

Focus on Spain

European Sovereignty

Ipsos survey on behalf of the Fondation Jean-Jaurès and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

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Survey conducted by Ipsos on behalf of the Fondation Jean-Jaurès and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Some 8,000 people were interviewed over the internet via Ipsos' Access Panel between 28 December 2020 and 8 January 2021, making up eight samples of 1,000 persons representative of the national population of persons aged 18 and over in France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Spain and Sweden. The sampling was carried out in accordance with the quota method (sex, age, occupation, rural/urban location, region). This summary presents the results on Spain.

SOVEREIGNTY? AN AMBIGUOUS IDEA FOR MOST SPANIARDS

Is this because Spain is a constitutional monarchy? Whenever Spaniards are asked what comes into their minds when they hear the term »sovereignty« they seem a little awkward: a mixture of »neither positive nor negative« (44 % of responses), »neither outdated nor modern« (43 %), »neither right-wing nor left-wing« (56 %) ... In each instance, a large majority (whether relative or not) of respondents replies »neither ... nor«.

On other issues, opinions are divided: 28 % of Spaniards have a »rather positive« view of sovereignty, as against 23 % who take the contrary view. This lags a long way behind the high-

est scores registered in the survey, in Germany (73 % answering »rather positive«) or in Poland (69 %), and instead is similar to the lowest levels, like those registered in France (29 % positive) and Italy (21 %). The 60 % of positive associations recorded in Romania, however, prevents us from inferring a linguistic bias specific to Latin countries.

Furthermore, over one in three Spaniards regard the term »sovereignty« as »outdated« (38 %), higher than the European average (32 %). Only 13 % consider it, by contrast, to be »modern«, one of the lowest scores, along with those registered in France (12 %) and Italy (10 %). As for political orientation, while there is no majority view, one in four Spaniards (25 %) associate sovereignty with »the right«, as against 12 % who associate it with »the left«. While this is very much a minority view, these 12 % of respondents are relatively atypical by comparison with the figures recorded in the other countries: nowhere else is 10 % achieved on this item, with a European average of only 6 %.

When asked to select two words from a list of ten that one might associate with sovereignty, Spaniards choose »power« (mentioned by 54 %) and »nationalism« (43 %), two concepts that are not necessarily constructive in relation to the European project, and which also take top billing in France and Italy. Some way below this are mentions of »freedom« (27 %), »independence« (20 %) and »self-determination« (again 20 %).

Finally, when asked about the associations with sovereignty that come to mind in relation to particular concepts rather

than words, »living in accordance with one's own values and preferences« is mentioned by 63 %, »the ability to assert one's own interests« by 58 % and »independence in relation to others« by 43 %. »Cooperation freely agreed with one's partners«, chosen by half of Germans and Swedes, only comes at the bottom of the list in Spain, at 36 %.

EUROPEAN SOVEREIGNTY, FAIRLY WELL REGARDED

Generally speaking, the expression »European sovereignty« is less well understood in countries in which the idea of sovereignty has rather adverse connotations. This is not the case in Spain, where 71 % of respondents state they understand these terms »well«, one of the highest figures among the eight countries in the survey (63 % on average), similar to the scores for »national sovereignty« (70 %). The level of understanding of the term »strategic autonomy«, by contrast, falls back to the European average, garnering 62 % in Spain as against 61 % in the countries in the survey overall.

The good understanding of the concept of European sovereignty is perhaps fostered by its connotations. For just under half of Spaniards (49 %), this term conjures up »something positive«, in contrast to 24 % for »negative« and 27 % »neither positive nor negative«. In detail, positive judgements are given by 74 % of supporters of the People's Party, 57 % among supporters of the PSOE and even 45 % among Vox supporters (as against 25 % negative opinions). Only the supporters of Unidas Podemos stand out here, with 33 % positive opinions and 42 % critical ones. European sovereignty has positive associations for half of Spaniards, similar to the level of support for »national sovereignty« (50 % / 24 % / 26 %), an exception also seen in Germany. In the other countries, indeed, national sovereignty is a little more highly regarded than European sovereignty, with positive assessments ranging from 5 to 10 percentage points higher. Concerning »strategic autonomy«, on the other hand, they take a harsher view. This term evokes positive associations only among 37 % of Spaniards, 12 percentage points below the European average of 49 %. The fact that in Spain the term »autonomía« refers to the debate on the status of the regions (starting with Catalonia) undoubtedly goes a long way towards explaining the results.

To sum up, the majority of Spaniards see no problem in associating the terms sovereignty and Europe and no contradiction with the notion of national sovereignty. For 64 % of those interviewed, »it is possible to use the two words together because European sovereignty and national sovereignty are complementary«. Only one person in three (36 %) consider, on the contrary, that sovereignty refers above all to the nation. Germany, where the balance of judgement is most favourable to the European project of all eight countries in the survey, stands somewhat apart in this respect (73 % / 27 %).

SPANIARDS FAVOUR STRENGTHENING EUROPEAN SOVEREIGNTY EVEN MORE THAN THAT OF THEIR OWN COUNTRY

So, »is Europe today sovereign?« Like all Europeans, Spaniards are divided. A slim majority (53 %) responds in the affirmative, as against 47 % who take the contrary view.

It's true that, for many, the check list of essential elements that Europe must have in order to be considered sovereign has been satisfied: »a strong economy«, considered »essential« by 75 % of Spaniards; »safeguards on European production in such strategic areas as food and health« (deemed essential by 72 %); »a common security and defence policy« (67 %); »European energy sources« (64 %); »strong defence of its own values – democracy, rule of law – both internally and externally« (62 %); »its own tax revenues« (61 %); »control over the EU's external borders« (60 %), to mention only the items considered essential by over 60 % of respondents.

There is still some way to go. And three-quarters of Spaniards (73 %, a clear majority of them supporters of the five main political parties, PP, PSOE and Ch, but also VOX and UP) concur with the view that European sovereignty should be »strengthened«. This is regarded as even more desirable than reinforcing national sovereignty (70 %), a view that is unique to Spain. Once more, this can be explained in terms of the Spanish debate on the status of its regions, with people who declare themselves close to separatist or »nationalist« parties (ERC, Junts, PNV ...), but also to Podemos prominent among those who oppose any strengthening of national sovereignty, which they associate with centralisation from Madrid.

Many reasons are given to justify strengthening European sovereignty, but »the threat to health« (mentioned by 41 %, as against a 31 % European average) comes up most often, perhaps not surprisingly in a country that has been severely hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. »Their country's lack of clout at international level« (32 % in Spain, 27 % on average), »the challenge of climate change« (31 %, 34 %) and »the terrorist threat« (31 %, 37 %) are the other reasons mentioned most frequently. To a lesser extent, people believe that an enhanced European sovereignty would also make it easier to stand up to »US great-power ambitions« (mentioned by 22 %, 17 % on Average), which Spaniards consider slightly more of a threat than »Chinese great-power ambitions« (19 %, 20 %), while the other countries take the opposite view.

As for the remaining obstacles that need to be dealt with, »pressure from certain foreign countries in whose interest it is that Europe does not become stronger« is ranked first (mentioned by 24 %), followed by »the weakness of the European institutions (Commission, Parliament) in their present condition« (22 %), »the fact that some European countries are governed by nationalists«, and, to a lesser extent, »cultural differences between European countries« (12 %), »popular reluctance in various European countries« (12 %), and »pressure from big industrial corporations or digital platforms« (9 %).

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