
YOUNG EUROPEANS BELIEVE IN THE EU, FEAR DONALD TRUMP

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Given the chance, young Europeans would vote no to a Brexit, Frexit, Grexit or Polexit. They believe in democracy but not in their political institutions. And they see Donald Trump as a threat, a new study shows.

New research indicates that young people in Britain, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and Spain are, by varying degrees, not inclined to embrace populist positions, nor would they support their country leaving the bloc, if they had a chance to vote on it, the Youth Europe 2018 study, carried out by YouGov on behalf of the TUI Foundation, found.

Asked to vote on whether their country should leave the European Union, 71 percent of young Europeans said "no," an increase over last year when 61 percent said they would opt to remain. Their attitudes definitely have to do with the effect of Brexit, says Marcus Spittler, a research fellow focused on populism, youth and democracy at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center and a consultant on the study.

"Young people voted against Brexit beforehand, and now they're seeing how poorly the negotiations are working between the EU and the United Kingdom."

But there's more to it than just that, he added: "I also think it's [French President Emmanuel] Macron. He has a pro-European vision and speaks very positively about the EU, in contrast to populist actors who regularly engage against the European Union."

Young Europeans see the bloc as primarily being an economic alliance (73 percent). They see the policy of open borders and the freedom to travel and work within the bloc as of secondary importance (69 percent), followed by being an alliance to ensure peace in Europe (63 percent).

Spittler says the rise in support for the European project this year □ which grew most among the French □ is likely not very stable, pointing to the first round of French elections in 2017, when young voters tended to cast their ballots for populist candidates on the right and left. Instead, young people's increased backing for the EU reflects the ability to frame a positive message, a lesson other European policymakers could learn.

'German and European'

The study also showed that more than half of young Europeans (52 percent) are more inclined to

identify as European in addition to their nationality, an increase of 7 percent, while only 34 percent describe themselves exclusively with their nationality, down from 42 percent last year.

Despite seeing themselves as European, though, only one-third (34 percent) trust EU institutions, while even fewer believe in trade unions, churches or the media. Political parties benefit from even less trust.

Young people would like to see change in their countries. Only 17 percent believe their political systems function as they should, while 45 percent perceive a need for reforms and 28 percent believe radical change is the only solution.

France's president calls for more European unity

"People are more involved in democracy and politics in general, but that doesn't mean that they are satisfied with it," says Spittler.

'Democracy is best'

But 58 percent do believe in democracy, and only 6 percent would prefer a different system, the study found. At the same time, the tendency toward holding populist attitudes was as low as 7 percent in Germany and highest in Poland, at 23 percent.

The study identified young people as having a tendency toward populist attitudes depending on their views in three areas: elitism ("The so-called elites are different from the people"); a preference for popular sovereignty ("Politicians in parliament must follow the people's will"); and a belief in the homogeneity and virtuousness of the people ("Ordinary people share common values and interests").

But populists – whether on the right or left – don't necessarily reject democracy. Indeed "when you go back to the populist and the non-populist, you see that both care very much about democracy," Spittler says.

But that doesn't mean they understand it in the same fashion. Those who tend toward populist beliefs are even more distrustful and skeptical of political actors and institutions. Some (64 percent) would like to see political decisions made by experts rather than by elected officials. They may accept the role of opposition parties being compromised so that the political process is not hampered or slowed down.

Whether they had populist tendencies or not, most young people view US President Donald Trump as a threat (57 percent) rather than an opportunity (11 percent). Only young Poles were more inclined to see things differently: 29 percent see Trump as an opportunity, while 25 percent see him as a threat.

YouGov consulted 6,080 16- to 26-year-olds from Britain, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and Spain in online panels for the TUI Foundation. It is the second such study by the foundation, whose goal is to strengthen belief in the European idea.

Kaynak/Source: