



The roots of further electoral revolt?

Centre Kantar sur le futur de l'Europe

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Electoral revolt is underway. We are already seeing this through recent polls and election results across Europe. But what next?

In this note, seven Kantar Public experts analyse the latest Eurobarometer data to draw out the common roots of recent electoral upsets. This data suggests that a silent majority who felt ignored by the 'elite' have now found a voice through using the ballot box to disruptive effect.

Once the euphoria of winning is over, the new political leaders and parties now enjoying electoral success, will need to address real fears - shared by citizens across Europe - about unemployment, the cost of living and immigration.

As Job van den Berg from Kantar Public Netherlands writes, "The question is whether new political parties are genuinely able to represent dissatisfied voters when the elections are over."

This note is published by *Centre Kantar sur le futur de l'Europe*, which aims to contribute to the public debate on Europe.

Eurobarometer tables can be found here:

<http://ec.europa.eu/COMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2130>

Europe on Alert

by Edouard Lecerf (Kantar Public)
and Julien Zalc (Kantar Public,
Brussels)

Many people regard the results of the latest elections across Europe as primarily due to the recession and its repercussions. Indeed, an OECD survey of 22 EU countries found that since 2010, inequalities have widened in 14, have remained stable in four and decreased in four more.

What is more, the indicators of tension within the European Union have reached levels close to 'Red Alert' in recent years.

Europeans still see unemployment as the main problem their country is facing, but from a more personal perspective worry most about the cost of living.

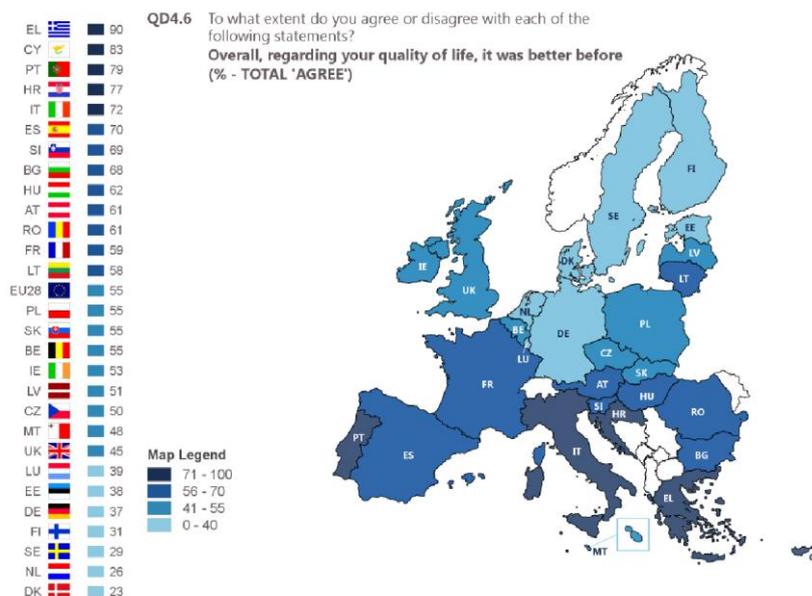
More precisely, almost two-thirds of Europeans say that the job situation is bad in their country (65%) and majorities share this negative vision in almost all Member States, most markedly in Greece (99%), Spain (96%), France (90%) and Portugal (90%).

In terms of more general impressions of the economic situation, the case of the United Kingdom is particularly interesting – and perhaps revealing.

What was striking in the Eurobarometer Survey conducted in May 2016, shortly before the Brexit referendum, was not so much that British respondents were anxious about the national economic situation (53% described it as good) but that there was a discrepancy between this upbeat assessment of the national economy and the much less confident judgment (30%) of the economic health of Europe.

This is the background to some of the motivations of the British voters who thought, this June, that their future might look brighter outside a Europe which they see both as lagging economically and also insufficiently concerned about their national interests (an opinion shared by 54%).

Other countries also share the feeling that they are living in a Europe which lags behind their own country in economic terms. This is particularly the case for Germany, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Austria.



Nostalgia and distrust of the establishment

The logical consequence is that Europeans, and in particular people in the most vulnerable groups, find it hard to see a positive future.

57% of those who say they have difficulties making ends meet, have lost confidence in the future, as have 44% of unemployed people and an equivalent proportion of the least educated.

This pessimism is also tinged with nostalgia; the majority of Europeans (55%) agree that the quality of life “was better before”.

This proportion is highest (75%) among those who have the most financial difficulties.

They are also uneasy about their difficulty in finding positive touchpoints in the world around them.

Today, globalisation evokes negative feelings for the majority of the vulnerable groups mentioned above.

Immigration – seen as the main problem facing the European Union (48%) - has heightened certain tensions. For almost six in ten Europeans (58%), the immigration of people coming from outside the European Union evokes negative feelings.

Making one’s voice heard

Beyond what some have seen as a surge of protest by voters looking for a new economic frame of reference, the latest electoral results were fuelled by rhetoric challenging the leading figures (the “elites”) and the rules of democracy itself.

Europeans are even more critical of those who govern and inform them than of the economic situation.

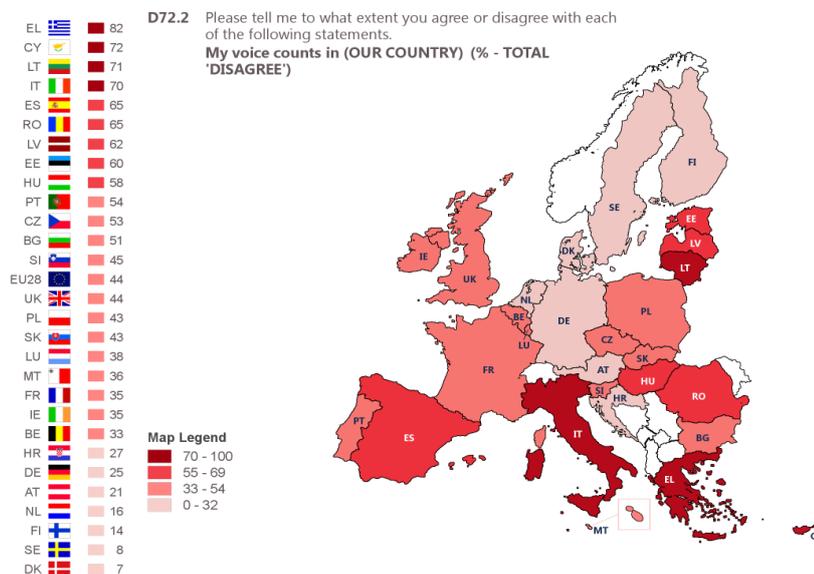
Political parties are widely disparaged: almost 8 out of 10 Europeans do not trust them (78% versus 15% who do). On average, national governments hardly do better (68% ‘distrust’ them). The European Union itself enjoys the trust of just a third of Europeans.

Nor are the media really spared, since they are suspected of being too close to the political and economic powers. Although a narrow majority of people surveyed (53%) believe that the media do provide trustworthy information, almost 6 out of 10 (57%) simultaneously believe that this information is influenced by political or commercial bias.

On these fragile bases, almost half of Europeans consider that democracy does not work well in their country (47% versus 51%). This opinion is held by 64% of unemployed people in Europe and 71% of those who have financial difficulties.

So what can we say about these ‘silent majorities’ who have been decisive during recent votes, who insist that they are ignored by ‘the elite’ and who certain leaders and parties nevertheless claim to represent? In autumn 2016, a huge 44% of Europeans said that they felt that their voice did not count in their own country. 64% of Europeans who are unemployed, and 71% of Europeans who have financial difficulties asserted this.

And using the ballot box to disruptive effect has now become a way of making these objections heard.



UK

by Alex Thornton Kantar Public UK

Brexit – what can the rest of the EU learn from the populist mood in the UK?

Six months on from the UK referendum on EU membership and it's far from clear what Brexit will mean for the country and the EU. If anything, the UK's split decision is now under even greater scrutiny than immediately after 23 June; the government are drawn into a number of legal battles and a parliamentary vote on the Brexit process may follow.

Observers typically cite public disaffection and economic unrest as catalysts for populism. Some of the Eurobarometer results are therefore surprising: in the run up to Brexit the UK displayed some of the highest levels of life satisfaction seen in any EU country (94% were satisfied with the life they led), UK residents were also upbeat about their national and household financial situation compared with much of Europe. This was far from a nation in despair.

Rather the national mood was driven by a lack of trust in political establishments and a sharp rise in popular concern about immigration.

In May this year, the Eurobarometer showed nearly two thirds (62%) of UK citizens did *not* trust their own National Government, higher even than the 59% who did not trust the EU. This is nothing new - Eurobarometer has shown trust in political establishments to be steadfastly low in the UK and elsewhere for more than a decade.

Furthermore, public perceptions of immigration played a part in the UK's decision to leave. Prior to Brexit, more than a third (38%) of Brits described immigration as one of the top two issues facing their country. The magnitude for this demands our attention - this made immigration the single biggest issue for the public. In contrast just 14% felt unemployment was as important, and 11% felt that the economic situation was as important. As recently as 2013 the reverse was true; unemployment and the economic situation were seen as more important. This, and the lack of public trust in political establishments, weighed heavily on government when making commitments to the British public.

Much of this will sound familiar to others across the EU. Many across the continent will watch with interest to see what happens next in the UK. One thing is clear - the referendum has resulted in more questions than it answered and the fallout may take years to reconcile.

Poland

by Joanna Skrzynska

Kantar Public Poland

Good is not enough - post-truth politics from a Polish perspective

In 2015 both presidential and parliamentary elections took place in Poland. The previously little-known candidate Andrzej Duda won the presidential election ahead of President Bronisław Komorowski, despite the latter's healthy approval ratings: in December 2014, a few months before the elections, almost 70% of Poles believed that Komorowski was handling his responsibilities well. In the parliamentary elections the major opposition force - Law and Justice - won an overall majority. An "anti-system" party led by the right-wing rock musician Pawel Kukiz also took several seats in the parliament. This marked the eclipse of the political elites that had governed for years. Hampered by unresolved scandals, Civil Platform was removed from power at a time when the unemployment rate was falling and overall optimism in Poland was rising. Under these generally propitious circumstances, the key slogan of the winning campaign was about "good change". There are clear analogies with the recent US elections ("Make America Great Again").

As the Eurobarometer survey shows, the Polish government of Law and Justice has not encouraged any change in attitudes towards the institutions of power. Distrust is still the dominant feeling towards political parties, government and parliament. The same goes for the traditional media.

Interestingly, respondents in Poland are more likely than those in other EU countries to claim that social media, sharply criticised after the recent US elections, is a reliable source of information (53%). This factor creates a breeding ground for post-truth politics. What does it mean? Without rebuilding trust, even the most capable and respected politicians will struggle to win over those who are not bound by any need to stick to the facts. They are on a hiding to nothing against those who use emotions, demagoguery and shock tactics to support their arguments.

France

by Guillaume Caline

Kantar Public France

Darker than necessary

The presence of a populist party in France, thriving on the fear of immigration and a rejection of globalisation and the establishment, is hardly new. The Front National emerged in French political life in the 1980s. Almost 15 years before the Brexit referendum and the election of Donald Trump, Jean-Marie Le Pen's qualification for the second round of the presidential election already represented a form of 'electoral revolt'. On that occasion, the leader of the Front National won only 17.8% of the vote. In the most recent elections, the Front National and its president Marine Le Pen together took between 25% and 30% of the votes of the French electorate.

The roots of the populist vote in France are deep and diverse. The results of the latest Eurobarometer survey shed some light on certain aspects of the French situation.

The rejection of the 'system' is principally fuelled by an extremely negative and pessimistic view of the country's position. In the matter of their country's economic situation, the French are consistently among the most pessimistic of Europeans – most often along with the Greeks, Spaniards and Portuguese. However, although France's economic position is far from enviable, objectively speaking, compared with that of its neighbours (and particularly Greece), it does not justify such a bleak view. This mindset is not limited to the economy, but reflects deep and generalised pessimism, leading 76% of the French to say that 'things are going in the wrong direction' in their country today (only the Greeks are more negative).

This gap between the reality, not always rosy, but not catastrophic either, and the very bleak French view of their society, is partly due to a deep crisis of confidence in the French political system and in the intermediary organisations. 55% of the French are not satisfied with the way democracy works in France: they are among the Europeans who are least likely to trust their government and their political parties (4% - the lowest level in Europe).

The success of the anti-system vote also reflects the low level of trust that the French have in the media, which is accused, like politicians, of being cut off from reality or of supporting the 'establishment'. Only 34% of French people believe that the media provide trustworthy

information, compared with 53% at a European level; again, only the Greeks are more negative.

Finally, both the Front National and left-wing populist movements thrive on the demand for protection from globalisation, which is seen as a threat: globalisation evokes negative feelings for 54% of French respondents, compared with 40% of Europeans overall.

In this context, and with the threat of Islamic terrorism in the forefront of voters' minds, the 2017 presidential and parliamentary elections will undoubtedly bring new electoral success for the Front National, even if the French voting system – with majority voting in two rounds - will probably continue to keep the party from national responsibilities.

Netherlands

by Job van den Berg

Kantar Public Netherlands

Could new parties attract more political trust in the Netherlands?

One of the most striking findings of the latest Eurobarometer study is that trust in Dutch political parties has risen slightly, and is on average significantly higher than in other EU countries. 35% of Dutch voters now tend to trust political parties, up from 31%. At the same time, distrust has fallen, from 62% to 57%.

Eurobarometer results also show that opinions are becoming more polarised in the Netherlands than elsewhere in the EU. For instance, approximately 40% of citizens say that 'things are going in the right direction', but at the same time 35% instead suggest that 'things are going in the wrong direction': optimists and pessimists are found in almost equal numbers. In the remaining Member States, there is much more consensus on this question, leading to a less heterogeneous, polarised picture. In recent months, new political parties have been started in the Netherlands in response to this increasing polarisation, claiming to represent the opinions of groups such as Turkish voters, lower middle class people or 'the older voter'. These parties are all anti-establishment and are sometimes led by disillusioned politicians who were formerly members of established or incumbent parties.

Another explanation for the increase in trust in political parties may be that the run-up to the US elections has encouraged people to believe that non-established parties representing the voice of

the 'dissatisfied voter' can wield more power in the political arena. The latest opinion polls in the Netherlands are indicating rising support for the radical right PVV, and it may be that the increasing popularity of right-oriented and new political parties is due to the fact that voters are more likely to believe that anti-established parties can help to bring about change. Trump's win in the presidential election has boosted trust in new, rather than established political parties.

An interesting question is whether the March general election in the Netherlands will intensify the split between 'winners' and 'losers' of globalisation and 'establishment' and 'non-established' politicians and parties. Are these new political parties really able to respond to negative feelings about democracy, globalisation and migration? **The question is whether new political parties are genuinely able to represent dissatisfied voters when the elections are over.** This could lead to a more generalised increase of trust in political parties in the Netherlands.

Germany

by Ingo Leven

Kantar Public Germany

'It's *not* the economy, stupid'...

In Germany there is much discussion of the emergence of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). Founded in 2013 and described as a populist right wing party, it poses a threat mainly, but not solely, to Chancellor Merkel's mainstream party CDU, and achieved double-digit results at this year's five regional elections held across the country. The AfD will be a new player in next year's federal elections, and it is currently very likely that six parties will be represented in new federal parliament.

The attitudes of Germans have been frequently measured by studies in Germany. The most recent of the regular surveys of extremism conducted by the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation (this edition is entitled *Gespaltene Mitte — feindselige Zustände*) revealed several interesting facts. First of all it found that a fairly stable and not increasing proportion of Germans hold hostile views about certain groups (e.g. anti-Semitism, hostility towards Muslims). The survey also tested some new populist statements and found that a rather high proportion of Germans agreed with them.

A majority of Germans (55%) totally agree that in Germany you are not allowed to say anything bad

about foreigners without being called a racist, and two-fifths (40%) totally agree that Germany should focus on itself. However, less than a fifth (18%) say that Germany would do better outside the European Union. Thus the more general statement (Germany should focus on itself) attracts more support than the statement expressing the possible consequences (Germany would be better off outside the EU). A similar pattern emerges when we consider the next pair of statements. More than four in ten Germans (42%) totally agree that the government conceals the truth from the public. But 'only' a little over a quarter (28%) totally agree that the government is cheating the public. Another study, the Shell Youth Survey, has found for some years that two-thirds of young adults and adolescents totally agree that 'politicians don't care what people like you and me think'.

The Eurobarometer research can enrich this German perspective by considering these results in a European context. At first glance, Germans seem less inclined than citizens in other Member States to turn away from the political system as it currently works. The main reason for this is quite simple. Germans are more satisfied with their personal lives (89%) than the European average (80%), and are much more likely to say that their country's economic situation is 'good' (83%, against a European average of 39%). Generally speaking, trust in German institutions such as the media and the national government and parliament is also higher than the European average. But this does not mean that the establishment should be complacent about the rise of populist ideas. Fewer people in Germany trust the EU, and fewer have a positive image of it. Even more importantly, fewer Germans expect their personal lives to be 'better' over the next twelve months.

In a European context, overall support for populist statements in Germany is relatively low. But we must bear in mind that that Germans are not overwhelmingly optimistic about their personal future prospects, and that in general a rather high proportion of people in Germany are growing away from the political system as it currently works. Political parties would do well to heed the clear warning signs.

Le Centre Kantar sur le Future de L'Europe

Authors and contacts:

Europe: julien.zalc@kantarpublic.com & edouard.lecerf@kantarpublic.com

United Kindom: alex.thornton@kantarpublic.com

Germany: ingo.leven@kantarpublic.com

France: guillaume.caline@kantapublic.com

Poland: joanna.skrzynska@kantarpublic.com

Netherlands: job.van.den.berg@kantarpublic.com