

BAT STIFTUNG FÜR ZUKUNFTSFRAGEN PUBLISHES NEW EUROPEAN STUDY

DISTRUST. DISSATISFACTION. FRUSTRATION. WHY FEWER AND FEWER PEOPLE ARE VOTING.

Next week 350 million Europeans will be called upon to elect a new European Parliament. But most of them will stay at home. Despite a higher level of education across a broad section of the population, it is expected that the number of people voting will be at its lowest since direct elections were first introduced 25 years ago. For the first time, the STIFTUNG FÜR ZUKUNFTSFRAGEN ("Foundation for Future Studies") set up by British American Tobacco has carried out a survey of citizens of 10 countries in Europe, asking why the number of voters going to the polls is declining. Over 12,000 people over the age of 14 years were surveyed, from the EU member states of Austria, Germany, Finland, France, Great Britain, Italy, Poland and Spain as well as Russia and Switzerland. The results give a problematic picture of their citizens where the politics of the future are concerned.

- For three-fifths (60%) of Europeans, the assumption that they are "being lied to in election promises" is one reason why fewer and fewer citizens are using their vote. In Finland the number of people who mentioned these concerns was as high as four out of every five (82%), and it was about two out of every three in Germany, France (68% each), Russia and Great Britain (63% each). On the other hand, it was "only" about one person in two in Switzerland (45%), Spain (46%) and Italy (44%).
- In every country of the European Union the majority of people surveyed (57%) agreed that there was "general dissatisfaction with politicians and parties", with only minimal differences between people of different ages, sexes, income and education.
- The third important reason is people's concern that they "cannot improve anything by voting" (49%). But in this argument Europe is once again divided: approximately two-thirds of the Finns and the Poles (68% each) agree with this resigned attitude. On the other hand, in countries with a comparatively high turnout in elections – such as Spain (23%) or Italy (27%) – only about one person in four expressed this concern.

"Dissatisfaction with current policies is running through every social stratum. Many people are disappointed or frustrated and are refusing to give their endorsement. That is why fewer and fewer European citizens are taking the opportunity to play an active part in democratic processes. This may become a

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real problem for democracy, if it means that a party that achieves an absolute majority with over fifty per cent of the votes in fact only has the approval of one fifth of the electorate. It then has little in common with popular government," says Dr Ulrich Reinhardt, the Foundation's expert on Europe.

NO ROLE MODELS. NO INFLUENCE. NO INTEREST.
THERE IS DANGER OF AN "ANTI-PARTY ATTITUDE"

For almost half (45%) of the people surveyed, politicians are no longer moral role models nowadays. Fewer and fewer politicians still stand for values such as trust, reliability and honesty or exemplify these values through their own lives. This calls into question the credibility of politicians and at the same time the ability of politics to function. More than two out of every five people surveyed (44%) also believe "that their vote has no influence", but at the same time they also have "little interest in politics" (40%). And about one person in every seven (15%) even admits openly that he's "got better things to do than to go and vote".

In consequence, people are turning away from politics, preferring to moan and complain rather than taking on responsibility themselves. For them, power no longer comes from *doing things themselves* but is done for them by other people. As a result, they encourage what they find fault with, letting other people decide for themselves. As Dr Reinhardt says: "It is always a matter for concern when people do not take advantage of the opportunities available to them. A feeling of indifference and resignation is becoming increasingly widespread and confused, and the European elections are regarded as being of no significance. What is also lacking is a relationship with the politicians, who are regarded more like bureaucrats than as representatives of the people. All these political dissatisfactions are increasingly leading to a sort of anti-party attitude which could bring with it danger for the project to build a *single* Europe. In order to win back people's confidence, parties as well as politicians would have to offer more reliability, a more individual profile, more prospects and less compatibility, staging and thinking in legislative periods."

STATE-CONTROLLED OR PRIVATE: WHAT PEOPLE REALLY WANT!

Have we got more state control in Europe than is good for us? Have we become too accustomed to the nanny state? How much state controls do people need and how much do they want in the future? And surely the frequently criticised crisis of democracy is also an opportunity for more basic democracy and self-reliance on the part of the citizens? In the same way, as voter fatigue and disenchantment with politicians increase, new forms of citizen participation are appearing which represent a sort of democratic counter-movement. For example, today almost one European in three (30%) believes that people are absolutely prepared to help themselves more and not to simply hand over every problem to the state. In particular the Swiss (43%), Germans (40%), Austrians (39%), Finns (38%) and French (37%) express their agreement, whilst the Spanish (11%) and Italians (16%) tend to react sceptically.

- Two-fifths (36%) of the people surveyed criticise the multitude of laws, directives and state regulations and have come to the conclusion that “many things would run better with no state intervention.” The Italians (19%), Spanish (16%) and Russians (18%) answer most conservatively, whilst the Poles (55%) and Germans (50%) are considerably more in agreement.
- Across Europe, more than half of the people surveyed agreed with the statement that “the freedom of the individual citizen must be maintained under all circumstances – so long as this does not have a negative effect on any other citizen.” In France the proportion of people who emphasise this freedom is even more than three-quarters (77%), in Finland (71%) and Switzerland (68%) it is more than two-thirds, but in Great Britain, on the other hand, it is only one person in three (35%).
- On the other hand, only a minority can show enthusiasm for the state taking on a stronger role. Only one person in four (27%) would “like the state to take more decisions for its citizens, e.g. on questions such as the speed limit or eating fast food.” The Germans (20%) are least enthusiastic about this scenario, compared to the Finns (48%) who are thoroughly in agreement.

Dr Reinhardt says: “It is always at those times of threatened mass unemployment, the risk of poverty and the loss of wealth that awareness of our dependence on one another experiences a renaissance. Because they see that the welfare state is ‘flagging’, people are prepared to take over more

responsibility once again for their own lives and for their social environment.” This fact encourages the state and politicians to further extend or re-create the self-help infrastructure in the community. Over a third of those surveyed (37%) see it as an opportunity for the state to save a lot of money if it would support and promote more actively private initiatives from the ranks of its citizens. But at the same time almost one person in two (47%) is also demanding that at least half of the savings and profits made in economically good times should be used to reduce debt in order to ensure that the next generation will have a future that’s worth living.

To summarise: Now that unlimited increases in wealth are coming to an end, states are giving up acting as the providers and distributors for everyone. This has far-reaching political consequences: the state will become less powerful and the bond between citizens and the state will weaken. Politics will once again happen more “from the grass roots upwards”. This shift in the balance of power will go hand in hand with a loss of importance of parties and politicians. Democracy will become a mutual guarantee society and a movement with a sense of civic-mindedness.

Information about the research:

Countries surveyed:	Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Poland, Russia, Spain, Switzerland
Size of sample:	A total of 12,100 persons over 14 years of age
Method:	Representative face-to-face survey
Survey period:	March 2009