



CORDIS Results Pack on connecting citizens with democracy

A thematic collection of innovative EU-funded research results

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New tools and insights to bolster political participation



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Editorial

New tools and insights to bolster political participation

In 2024, citizens go to the polls for the European Parliament elections. In the face of reduced trust in governance, increased political polarisation, and growing external threats to democracy, this Results Pack highlights 15 Horizon-funded projects exploring the current challenges to democracy, and testing innovative solutions that support better engagement with the democratic process.

The 2024 European Parliament election is scheduled to be held from 6 to 9 June. It will be the 10th parliamentary election since the first direct elections in 1979, and the first since the departure of the United Kingdom from the Union. It arrives at a time when, more than ever, the strength of democratic systems operating in Europe is being called into question, and solutions are urgently sought.

Europe is facing a rash of threats to its democratic ideals. Conflict, climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine have all brought uncertainty to the continent.

In response to these issues, populism is in resurgence, encouraging citizens to turn away from the pan-European ideals and liberal democracy, to instead focus on exclusionary identities and self-interest. Consequently, policies that limit the rights and freedoms of women, minorities, LGBTIQ citizens and immigrants are on the rise.

There is an urgent need to examine the practices of democracy and identify how they can be improved. Horizon-funded research is helping to deliver the answers.

Trust is an essential component of democracy. Without it, citizens cannot engage meaningfully in the democratic process, and governments and regulatory bodies lack moral authority. EnTrust, PERITIA and TiGRE all explore different aspects of trust in governance. They suggest that encouraging a healthy scepticism of governing bodies is a key foundation for a responsible relationship between citizen and state.

Growing citizen participation in policymaking is a crucial step for a more engaged and informed electorate. EUARENAS, EUCOMMEET and DEMOTEC all explore aspects of deliberative and participatory democracy. They offer new tools and methods for increasing democratic involvement, from participatory budgets to deliberative spaces for citizens. Taking this a step further, the ISEED project uses conceptual and empirical means to deliver a guide to best practices for citizen engagement.

The media also plays a role in the relationship between governments and citizens. EUMEPLAT and MEDIADELCOM both seek to quantify the role of the media in helping – or harming – public discourse of the issues that matter to citizens. The RADICALISATION project investigates how extremists use disinformation campaigns to radicalise and recruit new members, offering strategies to prevent future conflicts.

EUGenDem examines the role of parliamentary political groups in advancing gender equality, while in the context of rising populism, the LIDD project examines the double-edged sword of direct democracy, which offers citizens a straight path to policymaking, but can circumnavigate protections and due process. ELECTRUST reviews the risks and benefits offered by internet-voting systems. And POLEMIC questions whether appealing to voters' negative emotions is really on the rise – or even a successful strategy.

Finally, work carried out by FASDEM examines the trajectories of states, and highlights that the transition to liberal democracy is not a foregone conclusion, nor always a stable end point. It cautions us not to take what we have for granted; to survive, democracy must be defended.

How sharp is participatory budgeting as a policymaking tool?

By inviting citizens to help make decisions, could participatory budgeting inspire more political engagement? The EU-funded DEMOTEC project investigated a potential response to the issue of widespread political polarisation and alienation.



[Participatory budgeting](#) describes a system where citizens directly decide how public funds are spent, and it is typically exercised locally or regionally. It has attracted attention as a policymaking tool to encourage more civic engagement at larger scales.

Led by project coordinator Paschalia Spyridou from the [Cyprus University of Technology](#) (CUT), [DEMOTEC](#) has been exploring whether participatory budgeting, as part of regional and urban policies, has led to increased citizen participation, and a better informed electorate.

According to Vasilis Manavopoulos, project manager from the CUT, it first emerged in the late 1980s in Porto Alegre, Brazil, from a politically left-leaning programme of social justice and governance reform. It has since been adopted by over 1 500 municipalities worldwide, including more than 200 in Europe.

“Promising numerous benefits, participatory budgeting is attractive, but [studies](#) have often focused only on successful implementation, possibly overstating its effects,” says Manavopoulos. “We wanted a more in-depth investigation of its different forms.”

Comparative case studies

To explore the impact of participatory budgeting across Europe, DEMOTEC set up a study in urban regions of Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and the United Kingdom, representing a sociopolitical continuum of countries with varying engagement with the practice.

The team used a mixed methodology to assess if, and how, this process impacts political engagement. “We set up three different research programmes, using a survey to investigate citizens’ attitudes towards participatory budgeting, text analysis to explore how civil society organisations and the media shape these attitudes, then simulated scenarios to test hypotheses,” explains Manavopoulos.

Online surveys polled 3 000 representative citizens, across the case study countries as well as Germany, France and Spain.

Almost 43 000 online news articles and over 300 000 tweets in nine languages were examined, and coded for tone/valence (positive or negative).

In addition, interviews were conducted with journalists from the study areas, and simulations were run exploring how participatory budgeting design affects participants, processes and outcomes.

Regional differences emerge

Analysis of the surveys to date has indicated low awareness of participatory budgeting across all countries except Poland, where it has been legally mandated. Participation rates in the seven countries had been low, yet there remained high willingness to take part in future activities.

“The key predictors of participatory budgeting support were institutional and social trust, pre-existing civic engagement, such as volunteering, education and a prior interest in politics,” notes Spyridou. Media analysis revealed that interest in participatory budgeting has consistently risen since 2014.

“In just over half the articles, it was only mentioned tangentially, otherwise coverage was overwhelmingly positive. While its practicality and ability to engage and empower citizens were often highlighted, its transformative potential, for example to promote social justice, was very rarely mentioned,” says Spyridou.

Analysis of the tweets showed that participatory budgeting was mentioned mainly by organisations, and when by individuals, mostly by people formally involved in the process.

The journalists revealed that while many thought participatory budgeting useful for mobilising and empowering citizens, it was difficult to implement. There was also consensus that ‘democratic malaise’ is a real phenomenon and that while participatory budgeting was a newsworthy topic, audiences would likely be uninterested.

After taking part in the simulations, regardless of group, all participants indicated high degrees of satisfaction with the process, declaring they intend to participate if implemented locally.



Participatory budgeting is attractive but studies have often focused only on successful implementation, possibly overstating its effects.

“While the experiments resulted in all groups rating participatory budgeting higher than before, the jump was more pronounced for face-to-face groups than online. This could suggest the value of social interaction for community-based decision-making,” adds Manavopoulos.

DEMOTEC’s partners are currently working in a consultative role with local municipalities to help promote and implement participatory budgeting in their regions.

PROJECT

**DEMOTEC – Democratising Territorial Cohesion:
Experimenting with deliberative citizen
engagement and participatory budgeting in
European regional and urban policies**

COORDINATED BY

Cyprus University of Technology in Cyprus

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-SOCIETY

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/962553

PROJECT WEBSITE

demotec-project.eu



Anxieties over internet voting reflect wider social concerns

The EU-funded ELECTRUST project found that trust issues are key to voters' attitudes around online ballots, and could help inform standards for the successful implementation of digital democracy.



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The internet has transformed many aspects of our daily lives, from how we watch television to how we find romantic partners. However, it has yet to radically transform how people access and interact with government services.

Despite being technologically feasible for a couple of decades, [i-voting](#) – where voters submit their ballot via the internet, in an unsupervised environment – has not been embraced by many governments.

“Trust issues lie at the heart of many of the explanations for this reluctance,” explains David Duenas-Cid, principal investigator of ELECTRUST. Hosted at [Gdańsk University of Technology](#), the project was undertaken with the support of the [Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions](#) programme.

ELECTRUST explores how discourse around i-voting both constructs and leverages issues of trust and distrust, ultimately framing public opinion of the technology and its promoters.

Beyond technology

Estonia is the only country where i-voting is used in all elections. Some countries, such as Canada, have implemented it in local elections, while France and Panama have deployed it for expatriated voters.



We've found that i-voting offers a more direct democracy, which can reach the marginalised and transform public administration.

ELECTRUST conducted an extensive case study of New South Wales, Australia, where i-voting was abandoned after early experiments. Cryptography experts had raised security concerns about the integrity of the system, while an unexpectedly high number of voters had experienced technical problems with the identification process.

“This is symptomatic of one of the key problems with i-voting: a clash between trust and distrust. The decision makers [discontinued it](#) out of fear,” adds Duenas-Cid.

Duenas-Cid interviewed various stakeholders including technology providers, electoral administrators, journalists, politicians and activists.

Preliminary analysis highlights how i-voting discourse flexibly adopts trust- and distrust-related arguments, often unconnected to the technology, but rather touching on wider sociopolitical contexts and individual beliefs.

A guide for future elections

Exploratory case studies have also been undertaken into the various forms of i-voting adopted by Estonia, the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland.

One side study that [compared Estonia and the Spanish province of Catalonia](#) outlined how i-voting is top-down in Estonia, as a branch of the country's e-governance system seeking easier democratic participation. By contrast, in Catalonia, the online participation system ‘[Decidim](#)’ evolved as a bottom-up development to encourage wider citizen engagement.

“Our approach was informed by theories of ideal democratic methods – how decisions are made, and by whom,” says Duenas-Cid. “We've found that i-voting offers a more direct democracy, which can reach the marginalised and transform public administration through wide-ranging citizen engagement.”

Interesting paradoxes were also found between communities seemingly at odds, despite the common goal of improved democratic systems. For example, while some experts cite cybersecurity concerns, voters with disabilities argue that i-voting enables equal participation in elections.

The project's findings will be outlined in a white book, including recommendations for policymakers. Duenas-Cid says ELECTRUST offers a valuable contribution to debates about the expansion of i-voting: “We're not necessarily arguing for widespread i-voting implementation, but our results could help explain some of the likely reactions to its adoption.”

PROJECT

**ELECTRUST – Dynamics of Trust and Distrust
Creation in Internet Voting**

COORDINATED BY

Gdańsk University of Technology in Poland

FUNDED UNDER

Spreading excellence; widening participation

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101038055



‘Enlightened trust’ could be the key to healthy democracies

Exploring trust in political institutions across seven European countries, the EU-funded EnTrust project finds that healthy scepticism has a valuable role to play in creating and maintaining well-functioning democracies.



Research suggests that trust in governance [has fluctuated](#) across EU Member States in recent years, with declining trust in national governments a noteworthy trend.

The reasons for how and why trust levels change are complex, occurring within a dense web of relationships. Trust is bestowed by individuals, groups and mass-mediated discourse, while local, regional, national or transnational political actors, administrations and experts are potential recipients.

The [EnTrust](#) project generated valuable comparative data sets to shed light on the underlying processes that can build or degrade trust. A key finding is that democratic systems function best when a healthy balance between trust and distrust is reached, explains project coordinator Christian Lahusen from the [University of Siegen](#) in Germany: "Poorly performing governance systems tilt to the extremes of cultivated mistrust and blind trust. Healthy democracies rely on critically engaged citizens able to genuinely challenge the status quo."

Exploring regional variation

The project [consortium](#), including seven universities and Civil Society Europe, gathered data from Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and Serbia.

A population survey with 14 000 respondents across the seven countries captured public opinions about trust in governance. This was complemented by survey experiments to help identify the psychological processes of trust formation, alongside online discussions with citizens, politicians and experts, to explore the impact that aspects of policymaking might have.

With trust found to be variable across all countries, respondents were categorised as 'trusters', 'sceptical distrusters', then 'cynical distrusters' associated with populist attitudes and conspiratorial thinking.

Overall, northern Europe countries, notably Denmark followed by Germany, were found to have higher, more stable, patterns of political trust, whereas eastern and southern countries (including Greece, Poland and Serbia) showed remarkably lower levels.

Trust in political institutions (including in government) was low in all countries, with the highest percentage of those reporting trust identified in Denmark at 62 %, Germany at 56 % and then Czechia at 36 %. Trust in these institutions was lowest in Serbia at 17 %, with Poland at 22 % and Greece at 29 %. Predictably,

the highest levels of people reporting cynical distrust were found in Serbia (50 %).

"We found these country differences mirrored perceptions of corruption," says Lahusen. "Strikingly, in Greece 92 % and in Serbia 89 % of respondents saw corruption as very or fairly widespread. In contrast, only 28 % of respondents in Denmark and 52 % in Germany felt the same. Corruption clearly not only destroys trust, but also fuels disenchantment and cynical distrust."

Trust in regional and local governments was higher in all countries (except Serbia) than in national governments or the EU, by around 10 percentage points on average.

How to build trust

To investigate these feelings of trust, EnTrust conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups, exploring citizen encounters with public administration staff, the dynamics of social movements, and public discourse in mass media.

The project found a country's political culture and quality of governance to be significant factors in trust, alongside citizens' socio-economic and education background, and any prior civic or political engagement.

"But this didn't hold true for more disadvantaged groups or protest movements, even in the more trusting countries, especially when it comes to dealing with welfare bureaucracy," adds Ulrike Zschache, project co-coordinator.

Against this backdrop of widespread distrust towards public authorities among vulnerable citizens, EnTrust found that positive interactions with frontline workers are key to boosting positive views.

"Individual interactions, if empathetic and respectful, can compensate for mistrust grown from negative institutional experiences," notes Zschache.

Regarding institutions, the project's research highlighted the importance of integrity, transparency and accountability, bolstered by stringent anti-corruption measures, which collectively helps foster what the researchers have called 'enlightened forms of trust'.



Healthy democracies rely on critically engaged citizens able to genuinely challenge the status quo.

“Our findings also suggest that trust is more likely to be earned by genuine opportunities for empowerment, participation and contestation, particularly locally. Symbolic versions breed more mistrust and so are counterproductive,” remarks Lahusen.

Dialogue with project participants and stakeholders, including EU institutions, has already led to a series of [policy briefs](#).

PROJECT

EnTrust – Enlightened trust: An examination of trust and distrust in governance – conditions, effects and remedies

COORDINATED BY

University of Siegen in Germany

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-SOCIETY

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870572

PROJECT WEBSITE

entrust-project.eu



Revitalising citizen engagement in local democracy

Strategies that encourage and strengthen democratic participation at the local level could help to reinvigorate citizen trust in democracy, and overcome apathy and illiberalism, according to results of the EU-funded EUARENAS project.



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In Europe, there is growing disaffection and a lack of trust in democratic processes, driven by widening inequalities and anxieties concerning social, economic and cultural change.

“Many citizens have the perception that ‘the system’ does not work for them, and that it is too distant to be influenced,” explains James Scott, a professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Business Studies at the [University of Eastern Finland](#).

“As a consequence, populist and illiberal alternatives to democratic participation have gained in popularity. While these antidemocratic political forces have increased the degree of political activism, it has been at the expense of a belief in democracy.”

Strengthened democratic participation at the local level

Scott is project coordinator of the [EUARENAS](#) project, due for completion in June 2024. Its goal is to identify effective ways of reversing this trend, and to strengthen democratic participation at the local level. To achieve this, the project set out to analyse the effectiveness of a number of local initiatives, all designed to promote a greater and more inclusive sense of civic involvement.

“These experiments include participatory budgeting, citizen assemblies, community budgeting, asset-based community development and social [hackathons](#),” says Scott. “We are also looking into how communities can use innovative digital tools, to solve problems in collaboration with citizens.”

Through analysing these activities, the EUARENAS project team has been able to collect valuable data regarding local experiences in promoting more inclusive democracy. Encouragingly, this has confirmed that these initiatives are generating considerable momentum.

“This has occurred in part as a response to the perceived need to ‘open up’ the decision-making process,” adds Scott. “Inevitably though, these initiatives have created challenges, and often tested the limits of local governance capacities.”

Ensuring diversity, inclusiveness and engagement

Initial findings have led to some preliminary recommendations. “Ensuring diversity, inclusiveness and engagement is a complex task that requires a long-term approach,” remarks Scott. “Local government priorities however are often determined by short-term electoral cycles.”

For this reason, trust relationships between local government and citizens need to be developed, as part of achieving functioning co-governance arrangements. Leadership, from both citizens and city officials, is also vital.

“Citizens’ assemblies and panels represent a potentially decisive tool for stimulating participation and co-governance,” says Scott. “However, these need to be used carefully and judiciously. Used improperly, these can incur high costs, while potentially alienating local citizens due to lack of follow-through.”

Another key finding is the need to avoid politics at the local level that sinks into identity politics and polarised political positions. Such policy drift can play into the hands of illiberal populist groups, adds Scott.

A future vision of local democracy

From these initial findings, the project is now building a future vision for local democracies in Europe. This vision includes key elements such as sustainable, long-term thinking and valuing difference and diversity.

“Working towards such a future, cities might want to consider actions that address structural barriers to participation, build relationships of trust, and most of all, make decisions for the long term,” explains Scott. “The main aim of local governance should be to stimulate an inclusive decision-making process that results in practicable decisions.”

As the project nears completion, Scott and his team hope to further strengthen cooperation between academic, civil society and government spheres, in order to generate more knowledge about how democratic participation at the local level can be enhanced.

“EUARENAS has already been able to identify several potential strategies, as well as several potential pitfalls,” says Scott. “Our hope is that this project will provide local governments in Europe with a valuable knowledge source, to help them identify effective governance practices.”



Citizens’ assemblies and panels represent a potentially decisive tool for stimulating participation and co-governance.

PROJECT

EUARENAS – Cities as Arenas of Political Innovation in the Strengthening of Deliberative and Participatory Democracy

COORDINATED BY

University of Eastern Finland in Finland

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-SOCIETY

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/959420

PROJECT WEBSITE

euarenas.eu



Creating citizen spaces to encourage democratic engagement

Online deliberative platforms could be a useful tool for engaging citizens in the decision-making process and strengthening democracy, according to the EU-funded EUCOMMEET project.



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Europe's capacity to overcome challenges and crises rests, at least in part, on having a healthy representative democracy. If citizens are not part of the decision-making process, or if they feel ignored, overcoming difficulties becomes that much harder.

"One solution is to make our politics more inclusive, participatory and deliberative," says [EUCOMMEET](#) project coordinator Pierangelo Isernia, a professor of Political Science at the [University of Siena](#) in Italy. "We need to bring democratic discourse and the practice of democracy closer to the needs and demands of the citizens."

The goal of the EU-funded EUCOMMEET project was to explore how this could be achieved – and to identify some of the challenges to implementing more deliberative and participatory forms of democracy.

Isernia notes that one key challenge is finding ways to include citizens who are not very interested in politics. Another is that involving citizens in deliberations – especially at the EU level – is a large-scale undertaking, and can be expensive. Many politicians are also unsure about the value of citizen-based deliberations, or how their input can be usefully fed into the decision-making process.

Deliberative and participatory democracy

To address these challenges, the project designed a set of online participatory spaces, within which citizens could discuss and deliberate. These were conceived as being flexible, interactive and scalable, and involved the use of innovative technologies for automated moderation and translation.



The open-source platform we developed can now be used, adapted and improved for future use by local, national and European authorities.

The project next set up an open-source deliberative platform, to enable these spaces to function. These spaces were then implemented in five countries: France, Germany, Ireland, Italy and Poland.

The pilot experiment consisted of a series of online deliberative sessions involving a cross-section of between eight and 10 citizens. Around 400 people participated in all activities over the entire project period.

These sessions began at the local level (involving residents of the same city) before moving onto the national level, and concluding with an online plenary at the European level.

These plenary sessions involved citizens from at least three different countries.

“A number of innovations were tested during these trials,” adds Isernia. “These included the automated moderator tool and translation tool. We also integrated text translation to meet the need of multilingual deliberations.”

A key success, notes Isernia, was demonstrating that such a system could be robust and support open dialogue. “We had no idea of the impact that these technologies would have on the quality and nature of deliberation when we started,” he says. Isernia and his team are still going through the data generated by the project.

Open-source platform for discussion

A key lesson for policymakers is that successfully developing an online deliberative platform is not just a question of overcoming technical challenges. It also demands that strategies are developed to involve and motivate a cross-section of people, particularly those disinterested in politics.

The main task now is to digest, process and analyse the vast amount of information collected during these experiments. This will help the team to identify how citizen deliberations can be used to help reduce polarisation, and perhaps strengthen European identity.

“The [open-source platform](#) we developed can now be used, adapted and improved for future use by local, national and European authorities,” remarks Isernia. “Our hope is that EUCCOMMEET can be a springboard for future online citizen-based deliberations, something that is still in its infancy.”

PROJECT

EUCOMMEET – Developing Participatory Spaces using a Multi-stage, Multi-level, Multi-mode, Multi-lingual, Dynamic Deliberative approach (M4D2)

COORDINATED BY

University of Siena in Italy

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-SOCIETY

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/959234

PROJECT WEBSITE

eucommet.eu



Understanding how political groups in the European Parliament shape gender policy

With European elections on the horizon, the critical role of parliamentary political groups in advancing gender equality has been underlined by the groundbreaking EU-funded EUGenDem study.



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“The European Parliament is often seen from the outside as being a unified actor,” says Johanna Kantola, [EUGenDem](#) project leader and professor of European Societies and their Politics at the [University of Helsinki](#) in Finland. “People will say, for example, ‘this is what the Parliament does’, or ‘this is what the Parliament says’.”

Yet this view glosses over the important role that politically aligned groups play in shaping the politics and policies of the EU. These groups can be made up of members of one or more political parties. Officially recognised groups include the European People’s Party, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, and Renew Europe.

The EUGenDem project, funded by the [European Research Council](#), set out to perform in-depth research on the working of several political groups, with the focus on gender. “There is this idea that this is an ‘equality parliament’,” notes Kantola. “We wanted to see if this is really the case.”

Lack of formalised equality procedures

“We didn’t just look at quantitative data, such as voting patterns on gender, but at what really goes on in Parliament on an everyday basis,” adds Kantola. “For this, interviews were the obvious source of data.”



Our key message here was that progress in gender equality has to happen at the level of political groups.

Over the course of the project, Kantola and her team interviewed around 140 MEPs and their staff, from eight political groups. The project team also spent days shadowing MEPs and attending meetings.

“This was about understanding the informal political structures that are in place, how everyday practices in each political group shape the politics, and how this might be gendered,” explains Kantola.

One surprising finding was the lack of formalised practices and procedures relating to equality, at both the institutional and the political group levels. “There is nothing inherently bad about such practices, but viewed through the lens of equality, this can be critical,” says Kantola. “For example, we spoke with one female MEP, who quipped that while women arriving at Parliament for the first time are still looking for the bathrooms, the men are already in top positions.”

The researchers also highlighted the specific challenges facing each political group when it comes to addressing gendered inequalities. And, despite their transnational nature, national politics continues to play a major role in many of the groups.

Gender equality at the political group level

These findings have already been communicated to both academics and policy practitioners. A parliamentary workshop was held, to which MEPs and staff were invited.

“Our key message here was that progress in gender equality has to happen at the level of political groups,” remarks Kantola. “We also identified specific challenges facing each group, as well as good and bad practices.”

The project has also reached out to scholars and citizens, with ‘European Parliament’s Political Groups in Turbulent Times’, an [open access book](#). This publication analyses and assesses the role and significance of political groups in EU politics.

In response to the huge amount of interest in the project, Kantola and her colleagues also published the ‘[Guide to Qualitative Research in Parliaments](#)’, which focuses on the investigations conducted by EUGenDem. “This is targeted more at academics, and explains how we gathered and analysed the data,” she explains.

EUGenDem has also helped to shine a light on the importance of the European Parliament on the future of Europe. “I think our research can help citizens understand that Parliament is a place where things happen,” notes Kantola. “Whenever there is a crisis, it is played out in Parliament. Our research also very much focuses on the human element of Parliament – this is a living institution that really matters.”

PROJECT

EUGenDem – Gender, party politics and democracy in Europe: A study of European Parliament’s party groups

COORDINATED BY

University of Helsinki in Finland

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-ERC

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/771676

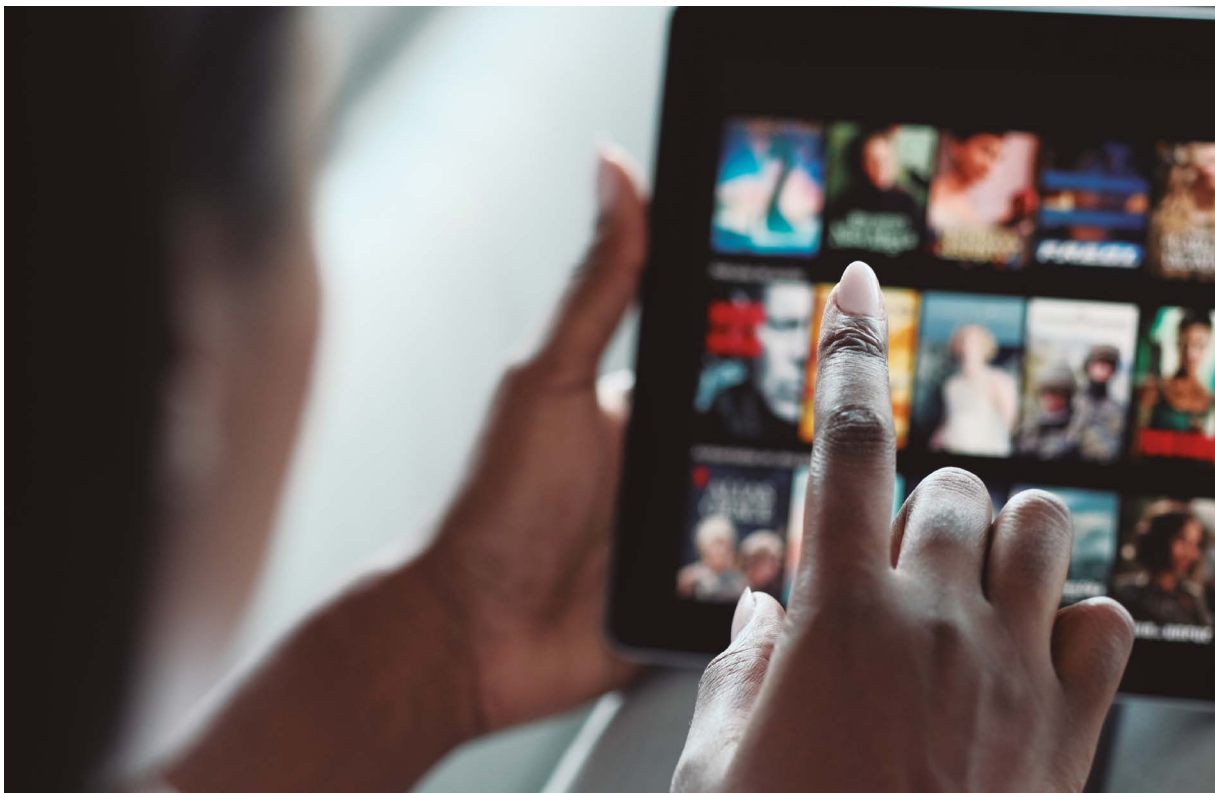
PROJECT WEBSITE

blogs.helsinki.fi/eugendem-project



Are media platforms making or breaking European identity?

Instead of creating a more robust European culture, preliminary research by the EU-funded EUMEPLAT project indicates that modern media platforms, such as streaming services and social media, are having the opposite effect.



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In 2021, 'The Economist' declared that [new streaming media was creating a common European culture](#). "Moments when Europeans sit down and watch the same thing at roughly the same time used to be rare," it said. "Now they are more common, thanks to the growth of streaming platforms such as Netflix."

That's a bold statement, and one that is questioned by [Andrea Miconi](#), a professor of Media Sociology at [IULM University in Milan](#), Italy. "While media platforms can play a role in enhancing

a European identity, the European dimension is rarely portrayed in such media," he says.

Rather than growing a sense of shared European culture, the opposite may be true. With most major web platforms being owned by American companies, much of the content being produced is imported from the United States, or from other major market countries.

With the support of the EU-funded [EUMEPLAT](#) project, Miconi is analysing the role media platforms play in fostering or dismantling European identity. “With a focus on the ‘platformisation’ process and its positive and negative externalities, the main research question is whether or not new platforms such as Netflix, YouTube and NewsFeed are making European culture more or less European,” adds Miconi.

Stream and study

Answering this question requires some substantial binging. Aiming to complete work in February 2024, the EUMEPLAT team is studying indicators related to production, consumption and representation, while also looking for patterns on a national, regional and European level.



While media platforms can play a role in enhancing a European identity, the European dimension is rarely portrayed.

Specifically, researchers are investigating different fields, including national and EU media regulation, the transformation of TV systems, the state of theatrical movie distribution, the most watched programmes on streaming platforms and the most followed profiles on social media. They are also monitoring the ongoing political debates happening on social media.

Although still a work in progress, the answer to one question about how these media platforms impact European identity is already starting to emerge. “We have strong indications that the platformisation – and internationalisation – of today’s media is clearly not working in favour of Europeanisation,” explains Miconi.

Alternative paths

If modern media isn’t helping Europe become ‘more European’, then what is it doing? “This is the real question to be addressed,

which requires both an advanced scientific understanding and a theoretical leap forward,” says Miconi.

Miconi says that quantitative evidence suggests that the European dimension is the less relevant, when compared to both the national pattern of news and media daily usage, and the global one, which is hegemonised by the American platforms. “However, attention must be given to the exceptions to that rule, to the best practices, and even to the weak signals, which may provide a hint of alternative paths to Europeanisation,” he concludes.

Once the research is complete, the project plans to publish its results and recommendations via scientific publications and open data sources. The team is also looking to hold activities targeting students, along with creating applications, both of which will be used to help disseminate the project’s work and increase its impact.

PROJECT

**EUMEPLAT – European Media Platforms:
Assessing Positive and Negative Externalities
for European Culture**

COORDINATED BY

IULM University in Italy

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-SOCIETY

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101004488

PROJECT WEBSITE

eumeplat.eu



From citizen science to participatory democracies

Inspired by citizen science, the EU-funded ISEED project looks at the conceptual and empirical means to revitalise citizen participation in European democracies, culminating in a guide to best practices for citizen engagement.



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Ongoing financial, health and geopolitical crises in Europe have led to an increase in public scepticism of governance and feelings of disengagement from the political process. Coupled with a rise in extremism, these crises threaten core democratic values such as inclusion, participation and political action.

The EU-funded [ISEED](#) project is using the example of citizen science for a model of how the public can be inspired to actively participate in politics.

“Citizen science works by inviting and including non-scientists in the collection and production of scientific knowledge,” says [Eleonora Montuschi](#), a professor of Philosophy of Science at [Ca' Foscari University of Venice](#) in Italy. “By adapting this approach to democratic decision-making, we hope to make the political process more receptive to people’s input and interests while also enhancing citizens’ ability to act as informed decision makers.”

Repurposing citizen science for the political arena

The ISEED project aims to revitalise citizen participation in European democracies by demonstrating the significant impact citizens can have on public decisions. “Citizen science has proved that participation is not an accessory, or a piece of propaganda,” explains Montuschi. “On the contrary, it could be key to improving crucial aspects of how science operates.”

The project is developing tools and strategies for bringing together citizens and policymakers in a purposefully structured way, allowing for cooperative decision-making. “Our project aims to generate a new level of understanding of how deliberative citizen participation can be fostered in democratic EU societies, and to develop insights and tools that could be disseminated beyond the academic sphere,” adds Montuschi.

Building an open access knowledge repository

While still a work in progress, the project has delivered some important results. Based on a preliminary mapping of participatory and deliberative practices, researchers have [published several papers](#) on such participatory concepts as the meaning of public understanding and lay expertise.

On the empirical side of the equation, researchers conducted a series of [case studies](#) on citizen science initiatives taking place in France, Poland and Uruguay. They also carried out [surveys](#) of online and offline forms of citizen participation, and an analysis of arguments extracted from online science-driven debates by means of a digital tool called the Argument Extractor.

“This research lays the groundwork for building an open access knowledge repository that will permanently contribute to a variety of purposes, from academic research to policymaking and citizen education initiatives,” remarks Montuschi.

From research to policy recommendations

This research is being used to inform a policy brief that, when complete, will include recommendations and best practices for citizen engagement. The brief will also include a strategy for scaling up the project’s results as a means of formulating future policy recommendations.

While this brief is being finalised, the project is launching a series of workshops across six partner countries. Each workshop will present different scenarios on what the future of democracy could look like in that country, along with providing strategies for using the principles of citizen science to help achieve (or avoid) said scenarios.

The project also aims to make all its data and tools available to the public for consultation and use. “Ultimately, we expect to contribute to knowledge-sharing in the arena of citizen science and beyond – and hope to inspire future initiatives to do the same,” concludes Montuschi.



Citizen science has proved that participation is not an accessory, or a piece of propaganda.

PROJECT

ISEED – Inclusive Science and European Democracies

COORDINATED BY

Ca' Foscari University of Venice in Italy

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-SOCIETY

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/960366

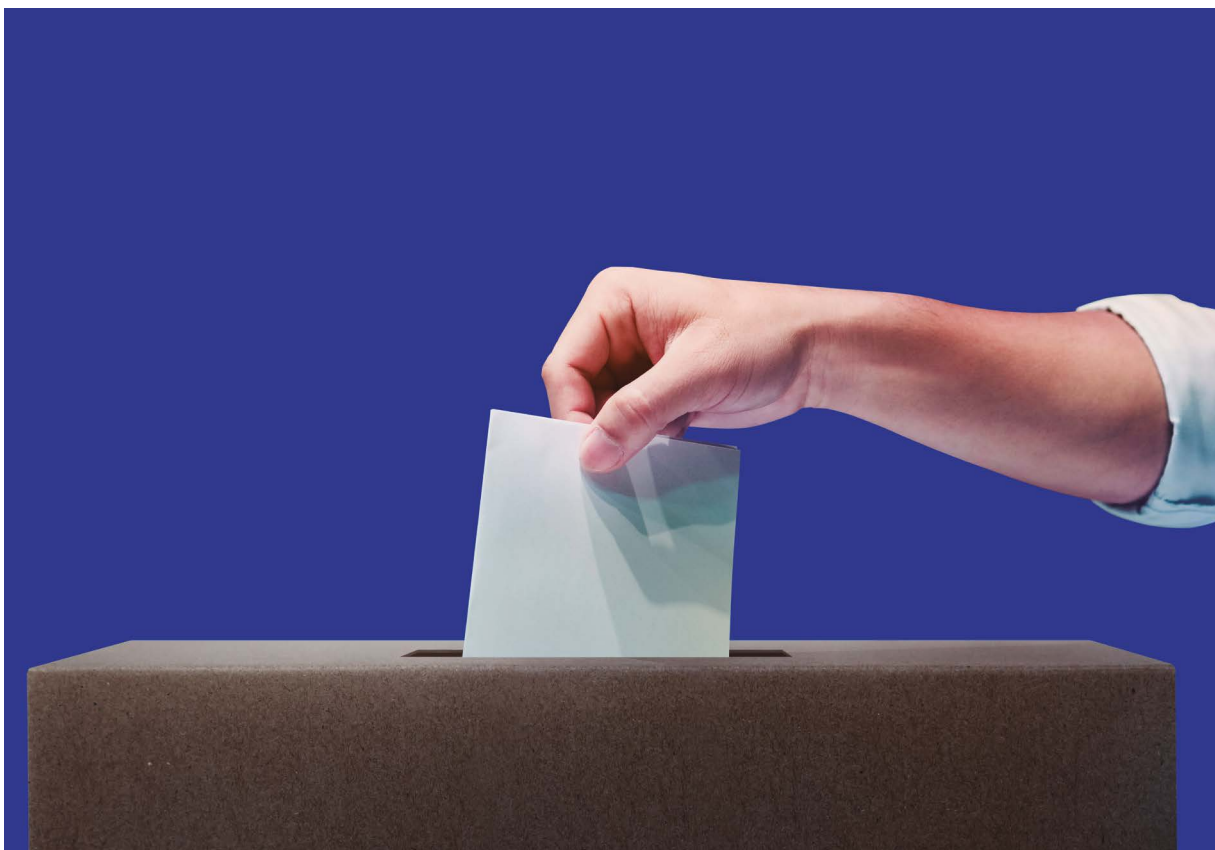
PROJECT WEBSITE

iseeurope.eu



Unlawful ballots? Defining the limits of direct democracy

Should there be a limit on what policy changes can be put to a referendum? Who should review compliance with such limits? These are the questions that the EU-funded LIDD project aims to answer.



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To use an American aphorism: democracy is messy, and never easy. Take the concept of direct democracy, where citizens vote on policy initiatives themselves, rather than deferring to elected officials. It may sound like democracy at its purest – but it comes with its own problems.

“Citizens across Europe are being increasingly asked to vote on proposals that are problematic from the perspective of the rule of

law, such as immigration restrictions or the prohibition of same-sex marriage,” says Daniel Moeckli, a professor of Public Law with a focus on international and comparative law at the [University of Zurich](#) in Switzerland.

According to Moeckli, referendums such as these are creating tension between popular sovereignty and the rule of law. “Where should

the legal limits of direct democracy be drawn and who should be responsible for ensuring compliance with these limits?" he asks.

With the support of the EU-funded [LIDD](#) project, Moeckli set out to provide a scientific basis for answering these types of questions.

Europeans at the ballot box

To start, Moeckli and a team of researchers undertook the daunting task of collecting and categorising information on all direct-democratic instruments that exist in the 46 member states of the [Council of Europe](#).

"We wanted to find out whether, in terms of practice, there is agreement on certain minimum standards related to direct-democratic instruments," explains Moeckli.

The team found a great diversity of direct-democratic instruments used across Europe, far greater than was commonly perceived. Nonetheless, says Moeckli, all states struggle to meaningfully define the limits that should be imposed on such instruments. They also have difficulty devising efficient, rule of law-based frameworks for maintaining compliance with these limits.



Citizens across Europe are being increasingly asked to vote on proposals that are problematic from the perspective of the rule of law, such as immigration restrictions or the prohibition of same-sex marriage.

The LIDD project, which received support from the [European Research Council](#), is compiling its research into three different databases, which researchers plan to use to gain deeper insights on the topic.

One of these includes information on legal regulations of direct-democratic instruments in all Council of Europe member states, while another includes all the referendums held in these states since 1990. This year was chosen as a starting point for the analysis, as it correlates with the fall of Communism and democratic reforms of government in eastern European states.

A third database, which remains under construction, will cover all citizen initiatives launched in these states since 1990.

"With these databases, we now have the basis for analysing individual referendums

and popular initiatives, checking whether legal limits have been violated and finding out whether there are court decisions on such violations," adds Moeckli.

The data has been verified by constitutional law experts from across Europe, and is publicly available through an [online tool](#) that provides various ways of analysing the information.

Implications for direct democracy

LIDD researchers are currently analysing the gathered data to identify issues that can be regarded as off limits to direct-democratic decision-making across Europe.

The project also aims to elaborate best practices that states can use to define and apply reasonable limits to direct democracy in a sensible – and democratic – way. These could include, for example, establishing minimum standards that the institutional and procedural systems for reviewing compliance with these limits must satisfy.

"Our research holds important implications for how direct-democratic instruments can be used in the future as a means for upholding – not challenging – established democratic ideals," concludes Moeckli.

PROJECT

**LIDD – Popular Sovereignty vs. the Rule of Law?
Defining the Limits of Direct Democracy**

COORDINATED BY

University of Zurich in Switzerland

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-ERC

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/772160

PROJECT WEBSITE

lidd-project.org



Evaluating the threat to free debate in Europe

Open communication in Europe is under increasing threat from censorship, disinformation campaigns and repression. The EU-funded MEDIADELCOM project developed a tool to diagnose the health of Europe's media landscape, and its impact on deliberative communication.



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Broadcast, print and online news media [play a critical role](#) at the heart of democratic societies. But as populist and ultra-right political forces gather strength in Europe, informed decision-making, based on a free press, is increasingly under threat.

Deliberative communication is a precondition to democracy. Through this, opposing views are openly debated in a tolerant way to find agreeable solutions to the issues facing society.

The [MEDIADCOM](#) project sought to understand how deliberative communication is being affected by shifting media and democratic landscapes across Europe, and developed a diagnostic tool to assess the risks and opportunities due to changes in media between 2000 and 2020.

"The decline in freedom of expression could happen gradually, and might go unnoticed," says [Halliki Harro-Loit](#), MEDIADCOM project coordinator and professor of Journalism at the [University of Tartu](#) in Estonia.

Monitoring the health of the media

MEDIADCOM's tool is a complex model that monitors national media landscapes, and builds best- and worst-case future scenarios. Policymakers and other decision makers can assess how media transformation could affect deliberative communication.

The model incorporates knowledge of factors including media production and literacy, legal and ethical regulation (including media ownership and accountability), the journalism industry (such as job markets), and media usage patterns.



The decline in freedom of expression could happen gradually, and might go unnoticed.

To create the tool, MEDIADCOM used two types of country reports: the first asked what knowledge is available on current media-related risks to deliberative communication; the second focused on their diagnosis in certain countries.

The team found a lack of longitudinal information, especially in eastern European countries, and a tendency for data on media usage to be increasingly under private control, making it difficult to access.

One innovative aspect to the project was the use of 'agent-based scenarios' in the modelling. This goes beyond structural factors in the media, and incorporates knowledge of the motivation and competence of different members of society (agents) and the interactions between them.

"Journalists, different types of media prosumers, lawyers, etc. all have different influences in different countries," adds Harro-Loit. This analysis will be presented in a forthcoming book.

Uncovering country-specific situations

MEDIADCOM's analysis revealed differences between EU countries and a varied 'matrix' of differences: some factors balance out other risks.

In Estonia for example, press freedom (which includes factors such as state ownership) is stronger than freedom of expression (the legal basis for citizens to express their thoughts and opinions freely), notes Harro-Loit. "If we didn't have a strong community of journalists sensitive to any restrictions, could we maybe also move towards a more authoritarian regime?" she asks.

Practically, this means that EU-wide policies may have varied consequences. In Greece, the introduction of [GDPR rules on data management](#) improved citizen access to information. Yet in Estonia, it supported a tendency toward less transparency in public and private spheres.

The MEDIADCOM team hopes the analytic tools and scenarios will help show how regulations or shifts in the media landscape will affect deliberative communication. Ultimately this could help to foster social cohesion across Europe.

"MEDIADCOM in some aspects is in the same position that climate researchers were about 20 years ago," says Harro-Loit. "We call for more systematic, purposeful research that assesses potential risks."

PROJECT

MEDIADCOM – Critical Exploration of Media Related Risks and Opportunities for Deliberative Communication: Development Scenarios of the European Media Landscape

COORDINATED BY

University of Tartu in Estonia

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-SOCIETY

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101004811

PROJECT WEBSITE

mediadelcom.eu



Measuring public trust in experts, from COVID to climate change

Have people had enough of experts? Interdisciplinary research by the EU-funded PERITIA project has produced a toolkit to help policymakers better understand the role of expertise in steering public opinion.



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Policy decisions in [democracies](#) are mostly driven by the advice of experts. Trust in these experts is therefore necessary for new policies to bear fruit. But with the rise of populism and anti-elite sentiment, policy expertise is being called into question by parts of society.

The [PERITIA](#) project was set up to explore the question of trust in experts in the context of climate change. Yet due to a force of circumstance coinciding with the launch of the project in March 2020, the project decided also to focus on the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We could not simply ignore this momentous event, and began to investigate questions of trust and expertise in the context of the pandemic, as well as vaccine hesitancy,” explains lead investigator of the PERITIA project, [Maria Baghramian](#), a professor at the School of Philosophy, [University College Dublin](#), Ireland.

From theory to application

Drawing from 11 institutions spread across nine countries, PERITIA brought together a team of philosophers, social and natural scientists, policy experts, ethicists, psychologists, media specialists and civil society organisations. Together, the group addressed the complex issues of trust in, and trustworthiness of, experts’ roles in policy decisions.



When it comes to climate change, there are mindsets that play important roles in the decision to engage with expert advice.

The first two phases of the project investigated the social, psychological and ethical dimensions of trust in experts. In the final phase, the project attempted to engage directly with the public by hosting public discussions in five countries, on the topics of transport and climate change.

“The underlying thought was that structured but open discussions between experts and non-experts would enhance mutual understanding, and hence trust,” notes Baghramian.

Indicators to measure and establish trust

One major finding was that shared social and political values can affect the role of expertise in people’s decision-making. Trust in the expertise of social scientists, for example, is lower among those on the more conservative end of the political spectrum.

“The project also found that, at least when it comes to climate change, there are clearly distinguishable psychological or attitudinal mindsets that play important roles in the decision to engage with expert advice and to take action,” adds Baghramian. For example, those with a fatalistic attitude towards climate change pose a challenge to any attempt to initiate positive climate action.

The findings emphasise the multidimensionality of trust in experts, a complex picture that is summarised in the [PERITIA Trustworthiness Toolkit](#). The full quantitative findings and their analysis and policy guidelines are also available through the [PERITIA Trust Hub](#).

Building trust in experts

The combined output of the project [includes](#) 23 peer reviewed articles, five journal issues, three books, two literature reviews, two podcast series, data from a major European survey, three international conferences and 10 workshops.

PERITIA also produced [policy documents, briefing reports and working papers](#) for policymakers at the European Commission and beyond. Several PERITIA project members have presented their findings to policymakers and parliamentary working groups.

And beyond the public forums and podcasts, the project also ran the [Youth on Trust](#) essay competition in conjunction with the [Irish Young Philosopher Awards](#) and [\[Un\]Truths](#) lecture series.

“We hope this extensive effort to reach out to the general public – roughly 2 million people reached during the lifetime of the project – will have a positive impact on creating a climate of trust in legitimate expertise,” says Baghramian.

PROJECT

PERITIA – Policy, Expertise, and Trust in Action

COORDINATED BY

University College Dublin in Ireland

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-SOCIETY

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870883

PROJECT WEBSITE

peritia-trust.eu



Testing the link between politics and appeals to emotion

The rise in populism across Europe suggests that politicians increasingly appeal to voters' baser emotions, and the electorate is responding. Drawing from historical speeches and experimental work, the EU-funded POLEMIC project paints a more complex picture.



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In politics, emotions can run high, and a suitably emotive campaign can sway an election. Are politicians today making more emotional appeals to citizens than in the past? Do these appeals work to change the politics of a society, and if so, what type of emotional appeals are most effective?

The [POLEMIC](#) project, which was funded by the [European Research Council](#), sought to answer all these questions and more. A team of researchers led by [Gijs Schumacher](#), associate professor in Political Science at the University of Amsterdam, used state-of-the-art



We didn't find that language in politics is becoming more emotional, as is often suggested.

methods to examine historical emotional appeals by politicians, and whether people responded to them.

"From disciplines such as psychology, linguistics, sociology and political science we were able to generate different hypotheses that would explain why certain emotional appeals of politicians would affect us," says Schumacher, POLEMIC project coordinator.

The team analysed historical speeches from the [ParlGov](#) database, which contains 30 years of speeches from politicians in seven countries, and [EUSpeech](#), which holds head of government speeches from 15 countries over the past 20 years, as well as Twitter data from Denmark.

Despite the recent shift toward populist politics in Europe, "we didn't find that language in politics is becoming more emotional, as is often suggested," notes Schumacher. "Rather there is much more variation over time and between countries."

Exploring emotional appeal

The researchers explored the effects of emotional appeals, both in text and in facial expressions. In one test, they used software to manipulate the expressions of ingroup and outgroup political leaders – those who share a person's political identity or not – and of ordinary citizens.

They found strong unconscious responses toward the out party leader, detected with both electroencephalography (which measures brain activity) and facial electromyography (which measures faint movement in the muscles used to smile or frown). "This implies we have strong emotional responses to outgroup leaders, and pay close attention to them," explains Schumacher.

Another test exposed participants to two election posters, with politicians' facial expressions, tone and ideology all manipulated. "Smiling and positive tones both work really well," adds Schumacher.

This was the case even when political views didn't align. "In one study we found that the probability of voting for a politician whose statement you disagree with is still 50 % as long as this politician smiles," says Schumacher. The perhaps surprising result is that negative emotional appeals are less effective than positive ones.

A mismatch of emotions

The project also investigated what it means if citizens claim to be angry, anxious or hopeful about politics.

Using people's descriptions of situations that elicited specific emotions together with a set of survey questions, the project identified "that people often mismatch their emotions with the situation," remarks Schumacher, "a really surprising finding, because we can do this in a more personal setting."

This only refers to the conscious experience of emotions, however. "Emotions are a much richer phenomenon, they also include unconscious processes," he adds. In several studies the conscious and unconscious response to a political stimulus did not match.

The findings could lead to new interventions that improve the match between our evaluation of the situation, and the emotions we think we feel, explains Schumacher. This will be explored in a new EU-funded project, [Interdisciplinary Perspective on Adolescence and Democracy](#).

"We have to be more critical toward some of the discourse regarding emotions in politics," says Schumacher. "Journalists, politicians and opinion-makers speak of angry or anxious citizens, but we have to be more critical about what that implies."

PROJECT

POLEMIC – Politics and Emotions Investigated Comparatively

COORDINATED BY

University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-ERC

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/759079

PROJECT WEBSITE

hotpolitics.eu/polemic



Investigating the role of disinformation in the rise of eco-fascism

By understanding how extremists use far right propaganda and disinformation campaigns to radicalise and recruit new members, the EU-funded RADICALISATION project offers strategies to predict and defend against future conflicts.



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An emerging trend often overlooked at the policy level is the exploitation of the [climate crisis](#) by far right extremists.

Understanding this threat is an urgent priority, as white supremacist ideology poses a threat to EU security and social cohesion, and to

fundamental European values, such as tolerance, non-discrimination, and equality.

Co-hosted by [Norwich University](#) in the United States and the [Central European University \(CEU\)](#) in Austria, [RADICALISATION](#) investigated the construction and evolution of online disinformation

campaigns to understand their role in extreme right radicalisation strategies.

The project's preliminary findings point to emerging trends such as the [weaponisation of climate change](#) and its exploitation by far right populist political parties and white supremacist groups – so-called [eco-fascism](#). The project also examined disinformation in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its links to far and extreme right radicalisation.

"As the project evolved, it zoomed in specifically on the link between climate change, violent extremism and the language of eco-fascist propaganda in the global North," says [Eszter Szenes](#), former [Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions \(MSCA\)](#) research fellow, who is now a lecturer in the School of Education at the [University of Adelaide](#).

Understanding online disinformation campaigns

The RADICALISATION project, undertaken with the support of the MSCA programme, drew on a range of theoretical and analytical frameworks, including [systemic functional linguistics](#), [corpus linguistics](#), [forensic linguistics](#), [legitimation code theory](#) and [open-source intelligence \(OSINT\)](#).

This work included finding key narratives in online propaganda and disinformation campaigns, visualising eco-fascist propaganda and disinformation tactics, identifying [axiological constellations](#) to reveal extremist ideologies, and analysing the linguistic anatomy of Russian information warfare.



As the project evolved, it zoomed in on the link between climate change, violent extremism and the language of eco-fascist propaganda.

Disinformation tactics

The project revealed that disinformation tactics within eco-fascist rhetoric are made up of branding non-white populations as 'invading foreigners' and 'parasites' and local minorities as 'foreign species'.

"As a result of such linguistic violence, the invasion of non-native species that threaten the environment becomes synonymous with the invasion of immigrants, the protection of the environment with the protection of borders, trash with people, and environmental cleansing with ethnic

cleansing," explains Szenes in a forthcoming policy brief for the [International Centre for Counter-Terrorism \(ICCT\)](#) in The Hague.

Disinformation tactics in Ukraine were compared to those used in Syria, which laid the groundwork for military intervention. In Syria, Russian presence was justified by claiming to fight 'international terrorism', and in Ukraine, to fight 'Nazis' and 'extremists'. "These findings are especially relevant to the security of the European Union, to predict the possibility of future conflicts," adds Szenes.

Recurring linguistic patterns also construct disinformation tactics that condemn the United States, the EU and NATO as 'terrorist recruiters', 'civilian killers', 'failed states' and the 'declining West' collectively, while praising Russia as a 'terrorist slayer', a 'humanitarian' and a 'global superpower'.

Supporting European democracy in the face of a rising threat

Following the project results, Szenes recommended to the EU that government and law enforcement agencies should move from a reactive to a proactive educational perspective, including critical digital and media literacy, fact-checking, and online safety education in schools.

Szenes is writing the results of the project into an upcoming book 'The language of ecofascist propaganda: Greenwashing white supremacy', to be published by Bloomsbury.

PROJECT

RADICALISATION – 'We're not neo-Nazis anymore': Radicalisation strategies in online far-right propaganda and disinformation campaigns

COORDINATED BY

CEU in Austria

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-MSCA-IF

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/845643

PROJECT WEBSITE

ceu.edu/project/radicalisation



Why healthy distrust is an essential component of democracy

Researchers in the EU-funded TiGRE project investigated how citizens and decision makers can repair and nurture trust toward regulation and governance bodies, an essential task in building a healthy relationship between the electorate and the state.



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As technological infrastructure is increasingly embedded within citizens' lives – including banking, healthcare and personal data – so too is the requirement for citizens to place trust in private companies, and the regimes that regulate them.

Yet this trust, vital to support for democratic governance, has been buffeted by financial crises, food safety incidents, and scandals involving data leaks and threats to [privacy](#) from companies such as Meta, Google and Zoom.

Observing trust within society

To investigate citizens' response to these failings, the [TiGRE](#) project team examined the conditions of trust relating to regulatory regimes. The project sought to understand the dynamics, drivers and political and socio-economic effects of trust.

"We find that citizens tend to perceive regulatory agencies as rather trustworthy," says [Martino Maggetti](#), associate professor in the Institute of Political Studies at the [University of Lausanne](#) and project coordinator of TiGRE. "Similarly, trust between regime 'insiders' remains, on average, rather high across policy sectors and countries."

The TiGRE team pursued two strands of investigation. One looked at trust toward regulatory actors by those outside the regime, such as citizens and the media. The second unpacked trust relations between insiders: legislators, regulators, executive bodies, courts, regulatory intermediaries, regulated organisations and interest groups.

"In TiGRE, we argue that being aware of these, less visible, trust relationships involving different actors is a prerequisite for improving regulatory governance and developing appropriate policy design," explains Maggetti.

The team employed various methods to generate a comprehensive understanding of these relationships, including large-scale surveys, interviews, experiments, social network analysis, focus groups, and media content analysis.

A study was carried out comparing nine EU countries and non-EU countries (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain and Switzerland) across a range of policy sectors, including data protection, finance and food safety. This allowed the team to detect similarities and differences in trust relationships across the group.

Achieving a balance of trust

Relatively high levels of trust were found toward and within regulatory regimes. This is noteworthy, says Maggetti, yet he adds that maximising trust is not always desirable. A coexistence between trust and distrust – and specifically a "trust, but verify" attitude – incentivises regulatory actors to perform well.

"We argue that balancing both trust and reasonable watchfulness helps sustain stable and effective regulatory regimes," notes Maggetti. Blind trust could be detrimental and lead to 'regulatory

capture', a theory that suggests regulatory agencies may end up prioritising their own goals rather than public interest.

A healthy level of distrust, or vigilance, combined with high trust can persuade regulators to be more reflective. "This is nevertheless a balancing act, as too high distrust may lead to the erosion of the legitimacy of the regulatory regime," Maggetti explains.

Supporting trust in democracy

The TiGRE analysis suggests that in the face of crises that give rise to distrust among citizens and users, regulators can choose appropriate strategies to maintain or improve trust in regulatory regimes and democratic governance.

The team recommends a review and possible improvements to the institutional design of regulatory regimes concerning four major democratic qualities: participation, inclusiveness, accountability and especially transparency.

"Rather than remaining silent or shifting the blame, a trust-repair strategy is more effective when agencies respond to criticism of regulatory failure," says Maggetti. "By admitting the problem, explaining its causes, apologising for their responsibility and promising to learn from their errors," trust can be restored.



Balancing both trust and reasonable watchfulness helps sustain stable and effective regulatory regimes.

PROJECT

TiGRE – Trust in Governance and Regulation in Europe

COORDINATED BY

University of Lausanne in Switzerland

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-SOCIETY

CORDIS FACTSHEET

cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870722

PROJECT WEBSITE

tigre-project.eu



New data set redefines how we understand democratic transitions

By looking at episodes of regime transformation, a new data set from the EU-funded FASDEM project allows scholars to address democratisation and autocratisation as related but obverse processes.



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Why do some dictatorships transition to democracy, whereas others resist pressures to liberalise? And why do some democracies exhibit resilience, when others experience backsliding or break down altogether?

While such questions are at the heart of understanding regime change, the existing quantitative approaches used by political scientists require improbable assumptions and rely on debatable units of analysis. They also pursue questions about democratic

breakdown and democratic transition as separate research agendas, which hinders a joint and coherent study of regime change.

Thanks to a new data set on regime transformation developed by researchers at the [Varieties of Democracy Institute](#), scholars can now address democratisation and autocratisation as related but obverse processes.

The [data set](#), which was created with the support of the [FASDEM](#) project, captures 680 episodes of regime transformation (ERTs), spanning 1900 to 2019. It also differentiates between broad types of regime transformation: liberalisation in autocracies, democratic deepening in democracies, and autocratisation in both democracies and autocracies. The FASDEM project was funded by the [European Research Council](#).

The ERT database distinguishes 10 patterns with distinct outcomes, including democratic transition or breakdown. Using the data set, researchers concluded that only some ERTs have the potential for regime transition, and that there is no guarantee that such a transition will occur. In fact, only about 40 % of autocracies that liberalise actually transition into a democracy. By contrast, 77 % of democracies experiencing autocratisation break down by the end of the episode.

Three key advantages

According to an [article published](#) in the 'Journal of Peace Research', by providing novel insights into regime change over the past 120 years, the ERT data set offers three main advantages over other approaches.

First, it avoids problematic assumptions of unit homogeneity and constant as well as symmetric effects. Second, it integrates key insights from qualitative studies by treating regime change as a gradual and uncertain process. Finally, the data set allows scholars to study democratisation and autocratisation within the same systematic framework.

To illustrate these advantages, researchers compared ERT data for Türkiye with data provided by other sources. While the other sources either overstated the level of democracy or captured transitions and breakdowns, only the ERT data set accurately described Türkiye's long-term development.

Impacting conflict research

The ERT data set provides unique benefits to both quantitative and qualitative researchers. As such, researchers are confident the data set will find broad application in conflict research. This includes informing ongoing debates about whether autocratising countries are more belligerent, if democratisation in ethnically heterogeneous societies leads to a higher risk of civil conflict, and what impact military intervention has on a democracy.

PROJECT

FASDEM – Failing and Successful Sequences of Democratization

COORDINATED BY

University of Gothenburg in Sweden

FUNDED UNDER

Horizon 2020-ERC

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