European Elections Dystopia

first aid democracy toolkit

To: *Members of the European Parliament*

Your guide to enhancing citizen engagement with the European Parliament

ecas.

WHAT IS CROWDSOURCING?

Crowdsourcing is a digital democracy tool that harnesses the collective 'wisdom of the crowd' to address public policy challenges. As an e-participation instrument, digital crowdsourcing promises to bolster representative democracy by facilitating direct citizen engagement in decision-making. This method has the potential to generate policy perspectives that better resonate with citizens' concerns, thus reaffirming a fundamental democratic principle: not merely hearing citizens but actively incorporating their input in the formulation of public policies that impact them.

WHAT WAS THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS DYSTOPIA?

In 2023, ECAS implemented the European Elections Dystopia crowdsourcing process in all 27 Member States, which challenged EU citizens to imagine fictional dystopia scenarios that could highlight vulnerabilities that the EU democratic system might face under extreme circumstances. From a starting point of 'creative destruction' and an approach of gamification, participants were encouraged to share their fears and start thinking about their actions to finally end with possible solutions to avoid their worst nightmares for Europe. This crowdsourcing process was carried out online via ECAS's own Crowdsourcing Platform, and workshops were implemented in person, online, or hybrid format by our civil society partners across the EU.

WHAT THIS PROCESS ACHIEVED:

✓ Engage citizens in reflecting on the future of EU democracy, especially in the context of the upcoming 2024 European Parliament elections

✓ Identify solutions to improve the electoral process and functioning of the European Parliament

✓ Raise awareness among citizens about the upcoming elections

✓ Inform EU policymakers about the preferences of EU citizens regarding specific policy priorities
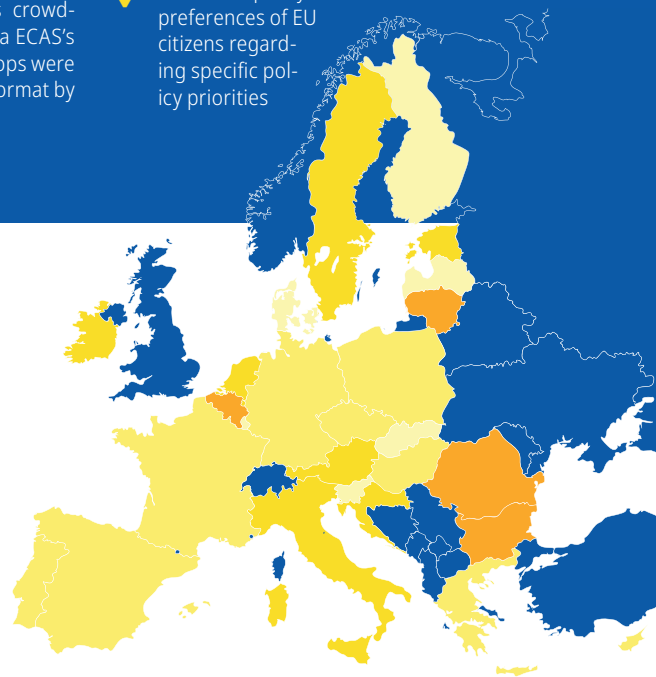
HOW MANY PEOPLE PARTICIPATED, AND FROM WHERE?

Total number of contributions:
1,435

Number of contributions via online crowdsourcing:
665

Number of contributions via workshops:
770

Participants per country: **1** ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ **169**

WHAT ARE CITIZENS CONCERNED ABOUT?

CONFLICT
Citizens worry about the potential for a large-scale conflict, particularly fearing World War III or involvement in nearby conflicts like the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

EXTREMISM
Citizens worry about how the prevalence of extremist parties in the European Parliament can lead to political gridlock and impact the efficiency of the decision-making process.

NATIONALISM
Citizens worry about how far-right MEPs will advocate for nationalist agendas and policies that may challenge the EU's inclusive and cooperative principles, thus deviating from the values that unite EU citizens.

UNFAIR ELECTIONS
Citizens worry about manipulation, electoral fraud, and disinformation impacting the upcoming elections. Particularly in the context of advancing digital technologies, citizens raised concerns about the electoral system's susceptibility to external manipulative forces.

POPULISM
Citizens worry about democratic backsliding as populist leaders seek to consolidate power, limit the independence of democratic institutions, and curtail the rights and freedoms of specific population segments.

UNEQUAL REPRESENTATION
Citizens worry that low voter turnout may result in a European Parliament failing to adequately represent the general population's interests, characterised by skewed representation and diminished legitimacy of elected officials.

Citizens expressed concerns regarding the upcoming 2024 European Parliament elections, highlighting the potential risks and challenges that could shape the future of the EU.

RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the main messages of this crowdsourcing process is that, while citizens believe that some threats to EU democracy are out of their control, they also think that certain unfavourable situations can be prevented if they actively engage in the upcoming European elections. By the end of the crowdsourcing activity, citizens reached real decisions about what they could do (or stop doing) to prevent their 'European Dystopia' from becoming a reality. Citizens also reflected on what they think EU decision-makers and civil society organisations should prioritise before and after the European elections in 2024.

1 Strengthen citizen-centric democracy

- Expand the participatory democracy toolkit, allowing more citizens to engage in online discussions via online forums.
- Make crowdsourcing through digital platforms an active part of the decision-making and legislative process.
- Hold general elections for significant policy decisions to ensure alignment of policy decisions with citizens.

2 Increase investment in civic education

- Increase investment in the education system to guarantee equal opportunities and prevent the marginalisation of individuals susceptible to Eurosceptic tendencies.
- Commit to long-term enhancement of civic education across the EU, whether that be through formal channels or by supporting civil society initiatives to improve civic education about the EU.
- Advocate for incorporating diverse sources and perspectives into educational discussions to cultivate critical thinking skills.

- Address the roots of prejudice and xenophobia through early education to combat the rise of populism.

3 Combatting disinformation and promoting media literacy

- Increase EU involvement in addressing disinformation, focusing on exposing and countering populist narratives during campaigns.
- Prioritise cybersecurity, strengthen investigative journalism and support fact-checking to counter internet propaganda.
- Fund and implement programmes to enhance digital and media literacy, especially among youth and older adults.

4 Address barriers to participation to ensure fair representation

- Implement comprehensive and accessible public awareness campaigns, providing information through targeted channels to ensure that citizens are aware of the election dates, electoral process, candidates, and the role of the European Parliament.
- Simplify voter registration processes and conduct targeted outreach campaigns to inform citizens about registration requirements and deadlines.
- Invest in efforts to encourage and enable all citizens, including marginalised individuals, to participate in EU elections as both voters and candidates.

5 Improve the long-term functioning of the European Parliament as an institution

- Conduct a thorough investigation and evaluation of the functioning of the European Parliament.

- Enhance the European Parliament's capacity to apply mechanisms to better address the differing needs of various regions of the EU.
- Strengthen collaboration between the European Parliament and national/regional institutions and networks.
- Ensure greater representation of minority groups among MEPs.
- Promote closer collaboration with local actors to address regional challenges.
- Implement more effective anti-corruption and accountability mechanisms to restore confidence among citizens in the European Parliament.

6 Work together with civil society to...

- Develop and implement awareness campaigns with more concrete and unbiased information about the EU, including what it can do (and does) for citizens and their countries and regions, what it means to be a citizen of the EU, and the advantages of being part of the EU.
- Develop and implement educational initiatives aimed at helping voters understand the consequences of their votes. This can be done, for example, through an online voting simulation to explain the implications of electoral programmes for each political party and potential coalition.
- Address Euroscepticism by actively monitoring and counteracting anti-EU rhetoric on digital platforms by disseminating accurate and objective information about the EU's policies, achievements, and challenges.