The Age of Fear: new polling reveals a gloomy, divided Europe

- Exclusive polling undertaken as part of a major Demos think tank project – *Nothing to Fear but Fear Itself* – shows Euroscepticism is no longer just a British phenomenon, with a desire for EU reform sweeping the continent
- Despite idea of populism being fuelled by globalisation’s divisive forces, a clear majority recognise its benefits both for their country and the region as a whole
- Citizens share widespread pessimism about both Europe’s prospects and their own country’s outlook over the coming year
- Trust in both national and EU-level governments remains low across most countries
- Not all Europeans are convinced of the benefits of social liberalism, and attitudes towards our increasing ethnic and religious diversity are profoundly divided

New polling conducted for a major Demos project on Europe shows a widespread sense of precariousness, uncertainty and pessimism are sweeping the continent – presenting an unprecedented social and political challenge to the future of the Union.

The polling, undertaken by YouGov, shows the UK is the most Eurosceptic country, with Britons (45%) almost twice as likely as any other to support leaving the EU as the preferred long-term strategy. Yet, significant minorities in all countries either want to leave the EU or reduce its powers: (57% in Sweden, 55% in France, 41% in Spain, 40% in Poland, 39% in Germany).

Poland is the only country where a sizeable minority (21%) wants to keep things as they are. Germany and Spain (both 23%) were found to be the most supportive of increasing the EU’s powers – although no country appears enthusiastic about the formation of a single European Government, with Germany the most supportive at 16%, compared the negligible 2% of Britons.

The polling also sheds light on the claim that globalisation is losing support in Western, developed economies, particularly among working class people, and those affected by deindustrialisation over recent decades.

However contrary to expectations, this polling shows widespread support for globalisation across Europe – with a clear majority recognising it has brought benefits to both their own country (58%) and the region as a whole (63%).

That said, the majority of the member states felt Europe had been positively influenced more than their own country, and figures fell further again when asked about its impacts on the local area where they live (55%). The exception is France, where a majority of respondents felt that globalisation had had a negative impact on their country (50% vs 39% positive).

The polling found widespread pessimism about Europe’s prospects over the coming 12 months (40% pessimistic vs. 19% optimistic), and about their own national outlook (41% pessimistic vs. 22% optimistic).

Great Britain is the most pessimistic about Europe’s short-term prospects, with 49% thinking things will get worse for the continent over the next year, and 42% thinking the same for Britain itself.

France is the most negative about its national outlook, with only 13% thinking things will improve, and more than half (53%) expecting a decline. They join the British (24% & 33% expecting things to worsen respectively) as the least optimistic about the outlook for their personal fortunes, with the Swedish (30%) the most bullish.
One exception to the gloomy mood was Spain, one of the worst hit during the financial crisis, whose citizens are both more likely to be optimistic for both Europe (36%) and its own short-term performance (32%).

**Trust in both national and EU-level governments and institutions remains low across most countries.**

The survey also reveals strikingly low levels of trust in national governments, with large majorities in France (61%), Spain (53%) and Poland (53%) reporting no to low trust (0-4/10) in their government. The same is true of attitudes to national parliaments.

When it comes to EU institutions, unsurprisingly, Britons report very low levels of trust in the European Commission (60% reporting low trust). They also hold the European Parliament in low regard, with 62 per cent reporting low levels of trust.

Conversely, Poles have far higher regard for EU institutions, with 36% having a high level of trust (6-10/10) in the Commission and 34% for the European Parliament, compared to 24% and 20% for the national government and parliament.

Perhaps surprisingly, France exceeds Britain’s distrust of the EU institutions, with 65 reporting low trust in the Commission and 66 per cent in the European Parliament. This indicates that France’s apparent commitment to EU membership is despite very low esteem for its institutions.

**Demos’ study, *Nothing to Fear but Fear Itself*, is interested in how economic and social trends are influencing political attitudes, and this polling explores preferences for different leadership styles.**

It found significant disparities is support for both consensus-building and individualistic/autonomous approaches, with Spain again distinct in heavily favouring strong leadership over compromise (58%, compared to Germany’s 14%). This could reflect a yearning for more decisive leadership in response to the country’s hyper-pluralised political system over recent years.

Sweden (64%), Germany (62%) and Poland (58%) were found to be the most likely to support political leaders who govern by consensus and compromise.

**Europe is by no means singing from the same hymn sheet on social liberalism, with significantly varied levels of support across the continent for the changes that have taken place over recent decades.**

Spain and Sweden were found to be the most socially liberal countries, particularly in their support for more women going to work (80% and 74%) and sexual equality (74% and 67%).

Small but not insignificant minorities of around 10% in each member state think that women’s economic participation has changed society for the worse, although twice as many people in Poland (13%), Germany (12%) and Great Britain (12%) believe this than in Sweden (6%). The Polish (35%) and British (17%) are most likely to regard the acceptance of same-sex marriage as having been a negative development.

However, it is clear that changes in gender and sexual equality are seen as much less controversial than increased religious and ethnic diversity, which is a much more divisive issue that gains significantly less support across the board.

Spain (50%), Sweden (41%) and – perhaps surprisingly - Britain (41%) are the most supportive of diversity, and they are twice as likely to see a positive societal impact than in Germany, France and Poland. 46% of French people think ethnic and religious diversity has changed their country for the worse, but it’s also high in other countries, with 32% of Britons saying this also.

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Notes to Editors -

Further Information and Media Contact

For more information about the project, ‘Nothing to Fear but Fear Itself?’, please contact the project coordinator, Demos’ Head of External Affairs and International Projects, Sophie Gaston on sophie.gaston@demos.co.uk or (+44) 0207 367 6325.

About the Project

Nothing to Fear but Fear itself?  
This major pan-European research project from the UK-based Demos think tank seeks to capture how an emerging culture and politics of fear is gripping the European Union as a whole, and its unique manifestations within member states. The project addresses five levels of impacts: party politics, public policy, social cohesion and integration, media rhetoric, citizens and identity.

Demos is undertaking extensive pan-European research, as well as conducting specific analysis on the United Kingdom’s vote to leave the European Union. We are commissioning exclusive new academic research within five other member states to provide a snapshot of the ‘flash-points of fear’ on the ground in Spain, France, Germany, Poland and Sweden. The project is supported by two high-level workshops in Brussels, bringing together thought leaders from across the European Union, to map local level impacts and devise solutions at EU, national and grassroots levels. For more information, visit: demos.co.uk/project/nothing-to-fear-but-fear-itself

Polling Methodology

This polling was conducted by YouGov for Demos think tank between 23rd August – 7th September 2016.

YouGov surveyed adults (aged 18+) in six countries: 1661 GB/ 1001 French/ 2125 German/ 1011 Polish/ 1000 Spanish/ 1007 Swedish adults. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of adults aged 18+ on age, gender and region. The YouGov panels (GB, France, Germany and Sweden) also took account of other factors such as: last political vote, education, political attention The non-YouGov panels (Poland and Spain) were sampled by age, gender and region and weighted by these variables in addition to last political vote and education post-fieldwork. All respondents were asked a set of common questions. YouGov is a member of the British Polling Council.

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