

European Values Study: Values and attitudes in Europe regarding the private sphere

Europe's citizens see sexual harassment and discrimination against women as widespread practices

- **Broad consensus** also to the effect that women and not men are the main victims of physical mistreatment within the couple
- **The unity of views** on these three dimensions locates the situation of women as among the biggest challenges facing society, and one that needs to be addressed in all its forms
- **Religion loses ground.** A majority of Europeans say they belong to a religion, but only a minority are practicing believers. Religion is more widely recognized for its contribution to art and culture than for its role in the advancement of ethics and democracy
- **Ethical principles** are acknowledged as providing a template to distinguish right from wrong, but their application, citizens say, should be flexible not rigid, allowing for the circumstances of the moment
- **Euthanasia** meets with majority acceptance; and abortion too, though in smaller measure. A majority in every country but Italy are accepting of surrogate motherhood, same-sex marriage, adoption by homosexual couples, and the conceiving of children by homosexual couples using assisted fertility techniques
- **The family** remains the prime recipient of interpersonal trust, but Spaniards do not see living with a partner as a pre-requisite for happiness or consider that personal realization depends on having children
- **The Spanish** score highest on the satisfaction scale (7.6 out of 10), and by the measure of the choice and control they feel they have over how their lives develop (7.4)

The BBVA Foundation has presented the second module of its European Values Survey 2019, examining values and attitudes in five European countries (Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Spain). Following a first module devoted to the public sphere (politics, economics, the media, trust), this second instalment considers a series of issues (religion, ethics, practices subject to moral controversy) that fall within the private domain.

The aim of the study is to capture a broad set of preferences, values and beliefs that inform individual conduct in multiple facets of public and private life, and to examine how these conducts interrelate in the two domains. Values in both spheres operate as a kind of “cognitive, normative and emotional GPS” that helps individuals navigate their way around complex issues and situations on which they have limited information, aiding them in their decision-making. They help identify what is “good” (valuable) and “right” (which sort of individual and institutional behaviors are obligatory or permitted/forbidden). The map of cultural “intangibles” – values and attitudes – of the adult population is fairly stable in its main contours, but may be affected or modified as a result of exceptional events (crises) or the emergence of new information of singular importance, visibility and reach.

The comparative analysis of values and attitudes conducted in the study identifies commonalities and differences both across and within the five societies by reference to sociodemographic and cultural factors: age, sex, educational level and declared political orientation.

The study of the public sphere, whose main results were presented in September, finds that Europeans have an interest in politics in the medium-to-low interval, while both public participation and following of the news are relatively low-key. This stands in contrast to their high expectations regarding the role and functions of the state, which extend beyond classic welfare state services to the control of market variables like prices, wages and corporate profits. In all countries, there is a prevailing current of trust in leading institutions and a large number of professional groups, most prominently doctors, teachers, scientists and engineers. This trust also extends to professionals linked to the public administration – police officers, judges, the military and government employees – but not to the political elites running the administrative apparatus.

Values in the public and private spheres are interconnected, and offer the individual an instrument to negotiate today’s complex landscape with a stable map of values, however flexibly they may choose to apply them.

In analyzing the private sphere, membership of a religion and religiosity are incorporated as opinion-forming factors of potential weight.

Religion conserves its relevance across the countries in the survey, France excepted, but is essentially circumscribed to the personal space. Its influence has declined in terms of both observation and practice, as we can see from the breach existing between the Church's official doctrine and citizens' views on issues of supposed moral controversy.

A majority of Europeans (60% in Spain) continue to declare themselves members of a religion, and, except in France, a majority say that they believe in God. However, with the exception of Italy, declared religiosity is medium or low (4.3 out of 10 in Spain vs. 5.7 in Italy), and only a minority (a third of Spaniards) claim to pray with a frequency of at least once a week. Levels of religiosity in Spain are higher among women, those aged 65 or over, and those identifying as on the political right.

Religion is acknowledged to have contributed significantly to the advancement of art and culture and, to a lesser extent, to the protection of the weak, the reduction of poverty and inequality, and the advancement of ethics. For a majority, however, it has contributed little or nothing to the advancement of science or democracy, or the protection of nature. Religions, moreover, are widely viewed as a source of conflict rather than peace.

Citizens were also asked to express their views on issues that may generate controversy. One such issue is abortion, which finds majority acceptance in every country ranging from 7.5 out of 10 in France to the 5.3 of Italy. In the case of Spain, views on this subject differ by social segment, with rejection persisting among the 65 or over age group, those of a lower educational level, those identifying politically as centre or right, and those in the medium and high religiosity brackets.

Beyond this general approval, we find that views of the embryo are a predictor for attitudes in all survey countries, with strong acceptance of abortion among those who see it as merely a cluster of cells and strong rejection among those who feel it has the same moral condition as a human being. The former option finds widest support in France, the United Kingdom and Spain, while in Germany and Italy opinions are more divided, with significant percentages according the embryo the same moral condition as a human being or closer to that of a person than a mere cluster of cells.

Responses also vary according to the scenario presented. Hence there is an ample consensus around the acceptability of abortion in cases of serious danger to the mother, rape or foetal

malformation, yet acceptance scores drop by up to 30 points if the sole condition is that the mother so chooses.

Euthanasia, defined as giving medical help to accelerate the death of terminally ill people who have an incurable disease and have affirmed that they do not wish to go on living, finds majority acceptance in every country and across all social segments. Moreover levels of acceptance have advanced across the board since 2012.

With the exception of Italy, majorities in every country, including the declaredly religious, express acceptance of same-sex marriage and adoption by homosexual couples. These practices indeed are only rejected by those in the 65 or over age group.

Panning out to the last seven years, we can see a shift in European attitudes towards these morally controversial conducts: Italians and Germans have transitioned from rejection to acceptance in the case of abortion; the British and Germans have come to accept same-sex marriage, and citizens in every country except Italy accept the adoption and/or assisted conception of a child by homosexual couples – in 2012, this was true only of Spain. Rejection of infidelity, conversely, is both firm and widespread in all survey countries, with acceptance levels highest in Italy.

The majority of Europeans (70% in Spain) do not embrace relativist ideas, but are convinced that there are clear ethical principles about what is right and what is wrong. This does not preclude them from advocating flexibility in the application of such principles, which they believe should make allowance for the circumstances of the moment. Note however that opinions on this point are more divided in Germany and Italy.

Views likewise converge across countries and social segments with regard to the situation of women. Citizens believe it is women not men who are the main victims of mistreatment within the couple, and that sexual harassment and discrimination are extremely widespread. The fact that there is such strong agreement on these points is indicative that this is seen as among the great social challenges of our time; one that needs to be addressed in every aspect and from all possible angles.

On the question of interpersonal relations, family and friends remain the prime recipients of interpersonal trust. Citizens accord only moderate trust to other people (5.2 out of 10 in Spain), which squares with the prevailing view (65% in Spain) that most people look out only for their own interests.

The ideal of coupledness has lost some of its currency. Majorities in Spain, the United Kingdom and Germany reject the idea that to be happy you need to live with a partner, or that personal realization can only come through having children. Contrary to the classic stereotype, in all countries it is men who are likelier to see happiness as contingent on living with a partner.

Asked about the factors they think are of most influence in attaining a good social position, Europeans concur in singling out effort, education and personal contacts. The Spanish stand out here for attaching more importance to political contacts – considered very or quite influential by 62% versus 38% in Germany – and government policies.

Regarding how they see their current lives, Europeans express the highest satisfaction of the last ten years (7.2 out of 10), with the Spanish to the fore (7.6). They also see themselves as largely free of the influence of external factors, believing that it is they themselves who control how their lives develop. Note, however, that although this perception of control has advanced in Spain to 7.4, in the United Kingdom and Italy it has dropped 6.7 points compared to 2012.

Technical notes:

- Geographical scope of the study: Germany, Spain, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom.
- Universe: in each country, the general population aged 18 and over.
- Method: administered face-to-face interview in the home.
- Sample size and distribution: 1,500 cases in each of the 5 countries. Multistage sample distribution stratified by region (NUTS classification or equivalent)/size of habitat, with primary units selected by lot at municipal level. Individuals randomly selected.
- Sampling error: The estimated sampling error is +/- 2.6% in each country for a confidence level of 95.5% and in the worst-case scenario ($p=q=0.5$).
- Survey period: April to July 2019
- Weighting: Total European results are arrived at by weighting each country's data according to its population weight in the universe of European countries surveyed.
- Fieldwork: coordinated and executed by the IPSOS network.
- Study design and analysis: BBVA Foundation Department of Social Studies and Public Opinion.

CONTACT:

Department of Communications and Institutional Relations

Tel. +34 91 374 5210 / 91 374 8173 / 91 537 3769
comunicacion@fbbva.es

To learn more about the BBVA Foundation, visit:
<https://www.fbbva.es/>