



A REPORT ON THE PROJECT
POLITICAL CULTURE,
DEMOCRATIC VALUES
AND MISINFORMATION:
DETECTING DEMOCRATIC
FOOTHOLDS & WEAKNESSES



Democratic Trends in Central Europe

Expert manual

Political Culture, Democratic Values and Misinformation: Detecting Democratic Footholds & Weaknesses

Expert manual

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Contents

Project description 5

Methods 6

Participants and procedure 6

Measures 7

Codebook 10

Links to the project 10

References 10

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Project description

The current world is experiencing a wave of democratic backsliding and populism which are to a great degree caused by misinformation. The Central European region appears to be particularly vulnerable. The Economist Intelligence Unit documents that the state of democracy of all Visegrad countries is falling, all of them currently belong to the category of “defective democracies”, ranking from the 32nd (Czechia) to the 57th (Hungary) world positions. In contrast, Germany ranks 13th, as a “full democracy” although it combines data on both old and new federated states. The 2020 Globsec Report indicated that over half of Czechs and Slovaks would trade their rights and freedoms for a better financial situation, while over a quarter of Poles, Czechs, and Slovaks would prefer an authoritarian leader over a liberal democracy. The majority of Slovaks, Hungarians, and 49% of Czechs believe that it does not matter who runs the government since nothing will change. Importantly, nearly a third of all V4 citizens admit they believe in some of the conspiracy theories. These data are an urgent warning and also give direction to our project: Identify not just the democratic footholds but focus especially on the weak points of democracy. Detect types of citizens most vulnerable to the lack of information, poor selection of information sources, easy explanations of complex problems, and those susceptible to misinformation, conspiracy theories, and hoaxes. We expect that various types of political culture (e.g., the naïve, the alienated) are associated with different cognitive biases and alterations.

The crisis of liberal democracy is alarming and the effect of conspiracy theories is disturbing; to adequately counter them we first need a valid insight. Based on the literature and our cultural experience, we know that the lack of democratic spirit and susceptibility to misinformation cannot be assessed on a single quantitative scale nor treated by a simple antidote. Instead, we first need to identify the diverse non-democratic socio-psychological types in the population and assess their incidence. Once we know these, we may recommend diverse strategies protecting against misinformation and enlightening citizens to better citizenship. Our approach is of political & cognitive psychology. We used surveys of representative national samples and applied original methodology, as well as some items from the Globsec and the World Values Survey for comparison.

Our project respects the Visegrad region’s specificity (especially its shared post-totalitarian experience) as well as the diversity of its cultures and people. Thus: (1) In recognition of the region’s shared culture and history, we have opted for the inclusion of yet another Central European country—Germany, which partly resonates with its post-communist experience yet is complementary by its current stellar democratic record (full democracy status according to Economist and Freedom House criteria). That enhances our methodological options, increases the practicality of our findings, and broadens their generalizability. (2) Believing in shared humanity, we do not profess the national characters’ philosophy but logically assume that politico-psychological differences do not run strictly along the national borders. In other words, in all countries there are democrats, and everywhere there are people vulnerable to misinformation. Thus, our methodology presents not just the differences but also shared concerns. (3) We take a cross-culturally sensitive approach. We hope

that our data can produce a solid knowledge base and recommendations that will be well suited for the Central European region we are well familiar with, including its cultural peculiarities.

In this manual, we provide a detailed description of our methodology to anyone interested in analysing the dataset we collected.

Methods

Participants and procedure

The participants were recruited via a participant recruitment agency which distributed our Qualtrics-based online questionnaire to a quota sample of the adult populations of the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia representative of the main categories, such as gender, age, and education. The data collection in all countries took place between November 10, 2022, to December 9, 2022. In total, 5344 people participated: 1063 in the Czech Republic, 1074 in Germany, 1082 in Hungary, 1078 in Poland, and 1045 in Slovakia (see Figure 1). Participants were between 18 and 89 years old ($M = 49.35$, $SD = 17.56$). The proportion of participants according to their education and gender is presented in Table 1.



Figure 1: Times of data collection, age, and gender of participants in surveyed countries

Table 1. Education based on ISCED categorization

Country	Education by group (low, middle, high) based on ISCED	Gender			
		Male		Female	
		N	%	N	%
Czech Republic	Low (ISCED0-2)	50	4,7%	80	7,5%
	Medium (ISCED 3-4)	360	33,9%	341	32,1%
	High (ISCED 5-8)	114	10,7%	118	11,1%
Germany	Low (ISCED0-2)	65	6,1%	155	14,4%
	Medium (ISCED 3-4)	290	27,0%	276	25,7%
	High (ISCED 5-8)	175	16,3%	113	10,5%
Hungary	Low (ISCED0-2)	64	5,9%	147	13,6%
	Medium (ISCED 3-4)	304	28,1%	301	27,8%
	High (ISCED 5-8)	151	14,0%	116	10,7%
Poland	Low (ISCED0-2)	65	6,0%	84	7,8%
	Medium (ISCED 3-4)	286	26,5%	354	32,8%
	High (ISCED 5-8)	171	15,9%	118	10,9%
Slovakia	Low (ISCED0-2)	73	7,0%	68	6,5%
	Medium (ISCED 3-4)	312	29,9%	346	33,1%
	High (ISCED 5-8)	126	12,1%	121	11,6%

Measures

Below please find a brief overview of variables in the English language. The exact wording for each of the four language mutations is available at <https://osf.io/38szx/>. All questionnaires were administered in the same order.

Section 1: Political Culture

Political Leaning (Q1). Left-right scale from ESS (2020) was used: “In politics, people sometimes talk of “left” and “right”. Where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?”

Voting Behavior (Q2). One question from ESS (2018) was used: “Some people don’t vote nowadays for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last [country] national election in [month/year]?” (Yes = 1, No = 2, Not eligible to vote = 3.). If participants voted, they were asked which party they voted for (Q3, country-specific, see <https://osf.io/38szx/>).

Authoritarianism (Q4). Four questions from Rippl et al. (2007) were used. Participants indicated their agreement on a 4-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *strongly agree*).

Tolerance (Q5). Six items from the World Values Survey (Round 7, 2017- 2022) were used. Participants had to indicate which of the six groups of people (People of a different race; Immigrants/foreign workers; People of a different religion; People who speak a different language; Refugees from Ukraine; Refugees from the MENA region) they would not like to have as neighbours.

Morally Debatable Behavior Scale (Q6). Participants had to indicate which of the 12 actions were *always justified* (=10) *never to be justified* (=1) or something in between. Twelve items were taken from the World Values Survey (Round 7, 2017- 2022): Claiming government benefits to which you are not entitled; Avoiding a fare on public transport; Stealing property; Cheating on taxes if you have a chance; Someone accepting a bribe in the course of their duties; Homosexuality; Abortion; Divorce; For a man to beat his wife; Terrorism as a political, ideological or religious mean; Political violence; Death penalty.

Political Culture Questionnaire (Q7). Twelve items from Klicperová-Baker et al. (2007) questionnaire were used. Participants had to indicate their agreement on a 7-point scale (1 = *do not agree at all*, 7 = *completely agree*).

Populism (Q8). Twelve items from Silva et al. (2018) were used. The scale consists of four subscales: People-centrism, Anti-Elitism; Manichean outlook, and Oversimplification. Participants had to indicate their agreement on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Section 2: Democratic Values

Importance of Democracy (Q9, Q10). To measure the importance of democracy, two items were used. First, participants indicated agreement with the question taken from the World Values Survey (Round 7, 2017- 2022) “How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically?” on a scale where 1 = *not at all important*, 10 = *absolutely important*. Next, the question from Globsec (2020) was used: “Which of the following forms of government is, according to you, better for [your country]?” (1 = *Having a strong and decisive leader who does not have to bother with parliament or elections*. 2 = *Having a liberal democracy with regular elections and a multiparty system*.)

Evaluation of Democracy (Q11). Participants indicated their agreement with one question taken from the World Values Survey “How democratically is this country being governed today?” on a scale where 1 = *not satisfied at all*, and 10 = *completely satisfied*.

Satisfaction with Political System (Q12). One question from the World Values Survey 2017-21 was used. On a scale from 1 to 10 where “1” is “*not satisfied at all*” and “10” is “*completely satisfied*”, how satisfied are you with how the political system is functioning in your country these days?

Trading Rights and Freedoms (Q13). We used three items from Globsec (2020). Participants were asked to indicate, whether they would trade some of their rights and freedoms for (a) a better financial situation, (B) greater security of their country, (C) for preservation of their traditional values, on a 4-point scale, where 1 = *definitely yes* and 4 = *definitely not*.

Benefits (Q14) and Costs (Q15) of the European Union. Two items from IPSOS (2017) were used. Participants had to choose one greatest benefit of the EU (Financial aid; Access to the common market and border-free travel; Support for European culture and values; Security and stability; Support for democratic governance and the rule of law; None) and one greatest cost of the EU (Rising prices and increased economic competition from other member states; Loss of independence and sovereignty; Being treated like “junior partners” in the European Project; Undermining of traditional values and ways of life; None).

Social Trust (Q16). Participants were asked to indicate their opinion on whether most people can be trusted on an 11-point scale where 0 = *you can't be too careful* and 10 = *you can trust most people*. The item was based on the Bertelsmann Social Cohesion Radar (Dragolov et al., 2013).

Institutional Trust (Q17). Participants indicated their trust in seven institutions (Government; President; Courts and judiciary; Public law media; Political parties; Police; and Armed forces) on a 4-point scale, where 1 = *completely trust* and 4 = *completely distrust*. The item was based on the Globsec (2020) questionnaire.

Political Participation (Q18). Participants indicated (yes/no) whether they did any of the 8 political behaviours listed. Items were taken from ESS (2018).

Social Cohesion (Q19-Q26). Eight questions were taken from Bertelsmann Social Cohesion Radar (Dragolov et al., 2013) regarding socialisation with friends, diversity, emotional connection, trust in the federal government, fairness of economic distribution, prosocial behaviour, feelings of safety, and interest in politics. For detailed wording and response scales see <https://osf.io/rfxp6/>.

General Self-Efficacy Short Scale (Q27). Three questions from Doll et al. (2021). Participants indicated their agreement on a 5-point scale, where 1 = *do not agree at all*, and 5 = *completely agree*.

Spheres of Control (Q28). Seven items from Paulhus (1983) and Paulhus & Van Selst (1990). Participants indicated their agreement on a 7-point scale, where 1 = *disagree*, and 7 = *agree*.

Powerlessness (Q29). Seven items from Bruder et al. (2013) but also in their general susceptibility to explanations based on such theories, that is, their conspiracy mentality. We present the Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire (CMQ). Participants indicated their agreement on a 5-point scale, where 1 = *do not agree at all*, and 5 = *completely agree*.

Anomia (Q30). Seven items from Bruder et al. (2013) but also in their general susceptibility to explanations based on such theories, that is, their conspiracy mentality. We present the Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire (CMQ). Participants indicated their agreement on a 5-point scale, where 1 = *do not agree at all*, and 5 = *completely agree*.

Section 3: Information Processing

Cognitive Reflection (Q31). Three items from the Cognitive Reflection Test (Frederick, 2005) were used. The sum of the correct scores indicates higher analytic thinking.

Media Use (Q32-Q34). Three items from the PEW Research Center (2020) were used. For detailed wording and response scales see <https://osf.io/rfxp6/>.

Conspiracy Mentality (Q35). Five items from the Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire (Bruder et al., 2013) but also in their general susceptibility to explanations based on such theories, that is, their conspiracy mentality. We present the Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire (CMQ) were used. Participants indicated their agreement on an 11-point scale, where 0 = *certainly not (0%)* and 10 = *certain (100%)*.

Conspiracy Theories (Q36). Participants were presented with eight conspiracy theories. Six of them were from the Globsec (2020) report and two were created for this survey (“Covid-19 vaccines primarily serve the interest of the pharmaceutical industry.”; “Covid-19 vaccination is an irresponsible experiment conducted on humans.”). Participants indicated their agreement on a 4-point scale, where 1 = *strongly agree* and 4 = *strongly disagree*.

Self-Deception (Q37). Eight items from the shortened version of The Balanced Inventory of Desirable Re-

sponding Short Form, BIDR-16 (Hart et al., 2015) were used. Participants indicated their agreement on a 7-point scale, where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*.

Actively Open-Minded Thinking (Q38). Five items from the resistance subscale of the AOT (Svedholm-Häkkinen & Lindeman, 2017) were used. Participants indicated their agreement on a 6-point scale, where 1 = *strongly agree* and 6 = *strongly disagree*.

Intolerance of Uncertainty (Q39). Twelve items from the Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale (Buhr & Dugas, 2002) were selected. Participants indicated their agreement on a 5-point scale, where 1 = *Not at all characteristic of me* and 6 = *Entirely characteristic of me*.

Section 4: Satisfaction with life vs. frustration

Satisfaction in Different Domains (Q40). We asked participants how satisfied they were with their (a) financial situation, (b) the amount of respect they receive, (c) their health. Items were taken from the Globsec (2020) survey and participants indicated their agreement on a 4-point scale, where 1 = *very satisfied*, 4 = *very dissatisfied*.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (Q41). Five items from Diener et al. (1985) were used. Participants indicated their agreement on a 7-point scale, where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*.

Societal Frustration Levels (Q42). Seven items from Globsec's (2020) survey were used and participants indicated their agreement on a 4-point scale, where 1 = *strongly agree* and 4 = *strongly disagree*.

Groups Favoured in Society (Q43). Participants indicated whether each of the seven groups of people (People living in a particular region or regions in my country; People with contacts to political elites; People who earn more; People from the capital; Migrants; Minorities; Others) is favoured/is not favoured. Items were taken from the Globsec (2020) survey.

Identity Threat (Q44). We asked participants to indicate whether they feel their identity and values are being threatened by Western countries and their way of life, the European Union, the USA, the Russian Federation, China, Migrants, People with other sexual orientation (LGBTI), other (*yes, they threaten /no, they do not threaten*). Items were taken from the Globsec (2020) survey.

Biggest Problems in Country (Q45). This was taken from IPSOS (2017). Participants had to choose one biggest problem, one second biggest problem, and one third biggest problem facing their country today from the list of 17 problems (Poverty and social inequality; Corruption; Unemployment and jobs; Politics, internal politics; Healthcare; Economy; Immigration control; Inflation; Pensions; Crime; Security; Rule of law; Polarization; Freedom of speech; Climate change; Gender (in)equality; Other).

Future for Young (Q46). Participants were asked a single question from the IPSOS Survey 2017: "Do you think that today's generation of young people has a good future in [your country]?" (*Yes/No*).

Section 5: Socio-Demographic Questions

Gender (Q47). 1 = *Male*, 2 = *Female*, 3 = *Other*.

Age (Q48). In what year were you born (number)? Then the age was calculated by subtracting the year from the year of data collection (2022).

Migration Background (Q49-Q51). Three items taken from ESS, round 9: Were you born in [country]? (*yes/no*), Was your mother born in [country]? (*yes/no*), Was your father born in [country]? (*yes/no*).

Marital Status (Q52). Are you currently: 1 = *Married*; 2 = *Living together as married*; 3 = *Divorced*; 4 = *Separated*; 5 = *Widowed*; 6 = *Single*.

Children (Q52). Two questions from ESS, round 9: How many children do you have? (number) and Number of children outside the household (number).

Education (Q55). What is the highest level of education you have successfully completed? Answers were based on ISCED classification: *ISCED 0: Early childhood education ('less than primary' for educational attainment); ISCED 1: Primary education; ISCED 2: Lower secondary education; ISCED 3: Upper secondary education; ISCED 4: Post-secondary non-tertiary education; ISCED 5: Short-cycle tertiary education; ISCED 6: Bachelor's or equivalent level; ISCED 7: Master's or equivalent level; ISCED 8: Doctoral or equivalent level*. Participants also indicated, how many years their education lasted (Q55d).

Income (Q56). Using data about average salary in each country, participants were asked to indicate their income level. Additionally, Q57 asked, how many people live on this income.

Employment (Q58). Participants indicated their employment status: 1 = *Full-time employee* (30 hours a week or more); 2 = *Part-time employee* (less than 30 hours a week); 3 = *Self-employed*; 4 = *Retired/pensioned*; 5 = *Doing housework, looking after children or other persons*; 6 = *Student*; 7 = *Unemployed*; 8 = *Other*.

Place/Region of Residence (Q59). Participants indicated their place of residence: 1 = *A big city*; 2 = *The suburbs or outskirts of a big city*; 3 = *A town or a small city*; 4 = *A country village*; 5 = *A farm or home in the countryside*. Q60 considered specific regions in individual countries.

Religiosity (Q61). One question taken from ESS: “Regardless of whether you belong to a particular religion, how religious would you say you are?” Participants answered on a scale from 0 = *Not at all religious* to 10 = *very religious*.

Two attention check questions were also used: One after Media use (Q33), and one after Q46.

Codebook

<https://osf.io/rfxp6/>

Links to the project:

<https://psychologia.sav.sk/projekt/political-culture-democratic-values-and-misinformation-detecting-democratic-footholds-weaknesses/>

<https://osf.io/rfxp6/>

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