

# **EUROPE'S INVISIBLE DIVIDES: HOW COVID-19 IS POLARISING EUROPEAN POLITICS**

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## **SUMMARY**

- The lived experience of the covid-19 pandemic has split Europe just as the euro and refugee crises did, with the south and the east feeling much more badly affected than the north and the west.
- Some people were affected directly by illness, some only experienced economic consequences, while others feel untouched by covid-19. The economic victims are more likely than others to say that restrictions have been too severe, and they tend to be more sceptical about their governments' intentions behind lockdowns.
- Europeans are divided over what they believe to be governments' motivations behind restrictions: the Trustful have faith in governments; the Suspicious believe rulers want to cover up failings; the Accusers think governments are trying to increase their control over people.
- Splits are appearing between those who believe that, in the context of the pandemic, the biggest threat to their freedom comes from governments, on the one hand, and those who fear the behaviour of their fellow citizens, on the other.
- There is a major generational divide, with the young more likely than the old to blame governments for the ongoing impact; the young also feel more badly affected.

- Poland, Germany, and France could each be emerging as archetypes for post-pandemic politics.

# Introduction

Europe's covid-19 experience has been a tale of two pandemics – and the differences in each story could haunt the continent for many years to come. The European Council on Foreign Relations' newest poll of citizens' views in the time of the coronavirus reveals that most people who live in the north and west of Europe feel unaffected by covid-19 in a direct sense; for many of them, the virus has been more of a gruesome spectator sport than a shattering lived experience. But, in eastern and southern Europe, most people say they have been directly affected by bereavement, serious illness, or economic distress.

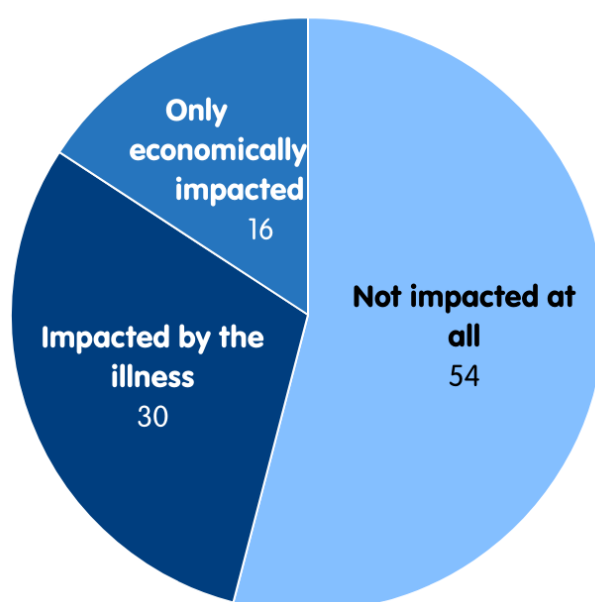
These divisions are only now beginning to surface. And they will soon start to shape many citizens' attitudes to politics, the role of the state, the idea of freedom, and the wider contours of European politics. Beneath this continental divide, there is also a series of new divisions emerging within our societies: between young and old; between people who report that they have been economically affected and those who see covid-19 mainly as a public health crisis; and between those who see the state as a protector and those who see it as an oppressor.

## How the pandemic split Europe

It is no surprise that covid-19 has divided Europe. Every major crisis of the last decade has left its imprint on the politics of the continent. The euro crisis sundered Europeans north and south, cleaving the continent into debtors and creditors. The refugee crisis created a different dividing line, this time between the east and the west. But while these divisions have been highly visible and crystallised into distinct camps that had an impact on other areas of policy, the pandemic in its early stages seemed to bring Europeans together. It started as a nationalist moment when EU governments closed their borders overnight – but it quickly evolved into a European moment when EU member states agreed to buy vaccines collectively, culminating in the bold step of the Next Generation EU recovery plan.

However, as time has gone on, it is becoming increasingly clear that the lived experience of the pandemic is very different in different parts of the European Union. ECFR's poll sought to map the diverse ways that Europeans have been affected by the crisis. One group has been directly or indirectly affected by covid-19 in the sense that its members have either fallen seriously ill themselves or suffered bereavement. (Some members of this group have also borne economic consequences on top of this). A second group reports that they have not been affected by illness or bereavement in these ways, but that they have experienced serious economic hardship. And a third group has not been directly affected at all.

### **More than half of Europeans say that they have not been impacted by covid-19. In per cent.**

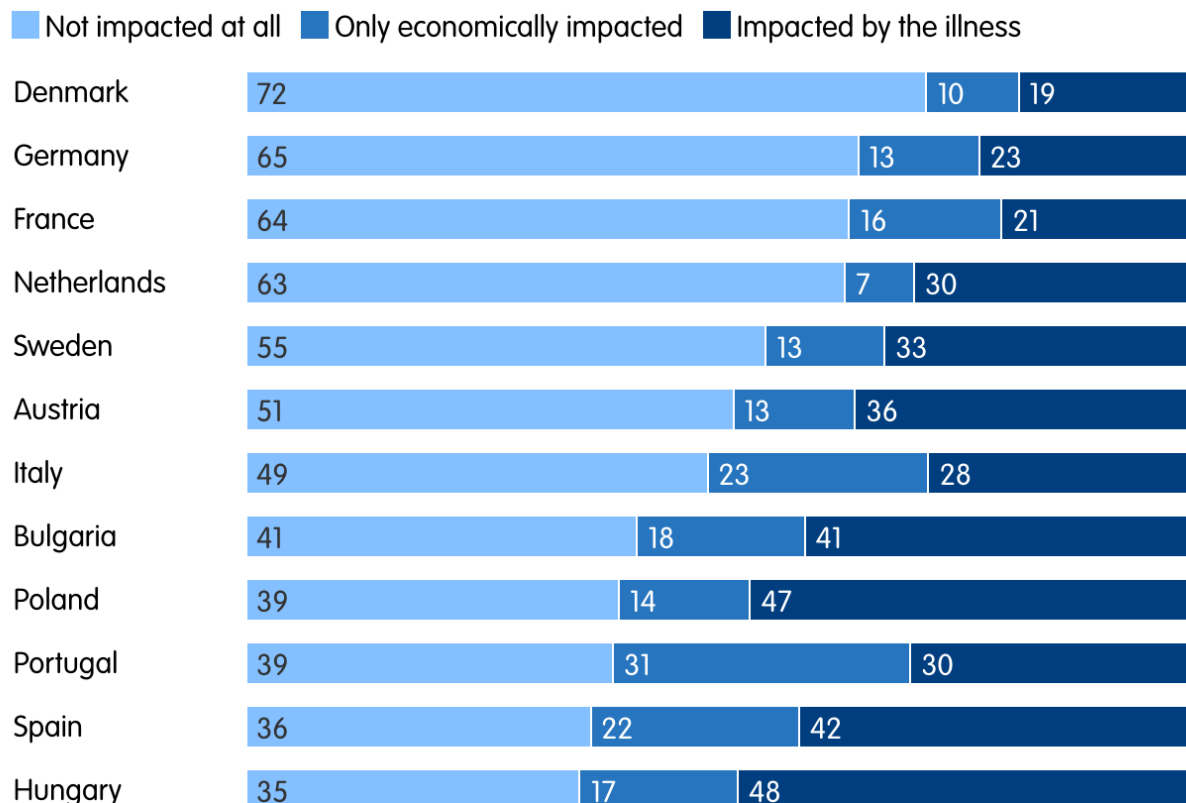


Jointly for all 12 countries polled. Excluding those who responded "Prefer not to say" (3 per cent). The question read: "Have you or a close friend or family member experienced any of the following because of covid?" The "impacted by the illness" includes those who chose at least one of the following options: "Contracting a serious case of covid"; "Being hospitalised for covid"; "Death of a friend"; "Death of a relative". The "only economically impacted" includes those who chose the option "Economic hardship (loss of income or loss of/change in employment)" but did not choose any of the health-related options. The "Not impacted at all" includes those who responded "None" to this question.

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**There is a stark divide between the east/south and the north/west when it comes to people's reported impact of the covid-19 crisis on their lives. In per cent.**



Jointly for all 12 countries polled. Excluding those who responded "Prefer not to say", who represented AT (2 per cent), BG (3 per cent), DE (4 per cent), DK (3 per cent), ES (2 per cent), FR (3 per cent), HU (0 per cent), IT (4 per cent), NL (2 per cent), PL (7 per cent), PT (5 per cent), SE (2 per cent). For more details on the segmentation, see preceding graphs or methodology box at the end of the paper.

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The poll exposes a stark divide between the east and the south, on the one hand, and the north and the west, on the other. Overall, 54 per cent of respondents report they have not been personally affected by covid-19 – but this group is not distributed evenly between countries. In Sweden, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Austria, and Germany, the majority of respondents say that they – or their close family and friends – have not been personally impacted by either serious disease, bereavement, or economic hardship. However, most respondents in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Spain, and Portugal have been personally affected by the crisis.

The tale of two pandemics is a tale of two Europes: the differences in the experience of countries appear to be as stark as the differences between debtors and creditors in the euro crisis, and countries that attracted refugees and those that did not in 2015. As Europe starts to deal with the long-term consequences of the pandemic, these divisions in experience will transform from a silent divide into a major schism. This could have profound implications for some of Europe's biggest projects: the idea of freedom of movement, the future of the EU recovery plan, and Europe's relations with the rest of the world as conducted through vaccine diplomacy, overseas aid, and more.

## Societies divided by covid-19

The results of ECFR's poll suggest that three main divides are emerging. These could lead to lasting splits that remake the politics of many European countries or lead to greater societal tensions.

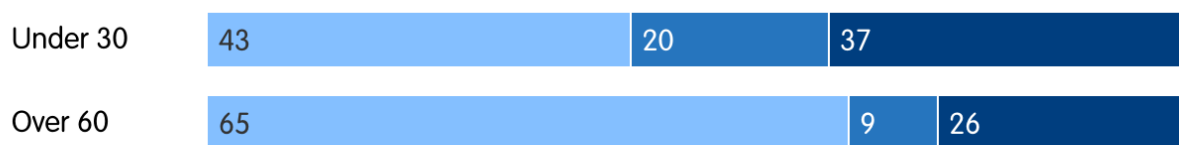
### The sacrifice of the young

In his 1957 novel *The Baron in the Trees*, Italo Calvino tells the story of the young Baron Cosimo who was so disgusted with the way of life of his parents that he refused to eat the snail soup they forced on him, climbed the trees in the garden, and promised never to come down. He kept his word, and Cosimo lived up among the leaves, permanently alienated from the older generation. The covid-19 crisis risks creating a similar schism.

Of all the divides exposed by ECFR's poll, the most glaring – both within European societies and across Europe – is generational. Almost two-thirds of respondents over the age of 60 do not feel that they have been personally affected by the coronavirus crisis but, among respondents aged under 30, only 43 per cent feel unaffected. France and Denmark are the only countries polled where a majority of those under 30 say they have not been impacted by the crisis. The outliers among the over-60s are Spain, Portugal, Hungary, and Poland, where majorities of this group feel impacted by the crisis.

## The generation gap: Covid-19 had more impact on younger people's personal lives. In per cent.

■ Not impacted at all ■ Only economically impacted ■ Impacted by the illness



Jointly for all 12 countries polled. Excluding those who responded "Prefer not to say" (4 per cent for under 30; 2 per cent for over 60). For more details on the segmentation, see preceding graphs or methodology box at the end of the paper.

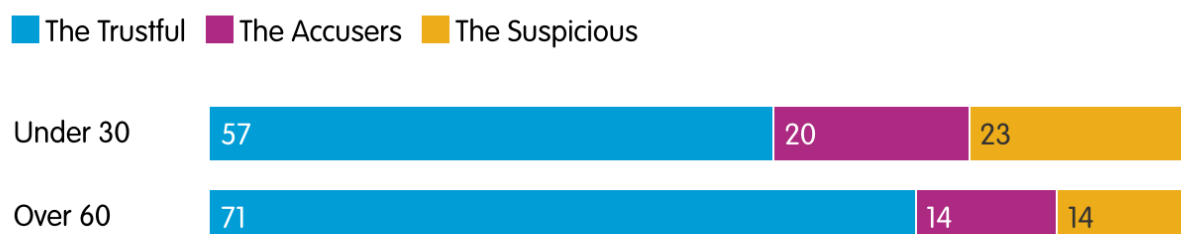
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The one lesson we learnt about covid-19 when it first erupted was that it would harm the oldest in our society. But the answers in ECFR's poll reveal young people feel they have been the major victims of the pandemic. In the case of older Europeans, although the virus was seen as a threat to their lives, a majority claim not to have been directly affected. In the case of the young, the pandemic was a threat to their way of life. And most say they have suffered. In some ways, this is not surprising. It is true that our ageing societies arrange many policies – on tax and public spending, on the environment, on planning laws – around the interests of the older citizens who vote rather than the younger ones who will inherit the earth. However, the division of the costs of covid-19 is, in some ways, even starker and more immediate. There is a widespread sense in many societies that the futures of the young have been sacrificed for the sake of their parents and their grandparents. This sentiment echoes that felt by earlier generations of young people who went through other seismic changes such as world wars and revolutions. It seems hard to think that we will not see consequences as the divide becomes more obvious.

One of the clearest consequences so far is a surge in cynicism among young people about governments' intentions. For example, the poll shows that younger people are less likely to believe that the main motivation of governments in introducing pandemic-related restrictions is to limit the spread of the virus. Among respondents aged under 30, as many as 43 per cent are sceptical of their governments' motives: 23 per cent think that their government mainly wishes to create the appearance of control, while a further 20 per cent say that governments are using the pandemic as an

excuse to increase their control of the public. Both figures are much lower among respondents over the age of 60 (in each case, it is 14 per cent of respondents of that age).

### **Younger people are more sceptical about government motivations when introducing covid-19 restrictions. In per cent.**



Jointly for all 12 countries polled. Excluding those who responded "Don't know" or "None of the above" (12 per cent under 30; 7 per cent over 60). For more details on the segmentation, see preceding graphs or methodology box at the end of the paper.

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The fact that covid-19 has additionally eroded young Europeans' trust in the political system could have long-term consequences for the future of democracy. Research by the Centre for the Future of Democracy at Cambridge University shows that – even before the crisis – today's young people are the generation most dissatisfied with the performance of democratic governments. Members of this generation are more sceptical of the merits of democracy compared not only with the older generation now but also with young people polled in earlier eras.

## **The pandemic as an economic or public health disaster**

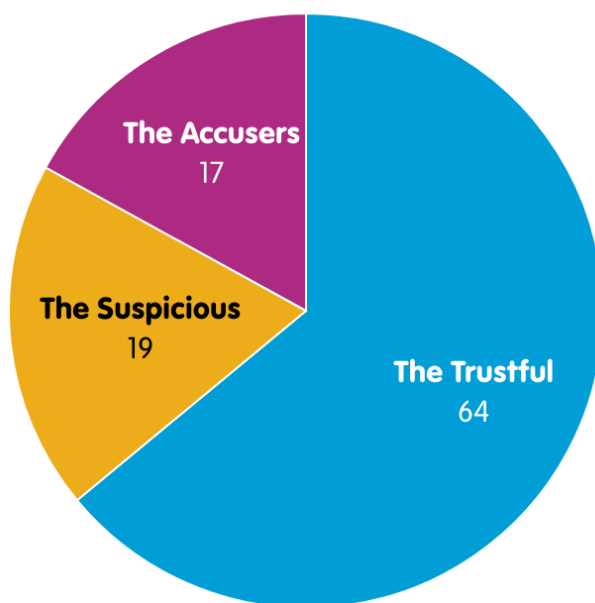
The second division that ECFR's poll identified is between those who experienced the long year of the pandemic mostly as a public health crisis and those who experienced it only as an economic disaster. The economic victims of the pandemic tend to be particularly sceptical about their governments' intentions behind lockdowns, and are most likely to accuse them of using covid-19 as an excuse to control the public, compared to those who were either affected by the illness or not affected by it at all. They are also more likely than others to say that covid-19 restrictions have been too strict.

The survey explored public beliefs about the main motivations for government restrictions. We have identified three main groups. The first group – the Trustful – think that the main motivation was



public safety and stopping the spread of the virus. A second group – the Suspicious – think that the biggest motivation was to cover up the impotence and incompetence of the government with a simulacrum of action. And the third group – the Accusers – blame governments for using covid-19 as cover to increase their control over people's lives.

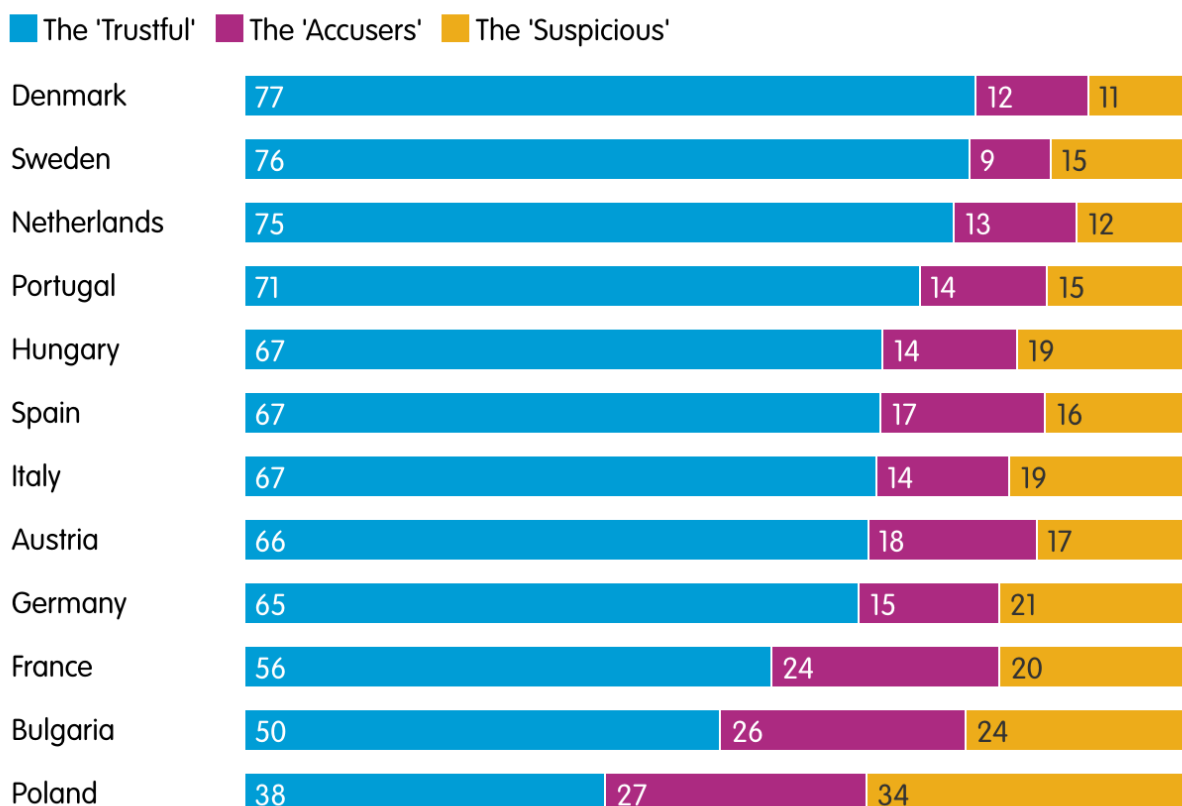
**A majority across Europe trusts the motivations behind lockdown restrictions. In per cent.**



Jointly for all 12 countries polled. Excluding those who responded "Don't know" and "None of the above" (9 per cent). The question read: "Thinking about the lockdowns that have been imposed since the covid-19 pandemic, which of the following statements is closest to your view?" The answers were: (1) The main motivation for restrictions/lockdowns is to help limit the spread of the virus [The Trustful]. (2) The main motivation for restrictions/lockdowns is to give the government an excuse to control the public [The Accusers]. (3) The main motivation for restrictions/lockdowns is to make it look like the government is in control of the situation [The Suspicious].

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**In all countries apart from Poland and Bulgaria, a majority trusts the motivation behind lockdown restrictions.** In per cent.



Excluding those who responded "Don't know" or "None of the above". For more details on the segmentation, see preceding graphs or methodology box at the end of the paper.

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Across Europe, 64 per cent of people are Trustful, 19 per cent are Suspicious, and 17 per cent are Accusers. But the Trustful are a much smaller group in Poland (38 per cent), Bulgaria (50 per cent), and France (56 per cent) than in the rest of Europe. Accordingly, these countries have larger numbers of Suspicious citizens: in Poland, it is 34 per cent; in Bulgaria, it is 24 per cent. Even in Germany and France, 21 per cent and 20 per cent respectively think along these lines. Bulgaria, Poland, and France are also the countries with the largest number of Accusers – comprising around one-quarter of those surveyed.

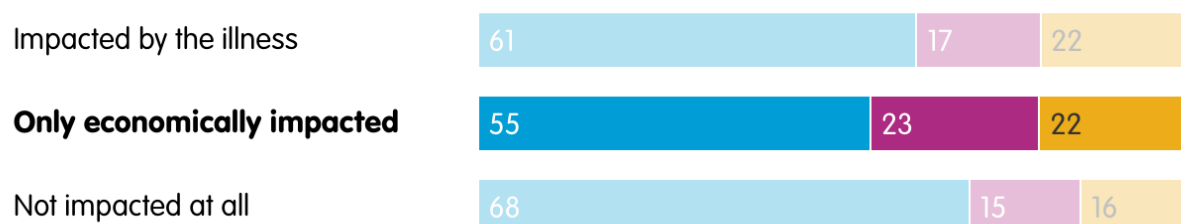
When it comes to assessing the main motivation behind restrictions, the data show that people who have been affected by illness or bereavement, and those who feel they have not been affected at all,

trust that lockdowns were mainly meant to help limit the spread of the virus. Of those indicating that they have suffered illness or bereavement, 61 per cent are Trustful; of those indicating that they have been unaffected, 68 per cent are Trustful.

Meanwhile, across most countries polled (apart from Denmark, Portugal, and Sweden), those who feel they have only been economically impacted by covid-19 are the most sceptical about the intentions of their government's restrictions. Of those who expressed a question-defined opinion, only about half (55 per cent) are Trustful, believing that the main motivation for the restrictions is to limit the spread of the virus. The biggest share of the Accusers can also be found among those who report being only economically affected (23 per cent), compared to those who are unaffected (15 per cent) and those are affected by the illness (17 per cent).

### Those who say they have been only economically impacted by covid-19 are the most sceptical about the intentions of their governments behind lockdowns. In per cent.

■ The 'Trustful' ■ The 'Accusers' ■ The 'Suspicious'

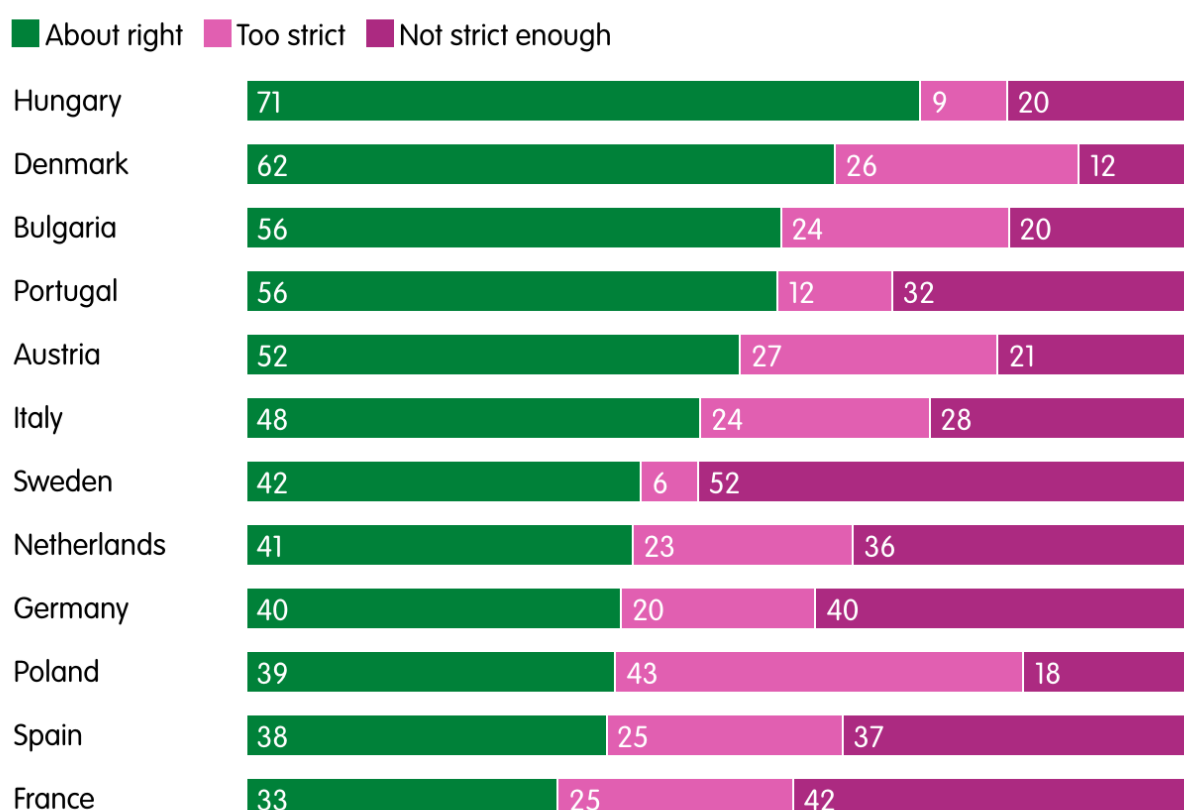


The analysis excludes those who responded "Don't know" or "None of the above". For more details on the segmentation, see preceding graphs or methodology box at the end of the paper.

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The survey also sought to examine whether respondents felt that the restrictions in their country were too strict, about right, or not strict enough. There were fairly big differences between member states. In Hungary, Denmark, Bulgaria, and Portugal, a majority of those who have been impacted by the illness feel that the restrictions imposed by their governments were about right. In the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, and Austria, pluralities of respondents agree. On the other hand, in Sweden, a majority – and, in France, a plurality – believe that the restrictions were not tough enough. In Poland, in contrast, a plurality believe that the restrictions were too severe.

**Among those impacted by the illness, a majority in half of the polled countries believes the restrictions were about right.** In per cent.



Excluding those who responded "Don't know". The question read: "Generally speaking, what is your view on your country's covid-related restrictions until now?" The answers were: (1) The restrictions have been too strict. (2) The restrictions have been about right. (3) The restrictions have not been strict enough.

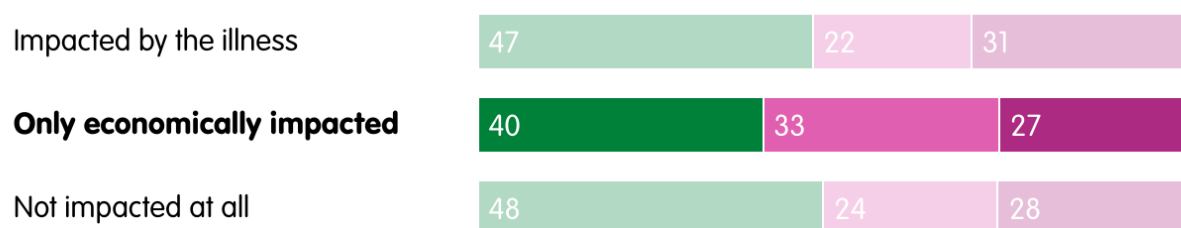
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The differences within societies are also stark – and, again, it is the economic victims who are most

sceptical of the restrictions. Thirty-one per cent of respondents who say they suffered only economically from the crisis feel that the restrictions were too harsh, compared to 21 per cent of those who report being affected by the illness, and 22 per cent of those who feel unaffected.

## The economic victims of covid-19 are the most sceptical of government restrictions. Jointly for 12 countries, in per cent.

■ About right ■ Too strict ■ Not strict enough



The question read: "Generally speaking, what is your view on your country's covid-related restrictions until now?" The answers were: (1) The restrictions have been too strict. (2) The restrictions have been about right. (3) The restrictions have not been strict enough. Excluding those who responded "Don't know". For more details on the segmentation, see preceding graphs or methodology box at the end of the paper.

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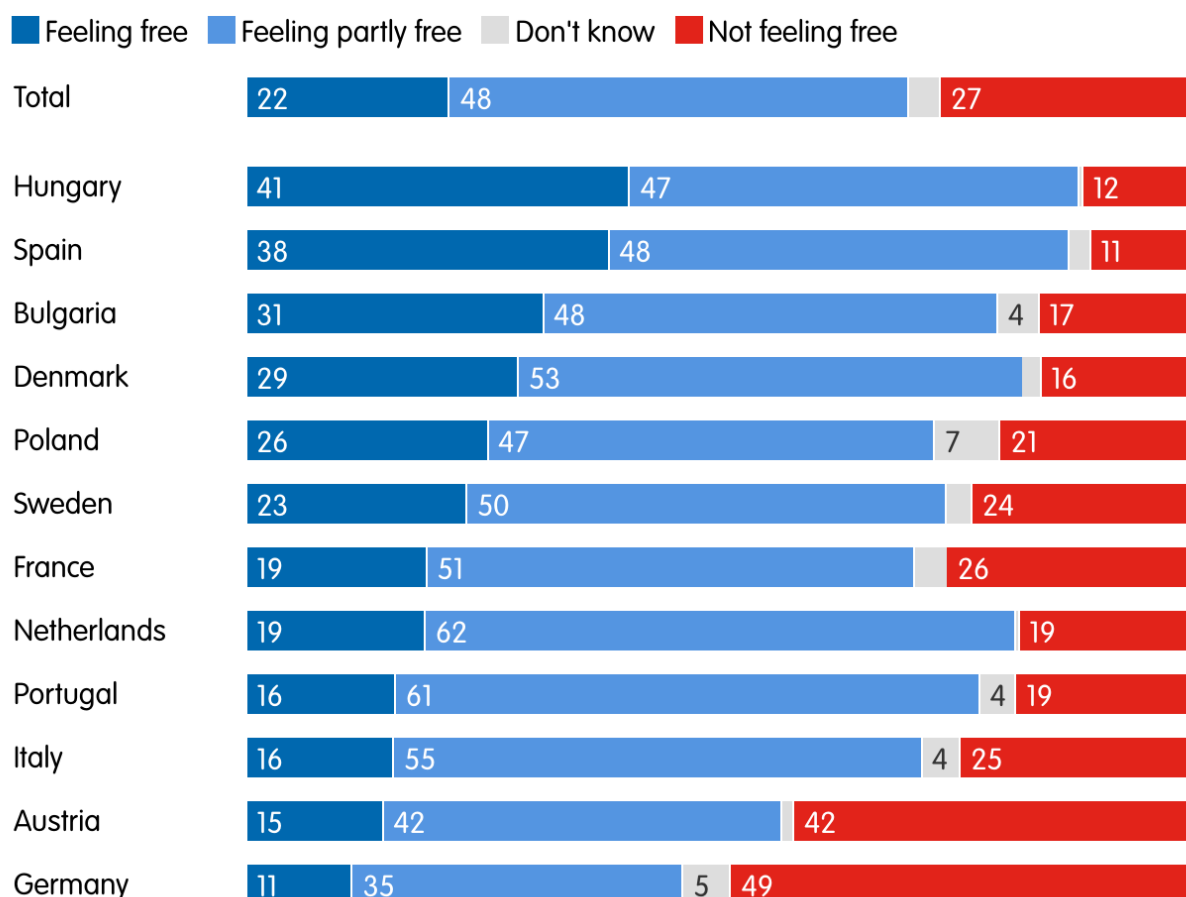
## The freedom divide

The third big divide revealed by the study concerns the idea of freedom. The survey asked how free citizens feel in the covid-19 era, and how this compares to their lives before the pandemic. This may matter because the crisis appears to have led to a big shift in the way that political parties relate to freedom: many mainstream parties have been busily re-embracing government action, while many populist parties are becoming more libertarian.

Across Europe, 22 per cent of respondents say they still feel free in their everyday life now compared to 64 per cent who say they felt free two years ago, before the pandemic struck. Accordingly, the share of people who do not feel free now is 27 per cent, compared to 7 per cent who did not feel free two years ago. The biggest share of people who currently feel free can be found in Hungary (41 per cent) and Spain (38 per cent). Interestingly, we find by far the largest share of people who do not feel free in Germany (49 per cent) – which did not have a complete lockdown in the way that many other

countries did – and in Austria (42 per cent).

**In most European countries, people feel free despite covid-19 restrictions. In Austria and Germany, people feel least free.** In per cent.



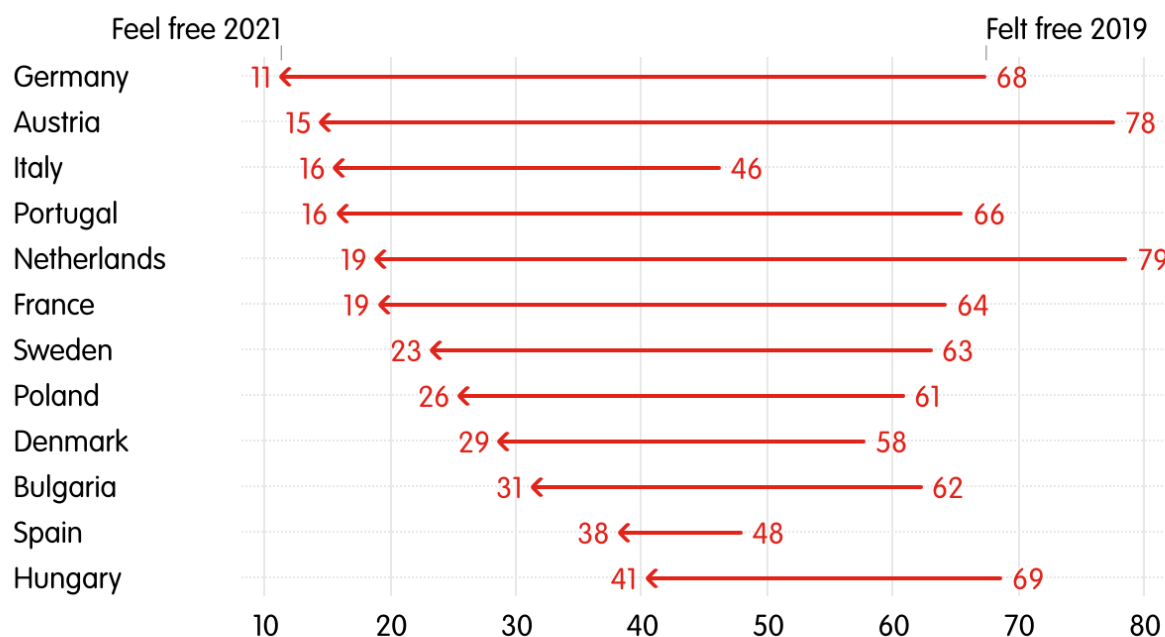
The question read: "How free do you feel in your everyday life today, in terms of your ability to lead your life as you see fit?"

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The data show that the crisis had the biggest impact on perceptions of freedom in Austria (a 63 percentage-point difference), the Netherlands (a 60 percentage-point difference), and Germany (a 57 percentage-point difference). Most Europeans say they felt free before the crisis – polling shows that Spain and Italy are the only two countries polled where less than 50 per cent say they felt free two years ago.

## Across Europe, people feel much less free than they say they did two years ago. In per cent.



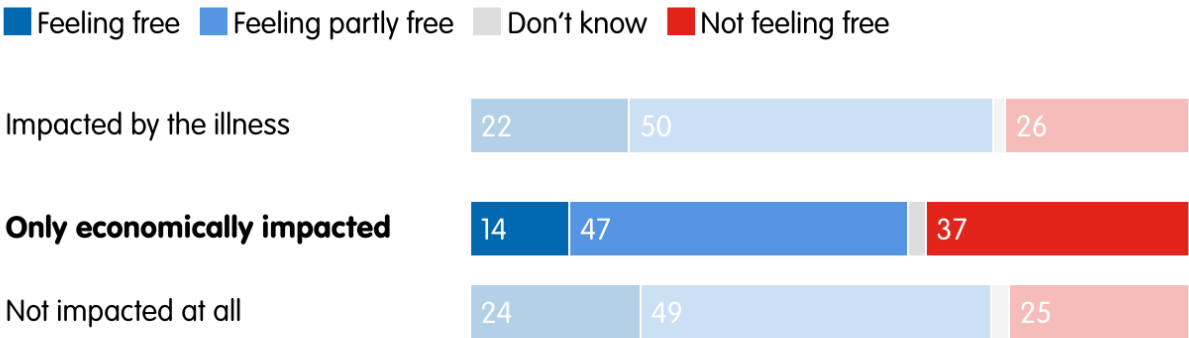
The questions read: "How free do you feel in your everyday life today, in terms of your ability to lead your life as you see fit?" and "Thinking back to two years ago before the covid-19 pandemic, how free did you feel in your everyday life?" The answers for both questions were (1) Free. (2) Partly free. (3) Not free. (4) Don't know.

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Thirty-seven per cent of those who say they suffered only economic hardship because of the crisis say they feel unfree. The figure stands at 26 per cent among those who feel impacted by the illness, and at 25 per cent among those who feel unimpacted. Also when we look by country at those only economically impacted by covid-19, everywhere (except for the Netherlands) they are less likely to say they currently feel free compared to those who say they either were impacted by the illness, or not impacted at all. What is more, in two countries – Germany and Austria – the feeling of not being free clearly dominates among those saying they only were economically affected, accounting for 67 per cent and 58 per cent of that group, respectively.

**Those saying they were only economically impacted by covid-19 are also less likely to say they currently feel free. In per cent.**



The question read: "How free do you feel in your everyday life today, in terms of your ability to lead your life as you see fit?" For more details on the segmentation, see preceding graphs or methodology box at the end of the paper.

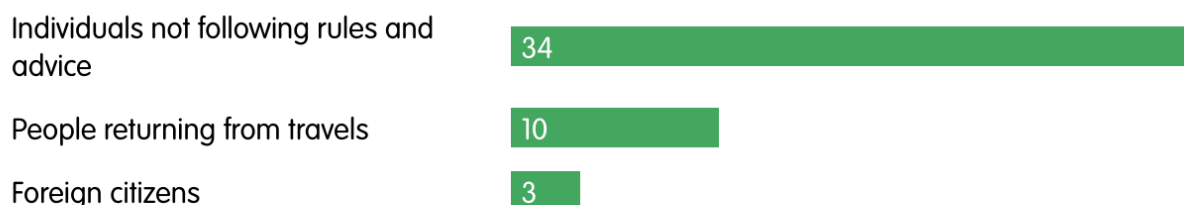
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The survey also explored who respondents blame for the ongoing impact of the crisis and, therefore, for limitations to their freedom. It shows that their perceptions of the culprits are very diffuse. Still, two broad groups emerge.

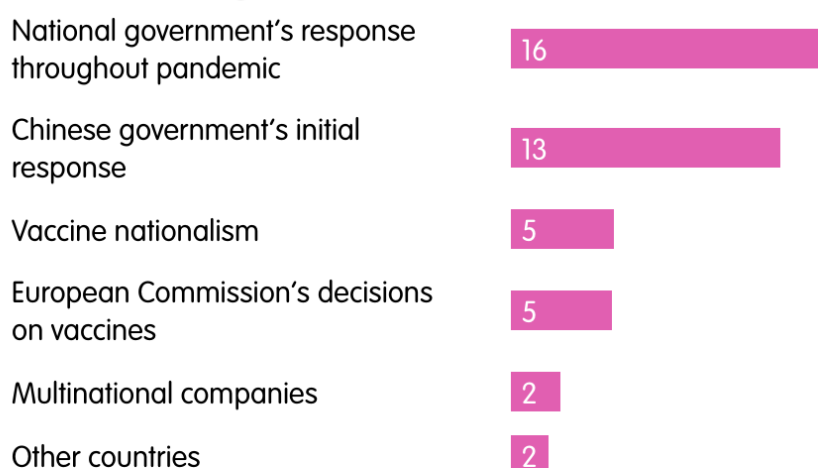


**Europeans are divided over who is mainly responsible for the covid-19 crisis. But the leading answer is that disobedient individuals are chiefly to blame.** In per cent.

**Individuals**



**Institutions and governments**



**No one**



Excluding those who responded "Don't know" (10 per cent) or "Other" (2 per cent). The question read: "Which of the following, if any, do you think is most responsible for the ongoing impact of the coronavirus in your country?"

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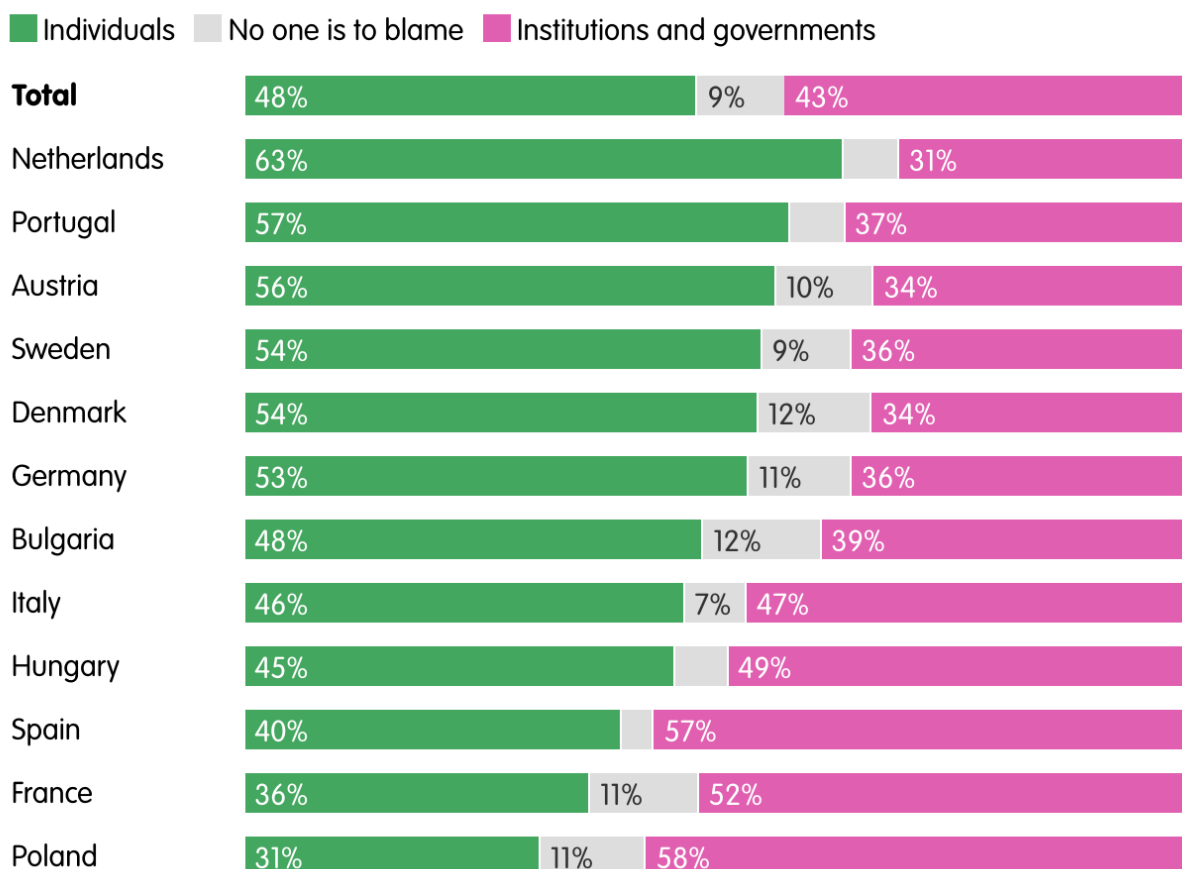
One group – 43 per cent of those with a clear view – appear to think that the threat to freedom comes mostly from governments and institutions. Members of this group blame China, the response of their national government, the European Commission, multinational companies, vaccine nationalism, or other countries.

Another group appear to think that the threat to freedom comes from members of society, such as

individuals who are not following the rules, people returning from travels, and foreign citizens. This group makes up 48 per cent of those with a clear view across Europe. Its members seem to follow the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre in believing that “hell is other people”.

Majorities of those with a clear view in Poland (65 per cent), France (59 per cent), Spain (59 per cent), and Hungary (52 per cent) belong to the first group. Meanwhile, majorities who believe that threats come from other people can be found in the Netherlands (67 per cent), Austria (62 per cent), Portugal (61 per cent), Denmark (61 per cent), Sweden (60 per cent), Germany (60 per cent), and Bulgaria (55 per cent). Italy is divided on this issue (50 per cent).

## Europeans are divided on who to blame for the covid-19 crisis. In per cent.



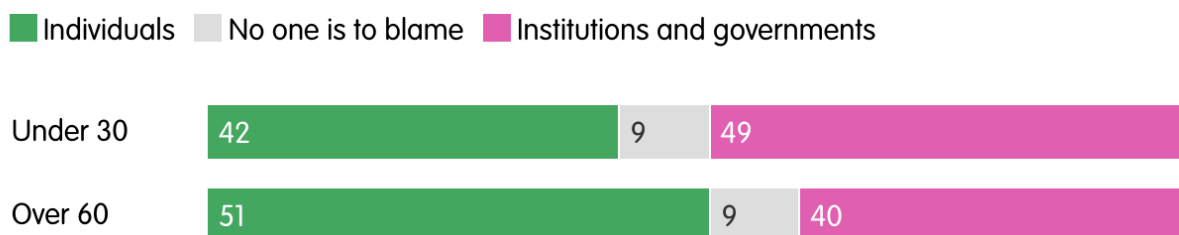
Excluding those who responded "Don't know" or "Other", who represented 8 per cent in AT, 13 per cent in BG, 18 per cent in DK, 13 per cent in FR, 14 per cent in DE, 11 per cent in IT, 12 per cent in NL, 6 per cent in PT, 12 per cent in SE, 7 per cent in HU, 15 per cent in PL, 7 per cent in ES, and 12 per cent in the joint sample for 12 countries. The question read: "Which of the following, if any, do you think is most responsible for the ongoing impact of the coronavirus in your country?" For more details on the segmentation, see preceding graphs or methodology box at the end of the paper.

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There is also a generational split across the two groups. Older Europeans aged over 60 are more likely to blame individuals, rather than institutions and governments. Younger Europeans aged under 30 are more likely to blame governments and other institutions, rather than individuals.

## Generational split on who to blame for the covid-19 crisis. In per cent.



Excluding those who responded "Don't know" or "Other" (13 per cent under 30; 9 per cent over 60). The question read: "Which of the following, if any, do you think is most responsible for the ongoing impact of the coronavirus in your country?" For more details on the segmentation, see preceding graphs or methodology box at the end of the paper.

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The split between these groups is leading to a new set of political divisions around the idea of freedom. Across Europe, supporters of many mainstream parties appear to believe that other people are chiefly to blame for the impact of the coronavirus on their country. Examples of this include supporters of the governing Austrian People's Party, En Marche! in France, the Christian Democratic Union and the Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) in Germany, and the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy in the Netherlands, which is the largest member of the governing coalition.

These attitudes likely underpinned actions by these parties to introduce a whole series of restrictions on personal behaviour to stop the spread of the virus. Meanwhile, supporters of many right-wing populist parties seem to think that the biggest threats to freedom through pandemic-related restrictions now come from governments or institutions. These parties are making a strong effort to portray mainstream parties as new authoritarians. They are now posing as libertarians rather than would-be autocrats. For example, supporters of Vox in Spain, the League in Italy, the Freedom Party in Austria, the Sweden Democrats, and the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands are more likely to blame the impact of the crisis on the government or institutions than on individuals.

## Conclusion: Germany, Poland, and France – archetypes of a new politics?

The political divisions emerging around different perceptions of freedom are playing out in different ways within European countries. ECFR's survey suggests that Poland, Germany, and France could be archetypes for new kinds of post-pandemic politics – each of them representing some of the dynamics that can be seen in other European countries.

In Poland, the pandemic is playing out in a “polarised democracy”. Here, the crisis has reinforced divisions between pre-existing ideological groups within society. Because most of the population is very distrustful of the government, they attribute nefarious motives to covid-19 restrictions and see government action as a big threat to freedom. Poland is home to the largest share of people who think that the government is using pandemic-related restrictions to create the illusion of control or as an excuse to control the public. As a consequence, most Poles think that the biggest threat to their freedom comes from the top – they blame their government and other major institutions for the pandemic's impact on their lives.

In Germany, the political system has long been categorised as a “consensus democracy” rather than one that is polarised between parties. ECFR's data indicate that there is no strong public opposition to the level of restrictions or the motivations for introducing them. However, this superficial consensus hides very high levels of discontent. Germany is the country where the biggest share of the population feels unfree (49 per cent, as noted above) – which is a significant change compared to how respondents say they felt two years ago, with only 9 per cent saying they did not feel free then. Even among the supporters of parties in the coalition government feel unfree – 42 per cent (CDU/CSU) and 43 per cent (Social Democrats) – while 71 per cent of Alternative for Germany voters feel unfree.

In France, the pandemic has led to striking changes of political philosophy in the main governing and opposition parties. This is the “nonbinary democracy”. The crisis has driven the liberal supporters of Emmanuel Macron's centrist political platform to support highly interventionist state action, with 89 per cent of those who expressed an opinion believing that the restrictions were either right or not strict enough. Meanwhile, among the current supporters of Marine Le Pen, whose party has often sought a more authoritarian state, almost one-third (33 per cent) of those who expressed their opinion think that the restrictions were too strict and hence want their party to pose as a tribune of freedom against the repressive power of the pandemic state. While 84 per cent of Macron supporters believe that the main motivation behind the restrictions is to limit the spread of the virus, only 41 per

cent of Le Pen supporters agree. Instead, 37 per cent of Le Pen supporters think that the main motive for the restrictions is to control the public; only 1 in 20 supporters of Macron share that opinion.

While the early stages of the crisis saw many citizens rally behind their national governments and EU member states move towards more cooperation, the next stage of the crisis could lead to more political divisions both within states and between them.

The various ways in which people have been affected by the pandemic have created different perspectives within many countries. And they have also caused perspectives in member states in the north and the west to diverge from those in the south and the east. The divides over public health, economic victimhood, and the idea of freedom could prove long-lasting. But the most dramatic divide may be that between generations. Across Europe, governments were right to focus on saving the lives of the oldest, but the time has come to focus on the problems of the young.

It is still too early to understand how much the trends identified in ECFR's survey will reshape politics within and between European countries. But these divides, which have hitherto lain hidden, could create a new political age in Europe as they burst into public view. Covid-19's new societal divisions could become as consequential to European public life as those spawned by the fiscal and refugee crises of recent years.

# Methodology

This paper is based on a public opinion poll in 12 EU countries that the European Council on Foreign Relations commissioned from Datapraxis and YouGov (Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden), AnalitiQs (the Netherlands), Alpha (Bulgaria), and Szondaphone (Hungary). The survey was conducted in late May and early June 2021, with an overall sample of 16,267 respondents.

This was an online survey conducted in Austria (n = 1,014), Denmark (n = 1,015), France (n = 3,110), Germany (n = 3,001), Italy (n = 1,002), the Netherlands (n = 1,004), Poland (n = 1,060), Portugal (n = 1,000), Spain (n = 1,011), and Sweden (n = 1,047). In Bulgaria (n = 1,002), the survey was conducted online and through telephone interviews. In Hungary (n = 1,001), it was conducted using phone interviews only. The results are nationally representative of basic demographics and past votes in each country. YouGov used purposive active sampling for this poll.

The general margin of error is  $\pm 3$  per cent for a sample of 1,000 and  $\pm 2$  per cent for a sample of 3,000.

The exact dates of polling are: Austria (19-27 May), Bulgaria (28 May-6 June), Denmark (19-26 May), France (26 May-4 June), Germany (20-27 May), Hungary (27 May-7 June), Italy (25 May-4 June), the Netherlands (20-24 May), Poland (21 May-9 June), Portugal (20 May-2 June), Spain (2-7 June), and Sweden (25 May-1 June).

For most of the survey questions discussed in the paper, the non-substantial answers (“Don’t know”, “Other”, and so on) were excluded from the analysis. Hence, one should assume that, in most cases in which the text refers to a certain percentage of respondents, it refers to those who expressed a question-defined opinion.

Two segmentations are presented in this paper. The first places respondents into three groups based on the reported impact that the pandemic has had on their lives. The question read: “Have you or a close friend or family member experienced any of the following

because of covid-19?”. The “impacted by the illness” includes those who chose at least one of the following options: “contracting a serious case of covid-19”; “being hospitalised for covid-19”; “death of a friend”; “death of a relative”. The “only economically impacted” includes those who chose the option “economic hardship (loss of income or loss of/change in employment)” but did not choose any of the health-related options. The “not impacted at all” includes those who responded “None” to this question.

The second segmentation puts respondents into three groups based on their perceptions of the main motivation behind lockdowns and other covid-related restrictions. The question read: “Thinking about the lockdowns that have been imposed since the covid-19 pandemic, which of the following statements is closest to your view?”. “The Trustful” are those who responded that “the main motivation for restrictions/lockdowns is to help limit the spread of the virus”. “The Accusers” are those who said: “the main motivation for restrictions/lockdowns is to give the government an excuse to control the public”. “The Suspicious” are those who responded: “the main motivation for restrictions/lockdowns is to make it look like the government is in control of the situation”.

For the analysis of differences between the EU’s regions, Sweden and Denmark represent the “north”; Austria, France, Germany, and the Netherlands represent the “west”; Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria represent the “east”; and Italy, Portugal, and Spain represent the “south”.



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