

Citizens' Engagement as a cure for democratic backsliding

Results of the Pilot ECoD Democracy Survey, presented at the Council of Europe's World Forum for Democracy

An online pilot survey conducted from 28 Oct to 1 Nov 2022 by European Capital of Democracy (ECoD) shows challenges as well as opportunities for democracies in Europe. Most of the 794 responding Citizens' Jury members observe a decline of their respective country of residence's democratic system - and at the same time wish for more participatory democracy.

From a geographical point of view, residents from all CoE member states were represented, while the participants' nationalities went beyond the CoE region and reached the Middle East, South America and Canada. In terms of gender (55 % women) and age (from 18 to 82, average age 41), the group was well balanced.

Democracies are alive, but weakening

When assessing the democratic situation in their countries of residence, most of the respondents showed a critical point of view: Only 31.1 % fully agreed with the assertion that their respective country shows a strong democracy. Most of them, 45.0 %, partly agree with this assessment, while 8.4 % of them even fully disagree. Being asked about the future developments of democracy in their countries of residence, the Citizen Jurors showed more pessimism. Most of them, 53.1 %, see democracy weakening, while 34.4% expect democracy to stay the same, and only 11.0 % share an optimistic view of democracy, expecting its future strengthening.

Respect for dissent and citizens' concerns

When taking into account political culture, the situation has also worsened. The majority of respondents finds that it is getting somewhat harder (45.4 %), or harder (28.6 %) to have a political disagreement with people of different opinions. Only 18.9 % perceive the situation staying the same. Even fewer think it is getting somewhat easier (4.1 %) or easier (2.6 %).

The respondents' judgement of whether politicians care for the concerns of citizens is sobering. Similar to the share of interviewees who partly agree with having a strong democracy in their respective country, 44.8 % partly believe that elected politicians care about citizens' concerns. Only 5.5 % of them fully agree that citizens' voices are heard, while a significant share of them, 29.1 % partly disagree, and even 19.1 % of them fully disagree with that, pointing to a distrust of elected politicians.

Most important factors and wishes for a well-functioning democracy

In the ranking of the most important factors of a well-functioning democracy, the three highest ranked factors were: 1) Freedom of speech and human rights, 2) Stable democratic institutions, and 3) Fair legal system, which in general all embody crucial elements of consolidated democracies. Interestingly, the share of those who prefer a different kind of democracy is 51.6 %, and slightly higher of 48.4 % who prefer the existing democratic system.

A significant majority of respondents (58.2 %) wishes for more citizen participation, a much higher percentage than the wish for more direct democracy, 26.2 %, or for a stronger parliament, 9.8 %. We conclude thus that the worrying state of democracy today may open a window of opportunity for more citizen participation to strengthen deliberative democracy in the future. ECoD aims to meet these citizens' needs and to contribute to bridging the gap between politicians, political professionals and citizens in the future.

Join the Citizens' Jury to select the first European Capital of Democracy

Starting in 2022, every year, a different city will be designated European Capital of Democracy, chosen by a jury of up to 10,000 European citizens. The Citizens' Jury will serve as a unique sounding board & network for social issues such as participation, democracy & sustainability.

About European Capital of Democracy

European Capital of Democracy is a non-profit organisation, founded by The Innovation in Politics Institute GmbH. Based in Vienna and Berlin, with a network of partner organisations in 20 countries in Europe and beyond, The Innovation in Politics Institute is dedicated to improving politics within the democratic spectrum across party lines. Since 2017, the Institute's Innovation in Politics Awards have honoured 598 people who are at the forefront of political innovation, giving visibility to the best political minds in Europe, providing them with a platform to present their innovative projects, and facilitating best practice exchange across borders.

Uniting democracy defenders across Europe

Efforts to undermine European democracy have been underway for some time – and it is now literally under attack. Taking a stand for our European values has never been more important. Democracy is our safest bet to protect our planet, restore peace, and secure a safe and prosperous future for us and our children. Become a Citizens' Juror now and play a crucial role in strengthening and securing Europe's democratic future!

The Citizens' Jury will be established in all 46 countries of the Council of Europe by the end of 2022. Its members - up to 10,000 European citizens - will select a European Capital of Democracy every year and serve as a unique sounding board and network for social issues.

Democracy needs you, and so do we. Apply now to become a Citizen Juror!

- Add the role as professional experience on your CV
- Give your feedback and exchange on burning issues
- Join information sessions, trainings & workshops

Applications are now open:

<https://capitalofdemocracy.eu/join-the-citizens-jury/>

