



Mapping 'TRUST'

An audit of operationalizations
and measurement practices

February 2026

Paris, Sheffield, Ottawa, Katowice

PODtrust Project

Founders



Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR), France

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The National Science Centre (NCN) is Poland's primary research funding body, supporting basic research across disciplines. NCN emphasizes scientific excellence, transparency, and the advancement of international partnerships.



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PODTRUST Project

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Introduction

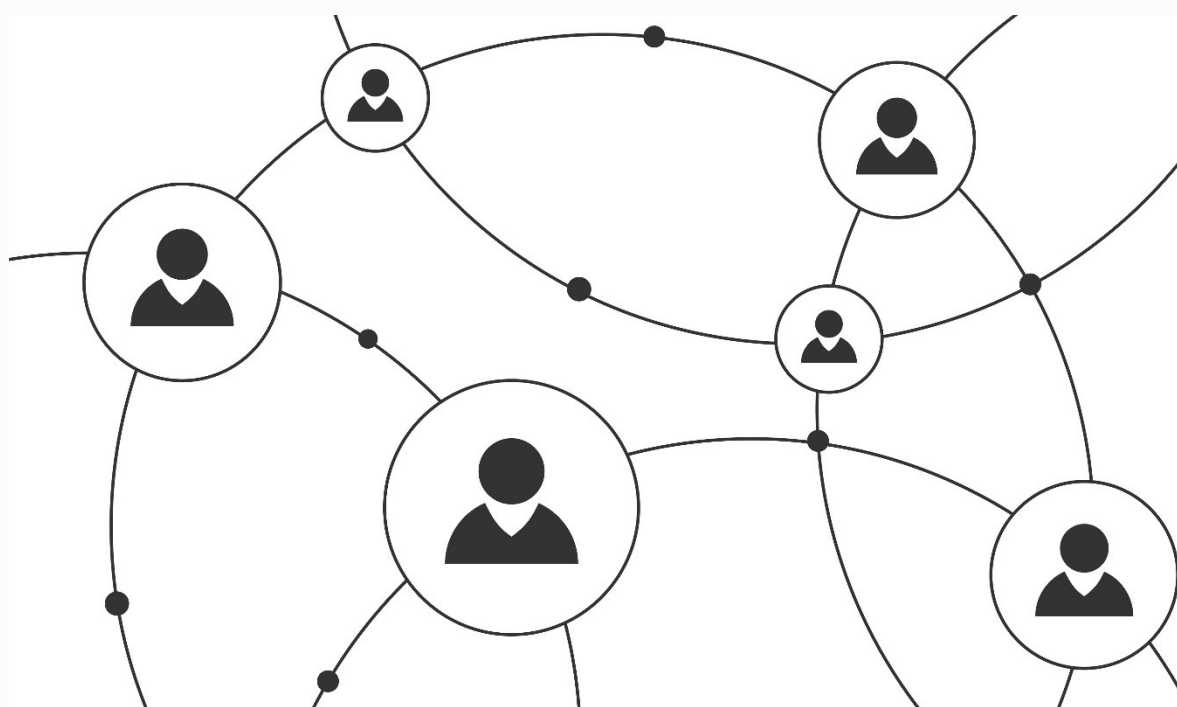
PODTrust is guided by a broad research agenda focused on understanding how political trust is constructed and maintained in an era shaped by digital communication. The project examines how trust should be conceptualized within contemporary digital politics, how social, cultural, and national contexts shape expectations toward political actors and institutions, and what forms of digital media and communication foster high-trust relationships. It further explores how democratic practice may be strengthened through more trustworthy forms of digital interaction.

To address these objectives, the research team conducts a mixed-method study across four countries characterized by historically low levels of political trust. The project combines survey audits, interviews with political elites, experimental interventions, and field studies involving real-world actors.



Mapping Strategy

The following report presents the results of a study aimed at identifying research projects that examine political trust and its underlying conditions. It covers projects at the regional (with particular emphasis on Europe), national, and global (cross-national) levels.



The report aims to understand how trust and its component elements are operationalised and measured in current research. This report will be followed by two publicly available files (at the end of 2026):

- ▶ a meta-file containing public opinion surveys conducted between 2014 and 2024. This file delivers the following pieces of information about the examined surveys: (1) principal investigator (PI), (2) the university of the PI, (3) the year(s) covered, (4) the co-leading researchers, (5) the secondary source (if exist), (6) the studied area (countries covered), (7) the data availability, (8) the name of the datasets in the SPSS, Stata and R format (if exist), (9) respective links to the datasets, and (10) the link to the overall survey;
- ▶ a database listing all questions identified within questionnaires employed in the projects involving public opinion surveys. This file indicates specific questions or sub-question extracted from the selection of investigated surveys. The database contains the following information: (1) the wording of the leading phrase, the main answer verbatim and sub-verbatim (if existing) in its original language, (2) the English

translation, (3) the abbreviated name of the variable, (4) the name of the original survey, (5) the year(s) covered, (6) the name/year of the wave, (7) the link to the wave, and (8) the link to the overall survey.

The audit focuses on surveys relying on public opinion data and dealing with three key notions:

- ▶ political trust
- ▶ digital interactions between politicians and citizens
- ▶ minorities and marginalized groups.

In European countries, the study specifically examines research projects funded by the following state institutions: the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), the Belgian¹ Science Policy Office (BELSPO), the Croatian Science Foundation (HRZZ), the French National Research Agency (ANR), the German Research Foundation (DFG), the Dutch Research Council (NWO), the Research Council of Norway (RCN), the Executive Unit for the Funding of Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Unit (UEFISCDI), the Hungarian National Research, Development and Innovation Office (NRDI), the Italian National Council of Research (CNR), the Spanish Investigation State Agency (AEI), the Swedish Research Council (SRC), the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)—part of the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). Concerning Canada, we focused on the Canadian Election Study and on research projects financed by the federal state, through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). The final selection was motivated by the wish to constitute a diversified and exhaustive sample, gathering North American and European cases involved in heterogeneous political pathways and having experienced democratization through its distinct waves (Haggard and Kaufman, 2016a; Haggard and Kaufman, 2016b; Lindberg, 2026). State funding institutions' websites were then carefully examined, through the mobilization of the keywords. A similar approach motivated our selection of cross-national and cross-time surveys. The longitudinal surveys that allow for pan-European comparisons – therefore including a set of countries experiencing different states of democratization – are the Standard Eurobarometer, the European Parliament Election Study (EPES), the European Values Study (EVS), and the European Social

¹ In the specific case of Belgium, we also reviewed the subnational funding institutions competent in the French-speaking and Dutch-speaking regional entities: the Wallonian *Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique* (FNRS) and the Flemish *Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek* (FWO). However, we did not find – among the research projects supported by the previously mentioned public bodies – studies dealing with our three topics of interest.

Survey (ESS). In the United States, longitudinal surveys include the General Social Survey (GSS), the American National Election Studies (ANES) and the American Trends Panel (ATP). In the Canadian case, a survey corresponding to the same characteristics was selected: the Canadian Election Study (CES). We selected these European and North American surveys by relying on the most frequently quoted and mobilized datasets in the literature.

The originality of our audit work can be summarised in the following points: first, and in coherence with the most recent literature (Valgarðsson et al., 2025), the created files embrace a global approach by covering a large extent of geographic areas, and do not only focus on public opinions in established liberal democracies, but also extend to regions which did not experience the European-centred waves of democratisation (Gunitsky, 2018). Second, our audit is structured by its longitudinal dimension (2014-2024). Third, the created files include surveys integrating the questions embedded in the concept of trust (Norris, 2017; Carstens, 2023) and the diversity of the objects covered by trust (Zmerli and Newton, 2017). This extended understanding of trust helped us to deliver the broadest overview of the surveys exploring its different dimensions.

Challenges in mapping the research on ‘Political Trust’

The current audit maps the research projects and operationalization of ‘trust’ measurements. One can identify multiple challenges.

► **The first challenge** is related to definition and conceptual issues. Beyond the cross-national or country-focused nature of the studies under review, one must also take into account the definitional diversity of the concepts examined. Regarding political trust, the density of the theoretical literature contrasts with the frequent methodological weaknesses that undermine the indicators proposed to measure it. Indeed, survey measures of trust tend to limit themselves to public assessments of incumbents’ performance—framed as perceived honesty, competence and procedural correctness. This multifaceted conception of trust creates confusion between the factors that condition trustworthiness and the notion of political trust broadly speaking (Seyd, 2016). The current audit concentrates on political trust and covers broader interpretations of this concept, encompassing all its potential dimensions. Consequently, political trust can be explored through several related notions, which are noticeable through different thematic clusters of questions:

- 1) trust in political actors and institutions;
- 2) factors shaping trust in political actors and institutions;
- 3) the reputation of political actors and institutions;
- 4) feelings of being represented (or not);
- 5) the perceived ability to voice one's concerns and have them make an impact;
- 6) evaluations of government performance; and
- 7) political (in)efficacy and (dis)satisfaction with democracy.

- **The second challenge** connects to the study's typology and depends on whether it is cross-national or country-specific. In the case of longitudinal and cross-national surveys, particular attention must be paid to possible *changes in question design*, as the same question may be worded differently from one wave to another, or it may offer different sets of response options depending on the wave concerned. In addition, cross-national surveys may be sensitive to contextual factors: the structure and framing of the same question may be modified to adapt it — for example, through the introduction of additional explanatory items — to a specific context at a given time.
- **The third challenge** relates to the difficulty of working across multiple languages, as concepts related to trust did not neatly translate across national contexts. This is especially true for state-funded surveys covering a specific country. In the current study, this problem was faced several times. While the study was mapped via an English search, the tools (questionnaire) were mainly accessible in the local language. Thus, part of the tool description relies on online translation platforms (e.g. Google Translate, DeepL, or ChatGPT) to identify relevant concepts.
- **The fourth challenge** is the sensitivity of the topic in some countries. For example, investigating racial-related or minority-oriented issues may be more limited and sensitive due to socio-cultural characteristics, legal reasons or understanding of certain phenomena, e.g. 'colour blind' citizenship. Moreover, the unpopularity of certain research topics also appears to depend on the national context. For example, we have identified rare research projects related to minorities and marginalization in some Southern or Eastern European countries.

From the perspective of knowledge transfer, some challenges arose in communicating with the principal investigators (PIs) of several research projects. In a number of cases, questionnaires were not publicly available, and requests for additional information or access to research instruments received limited responses. This occurred despite the projects being publicly funded. The challenge was particularly noticeable for studies addressing sensitive topics, such as discriminated or stigmatized populations, although

the present audit focused exclusively on research instruments (questionnaires and measurement approaches) rather than on the underlying datasets.

Method

In December 2025, 184 principal investigators (PIs) of state-funded research projects were identified, mostly through the websites of their respective funding institutions. All of them were contacted via a professional email address with a request to share their survey questionnaires. Each PI was contacted individually by initial email and then – in case no answer was received – followed up twice, each time one week apart. Out of all the researchers contacted, 45 (24%) answered; within them, 17 (38%) spontaneously shared their survey questionnaires (and sometimes information about their data collection pertaining to the themes covered in the given research), 15 (33%) answered with refusal to share, and 13 (29%) promised an alternative and more detailed answer (however, only one project indeed provided more detailed information). In two other cases, the concerned PIs finally declined to share their questionnaires. In addition, four contacted researchers promised answers from other members of their past research team or from the true PI. Lastly, five researchers explained that the questionnaires and data that they are working on are not publicly accessible now, or are still in preparation, and that they will provide these documents later.

Thus, the current study covers 49 research projects (visualized in the graphs and table below) based on public opinion surveys and measuring trust, as a focus or as a contextual variable. Within these studies, 25 research projects are labelled as multi-national (gathering more than two countries), and 24 as national or cross-national (comparing two countries). Within the national public opinion surveys gathered in this dataset, the most covered countries are France, Germany, Norway, the United States, Canada, and Sweden.

The audit also includes 29 global surveys (such as Asian Barometer, Eurobarometer) or national surveys (such as French '*Baromètre de la confiance politique*' run yearly by CEVIPOF SciencesPo Paris). Those could have been included without further contact with the PIs, as questionnaires and data are publicly available.

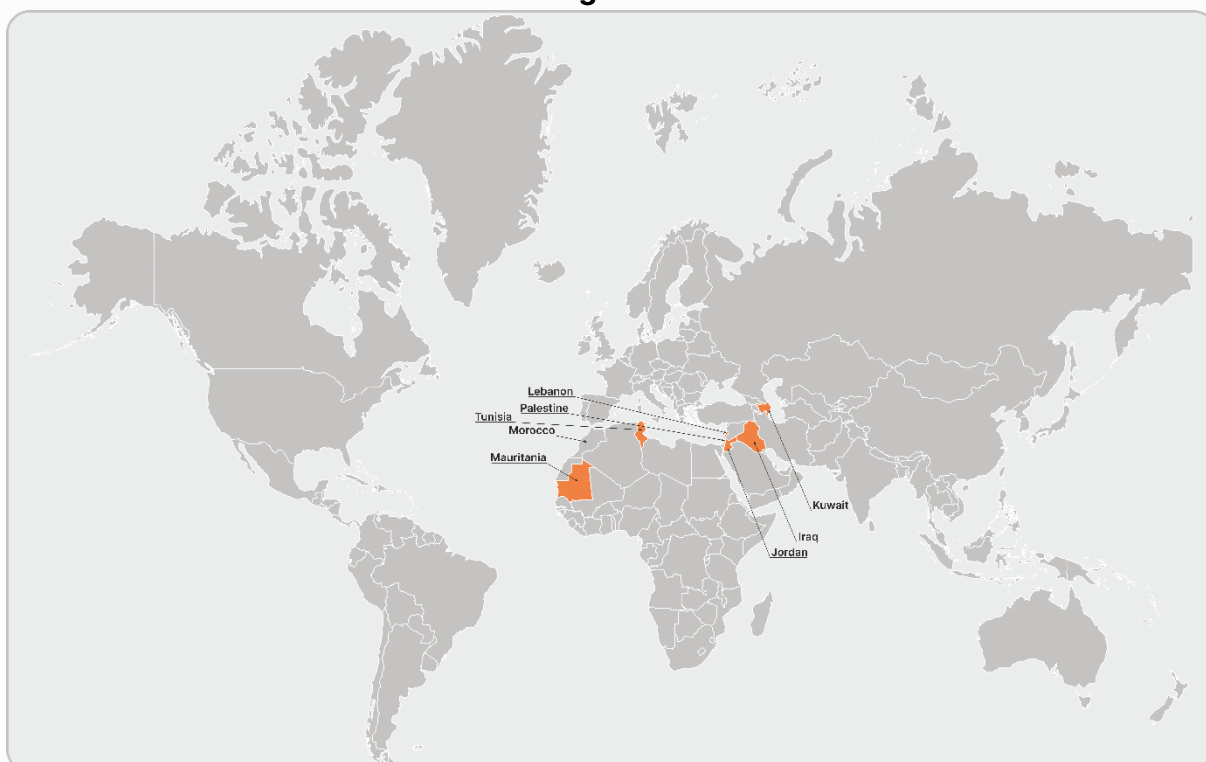
Data in our study

Figure 1



Asian Barometer, PI: National Taiwan University, 2001–2023, 6 waves

Figure 2



Arab Barometer, PI: Princeton University / University of Michigan / Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research / Middle East Council on Global Affairs / One to One for Research and Polling, 2006–2024, 8 waves

Figure 3



Afrobarometer, PI: Michigan State University / University of Nairobi / University of Cape Town, 1999–2023, 9 waves

Figure 4



Latinobarómetro, PI: Corporación Latinobarómetro, 2000–2023, 19 waves

Figure 5



AmericasBarometer, PI: Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) / Vanderbilt University, 2004–2023, 10 waves

Figure 6



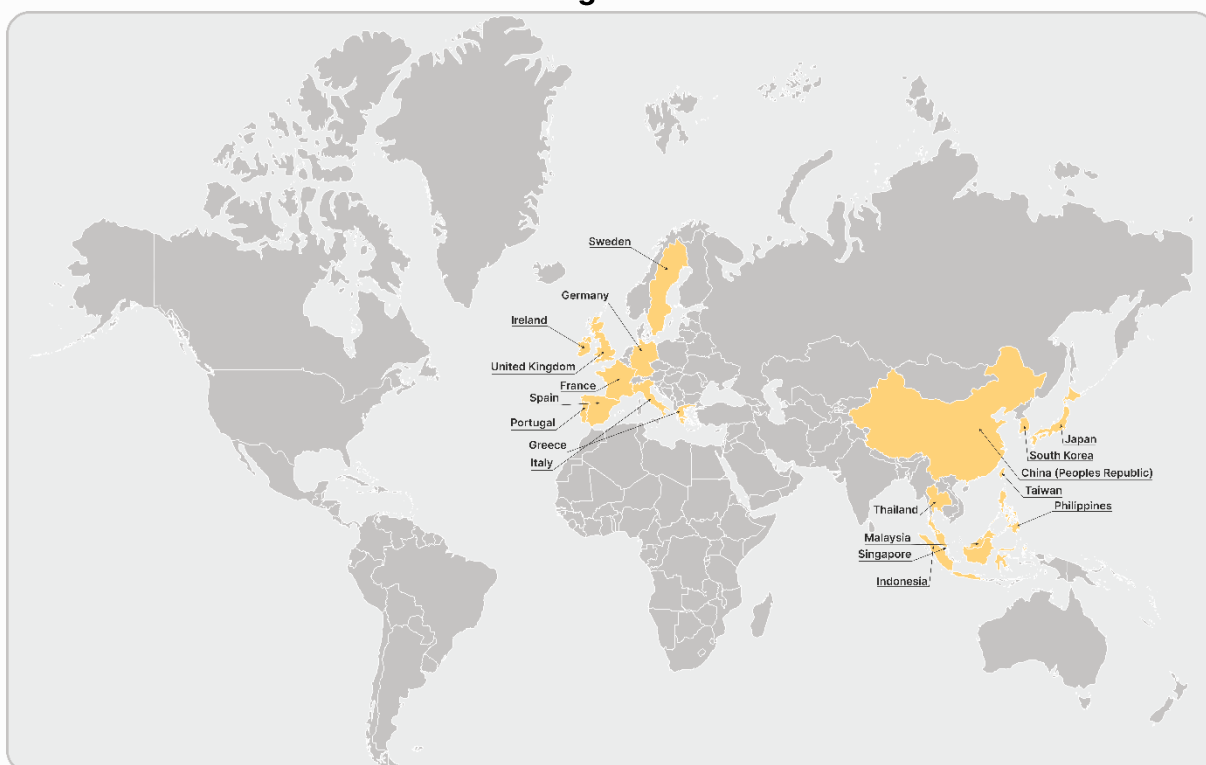
New Europe Barometer, PI: Centre for the Study of Public Policy / Paul Lazarsfeld Society, 2001 and 2004, 2 waves

Figure 7



Caucasus Barometer, PI: Caucasus Research Resource Center, 2008–2024, 12 waves

Figure 8



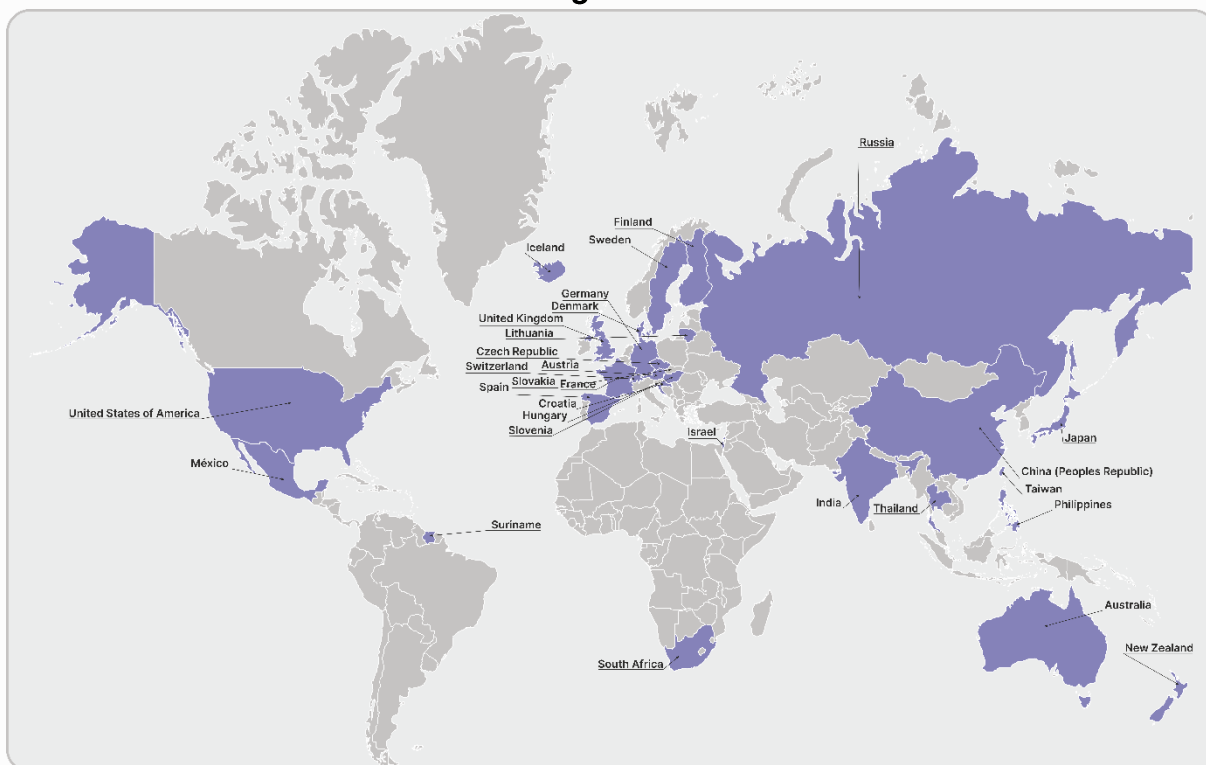
Asia Europe Survey, PI: Chuo University, 2000, 1 wave

Figure 9



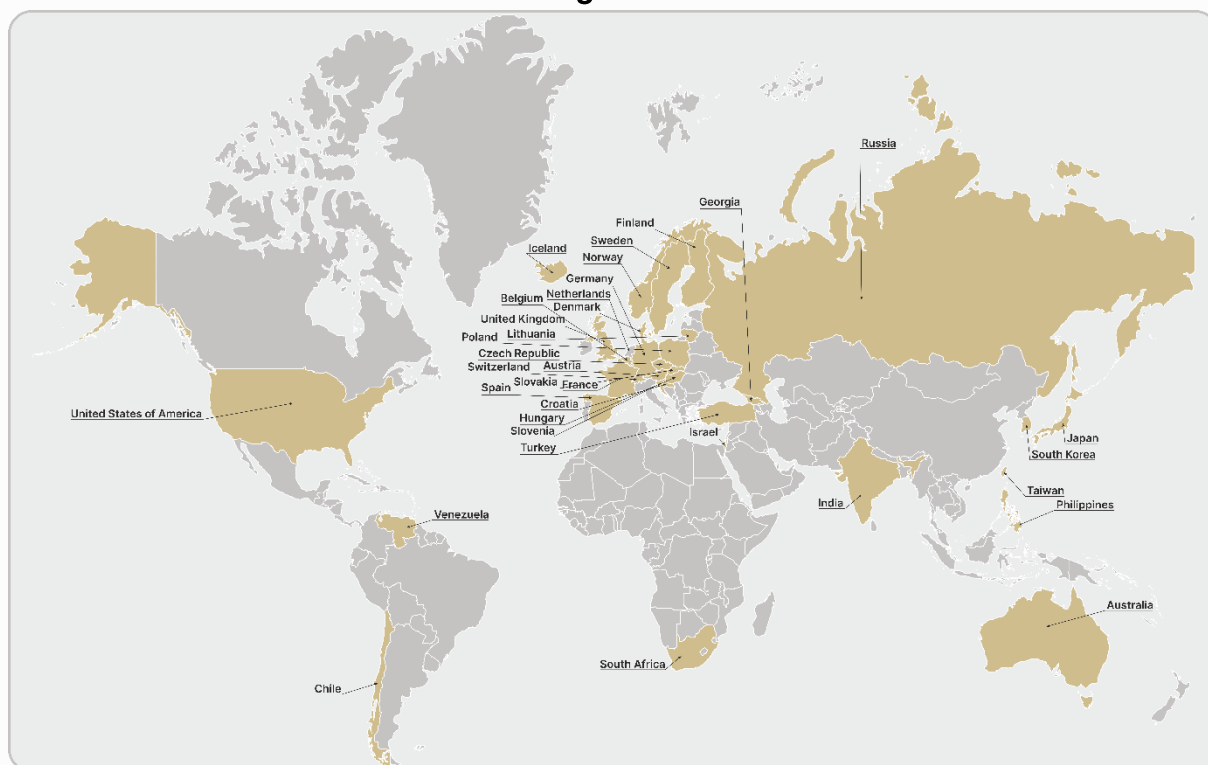
IntUne - Integrated and United: A quest for Citizenship in an 'ever closer Europe', PI: University of Siena / Friedrich-Schiller-University (Jena), 2007–2009, 2 waves

Figure 10



International Social Survey Programme: Social Relations and Support Systems, PI: National Opinion Research Center (NORC) / Australian National University / University of Nevada / Karl Franzens University (Graz), 2001 and 2017, 2 waves

Figure 11



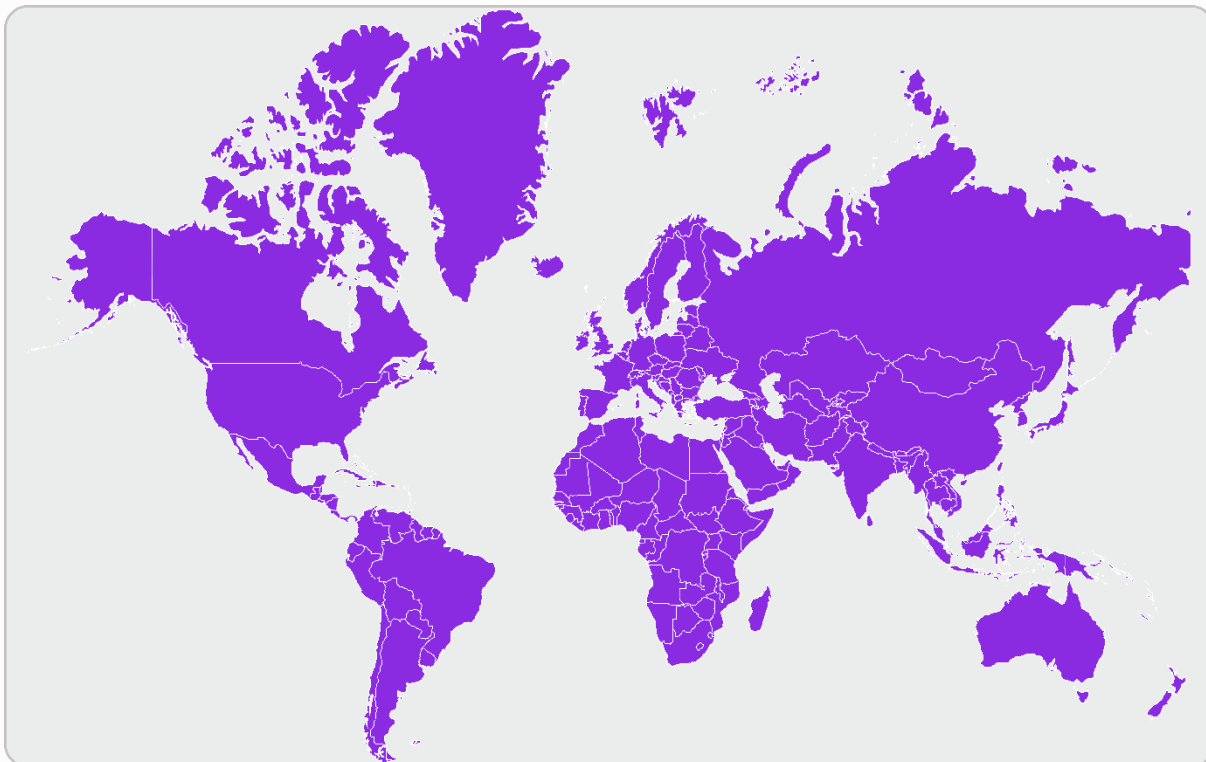
International Social Survey Programme: Citizenship, PI: Macquarie University / University of Manchester / Karl Franzens University (Graz) / Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile / Institute of Sociology (Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic), 2004 and 2014, 2 waves

Figure 12



International Social Survey Programme: Social Inequality, PI: Universidad de Buenos Aires / Australian National University / Karl Franzens University (Graz) / University of Amsterdam / University of Lausanne, 2009 and 2019, 2 waves

Figure 13



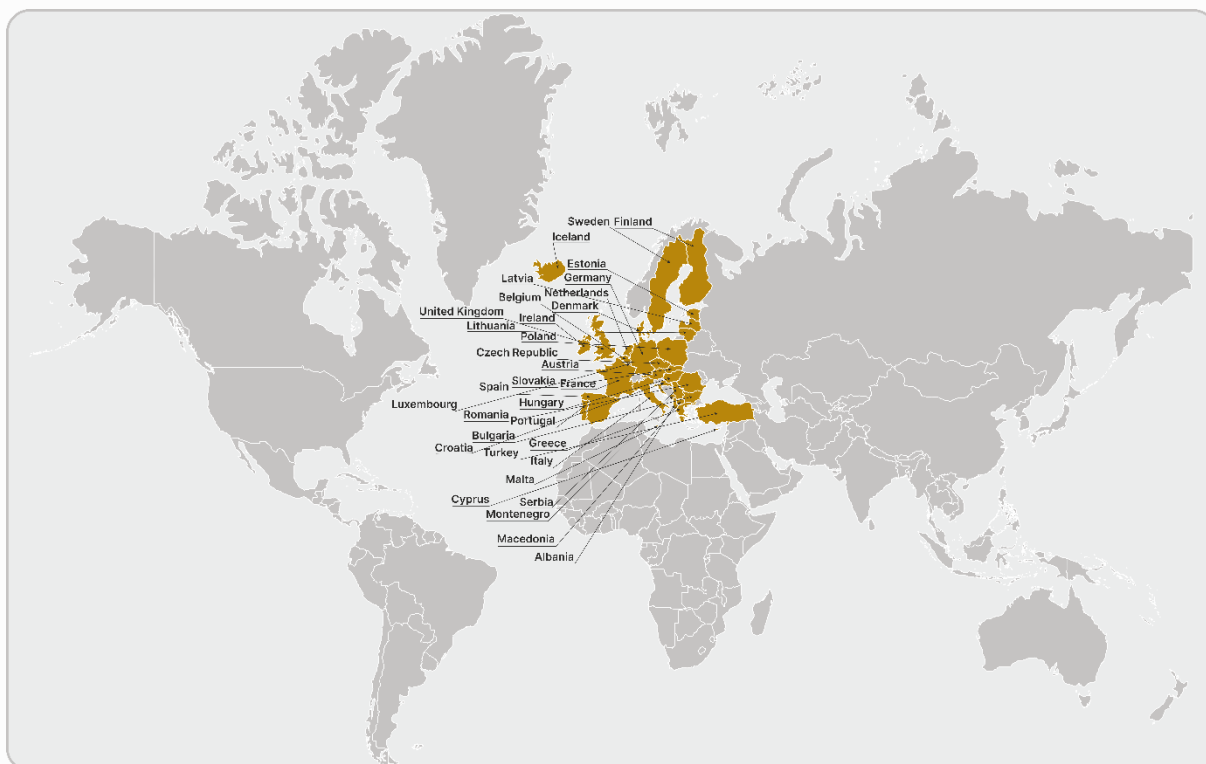
World Values Survey, PI: World Values Survey Association, 1999–2022, 4 waves

Figure 14



European Social Survey, PI: European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ESS ERIC), 2002–2024, 11 waves

Figure 15



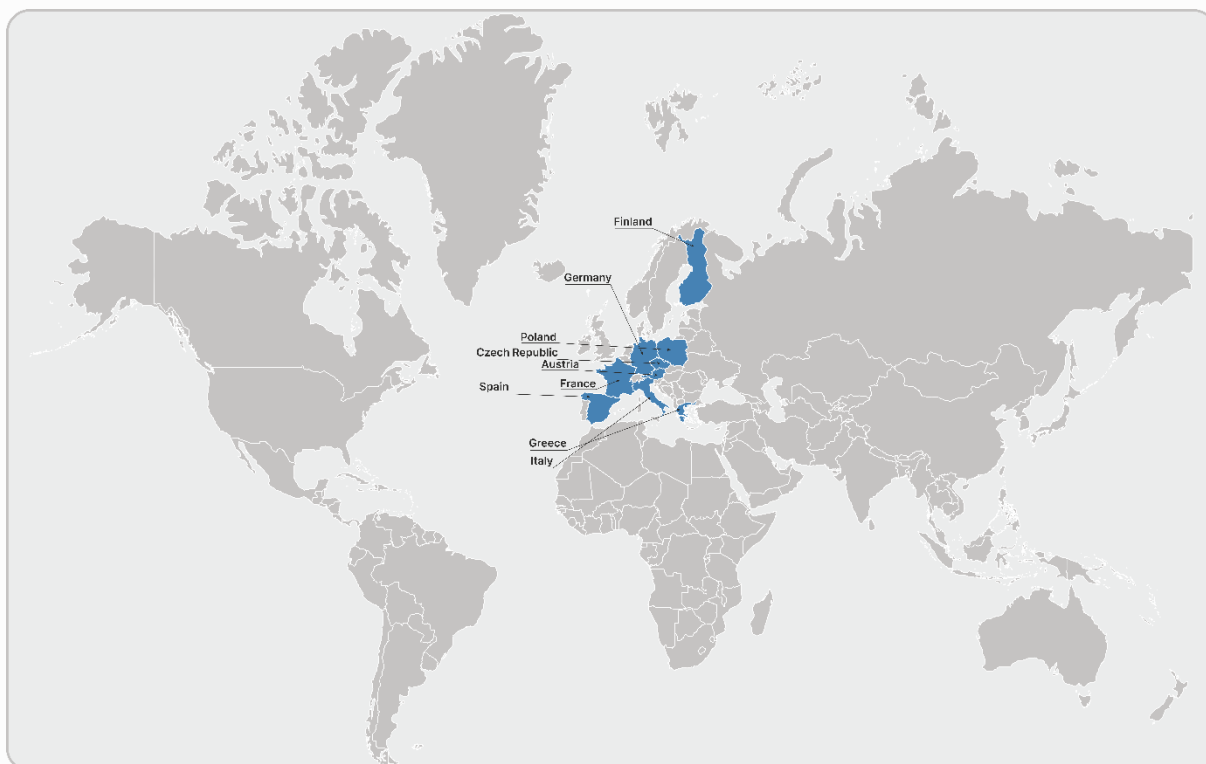
Standard Eurobarometer, PI: European Commission: Directorate-General Communication, 2014–2024, 21 waves

Figure 16



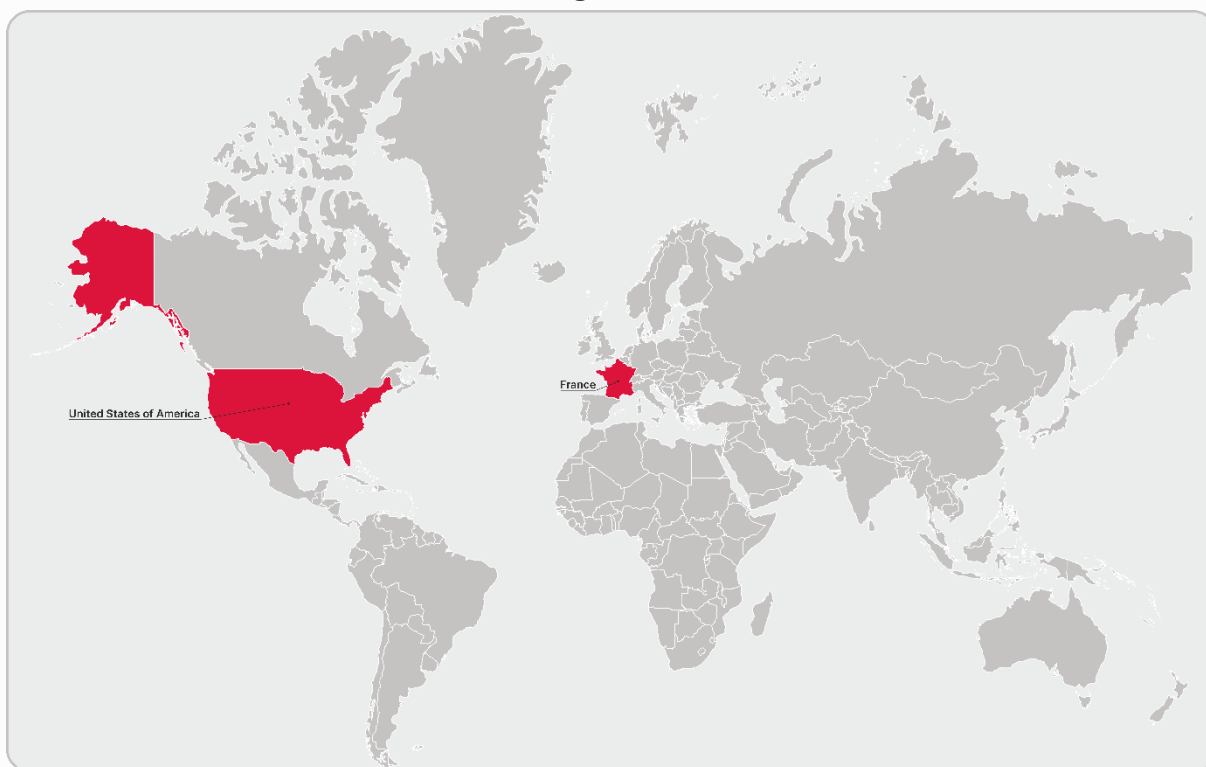
European Values Study, PI: Tilburg University, 1999–2021, 3 waves

Figure 17



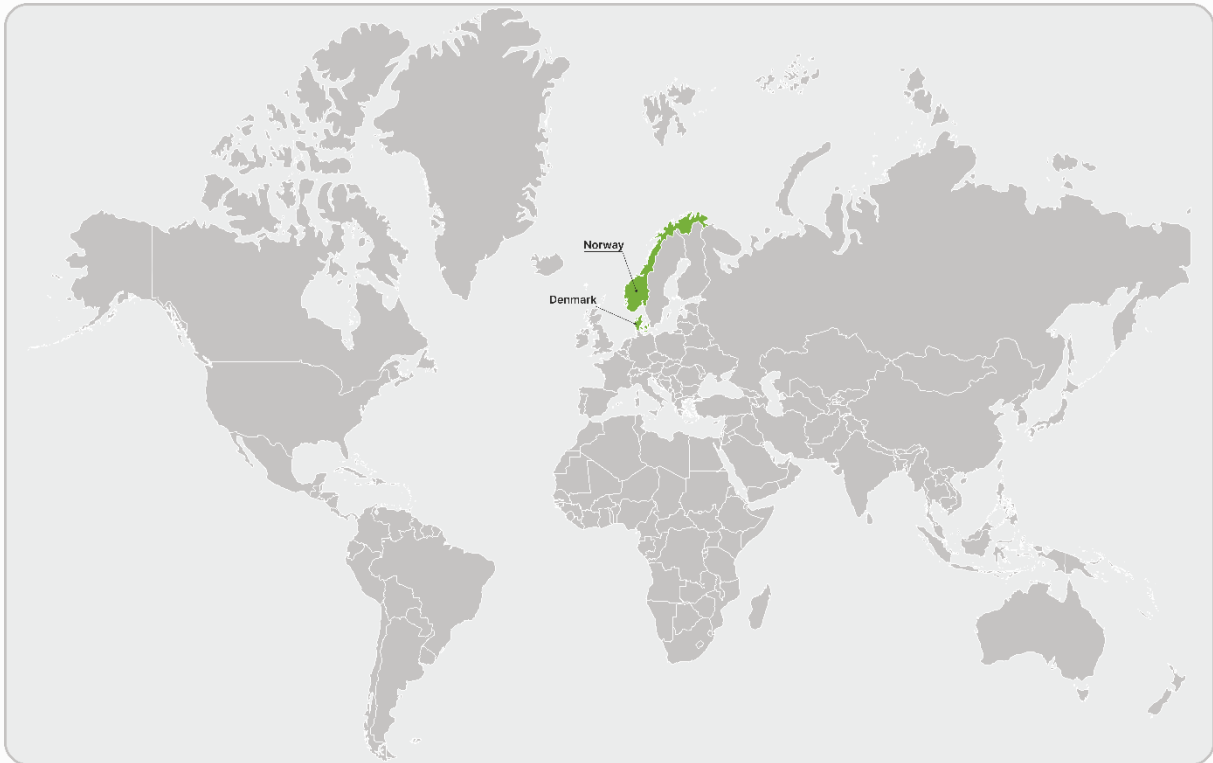
Towards a new era of representative democracy - Activating European citizens' trust in times of crises and polarization, PI: Sciences Po Paris / Catholic University of Lille / Duisburg-Essen University / Saarland University / Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) / Abo Akademi University / Paris Lodron University of Salzburg / Oviedo University / Institute of International Relations (Prague) / SWPS University / Aristotle University of Thessaloniki / University of Trento, 2024, 1 wave

Figure 18



MUTADATA, PI: Western Catholic University (Angers, France), 2020–2022, 1 wave

Figure 19



Trust among refugees. The impact of welfare state institutions, PI: Fafo Institute, 2023–2024, 1 wave

Figure 20



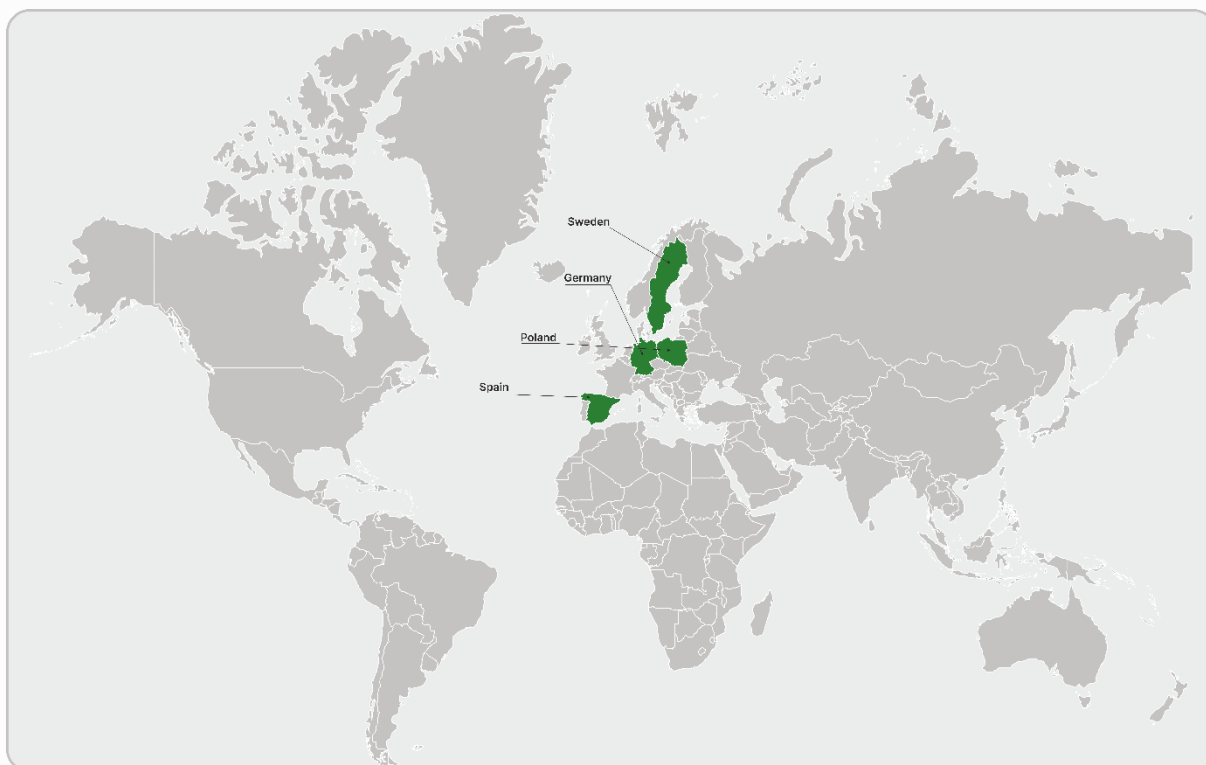
The consequences of coalition compromise on public opinion, PI: University of Vienna, 2024, 1 wave

Figure 21



The consequences of coalition compromise on public opinion, PI: University of Vienna, 2024, 1 wave

Figure 22



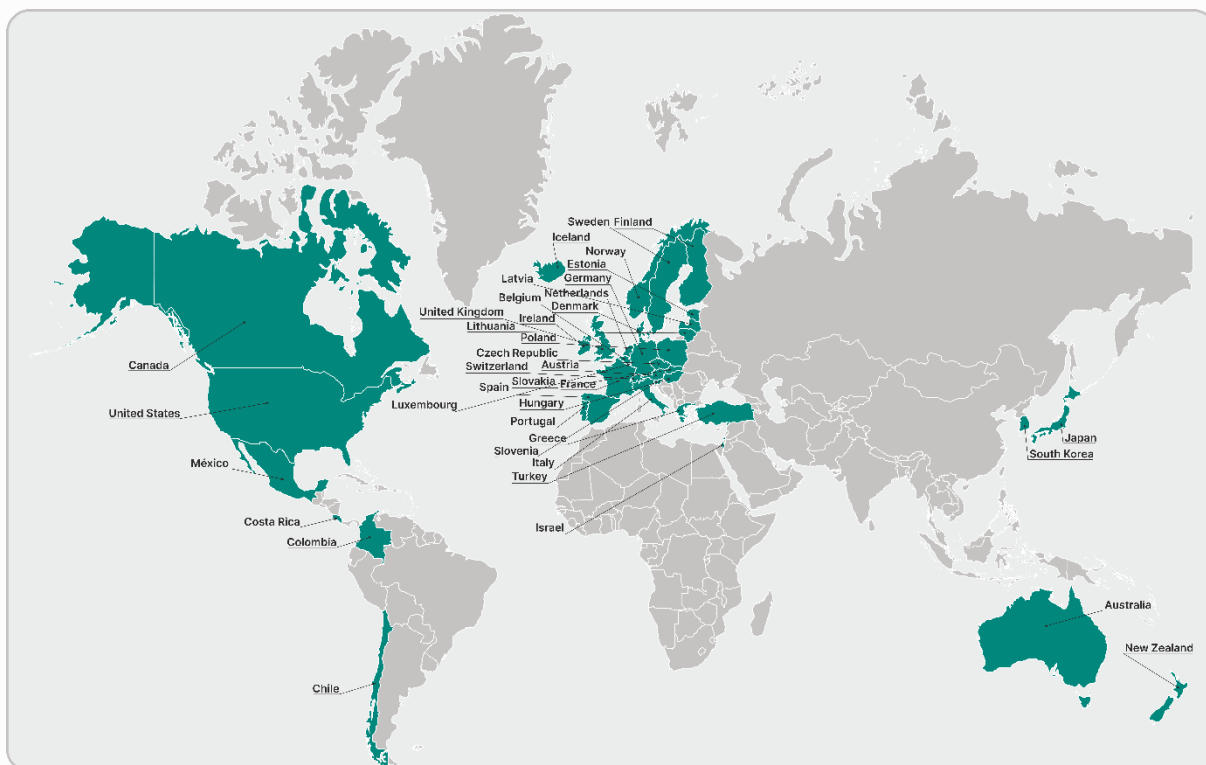
Political Trust and the Environment, PI: Uppsala University, 2021, 1 wave

Figure 23



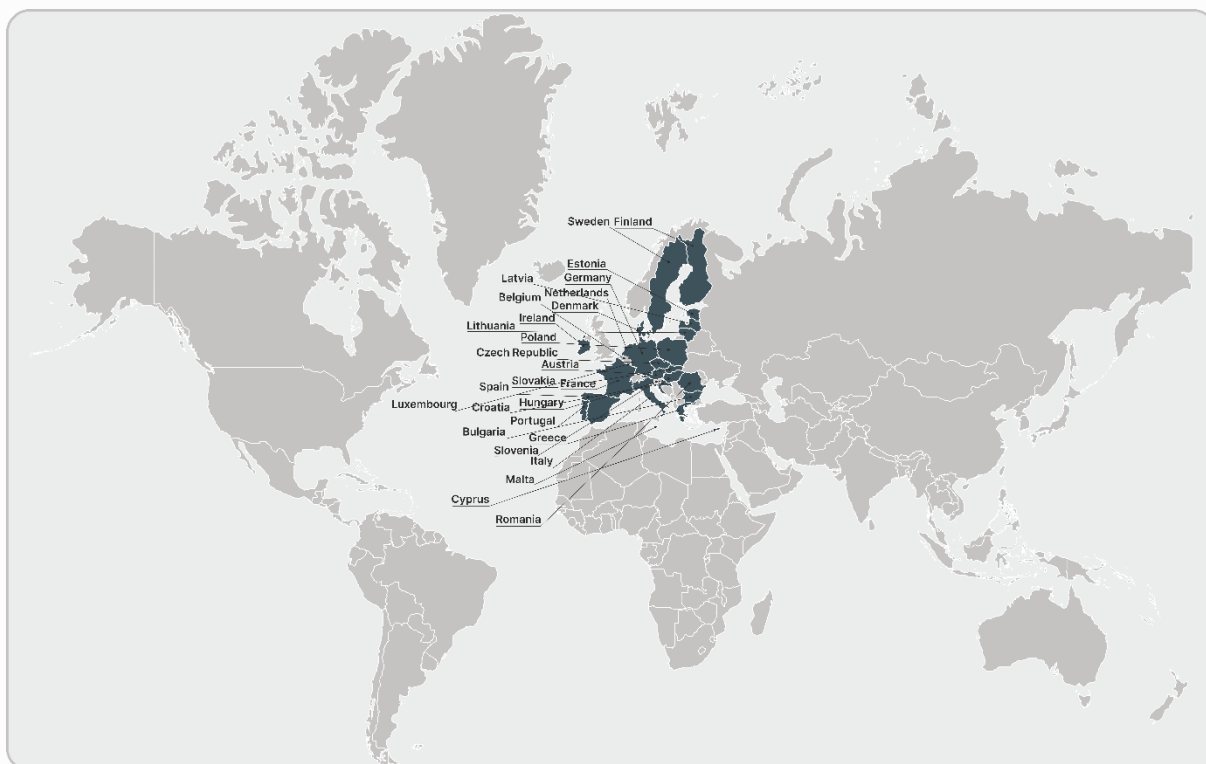
Far-right Politics Online and Societal Resilience, PI: Oslo Metropolitan University (OsloMet) /
Institute for Social Research (Oslo), 2020–2021, 1 wave

Figure 24



OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions, PI: OECD: Public Governance
Directorate, 2021 and 2023, 2 waves

Figure 25



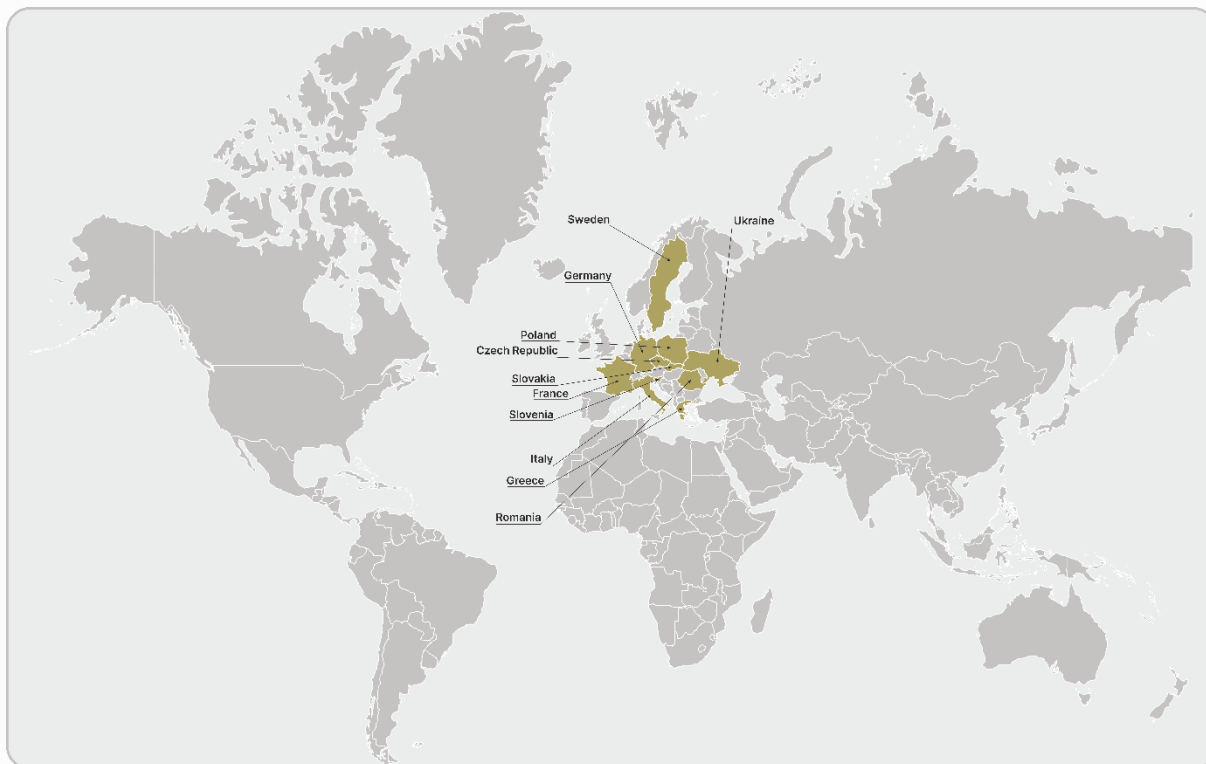
European Parliament Election Study, PI: Universities of Manchester and Mannheim / European University Institute / University of Amsterdam / London School of Economics and Political Science / Newcastle University, 2004–2024, 5 waves

Figure 26



Reciprocal relations between populist radical-right attitudes and political information behavior:
A longitudinal study of attitude development in high-choice information environments, PI:
University of Bern / RPTU, 2020, 3 waves

Figure 27



TRUEDEM: Trust in European Democracies Cross-country comparative comprehensive investigation of public perceptions of trust and trustworthiness (2023–2025), PI: Institute for Comparative Survey Research (University of Vienna), 2023–2025, 1 wave

Figure 28



British Social Attitudes, PI: National Centre for Social Research, 2000–2024, 26 waves

One Country Study

Full name of the study	Abbreviation of the study	University of the PI	Years covered	Number of waves	Country covered (last wave)
Norwegian Election Survey	NES	Statistics Norway (Institute for Social Research)	2001-2021	6	Norway 
World Happiness Report	WHR	Gallup	2005-2024	20	World
Baromètre de la Confiance Politique	BCP	Sciences Po Paris	2010-2024	19	France 
Fractures françaises	FF	Sciences Po Paris	2013-2024	12	France 
Participation and representation. A comparative study of linkage mechanisms between citizens and the political systems in contemporary democracies	PartiRep	Free University of Brussels / KU Leuven / University of Antwerp / Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES)	2014	1	Belgium 
Trauma and Trust: Exposure to War Violence and Trust Among Refugees in Sweden	TT	Uppsala University	2016	1	Turkey (Konya) 
Enquête électorale française	ENEF	Sciences Po Paris	2017-2024	49	France 
American Trends Panel	ATP	Pew Research Center	2018-2024	38	USA 
Pandemic Rhetoric, Trust and Social Media: Risk Communication	PAR-TS	University of Oslo	2020-2021	1	Norway 

Strategies and Public Reactions in a Changing Media Landscape					
Knowledge resistance: causes, consequences, cures	KR	University of Gothenburg	2020-2022	3	Sweden 
Objective and Subjectively Experienced Financial Inequalities	OSEFI	Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg / Universität Mannheim	2022	1	Germany 
PEOPLE2022ROUBAIX	Enquête à la sortie des urnes Roubaix - Pratiques et opinions lors des élections présidentielles de 2022	Catholic University of Lille / University of Artois / University of Lille	2022	2	France (Roubaix) 
Support for the Affluent Welfare State: A Norwegian Panel Study on Welfare State Orientations, Social Capital, and Local Context	SAWS	University of Oslo	2023	1	Norway 
Comportements électoraux et rapports au travail, à l'emploi et aux syndicats	CERTES	Université de Lille / Université de Versailles-Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines / Université d'Aix-Marseille / Université Gustave Eiffel / Université Paris 1-Panthéon-Sorbonne / Sciences Po Bordeaux / Centre de recherche, médecine, sciences, santé, santé mentale	2024	1	France 

Decision-making Processes under Extreme Radical Uncertainties	DePERU	University of Lille	2024	3	France 
Understanding NEETS. Individual and institutional determinants of youth inactivity in France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, and the UK	NEETS	Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB)	2024-2025	2	Germany 
General Social Survey		PI: University of Chicago / NORC	2000–2024	11	USA 
American National Election Studies		PI: University of Michigan	2000–2024	8	USA 
2025 Hamburg State Elections	HSE	Rheinland-Pfälzische Technische Universität Kaiserslautern-Landau (RTPU)	2025	1	Germany (Hamburg) 



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