center left, with the furthest left segment doubling in size that of all other countries analyzed.

Europeans express an interest in politics in the medium-low interval, while both public participation and following of the news are relatively low-key. This stands in contrast to their high expectations regarding the role and functions of the state, which extend beyond classic welfare state services to the control of market variables like prices, wages and corporate profits. Spain stands apart on this score in opting, by a small margin, for income equality even among those with differing levels of qualifications.

Regarding economic policy options, a majority in all countries would favor spending cuts rather than risking an imbalance in public accounts. In Spain, this view also finds support among those identifying as on the left (58%), albeit at some distance from those declaredly in the center (71%) and, above all, on the right (82%).

In all countries, there is a prevailing current of trust in leading institutions and a large number of professional groups, most prominently doctors, teachers, scientists and engineers.

This trust also extends to professionals linked to the public administration – police officers, judges, the military and government employees – but not to the political elites running the

administrative apparatus.

Citizens perceive high or very high levels of corruption in their countries, a view especially accentuated in the cases of Spain and Italy. At the other extreme is Germany, where this perception is weak.

Europeans choose to stick with conventional media, principally television, to keep themselves informed of current events. The exception here is young people in the 18 to 24 age group, who turn preferably to social networks.

The majority of citizens express a strong sense of identification and pride of belonging with regard to their own nation-state and its symbols, and clearly recognize the value of the rule of law as a pillar of democracy and core component of civic coexistence.

European Union membership is seen by most citizens as being beneficial for their country. This is especially so in Spain and even, significantly, in a country like the United Kingdom with Brexit in full flow.

Of the factors that weigh in their voting decisions, Spaniards single out the party's program and ideology ahead of professional competences in general, except for ability to manage the economy, which ranks high in their priorities.

Climate change, terrorism, a cyber attack and immigration are viewed as serious problems for the country, with scores in Spain ranging from 8.6 for climate change to 6.7 for immigration.

Technical notes

The BBVA Foundation's European Values Study examines a broad set of values and attitudes held by the adult population of five European countries: Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Spain. Empirical information was gathered through a survey of a representative sample of 1,500 people aged 18 and over in each of the European Union's top five most populated countries.

The fieldwork was conducted by Ipsos between April and July 2019. The design of the questionnaire and analysis of the survey data were the work of the BBVA Foundation Department of Social Studies and Public Opinion.

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