TWITTERISATION

THE EUROPEAN AUDIENCE IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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INTRODUCTION

Berlin, April 2017. There is no shortage of political challenges in Europe. How to deal with mass migration from the Middle East and North Africa has become a divisive issue. The "Brexit" vote by UK citizens looms large, and anti-establishment parties question the legitimacy of Europe, calling for a "my nation first" policy. Political debates are increasingly influenced by "fake news" that is often reiterated by high-level politicians and which makes fact-based public discourse more difficult.

All major political decisions in European democracies are validated by national elections in one way to the other - even by those voters who have low confidence in European-style democracy or the democracy in their countries. The message of anti-establishment parties is gaining traction, and political action at the voting booth to unmake Europe is a real threat. Will it materialize?

In this short study, we will look at political participation and what Europeans want from the EU. We will look at profiles of the politically engaged, people with pro- and anti-EU attitudes and different demographic profiles to analyse their preferences for EU governance and political action. We will also show how different groups of people can be engaged most effectively and make suggestions how policymakers can shape public discourse.

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THE DATA

To explore these questions, the report uses data from **"EuroPulse"**, **a quarterly survey by Dalia Research** conducted across 28 EU countries and in 21 languages. The survey was conducted between August 2, 2016 and August 19, 2016. The sample of n=11.754 was drawn across all 28 EU Member States, taking into account current population distributions with regard to age (14-65 years), gender and region/country. An estimation of the overall design effect based on the distribution of weights was calculated at 1.59 at the global level. Calculated for a sample of this size and considering the design-effect, the margin of error would be +/-1.1 % at a confidence level of 95%.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND SATISFACTION WITH THE EU AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

KEY TAKEAWAYS

◆ Even European citizens who are interested in politics are unlikely to protest
◆ The more engaged someone is in politics, the more likely this person has a positive opinion about the European Union
◆ There is a large potential of neutral non-voters who could be supportive of the European Union

Unsurprisingly, political interest and political participation are connected. The more a person is interested in politics, the more likely it is that this person participates in elections and voting. More than 50% of those stating they are not interested in politics have never voted. On the other hand, 46% of those who always vote are somewhat interested in politics while among those who vote most of time, the number increases to 49%. The same applies to the will to protest: the more politically interested a person is, the more likely this person is to protest. However, only 18% said they are likely to protest. Taking to the streets is apparently not the preferred form of political action.
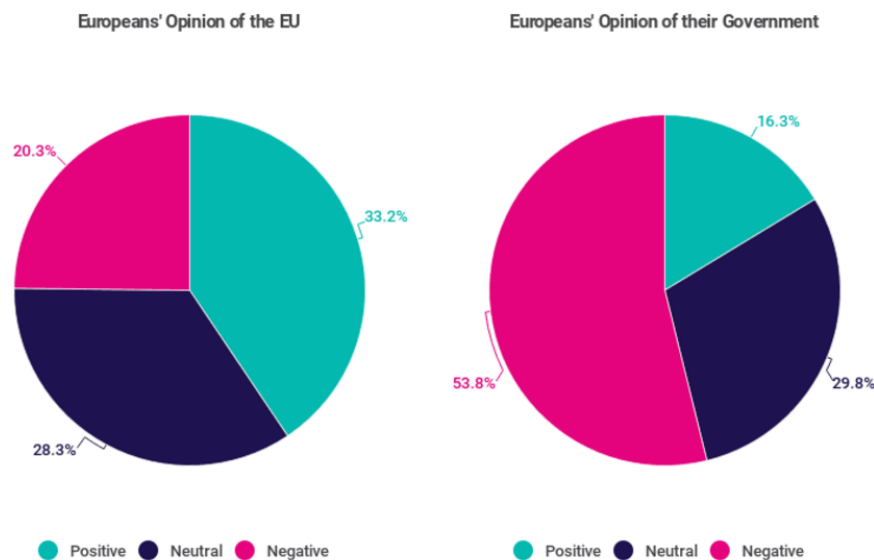

Chart 1: Opinion of national governments and the European Union

The European Union is usually seen much more positively compared to one's government. Interestingly, people who frequently vote are more likely to view the EU favorably but less likely to view their own government favorably. The reason could be that there is a cohort of people who are

highly politically engaged and who have placed their hopes in the EU rather than in their national governments. These people might thus be a supra-

or transnationally-minded class that supports the idea of a Europe built on cooperation beyond national borders.
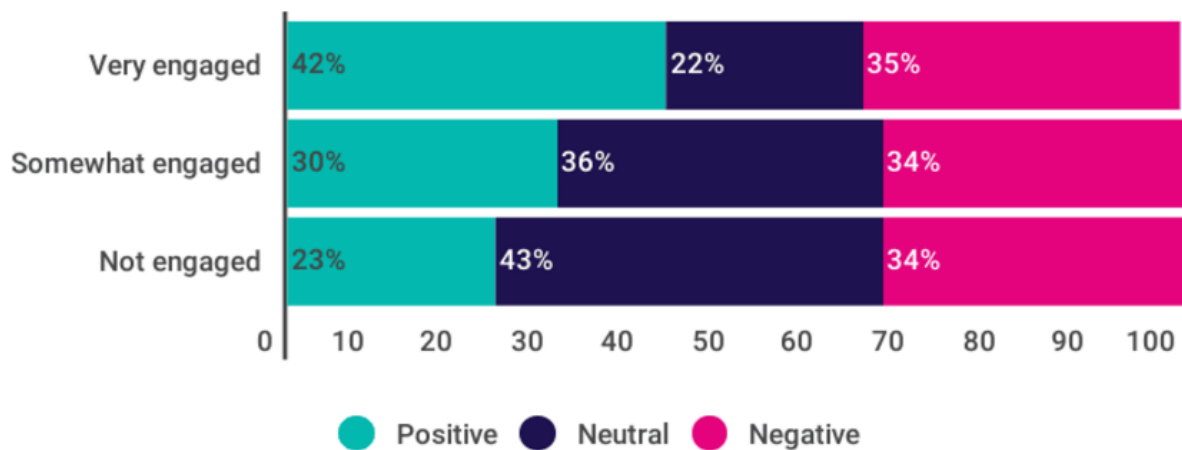

Chart 2: Opinion of the EU and political engagement

To sum up: The differentiation between the EU and its member states is important. The more a person participates in politics, the more likely it is that this person has a positive stance towards the European Union. The same, however cannot be said about national governments. This means that encouraging non-regular voters as well as non-voters to participate in (national) elections can

actually damage the likelihood of a party to stay in power as this is more likely to encourage those to vote who are not satisfied with the national government's policies policies. On the other hand, the large amount of neutral opinions among the non-voters is also a chance for the European Union to tell its story and to convince these non-voters that their vote matters.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND SATISFACTION WITH THE EU AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

KEY TAKEAWAYS

◆ The level of political engagement varies between users of different social media platforms
◆ Twitter is, in comparison with other platforms, not a news platform for the broad public but rather for the politically interested
◆ There is no correlation between being interested in politics and being active on social media platforms

Social media has become one of the most important sources for information. Three out of four respondents use Facebook at least a few times a week. Somewhat unexpectedly, Google+ is being used by nearly 40%, which is, on the one hand, way behind Facebook. On the other hand it contradicts the general impression that Facebook and Twitter are the most important sources for

news, as only 20% of respondents use Twitter at least a few times week, 6% less than Instagram.

Interestingly, more than 50% of the respondents who are not eligible to vote regularly use Instagram. Comparing these results with political interests shows Twitter is for the politically interested: Over 60% of the Twitter users are very or somewhat interested in politics. Meanwhile, only about 50% of the users of other platforms say the same about themselves. Overall, Twitter users post more regularly compared to Facebook users. Politically interested users are more likely to post

regularly on both platforms. However, there is no significant correlation between being politically interested and regularly posting.

This means two things: a) if you want to reach people interested in politics, you are more likely to find them on Twitter compared to other platforms, and b) even if a person is interested in politics, he or she is not necessarily more active on social media platforms. The challenge is therefore to identify those who are active and are maybe even able to create influence beyond their favorite platform.

PRIORITIES BY SUPPORTERS AND OPPONENTS OF THE EU: FOCUS ON TARGET GROUPS

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- EU supporters and opponents vary most significantly by education, while age also plays a large role
- Levels of support for EU policies vary significantly between EU supporters and EU opponents
- EU decision makers should aim to spread their messages and consolidate support for the policies among voters by segmenting between different groups, such as by net promoters or by undecided voters with high likelihood to be convinced

To choose the right policies to make the EU more attractive and appealing to voters, it is important to understand what people want from the EU. In the

wake of the challenges the EU is facing, there is wide disagreement between people who are supportive of the EU and those who are less supportive.

First, it is important to understand who these people are. As the graphic below shows, support for the EU and support for the national government is highly correlated. The net supporters of the EU are significantly more likely to be highly educated. High education scores above all other possible combinations of age and gender when it comes to predicting support for the EU. The second is age: EU supporters are significantly more likely to be young. The ones who are most negative about the EU are low-educated, older females and low-educated middle-aged males. There is no gender difference for the most pro-EU group: the young and highly educated.

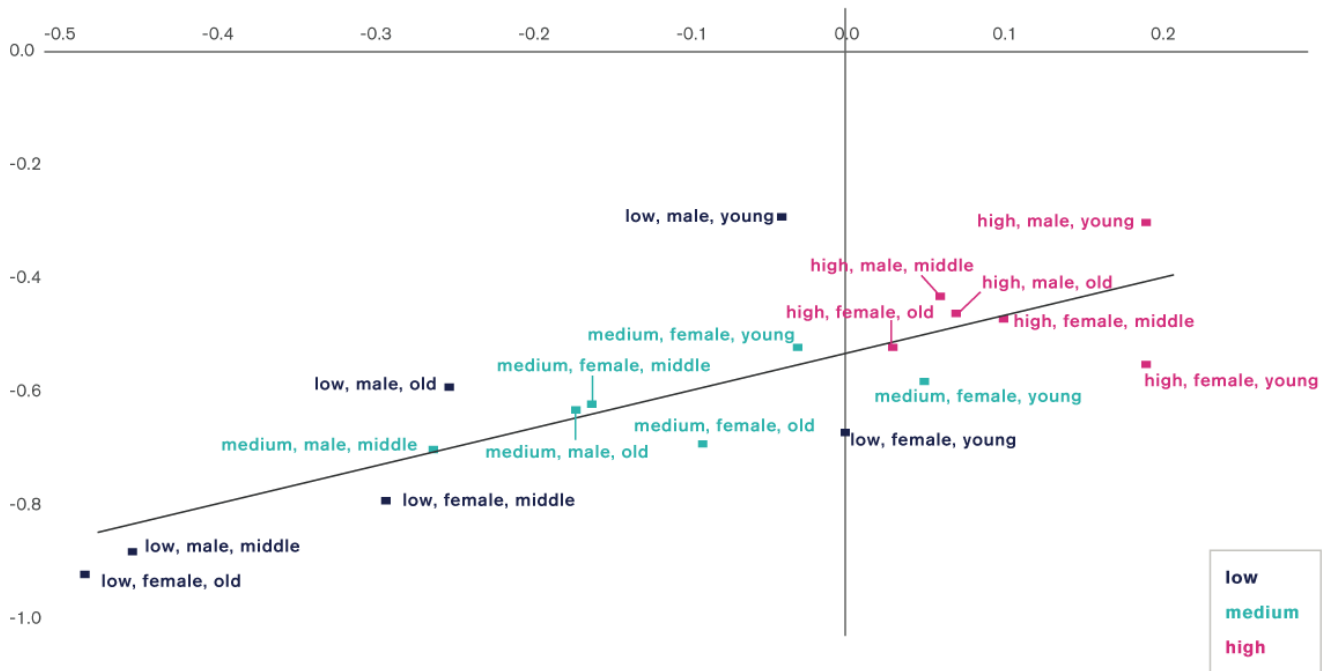## Opinion of Government and the EU: Demographic Groups

Chart 3: Opinion of the EU by demographic groups

What divides EU supporters and opponents most? The biggest disagreements are on the issues in the graphic below: 15% of EU supporters want the EU to limit migration between EU countries compared to 35% of EU opponents. Similarly high are the differences between support for making the public more aware of what the EU does (16 percentage points higher for EU supporters), increasing border security to restrict immigration from outside the EU and giving more economic aid to developing countries (both 15 percentage points higher for EU opponents).

Policy Issue	Positive EU Opinion	Negative EU Opinion
Increasing economic aid to developing countries	35%	20%
Increasing border security to restrict immigration from outside EU	37%	51%
Less financial assistance to certain EU member states	12%	23%
Preventing more countries joining the EU within the next 5 years	11%	24%
Making the public more aware of what the EU does	51%	35%
Limiting migration between EU countries	15%	35%

Table 1: Opinion of the EU and political priorities

SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL OPINIONS: TWITTER USERS ARE MOST OPINIONATED

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Twitter is the leading social media platform for opinionated political debates
- EU decision makers can increase their outreach effort to raise support and awareness for policy issues by targeting Twitter users
- Focusing on Twitter users will have a larger effect in the voting booth compared to other platforms, although national peculiarities must be taken into account

Twitter users are more opinionated about specific EU policies than non-Twitter users, supporting the finding that Twitter users are more politically engaged. However, there is no clear trend whether Twitter users are, on average, more positive or negative toward the EU. When asked about their perception of the EU, Twitter users are much more likely to say positive things: 43% of Twitter users think the EU encourages cultural exchange and

diversity, compared to 33% of non-Twitter users. They are also more likely to say it improves workers' rights (+8 percentage points), it helps keep the peace in Europe, and it strengthens the idea of a European identity (both +7 percentage points).

Twitter users are also more likely to say negative things about the EU than non-Twitter users: Twitter users are 5 percentage points more likely than non-Twitter users to say the EU is not democratic enough, it makes poor decisions, and it places the interests of corporations over people. The only exception where Twitter users are less likely than non-Twitter users to agree is immigration: 33% of Twitter users say the EU lets in too many immigrants, compared to 36% non-Twitter users. Furthermore, Twitter users are more likely to vote than non-Twitter users: 49% of Twitter users say the always vote, compared to 39% of non-Twitter users.

Voter Turnout*	Twitter Users	Non-Twitter Users
Always	39%	49%
Most times	27%	27%
Some times	11%	9%
Rarely	12%	7%
Never	11%	8%

Table 2: Turnout and Twitter (*those not yet eligible to vote excluded)

CONCLUSIONS

- **High political interest does not equal desire for protest.** People don't seem to be willing to protest on the street to express their anger/dissatisfaction with politics. Even highly politically interested people seem to prefer choking back their anger rather than protesting against their government.

- **More hope in the EU than in national governments.** Overall, more people are still positive about the European Union than their national government. Especially politically interested people see the European Union positively. This means that by supporting interest in politics and political participation, one could improve this overall positive view even further.

> **The better people understand the EU, the more they support it**: Although the EU faces structural challenges, people who are interested in the EU are more likely to support it. The EU and its member states therefore face the challenge of increasing awareness of the benefits of being part of the EU. Fostering interest in political debates and procedures supports the legitimacy of the EU in the long run, but this does not come for free.

- **Young and highly educated most pro-EU.** The younger and the higher educated someone is, the more positive his or her opinion about the European Union is. This supports the thesis that the European Union is a project of/for the elite. It also clarifies to whom campaigns and messages promoting the benefits of the EU should be targeted.

- **Divide between pro-EU and anti-EU camp on EU policies.** Pro-EU people are less likely to want to restrict immigration, prevent other countries from joining the EU, and lessen financial assistance to lower-income member states. They want a Europe of open borders while people more anti-EU want to limit openness.

> **The EU as a "bridge builder" for future generations**: pro- as well as anti-EU individuals have clear expectations about the future policies of the European Union. The challenge is that these expectation are very different. Fostering a common understanding about the future and identity of the EU and its policies, especially among younger generations, will also increase support for the EU in general.

- **Political discourse takes place on Twitter.** Donald Trump used the right medium to influence politically engaged people. Twitter users are more likely to be actively involved in policy debates. Twitter users are also more likely to be pro-EU, a compounding factor to the overall higher political engagement of pro-EU people.

- **Twitter can be an accelerator for political action.** Twitter users are also more likely to vote than non-Twitter users, making them a key constituents to focus on for policymakers. People increasingly expect short and simple explanations from politicians themselves that they can easily engage with. Policymakers need to engage with this trend, else they risk being punished at the voting booth.

> **Extending the online debate:** Engaging people on online platforms is an important way to include already politically interested people in debates currently occurring on national as well as European levels. Twitter might be the most obvious choice, but it might be worthwhile to consider using 'non-political' platforms to to connect with people not currently interested in politics. It also helps to avoid frustration by showing that the 'political sphere' is aware of the concerns of the 'common citizen'.

WHAT NEXT?

All things considered, it is important to note that **the younger generation is overall positive about the EU**, and people who are interested and participate in political processes do have a more positive feeling toward the EU as well. They key to creating a better common understanding of the EU and its member states is fostering political participation and debates.

- **Using social media platforms to engage debates about politics can be a comparably easy to way to improve these processes.** This might primarily address young voters or digital natives, and it will only be successful if social media is used as an active and serious forum for exchange and debates. Social media aficionados are especially sensitive to being used as 'fig leaves'.

- **While social media might primarily attract the highly educated and young, other** measures that both attract and integrate older, non-digital-native generations into these debates are required as well. These events must be organized on-site and need to take into consideration the cultural and social peculiarities of a given location as well as geographical requirements. These events are also an opportunity to build a bridge between the younger and older generation, fostering not only understanding within each generation itself but also between generations as well as between people of different educational backgrounds.

We are presented with a unique opportunity in that we do have the technical, interpersonal, and intercultural tools to integrate all different kinds of people into political debates. These tools also empower us to use people's experiences and knowledge to foster mutual understanding across diverse groups, the national states, and the European Union. We only have to be serious enough to do it.

DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die Autoren analysieren Umfragedaten von über 12.000 Europäern aus 28 EU-Ländern, um herauszufinden wie politisches Engagement und Einstellung gegenüber der EU zusammenhängen. Auf einer tieferen Betrachtung demografischer Profile, Präferenzen für politisches Handeln und der Nutzung von Diskursplattformen der Europäer aufbauend, leiten die Autoren Handlungs-empfehlungen ab, wie Politiker die Debatte führen und partizipativer gestalten können, statt ihr nur zu folgen.

Die Autoren finden heraus, dass Menschen über alle Altersgruppen hinweg mehr Vertrauen in die EU setzen als in nationale Regierungen, auch wenn die Jungen und Gebildeten eine weitaus höhere Meinung von der EU haben. Allerdings ist Offline-Protestverhalten nicht notwendigerweise ein Merkmal der politisch aktivsten Europäer. Stattdessen konzentrieren sich die Aktivsten vor allem auf Online-Kanäle, um politische Debatten zu führen und ihre Meinung zum Ausdruck bringen. So ist Twitter ein Kanal, der überdurchschnittlich von politisch Aktiven genutzt wird.

Bürgern müssen online wie offline Möglichkeiten zur Partizipation geboten werden, z.B. über die Verzahnung lokaler, über Europa verteilter innovativer Formate in Verbindung mit der Nutzung sozialer Netzwerke, um die richtigen Zielgruppen anzusprechen und die Unterstützung für das europäische Projekt zu erhöhen. Dies verbindet die "digital native"-Generation mit jenen, für die soziale Netzwerke nicht Teil des alltäglichen politischen Diskurses sind. Wichtig ist dabei eine aktive Kommunikation sowie die Identifikation von Schüssel-Usern innerhalb der Netzwerke.

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Dalia

POLIS180

Polis180 is a grass roots think tank for European and foreign policy. Our participatory and inclusive approach allows us to develop innovative political concepts. We encourage our members to get involved and enable them to participate in the political discourse. The large Polis180 network extends our reach to policy makers, civil society and political stakeholders. We cultivate creative, political ideas as well as new event formats. In doing so, we address decision-makers and translate academic literature into clear messages and policy recommendations. We introduce the innovative spirit of a start-up to the established political landscape. In that sense, Polis fills a gap in bringing innovative ideas and formats to an audience that is largely isolated from the ideas and recommendations of our generation.

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