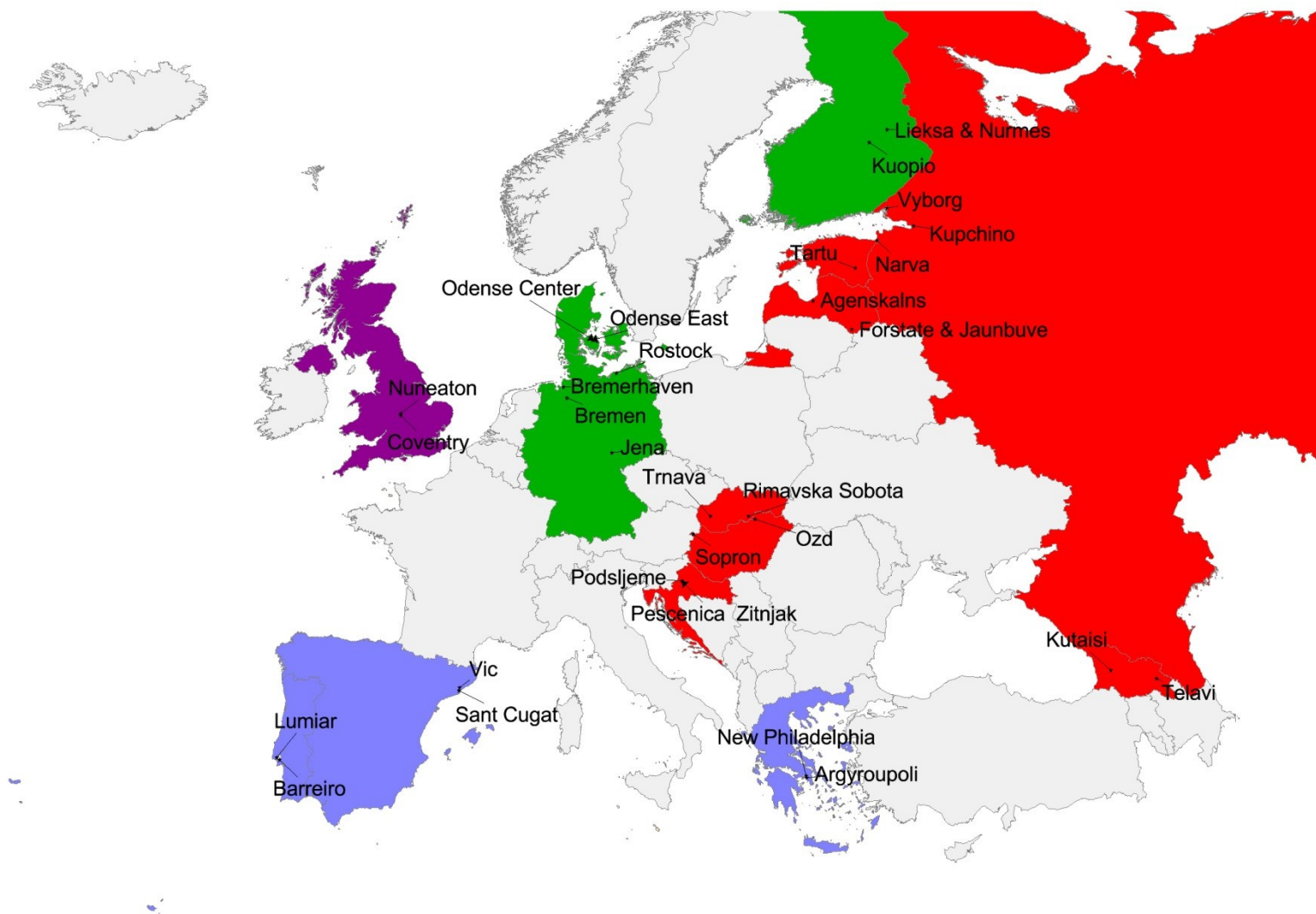




This project has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement no 266831

MYPLACE THEMATIC REPORT

MYPLACE Contribution to EU Youth Report 2015



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MYPLACE

Memory, Youth, Political Legacy and Civic Engagement

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MANCHESTER
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MYPLACE: Aims and Objectives

The central research question addressed by the MYPLACE (Memory, Youth, Political Legacy & Civic Engagement) Project is:

How is young people's social participation shaped by the shadows of totalitarianism and populism in Europe?

Key themes addressed include:

- Understanding the legacy of totalitarianism and populism;
- Mapping youth participation and civic engagement;
- Exploring receptivity to new radical and populist political agendas.

Case study approach

The MYPLACE project used a case study approach, using 30 carefully selected research locations (illustrated in Figure 1) which provided within country contrasts in terms of hypothesised receptivity to radical politics. MYPLACE work strands include:

- Questionnaire survey (N = 16,935, target = 600 per location) of young people aged 16-25;
- Follow up interviews (N = 903, target = 30 per location with a sub-sample of these young people);
- 44 ethnographic studies of youth activism, in 6 thematic clusters;
- Ethnographic observation at 18 sites of memory including expert interviews with staff (N = 73), focus groups with young people (N = 56) and inter-generational interviews (N = 180).

Thematic Reports

The aim of this series of thematic reports is to present a general Europe wide thematic analysis of young people's views, attitudes and behaviour towards a range of social and political issues.

This report focuses on content for the EU Youth Report 2015, and will cover the following areas:

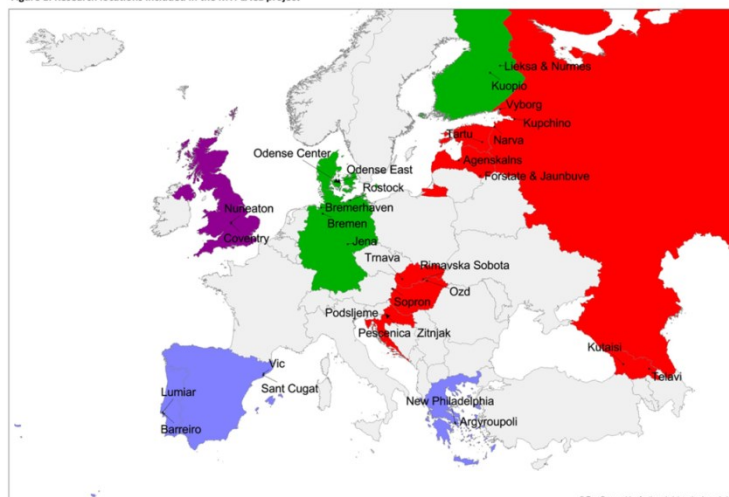
- Trust in Political Institutions;
- Cynicism: Attitudes towards politicians and politics;
- Participation: Traditional forms;
- Participation: Protest action;
- Propensity to Radicalism: Attitudes to democratic systems;
- Propensity to Radicalism: Receptivity to the radical right;
- Attitudes towards the European Union.

Format

Each page presents a specific theme and contains descriptive narrative, quotes from interviews and two graphs presenting questionnaire survey data. One graph presents the theme by the 30 research locations (colour coded into clusters of locations). These second graph illustrates a demographic breakdown. Quotes cited as 'Interviewee' emanate from follow up interviews with a subset of the survey sample of young people while those cited as 'Activist' are from young people interviewed as part of the ethnographic case studies.

Statistical techniques have been used to construct derived variables (Factor Analysis) and test reliability (Cronbach Alpha or Correlations).

Figure 1: Research locations included in the MYPLACE project



Trust in political institutions

Much of the recent literature on youth political participation demonstrates declining rates of youth participation and its association with decreased levels of trust.

The MYPLACE survey asked questions regarding levels of trust towards 'core national political institutions', 'the head of government/PM', 'parliament' and 'political parties'. These have been combined to create a 'Trust' variable. These have been standardised on a 0 to 100 scale, with 100 representing the greatest trust.

The overall average for all locations is 41.8 (n=16,128, sd = 22.9), demonstrating low levels of trust towards political institutions. This varies from Kuopio (FI) with 61.8 with the highest levels of trust to Argyroupouli (GR) with 24.2 with the lowest levels of trust.

Scepticism about political institutions does not necessarily mean a withdrawal from participation:

"Interviewer: So what about formal politics [...] what's your experience of participating in formal politics?"

Respondent: Whichever way you're going to get screwed, is my personal opinion.

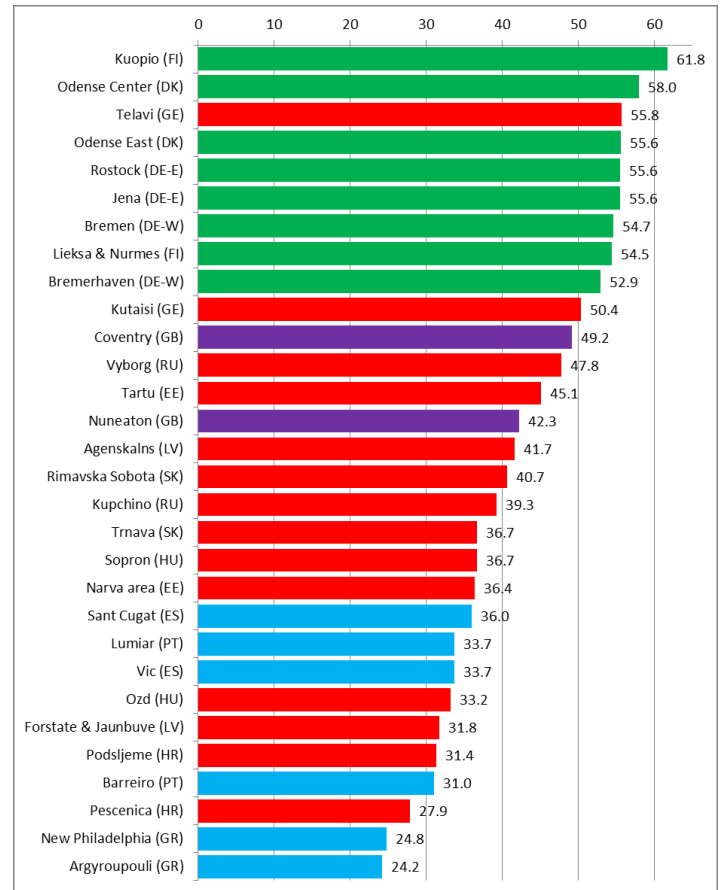
Interviewer: You mean whoever you vote for you're going to get screwed?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: So do you vote?

Respondent: I, of course, I vote [...] several people say if you don't vote you don't get to complain."

[Interviewee, UK]



Locations in Finland, Denmark and Germany have the highest levels of trust in political institutions.

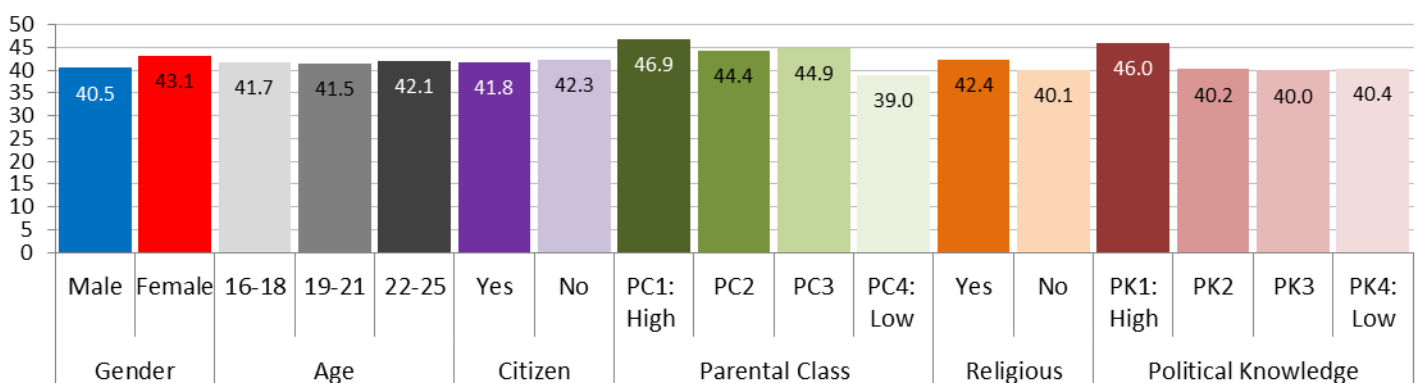
"I would say that they make a lot of good decisions and they work hard for a better society."

[Interviewee, Finland]

"I think I just heard it yesterday, that Denmark is the most democratic country in the world. I think we just became number one yesterday or the day before."

[Interviewee, Denmark]

Figure: Demographics breakdown



Cynicism: Attitudes towards politicians and politics

One explanation for declining participation is increasing cynicism about politics and politicians.

The MYPLACE survey asked two questions; 'Politicians are corrupt' and 'The rich have too much influence over politics' which have been combined to create a 'Cynicism' variable and have been standardised on a 0 to 100 scale, with 100 representing most cynical.

The overall average for all locations is 69.2 (n=16,018, sd = 21.5), demonstrating high levels of cynicism towards politicians and politics. This varies from New Philadelphia (GR) with 85.7 with the highest levels of cynicism to Odense Center (DK), 43.2 with the lowest levels of cynicism.

Alongside common clichés associating politicians with elitism, deceit and hypocrisy, young people frequently perceive politics to consist of 'meaningless chatter':

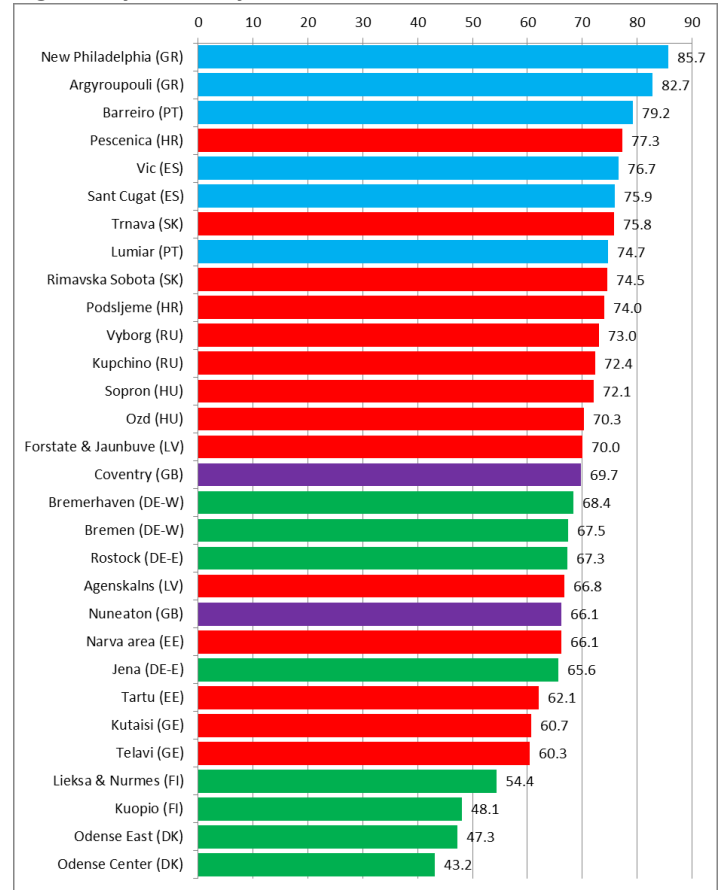
"I watch those debates and see politicians sitting in various talk shows talking, talking and talking. But when it comes down to it, they rarely succeed in having their finger on the pulse or my personal pulse, so I'd really say: 'Wow, that's what I believe!'"

[Interviewee, eastern Germany]

"Politics is chatter about nothing, which has no meaning. They sit there, discussing something. But nothing gets done."

[Interviewee, Russia]

Figure: Cynicism by location



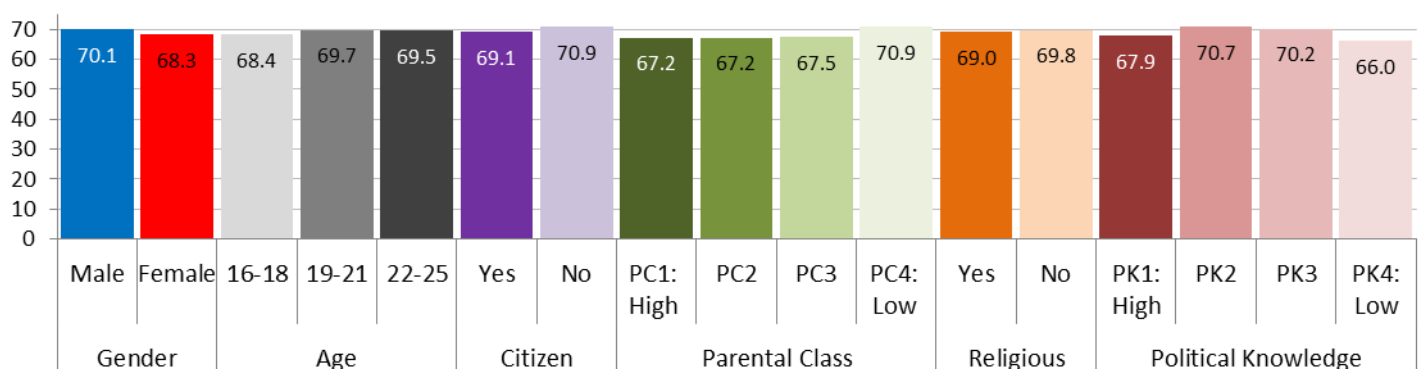
Locations in Mediterranean countries of Greece, Portugal and Spain are most cynical of politicians and politics.

Paradoxically these negative associations with how politics works today leads to a disavowal of 'the political' even by young people who are socially and politically highly active:

"we don't want to be dragged into politics. Why? Because, politics is like, for me, personally, the most noble thing to do, and our politicians just destroyed that, that sense of politics for me, they dragged it through the mud."

[Activist, Croatia]

Figure: Demographics breakdown



Participation: Traditional Forms

In addition to voting in elections young people's engagement can be measured through their broader political participation.

The MYPLACE survey asked if respondents had; 'Volunteered in an election campaign', 'Contacted a politician or local councillor', 'Collected signatures', 'Given a political speech', or 'Distributed leaflets with a political content'. These questions have been used to create a participation rate on a 0 to 100 scale, with 100 representing most active.

The overall average for all locations is 18.3 (n=16,727, sd = 38.7), demonstrating low levels of participation. This varies from Bremen (DE-W), with 31.3, with the highest rates of Traditional participation to Sopron (HU), 1.7 with the lowest rates.

A strong impulse for participation in political parties, trade unions and other traditional forms of politics is the sense that you can change things through uniting and working from the 'inside':

"The fact that we have a strong voice. You have more power than a regular employee."

[Activist, western Germany]

"the CUP is a political organisation in which you can be active for as long as you like, which tries to change things from within politics."

[Activist, Spain]

Locations in Germany and the UK have the highest traditional participation rates.

Figure: Demographics breakdown

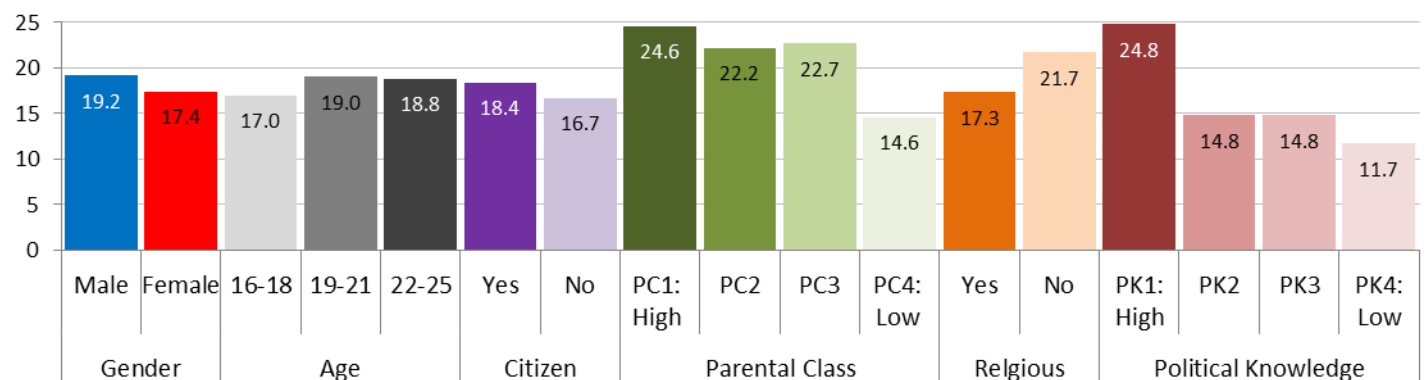
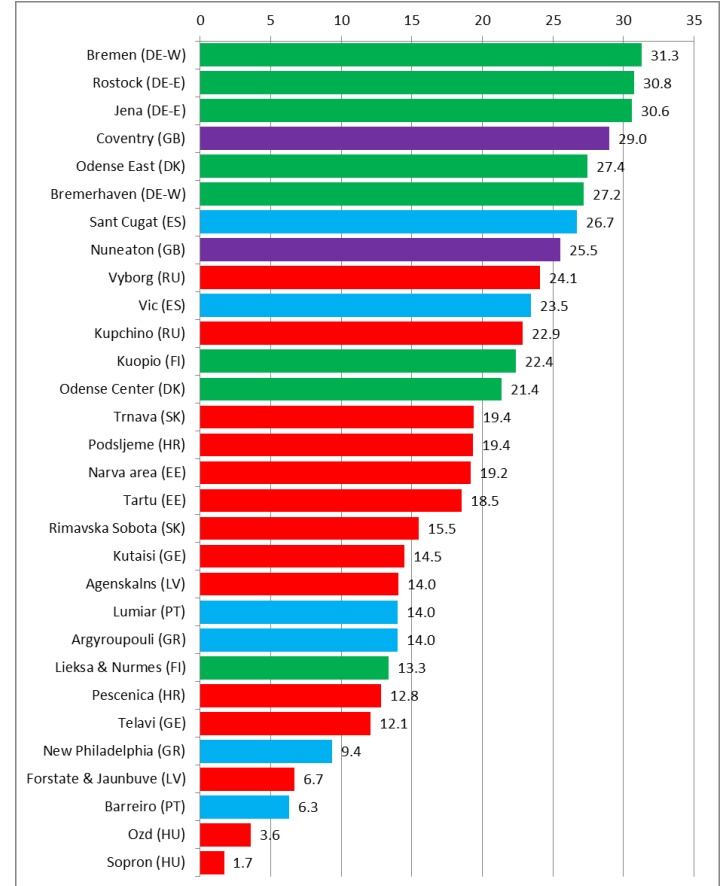


Figure: Traditional forms of Participation by location



For some youth sections of political parties are essentially self-serving:

"It seems to me that the most important idea of those youth sections is to expand youth sections [...] to find new voters or future party members."

[Interviewee, Estonia]

Those active in traditional forms of politics tend to have high levels of political knowledge often emanating from the family:

"My old man was very active, he had opinions on things and he was well-informed."

[Activist, Finland]

Participation: Protest Action

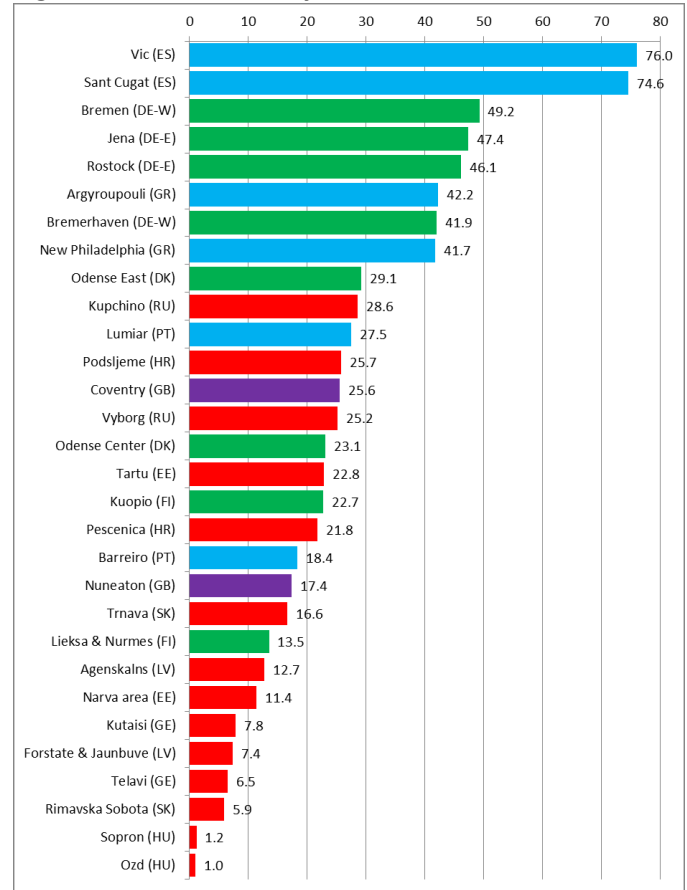
Young people also participate in a range of non-traditional forms of participation including protest.

The MYPLACE survey asked a series of Protest Action questions; including; 'Participated in a demonstration', 'Participated in a strike', 'Participated in a violent political event', 'Occupied buildings or blocked streets / railways' and 'Participated in a 'flashmob'. These questions have been used to create a protest action participation rate on a 0 to 100 scale, with 100 representing most active.

The overall average for all locations is 26.3 (n=16,699, sd = 44.0), demonstrating low levels of protest action participation. There is a large variation between locations, varying from Vic (ES), 76.0 with the highest rates of protest action participation to Ozd (HU), 1.0 with the lowest rates.

Locations in Spain, Greece, and Germany have the highest proportions of young people participating in protest actions.

Figure: Protest Action by location



"Yes, I took part in some of the demonstrations. My opinion is that they were quite useless, in the sense that they didn't lead to any results. They didn't produce any practical solutions."

[Interviewee, Portugal]

"I don't have only negative images about the economic crisis, but I think of people demonstrating, mainly young people, because they can't stand this situation any longer."

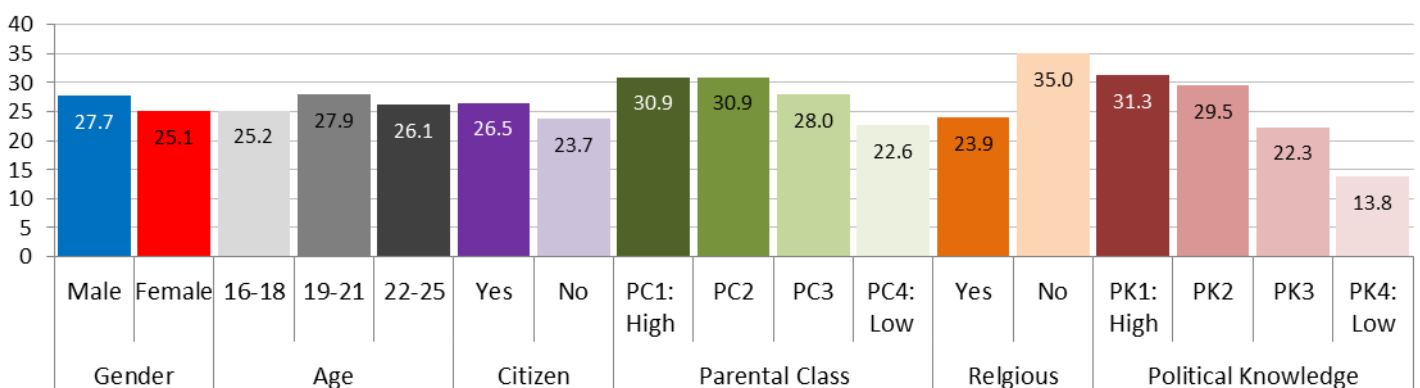
[Interviewee, Greece]

For young activists, protest action does not have to result in revolutionary change; a demonstration is a way of leaving a message and can be an important end in and of itself:

"You've got your word out. So more people know what you am [are] about. If you're into a demo as long as only one person listens to what we said, and thought 'that's right that is'."

[Activist, UK]

Figure: Demographics breakdown



Propensity to Radicalism: Attitudes to democratic systems

Young people show general support for democratic systems, but are often critical of how they work in practice and for them.

The MYPLACE survey asked two questions regarding support for democratic systems 'Having a democratic, multi-party system' and 'Having an opposition that can freely express its views'. These have been combined and standardised on a 0 to 100 scale, with 100 representing high levels of support towards democratic systems.

The overall average for all locations is 72.7 (n=15,475, sd = 19.2), demonstrating very high levels of support for Democratic systems. This varies from Odense Center (DK), 86.3, with the highest levels of support to Vyborg (RU), 59.3 with the lowest levels of support.

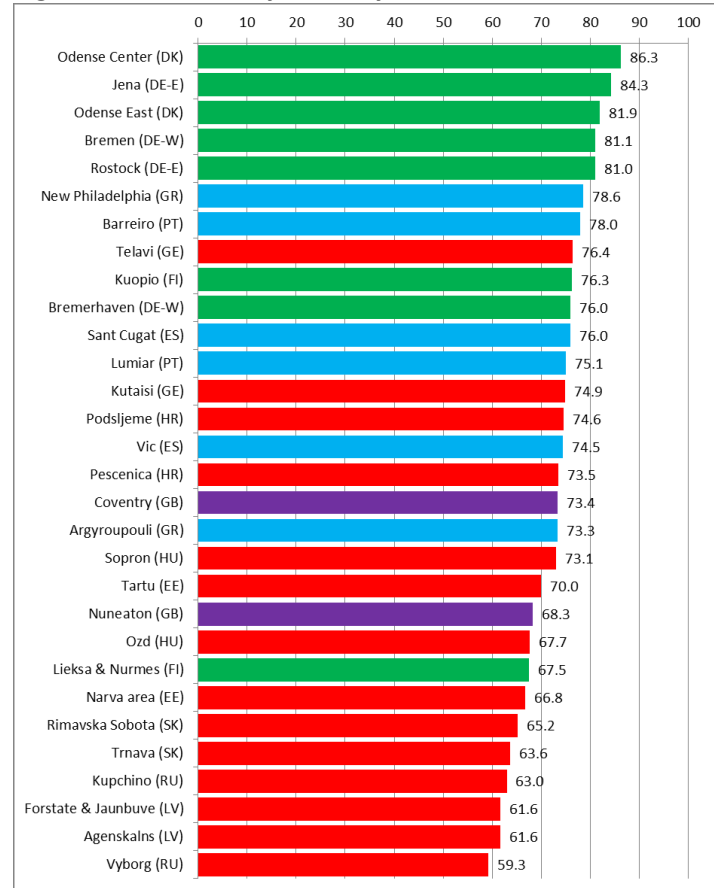
The general approval for democratic systems is accompanied sometimes by strong dissatisfaction with how democracy works at the moment, particularly in post-socialist European societies.

"Let me put it this way – we live in a democratic state with no democracy."

[Activist, Latvia]"

Locations in Germany and Denmark show higher levels of support towards democratic systems. Locations in Russia, Latvia and Slovakia have the lowest levels of support.

Figure: Democratic Systems by location



Frustration with how democracy works can act to both deter and inspire people to become politically active.

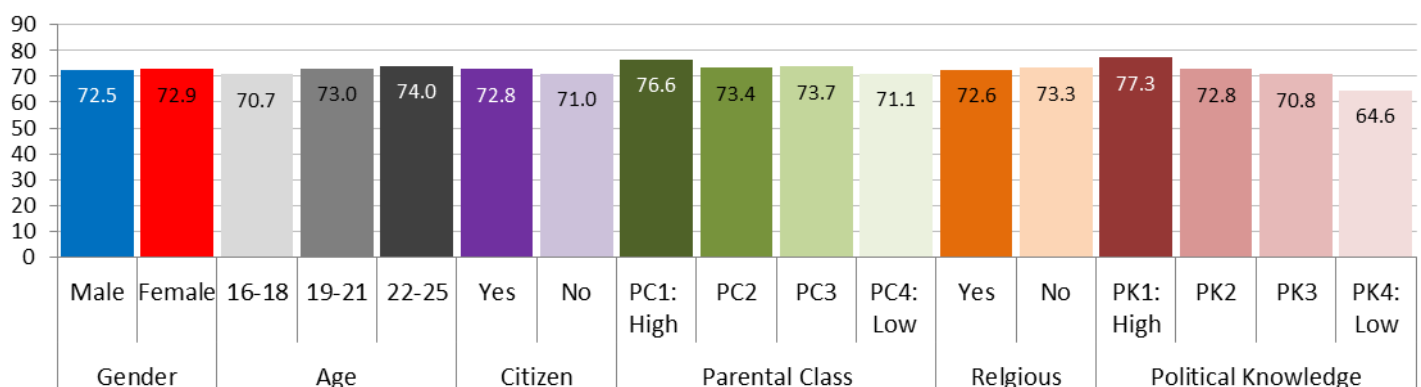
"Here in Russia, I think that everything is already decided. Whether you go vote or not, it doesn't matter. It's all already decided: who will get into power, which party will win, and who the President will be."

[Interviewee, Russia]

"At the moment I actually don't care who is sitting up there. They all just talk and talk about something and in the end they don't implement it anyway. Well, this is not what I like. So, I better get active myself."

[Activist, western Germany]"

Figure: Demographics breakdown



Propensity to Radicalism: Receptivity to the radical right

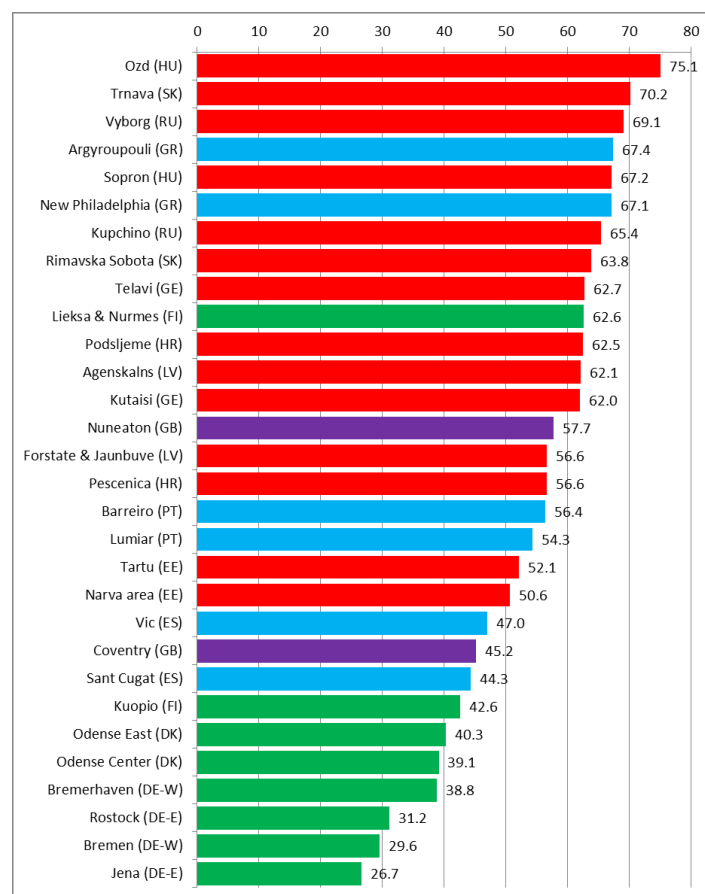
Young people's attitudes to ethnic and religious minorities are generally tolerant. However, there is evidence that elements of populist radical right ideology have resonance for many young people across Europe.

The MYPLACE survey asked a series of questions that have been developed into a 'Receptivity to radical-right agendas' variable: 'Foreigners should not be allowed to buy land in [COUNTRY]'; 'Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? '[COUNTRY] should have stricter border controls and visa restrictions to prevent further immigration'; 'When jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to [COUNTRY] people over foreign workers'. These have been standardised on a 0 to 100 scale, with 100 representing the greatest tendency towards receptivity.

The overall average for all locations is 55.4 (n=15,585, sd = 23.1). This varies from Ozd (HU), 75.1 with the highest tendency towards Receptivity to Jena (DE-E), 26.7 with the lowest tendency towards Receptivity.

"The main problem of present-day Slovakia is minorities, who pull us down. Minorities who are not educated -the Roma people. The social welfare system in Slovakia is bad; it does not support university students but people who do not offer good prospects for the country."

[Activist, Slovakia]



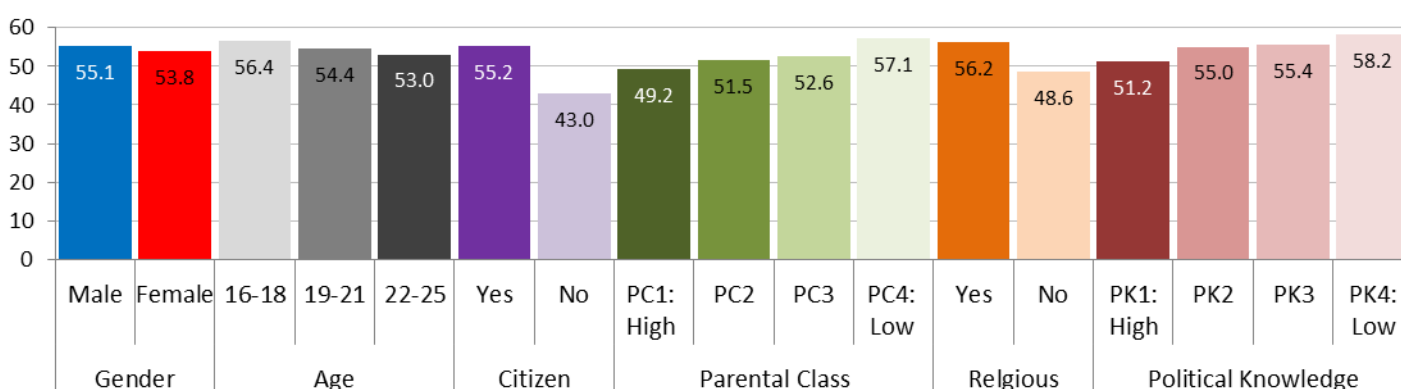
Locations in post-socialist countries of Hungary, Slovakia and Russia, together with Greece have higher tendencies towards Receptivity than German and Danish locations.

Latent support for far right parties was evident also among non-activist young people:

"You see, I think we should have parties like that [British National Party, BNP] because things like Polish people and that coming into the country, I can't get a job sort of thing [...] things like that are affecting me and the people who are around me and the place that I live. So of course I'd join a party like that [BNP]."

[Interviewee, UK]

Figure: Demographics breakdown



Attitudes towards the European Union

Young people's trust in the European Commission is slightly higher than in national political institutions, although, benefits of membership of the European Union are balanced with concerns about democratic transparency and constraints on sovereignty.

The MYPLACE survey asked young people whether they agree or disagree that 'Membership of the European Union greatly benefits this country'. This variable has been standardised on a 0 to 100 scale, with 100 indicating most benefit.

The overall average for all locations is 58.8 (n=14,031, sd = 25.7), demonstrating high levels of perceived benefit of membership of the European Union. This varies from Jena (DE-E) with 71.1 with the highest level of perceived benefit to New Philadelphia (GR), 44.8 with the lowest level.

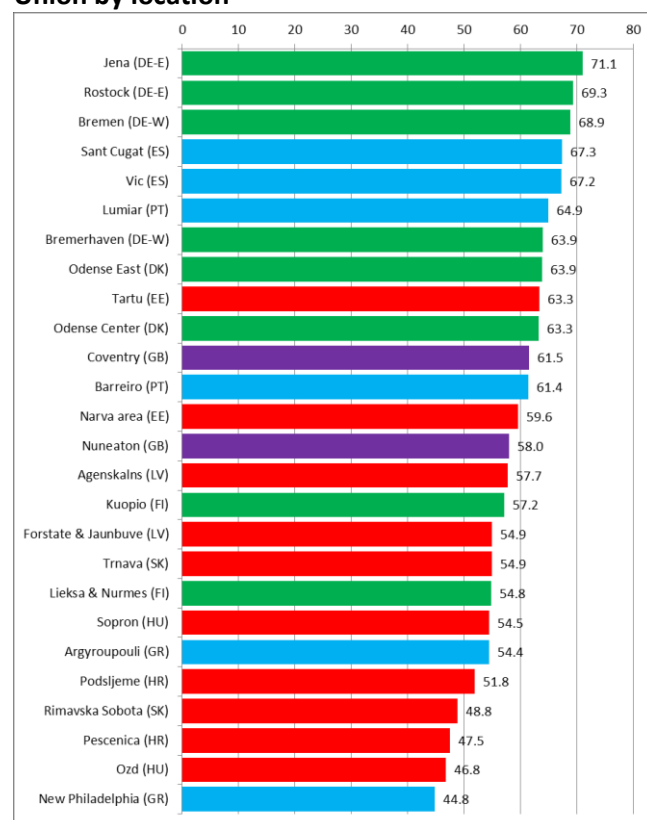
Those who were critical of the EU often complained that membership undermined national sovereignty.

"I'm afraid that we, the Croats, won't be autonomous ever again." [Activist, Croatia]

However, some respondents thought that the EU should become a stronger and tighter union.

"the problem is that though the EU is a monetary union, it is not yet a political union."
[Activist, western Germany]

Figure: Benefits of membership of the European Union by location

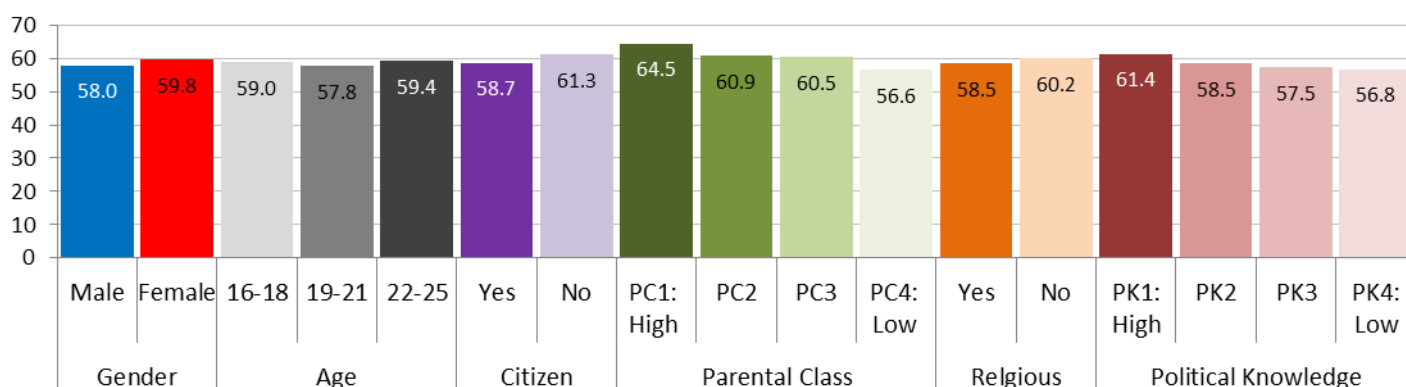


Locations in Germany and Spain have higher levels of perceived benefit from the European Union.

From outside the EU membership appeared to offer significant economic and security benefits.

"If we were in the European Union, we would not have so many economic problems, I think. We would also keep our territorial integrity, they [the EU] would help us to defend [ourselves] and I think it would be good if we joined the EU and NATO as well."
[Activist, Georgia]

Figure: Demographics breakdown



MYPLACE Partners



General Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the young people across Europe who participated in this study, all the fieldworkers and the various public, private and voluntary organisations who supported the fieldwork. We hope to have done justice to the collective efforts of so many people in our analyses. Without funding under the EU's Framework 7 programme none of this work would have been possible.