



EU Research and Innovation to foster and enhance European Democracy

February 2021



“We need a more resilient, secure, inclusive and democratic society for all Europeans, prepared and responsive to threats and disasters, addressing inequalities and empowering all citizens to act in the green and digital transitions.”

Mariya Gabriel, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth

The European Commission continues to deliver on its commitment to give “a new push for European democracy” through the European Democracy Action Plan, the Media and Audiovisual Action Plan, the Strategy for the European Charter of Fundamental Rights and the EU Citizenship Report 2020.

Democracy is not a given

The EU is a unique experiment in collective governance. To function properly, it requires citizens to trust its democratic legitimacy and efficiency. Only an effective decision-making that ensures fair representation and takes the historical, cultural and social diversity of Europe into account will earn that trust. For this, EU and national institutions need to address a number of key questions:

- How can citizens be more involved so that policy-makers can better understand their needs?
- How can social and economic inequalities be addressed to uphold the spirit of democracy?
- How can we increase the political participation of citizens, especially among young people and underrepresented groups?

By launching a European Democracy Action Plan, the Commission wants to help improve the resilience of democracies. It sets out a reinforced EU policy framework and specific measures to promote free and fair elections and strong democratic participation, support free and independent media, and counter disinformation. To achieve this while also overcoming the challenges of the digital transformation, it is essential that innovative social science research provides fact-based neutral analysis, devises innovative solutions to improve democratic systems, and assists in the formulation of evidence-based policy. The Commission counts on researchers' help to rise to this challenge.

EU-funded research and innovation in the new push for European democracy

Horizon Europe, will support democracy and governance within cluster 2 ‘Culture, creativity and inclusive societies’. This will enable the Commission to accompany the European Democracy Action Plan with excellent research and innovation actions, building on the many relevant projects already funded under Horizon 2020.

EXAMPLES OF EXISTING EU FUNDED RESEARCH AND INNOVATION PROJECTS SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE INCLUDE:

€800 million

EU funding for over 300 projects with more than 1700 participants for ongoing research relevant to safeguarding and fostering our democracies



The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for reinforced communication tools to deal with disinformation at a global level. More science-based information needs to be shared to help build an effective response and counter the “infodemic”. The success of anti-epidemic measures requires **public trust towards health and science institutions, government and the media**. EU-funded research and innovation projects **EnTrust, PEriTiA and TiGRE** contribute to improving trust in science and to constructing **trust enhancing narratives for national governments and EU governance**, which in turn enhances the quality of democracy. The project **COVINFORM** addresses these questions specifically within the COVID-19 pandemic context.



Misperceptions pose a significant problem to European society and democracy. Dealing with problems like vaccine hesitancy/scepticism and climate change require that the public are fully informed. The **HERoS** project includes an assessment of the online spread of COVID-19 misinformation and the impact of fact-checking. The **DEBUNKER** research programme is an attempt to **better understand why misperceptions are commonplace, and how to correct them**.



GOVERNANCE (“Democratic governance in a turbulent age”) is a research programme, co-funded by Horizon 2020 and a collaborative partnership of national research funding agencies (**NORFACE**) in the area of social and behavioural sciences. It offers a timely investigation of the precise nature of this recent turbulence, on how European states can negotiate it and develop strategies to enhance the quality of democratic politics and governance.



Support for populist parties, movements and ideas has been on the rise, and many citizens perceive mainstream political parties as not adequately addressing the challenges faced by the EU and its Member States. The projects **POPREBEL, DEMOS, PaCE** and **EUROPOPULISM** analyse the phenomenon of populism and its consequences for European democracies and the European project. They identify innovative ways of **understanding and addressing the causes of populism** as well as strategies for **strengthening democratic values and practices**.



Democracy and rule of law are two of the EU’s fundamental values. However, over the past ten years, they have come under increasing pressure, with a growing distrust from citizens towards EU institutions, rising populist and extremist discourses and other challenges. The **RECONNECT** project aims to understand and provide solutions for **strengthening the EU’s legitimacy through democracy and the rule of law**.



Political choice is crucial to democracy and lies at the heart of what distinguishes democratic systems from non-democratic ones. The **EUDEMOS** project examined how the nature of political choice developed and changed in Europe in the post-war period up to the current day. **REDEM** will study the reasons that make European citizens unwilling to participate in the elections as well as investigate the long-term ability of elections to legitimise governance and policies.



The engagement of well-informed citizens is at the heart of democracy and ever more important to address the declining trust in representative forms of democracy. The last calls of Horizon 2020 fund projects for **developing deliberative and participatory democracies through experimentation**, on the **transformations of the European media landscape** and on **citizens’ engagement in the Green Deal**.

More information

[A new push for European democracy](#)

[Research and innovation on governance and democracy](#)

[ERC Project Stories](#)

[Challenges to democracy in Europe](#)

#EUdemocracy #EUvsDisinfo #ResearchImpactEU

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KI-08-21-004-EN-N ISBN 978-92-76-30609-2 doi 10.2777/28392



Publications Office
of the European Union