

# Southeast Europe: The Six Faces of Youth

*A Segmentation Analysis and  
recommendations for engagement*

2025



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#### **About FES Youth Studies**

What are young people afraid of or hopeful about? In a rapidly changing world that is challenged by the climate crisis and inequalities, and in many parts aging societies and democratic decline, **FES Youth Studies** investigate how young generations perceive the development of their societies and their personal future. Our aim is to foster informed debate about young people's views on politics and democracy against the background of their life circumstances and values. This includes key issues such as education, employment and mobility, family and friends, and their overall attitudes and perceptions. We focus on young people aged 14 to 29 to understand their perspectives on these critical topics.

**FES** has conducted numerous youth studies around the world since 2009. For this report, young people between the ages of 14 and 29 in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Greece, and Türkiye were surveyed by IPSOS.

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# Executive Summary

## Unearthing the hidden voices of Southeast Europe's young people

In our study examining the hopes, fears and worldviews of young people across Southeast Europe, we unveil a complex mosaic of perspectives that challenge conventional assumptions. The Youth Study Southeast Europe 2024, conducted by IPSOS in spring 2024 for the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), sheds light on how young people in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Greece and Türkiye are coping with turbulent political landscapes, economic instability and cultural transitions.

## Beyond the numbers: a new approach to understanding young people

Instead of focusing solely on broad, traditional demographic categorisations, this study employs a sophisticated segmentation analysis to identify six distinct segments of young people, each characterised by unique political attitudes, social values and aspirations. By combining advanced statistical tools such as factor analysis, random forest models and clustering techniques, the researchers aimed to decode the deeper undercurrents driving youth perspectives across the region.

A person's general attitudes and beliefs matter far more than their demographic characteristics in shaping their political views. Our innovative approach revealed that social values, trust in institutions and cultural identity are far more predictive of political leanings than age, income or education level.



## The six faces of youth in Southeast Europe

The analysis identified six distinct youth segments, each presenting different challenges and opportunities for policymakers:

**1. Tradition-oriented believers:** Highly religious and conservative, these young people, primarily women from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Serbia, and Türkiye, prioritise family, tradition and security. Their anxiety about economic instability and social change drives their distrust of democratic institutions, favouring strong leaders instead.

**2. Disengaged conservative optimists:** Dominated by young men from rural Albania and Kosovo, this group struggles with limited education and career prospects. Despite their low political engagement, they exhibit high trust in traditional institutions such as the army and the police, while their views are often polarised under strong social media influence.

**3. Ambitious but anxious strivers:** Teenagers from Türkiye, Bulgaria and Romania facing financial hardship but with a strong materialistic drive. While economically marginalised, they express progressive views on social issues such as LGBTQ+ rights and minority protections, highlighting their potential for future civic participation.

**4. Engaged and protective traditionalists:** Young men aged 25–29 from Serbia, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina who are economically stable but driven by conservative, nationalist values. Their distrust of authorities and democratic institutions drives their active political engagement and right-wing ideological leanings.

**5. Complex and curious conservatives:** Young men from Bulgaria, Romania and Türkiye who straddle traditionalism and modernity. Financially constrained yet adventurous, this segment paradoxically combines conservative political beliefs with openness to cultural exchange and personal growth.

**6. Socially engaged progressives:** Highly educated, urban women with a strong focus on social justice, human rights and gender equality. Although they are financially comfortable, their desire to emigrate for cultural and professional growth reflects disillusionment with domestic opportunities.

## Implications for policy and youth engagement

The findings have significant implications for political parties, particularly those with progressive agendas. The analysis suggests that engaging young people effectively requires acknowledging their diverse realities and designing policies that resonate with their lived experience.

For instance, social democratic parties must develop strategies that directly address the economic insecurities of a segment such as ‘ambitious but anxious strivers’, while simultaneously countering the polarising influence of social media on groups such as ‘disengaged conservative optimists’. Meanwhile, the strong willingness to emigrate among ‘socially engaged progressives’ highlights the need for domestic policies that enhance career prospects and social inclusion.

In a region in which political disengagement and social fragmentation remain significant challenges, understanding young people’s nuanced perspectives is not just an academic exercise, but a political necessity. The ability to forge meaningful connections with these young people may well determine the future of democracy and stability across Southeast Europe.

# 1 ■ Introduction

Young people in Southeast Europe are navigating a rapidly changing world, shaped by economic uncertainty, shifting political landscapes and evolving social norms. Understanding how they see their future, engage with democracy and perceive societal progress is crucial for shaping policies that reflect their needs and aspirations. While broad surveys provide valuable insights, they often fail to capture the nuances within youth populations. What if different groups of young people experience and interpret the world in fundamentally different ways?

This paper is a continuation of our Comparative Youth Study Southeast Europe (SEE), with a specific focus on segmentation analysis of the data. While the original study<sup>1</sup> examined how young people in Southeast Europe perceive societal progress and their own futures, this paper delves more deeply into the data to uncover patterns and distinctions that traditional statistical analyses might overlook.

The Comparative Youth Study SEE explored youth perspectives on politics, democracy and societal values across Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Greece, and Türkiye. By comparing insights from these diverse contexts, the study aimed to foster informed discussions on how young people relate to their life circumstances and broader societal developments. The research focused on individuals aged 14 to 29, building on previous surveys conducted in the region by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) between 2011 and 2015, and again in 2018.

## Why conduct segmentation analysis?

Expanding upon the original study, this paper introduces segmentation analysis to deepen our understanding of youth perspectives in Southeast Europe. While traditional statistical methods focus on aggregate trends and averages, segmentation analysis groups individuals on the basis of shared characteristics or behaviours, uncovering patterns that conventional approaches often hide.

This method enables more targeted policy recommendations by identifying distinct subgroups within the youth population, each with unique attitudes, concerns and behaviours. It enhances our ability to design interventions that are more responsive to the specific needs of different youth segments, whether in the context of political engagement, educational initiatives or social policy.

Segmentation analysis helps us to discern the bigger picture by looking at different aspects of young people's lives all at once, including their age, beliefs and behaviour. It's like using a detailed map that shows not only the main roads but also the hidden paths and intersections. This approach makes it easier to compare different groups and find both the differences and similarities between them. For example, it can reveal how socially progressive urban young women differ from rural young men who feel disconnected from politics. By pinpointing these unique groups, policymakers and organisations can create strategies that truly match what each group needs, instead of relying on one-size-fits-all solutions.

## Structure of the paper

This paper is structured around three key questions:

- 1. How can we uncover hidden patterns within the youth population?** In the first section, we outline the multi-method segmentation approach used to analyse the data, explaining how this methodology identifies distinct groups based on shared characteristics.
- 2. Who are the six distinct segments of young people in Southeast Europe?** The second section introduces the six unique segments revealed through our analysis, detailing their defining values, socio-political attitudes and beliefs.
- 3. What do these findings mean for policy and youth engagement?** In the final section, we explore the broader implications of these segments, discussing how the insights can shape policymaking and improve strategies for engaging young people across the region.

# 2 ■ Segmentation methodology<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction: a multi-method approach

The analysis of young people's political attitudes in Southeast Europe required a sophisticated multi-method approach to capture the complexity of modern political views while remaining analytically meaningful. This multi-method approach laid the groundwork for a segmentation that goes beyond surface-level categorisations to reveal how different aspects of youth perspectives interact and form coherent patterns.

Our study aimed to understand not just what young people think about politics and society, but how different aspects of their worldviews connect and influence each other. This required moving beyond simple demographic categorisations to understand deeper patterns in attitudes and beliefs across national borders.

Our analytical process combined several advanced statistical methods working together in a carefully planned sequence. We began with factor analysis to understand the underlying patterns in our survey data, revealing how different questions naturally grouped together.<sup>3</sup> This initial step helped us to make sense of our extensive dataset, which included over 200 questions covering topics from basic demographics to complex political attitudes and social values.

Building on these insights, we used random forest analysis<sup>4</sup> to identify which aspects of young people's views were most important in predicting their political attitudes. The random forest analysis uses hundreds of decision trees working in parallel to identify patterns in complex data, making it particularly valuable for handling our diverse question formats, from simple yes/no responses to complex attitudinal scales.<sup>5</sup>

## Multi-method approach



The random forest model offers several key advantages for this type of research. First, variable importance scores allow us to identify which survey questions are most important in predicting key attitudes such as democratic values and nationalism.<sup>6</sup> Second, with the right preparation, it can handle the typical messiness of survey data, where people might answer some questions but not others.<sup>7</sup> Third, it can capture both how different aspects of people's views work together and complex non-linear patterns in their responses, rather than assuming simple straight-line relationships.<sup>8</sup>

We then employed multiple clustering techniques to identify distinct groups of young people with similar viewpoints.<sup>9</sup> This step was crucial

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**The multi-method approach laid the groundwork for a segmentation that goes beyond surface-level categorisations to reveal how different aspects of youth perspectives interact and form coherent patterns.**

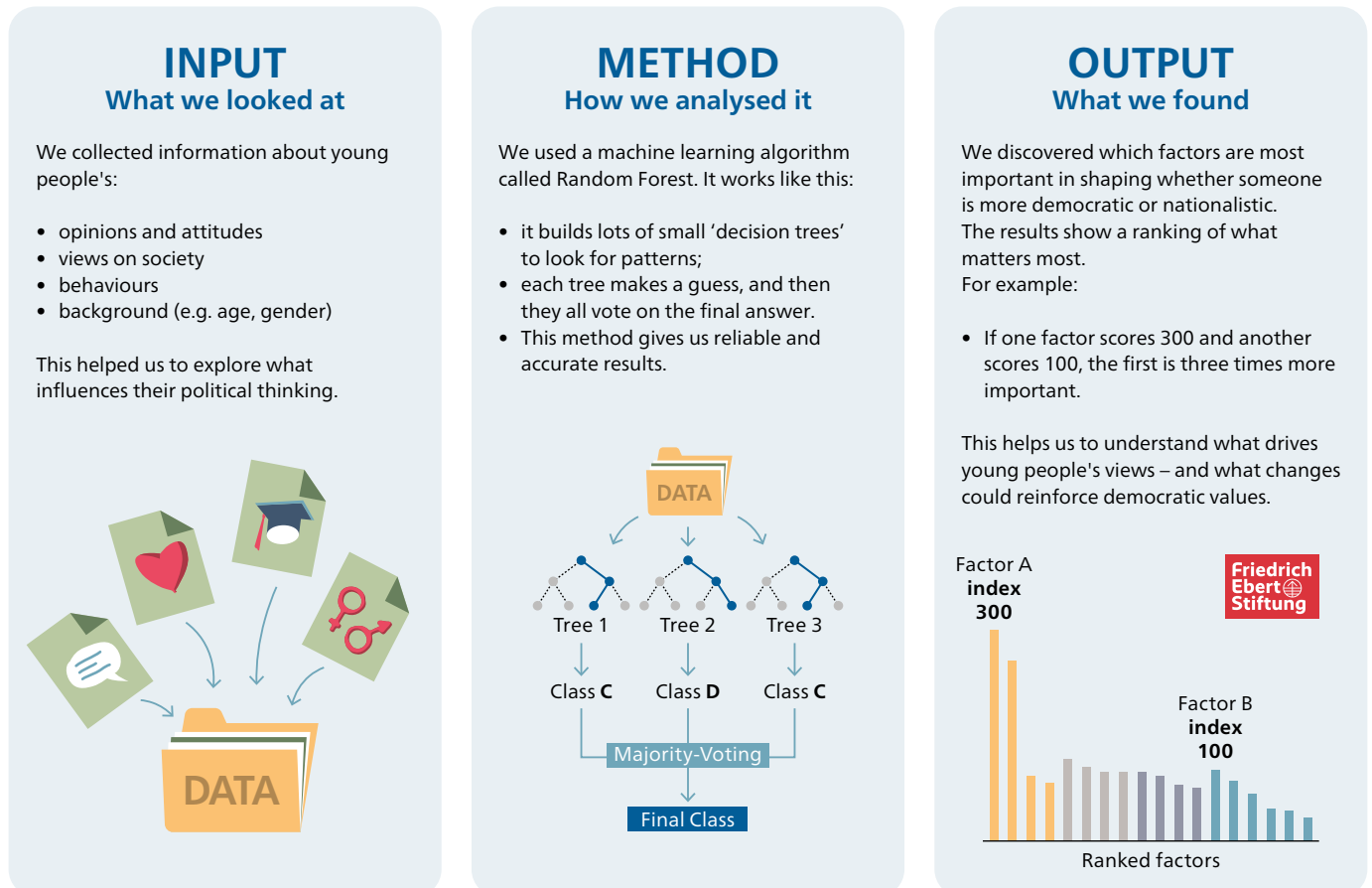
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in order to move beyond individual patterns to understand how different attitudes and beliefs tend to occur together. To ensure that our findings were robust, we validated these groupings using linear discriminant analysis.<sup>10</sup> This helped confirm that our segments were stable and meaningful. Finally, we used correspondence analysis<sup>11</sup> to map how these different groups related to each other across key dimensions of political and social attitudes.



Fig. 1 **What influences people's nationalistic and democratic inclinations**

*Via Random Forest – a machine learning algorithm based on decision trees, that allows us to investigate simultaneously a multitude of aspects*



Through this comprehensive analytical approach, we discovered that a person's general attitudes

**A person's general attitudes and beliefs matter far more than their demographic characteristics in determining their political views.**

and beliefs matter far more than their demographic characteristics in determining their political views. This finding challenged the assumption

that factors such as age, income or location are the primary drivers of political attitudes. Instead, we found that understanding someone's broader worldview – their trust in institutions, their social values, their views on democracy – gives us much more insight into their political thinking.

As we will detail in subsequent sections, this required careful data preparation, rigorous statistical analysis and thoughtful interpretation to ensure that our findings would be both statistically robust and practically useful.



## Data preparation process

Our analysis relied on careful survey data preparation, a crucial step for ensuring quality and reliability. The survey included over 200 questions covering demographics, political attitudes, religious beliefs and social values, and required thorough cleaning and standardisation.

We identified and temporarily set aside approximately 12% of responses showing patterns that could distort the results, such as response inertia or excessive missing data. The survey's diverse question formats – yes/no, five-point scales, and multiple-choice – necessitated standardisation to allow meaningful comparisons.

Balancing data richness with statistical reliability, we later reintegrated certain flagged responses into final segments. This meticulous preparation ensured that our findings were both robust and practically relevant.

## Random forest analysis implementation

Before implementing our primary analytical approach – random forest algorithm – we combined several sophisticated statistical methods to build a comprehensive understanding of young people's political attitudes. We began with factor analysis to understand the underlying patterns in our survey data. This initial step revealed how different questions naturally grouped together, showing, for instance, how views on various social issues tended to cluster, and how trust in different institutions was interrelated. While these factors helped to identify patterns, they did not reach optimal levels of explained variance (70–80%). This led us to use original items rather than factors in subsequent analyses.

Next, we applied random forest analysis to determine which components most strongly predict key political attitudes. This machine-learning method constructs multiple decision trees to assess how different survey responses influence specific outcomes. Our analysis focused on five core areas: democratic attitudes, nationalism, political trust, political engagement, and views on social cohesion.

## Index system

To quantify the predictive power of each question, we used an index system in which 100 represents the average level of importance. We can think of it as a measure of how strongly certain factors shape political views. For example, questions measuring social acceptance (views of people in different religious, ethnic and social groups as neighbours) and attitudes towards abortion and homosexuality scored 333, indicating they were more than three times better at predicting nationalist attitudes than average. This means that knowing whether someone would accept a gay couple or member of a religious minority as neighbours tells us more about where they stand on nationalist views than, say, their employment status.

Similarly, trust in institutions (index score 1395) – which included trust in the police, courts, army, NATO, the EU, civil organisations, unions and religious institutions – was nearly fourteen times more predictive of political trust (defined specifically as trust in national parliament, national government and political parties) than any demographic characteristic. In practical terms, this means that knowing how much someone trusts the police or courts gives us approximately fourteen times more insight into their likely trust in parliament than knowing what is important to them when choosing a partner (index score 110).

To facilitate interpretation, we established colour-coded significance thresholds:

- **Green:** at least 10% above average (index > 110)
- **Red:** at least 10% below average (index < 90)
- **Black:** average range (index 90–110)

This system enabled the quick identification of significant variations in young people's political attitudes.

## Identifying segments and dimensions

Through multiple iterations of the analysis, we determined that segmenting the data into six distinct groups produced the clearest and most stable patterns. We re-integrated the 12% of initially flagged responses, ensuring that all meaningful data contributed to the final segmentation.

Our analysis uncovered four primary dimensions that shape young people's political attitudes:

- 1. Social progressivism vs conservatism (41%)** – views on LGBTQA rights, minority protections and social inclusion.
- 2. Status-seeking vs ethical orientation (32%)** – the balance between personal ambition and moral principles.
- 3. Optimism vs pessimism (15%)** – confidence in the future and institutional effectiveness.
- 4. Patriarchal and security-oriented vs altruistic and security seeking (8%)** – attitudes towards law enforcement, public safety and state authority.

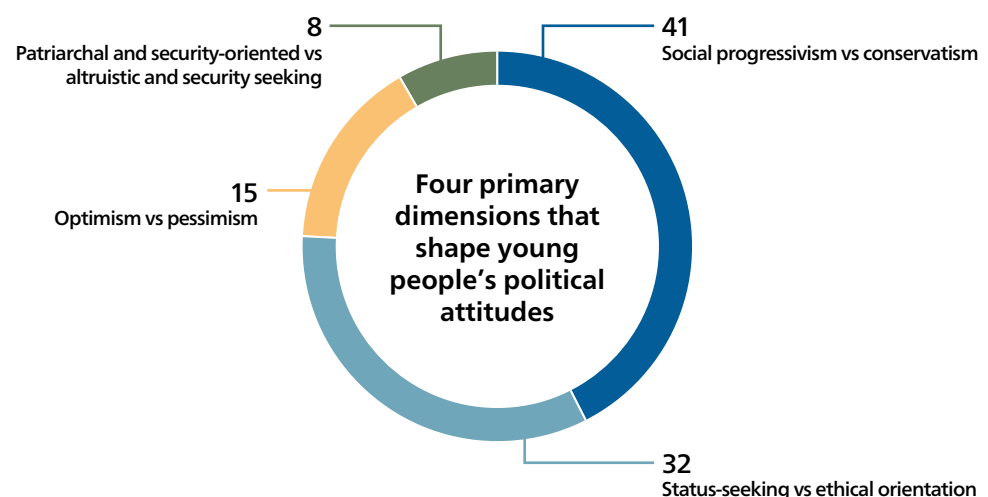
The percentages shown for each dimension (41%, 32%, 15% and 8%) represent how much each contributes to explaining the differences between youth segments. Social progressivism vs conservatism, at 41%, is the most powerful dimension in distinguishing between different groups of young people. This means that where someone stands on social issues tells us more about which segment they belong to than any other factor. To put it simply, if we had to predict which segment a young person belongs to based on just one aspect of their worldview, their stance on social issues would give us the most accurate prediction. Together, these four dimensions explain over 90% of what makes each segment distinct from the others.

**Our segmentation approach allowed us to let the data determine the most meaningful distinctions.**

Rather than relying on predefined categories, this approach allowed us to let the data determine the most meaningful distinctions. Understanding young people's political attitudes as multidimensional helps us to avoid oversimplifications and provides a more nuanced policy-relevant perspective.

Fig. 2 What makes each segment distinct?

*The percentages shown for each dimension represent how much each contributes to explaining the differences between youth segments. Values in %*



# 3. The six segments

In the following section, we introduce the six distinct segments of young people identified through our analysis, each characterised by unique values, socio-political attitudes and beliefs.

## 1. Segment one: tradition-oriented believers

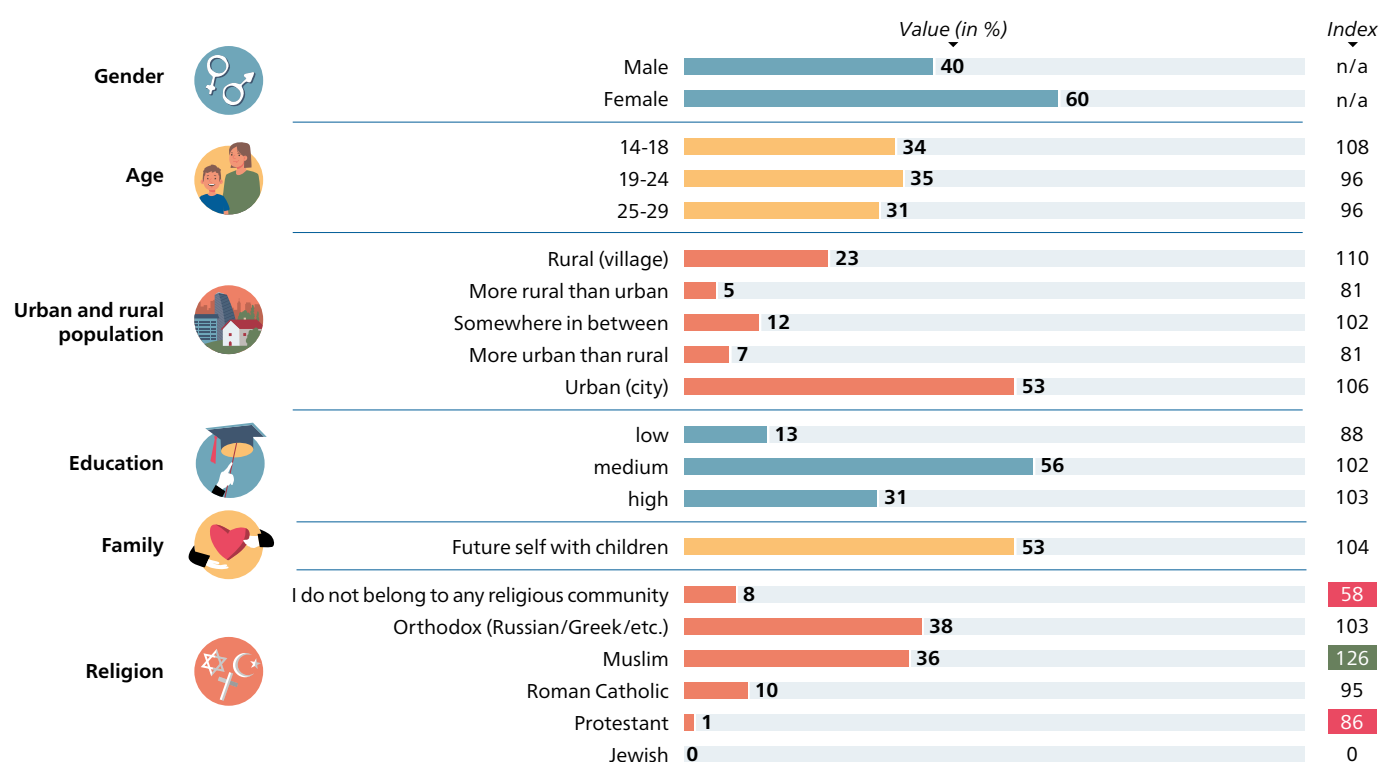
Segment one primarily consists of young, married women with strong Orthodox Christian or Muslim beliefs. Tradition-oriented believers represent 37% of all respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Albania, Serbia and Türkiye they comprise 27% of all respondents for each country individually. These women are typically well educated and heavily engaged in social media, reflecting their connection to both traditional and modern influ-

ences. They emphasise family and tradition, often marrying young and aspiring to build stable, family-oriented lives. Their partner choices are deeply influenced by family approval and religious values, underscoring the importance of their cultural and spiritual roots.

Financial stability is a significant priority for this group. Many come from households with good living standards, although not necessarily able to afford luxuries. They demonstrate a strong interest in education, dedicating substantial time to academic pursuits, suggesting that many are students or engaged in higher education. While they may not have extensive travel experience, they express a clear desire to study or work abroad, driven primarily by hopes of better living standards and career opportunities.

Fig. 3 Segment one: tradition-oriented believers

Overview of the defining characteristics



### How to read the graph

Understanding what matters most: a simple index system. To see which questions had the biggest impact on young people's political views, we used a simple score system. We set 100 as the average – this helps us to compare everything easily:

- if something scored more than 100, it was more important than average;

- if it scored less than 100, it was less important.

To make things clearer, we used colours:

- **Green** = more important than average
- **Red** = less important than average
- **Black** = about average

This way, we could quickly spot which topics really matter with regard to young people's political attitudes.

Despite their aspirations, this segment is marked by pervasive anxieties about job security, health-care access and economic instability. Broader fears about violence, war, terrorism and the societal impact of so-called ‘artificial intelligence’ and immigration further contribute to their sense of unease. These concerns align with their political conservatism, as they lean slightly to the right and exhibit distrust of government institutions. However, they put considerable trust in institutions such as the church, the army and the police, reflecting a deep-seated need for protection and stability. Their preference for strong leadership, coupled with a willingness to accept limitations on civil liberties, highlights their prioritisation of security over personal freedoms.

Although their political engagement is relatively low, these women display nationalistic tendencies and advocate for preserving cultural values and traditions. Their conservative outlook extends to social issues, as they believe that LGBTQIA+ communities have too many rights, and they emphasise the importance of religious and traditional principles. The influence of social media, where they spend significant time, may amplify their fears and anxieties, reinforcing their concerns about external threats and societal changes.

Overall, this segment represents a group of young women driven by a desire for security and stability. Their worldview is shaped by a mix of traditional values, educational aspirations and modern anxieties, creating a nuanced profile rooted in both fear and a strong attachment to family and culture.

Fig. 4 Dimension position for segment one: **tradition-oriented believers**

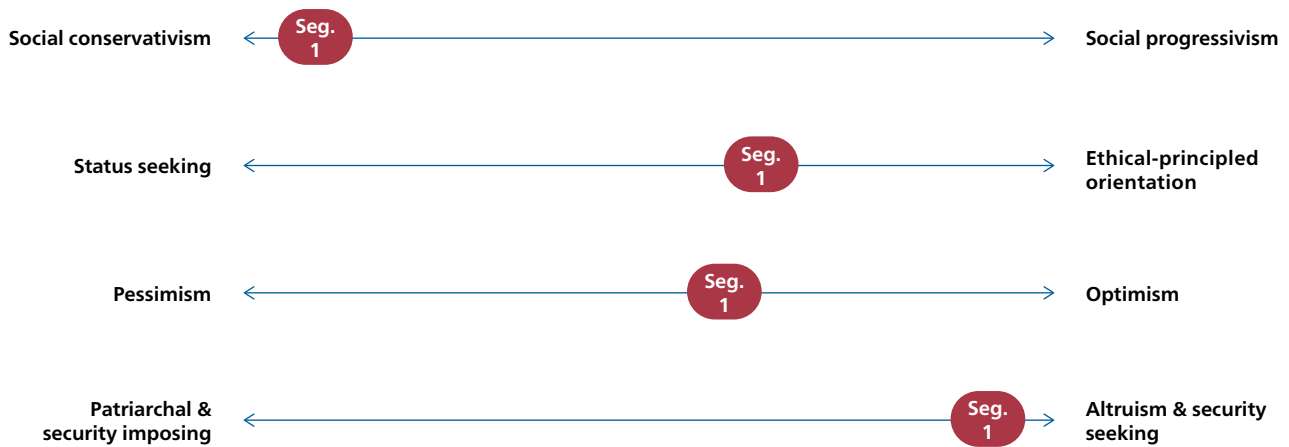


Fig. 5 Interests and views of segment one: tradition-oriented believers

What do '% and 'Index' mean in these tables?

#### Index

A score that that measures whether certain item is good at predicting if a respondent belongs to a group or not. For a more detailed explanation of the 'index' see p.9.

#### % (Percentage)

This shows how many people in this segment gave a positive answer.

Average number of hours spent on activities	h	Index
Schooling / education	1.4	108
My work (paid activities)	1.2	100
Reading internet newspapers, informative portals	0.5	82
On social networks like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc.	2.2	117

Interest in & knowledge of politics	%	Index
Interest in politics	15.7	71
Knowledge about politics	20.4	72
Representation of young people's interests in politics	9.2	73
Willing to participate in politics	18.1	65

Europe	%	Index
leave EU/do not join EU	21.7	79
stay in EU/join EU	78.3	108

I see myself as...	%	Index
...a national of my country	81.3	106
...a European	29.6	81

Satisfaction	%	Index
Satisfaction with life in general	24.6	107

Personal future	%	Index
Worse than now	9.5	85
Same as now	11.8	80
Better than now	78.7	106

Political orientation	%	Index
1 far-left	4.9	84
2	3.4	109
3	5.3	85
4	6.9	84
5	23.6	106
6	27.2	115
7	11.3	95
8	6.2	75
9	4.0	89
10 far-right	7.1	117

Values	Avg. Share	Index
Democracy	6%	83
The rule of law	7%	91
Human rights	19%	103
Economic welfare of citizens	13%	105
Employment	13%	113
Social equality	6%	88
Gender equality	5%	95
Security	20%	114
Individual freedom	8%	76

Society's future	%	Index
Worse than now	37.2	97
Same as now	27.6	104
Better than now	35.2	101

Fig. 6 **Segment one: Opinions, Views & Political Beliefs of tradition-oriented believers**

What do '% and 'Index' mean in these tables?

**Index**

A score that that measures whether certain item is good at predicting if a respondent belongs to a group or not. For a more detailed explanation of the 'index' see p.9.

**% (Percentage)**

This shows how many people in this segment gave a positive answer.

Trust in political institutions	%	index
Political parties	7.2	69
National Parliament	15.4	92
National Government	14.8	82
Local government	16.9	84
Media in your country	12.1	84
Army	52.5	118
Police	43.6	123
Judiciary (courts)	23.8	101
NATO	30.7	97
European Union	30.2	92
Civil society organizations	22.6	93
Trade unions	13.9	89
Your church	47.9	128

Important values	%	index
Being independent	85.8	107
Having a successful career	83.7	112
Taking responsibility	82.8	109
Graduating from university	72.0	116
Getting/being rich	53.9	101
Wearing branded clothes	16.3	71
Looking good	71.6	116
Getting/being married	66.8	118
Having children	76.4	115
Doing sports	67.5	106
Healthy eating	78.0	110
Being active in politics	10.5	48
Participating in civic actions/initiatives	24.2	79

Behaviours viewed as socially acceptable	%	index
Accepting/giving a bribe	3.7	71
Cheating on taxes if you have a chance	2.9	50
Using connections to 'get things done'	8.6	104
Abortion	8.9	58
Homosexuality	5.0	35

Groups viewed as having too many rights	%	index
Young people	5.2	63
Poor people	2.1	38
Women	8.3	71
LGBTQIA+ community	36.4	109
Ethnic minorities	16.8	80

Groups viewed positively as neighbours	%	index
LGBTQIA+ people	16.8	66
Drug addicts	2.9	37
Christian people	65.6	104
Jewish people	30.7	84
Roma people	22.8	86
Muslim people	54.4	105

Societal views	%	index
When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women	9.2	72
On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do	13.0	74
There is a natural hierarchy between black and white peoples	16.9	108
Same-sex couples should have the right to marry	10.0	44
Same-sex couples are as good parents as other couples	9.3	47
Immigrants enrich our culture	10.7	68
We must protect our own culture from the influence of other cultures	65.3	132
Jews have too much influence in our country	14.3	99
Democracy is a good form of government in general	59.4	102
Democracy is always and under all circumstances preferable to any other kind of government	56.5	105
Young people should have more possibilities to speak out in politics	72.6	108
Democracy is the best possible system of government only when it can deliver economic security for people	54.2	104
Sometimes civil liberties should be restricted to better protect citizens from terrorism or other threats	46.9	119
I would sacrifice some civil liberties to secure higher standards of living	35.1	101
We should have a strong leader who does not have to bother with Parliament or elections	46.1	116
Under certain circumstances dictatorship is a better form of government than democracy	21.4	98



## 2. Segment two: disengaged conservative optimists

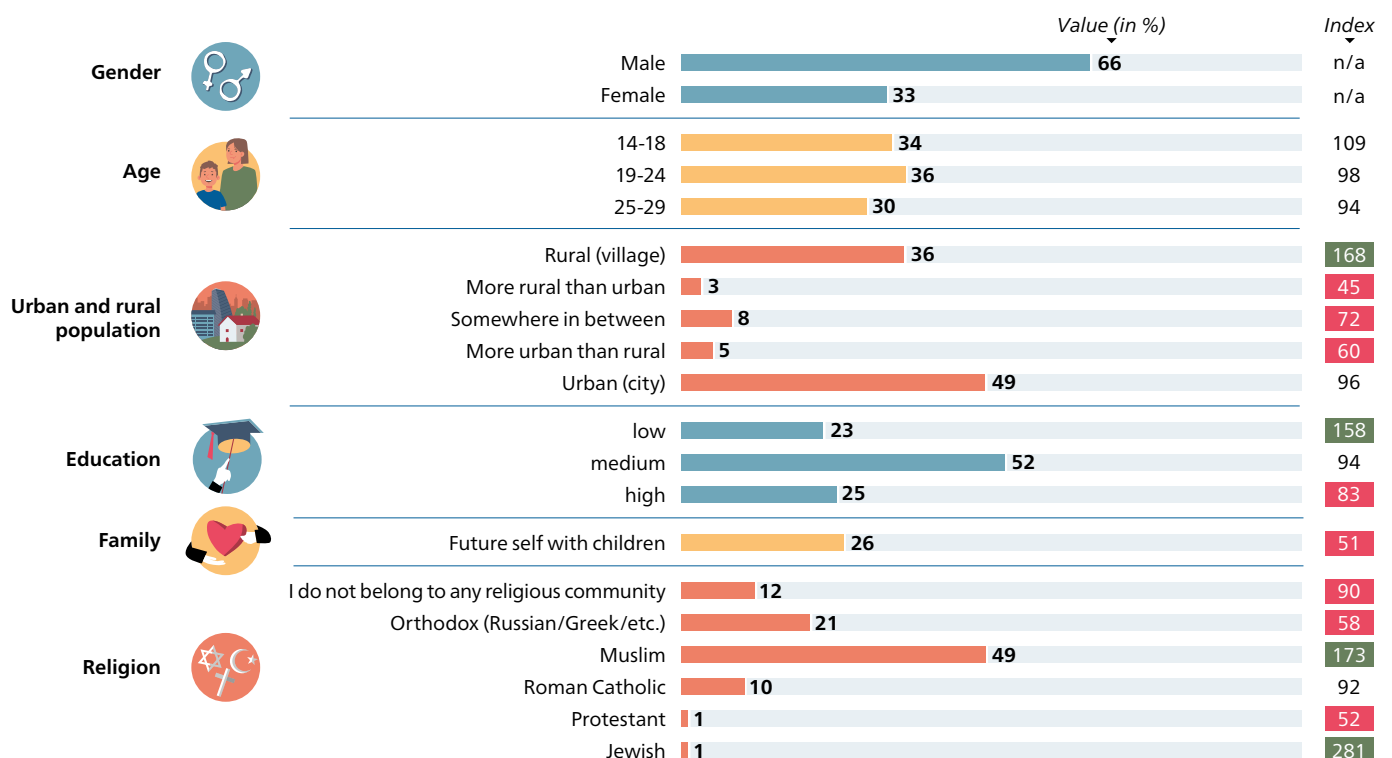
Segment two predominantly comprises young men from rural areas in Albania (46%) and Kosovo (39%) who live with their families. This segment is characterised by low educational attainment, and its members are often still in school, unemployed or actively seeking jobs. These circumstances afford them substantial free time, much of which is spent on social media, shaping their perspectives and influencing their interactions with the wider world.

Their primary aspirations revolve around personal well-being, family and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. They prioritise goals such as getting married, having children, engaging in sports and looking after their health. Career ambitions and desires to move abroad are notably less prominent within this group, suggesting a focus on local and immediate goals rather than long-term professional or geographic mobility.

While their political knowledge and engagement are minimal, their political views are often polarised, leaning toward either far-right or far-left ideologies. This polarisation may stem from their heavy reliance on social media, which can ampli-

Fig. 7 Segment two: disengaged conservative optimists

Overview of the defining characteristics



### How to read the graph

Understanding what matters most: a simple index system. To see which questions had the biggest impact on young people's political views, we used a simple score system. We set 100 as the average – this helps us to compare everything easily:

- if something scored more than 100, it was more important than average;

- if it scored less than 100, it was less important.

To make things clearer, we used colours:

- Green = more important than average
- Red = less important than average
- Black = about average

This way, we could quickly spot which topics really matter with regard to young people's political attitudes.

fy extreme viewpoints and create echo chambers. Despite their lack of active political participation, this group exhibits high levels of trust in institutions such as the parliament, government, media, army and police. This trust highlights a reliance on the authorities to shape policies and drive societal progress, reflecting a passive approach to civic engagement.

Although their political engagement is low, they exhibit a complex relationship with democracy. While they express support for democratic principles in theory, when ranking their values they prioritise practical concerns, especially economic welfare and employment. The low relative impor-

tance attached to democracy suggests that, while they accept democratic principles in theory, their immediate practical concerns take precedence, particularly economic ones which are emphasised more in this segment than in the population as a whole. Overall, this group reflects a blend of traditional values, limited aspirations and a passive political stance. Their reliance on social media, trust in institutions and polarised but disengaged political outlook make them an interesting albeit challenging demographic for engagement strategies aimed at fostering active participation or broader ambitions.

Fig. 8 Dimension position for segment two: disengaged conservative optimists

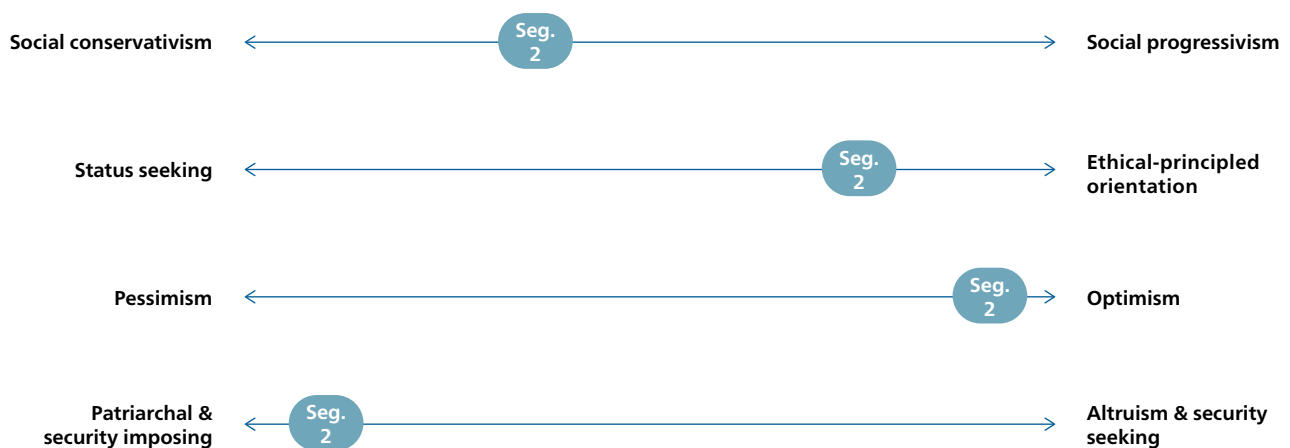


Fig. 9 Interests and views of segment two: disengaged conservative optimists

What do '%' and 'Index' mean in these tables?

#### Index

A score that measures whether certain item is good at predicting if a respondent belongs to a group or not. For a more detailed explanation of the 'index' see p.9.

#### % (Percentage)

This shows how many people in this segment gave a positive answer.

#### Average number of hours spent on activities

	h	Index
Schooling / education	1.1	85
My work (paid activities)	1.2	95
Reading internet newspapers, informative portals	0.5	74
On social networks like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc.	2.0	107

#### Interest in & knowledge of politics

	%	Index
Interest in politics	11.6	52
Knowledge about politics	18.6	65
Representation of young people's interests in politics	13.1	104
Willing to participate in politics	21.2	76

#### Europe

	%	Index
leave EU/do not join EU	13.2	49
stay in EU/join EU	86.8	119

#### I see myself as...

	%	Index
...a national of my country	86.8	113
...a European	42.7	117

#### Satisfaction

	%	Index
Satisfaction with life in general	31.0	135

#### Personal future

	%	Index
Worse than now	4.1	36
Same as now	6.8	46
Better than now	89.1	120

#### Political orientation

	%	Index
1 far-left	17.3	301
2	2.8	89
3	6.2	99
4	5.9	72
5	24.6	110
6	18.0	76
7	8.7	73
8	5.3	65
9	2.4	53
10 far-right	8.8	144

#### Values

	Avg. Share	Index
Democracy	6%	84
The rule of law	6%	79
Human rights	18%	97
Economic welfare of citizens	15%	118
Employment	15%	136
Social equality	5%	71
Gender equality	4%	78
Security	18%	105
Individual freedom	10%	102

#### Society's future

	%	Index
Worse than now	17.6	46
Same as now	20.1	76
Better than now	62.3	178

Fig. 10 Segment two: Opinions, Views &amp; Political Beliefs of disengaged conservative optimists

What do '%' and 'Index' mean in these tables?

**Index**

A score that measures whether certain item is good at predicting if a respondent belongs to a group or not. For a more detailed explanation of the 'index' see p.9.

**% (Percentage)**

This shows how many people in this segment gave a positive answer.

Trust in political institutions	%	index
Political parties	4.8	46
National Parliament	17.9	106
National Government	26.5	146
Local government	25.2	126
Media in your country	16.3	114
Army	58.4	131
Police	47.8	135
Judiciary (courts)	23.7	101
NATO	51.7	163
European Union	50.5	153
Civil society organizations	18.2	75
Trade unions	10.9	70
Your church	48.6	130

Important values	%	index
Being independent	88.2	110
Having a successful career	81.2	109
Taking responsibility	81.7	108
Graduating from university	65.0	105
Getting/being rich	66.5	124
Wearing branded clothes	26.5	116
Looking good	71.1	115
Getting/being married	74.3	131
Having children	79.7	120
Doing sports	72.1	113
Healthy eating	83.4	117
Being active in politics	13.8	63
Participating in civic actions/initiatives	23.2	75

Behaviours viewed as socially acceptable	%	index
Accepting/giving a bribe	4.2	82
Cheating on taxes if you have a chance	5.2	90
Using connections to 'get things done'	5.4	66
Abortion	6.5	43
Homosexuality	3.6	25

Groups viewed as having too many rights	%	index
Young people	6.8	83
Poor people	3.5	63
Women	8.9	77
LGBTQIA+ community	42.3	126
Ethnic minorities	16.5	79

Groups viewed positively as neighbours	%	index
LGBTQIA+ people	10.2	40
Drug addicts	3.2	40
Christian people	64.5	103
Jewish people	38.7	106
Roma people	32.6	123
Muslim people	65.5	126

Societal views	%	index
When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women	17.0	132
On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do	24.8	140
There is a natural hierarchy between black and white peoples	25.7	164
Same-sex couples should have the right to marry	9.9	44
Same-sex couples are as good parents as other couples	3.8	19
Immigrants enrich our culture	21.3	136
We must protect our own culture from the influence of other cultures	65.6	133
Jews have too much influence in our country	6.7	46
Democracy is a good form of government in general	70.7	121
Democracy is always and under all circumstances preferable to any other kind of government	57.7	107
Young people should have more possibilities to speak out in politics	79.9	119
Democracy is the best possible system of government only when it can deliver economic security for people	62.5	120
Sometimes civil liberties should be restricted to better protect citizens from terrorism or other threats	44.9	114
I would sacrifice some civil liberties to secure higher standards of living	44.4	128
We should have a strong leader who does not have to bother with Parliament or elections	40.4	102
Under certain circumstances dictatorship is a better form of government than democracy	14.5	66

### 3. Segment three: ambitious but anxious strivers

This segment represents teenagers, many of whom face financial hardships that shape their daily lives and aspirations. The size of this segment is largest in Türkiye (26%), followed by Bulgaria (22%) and Romania (22%).

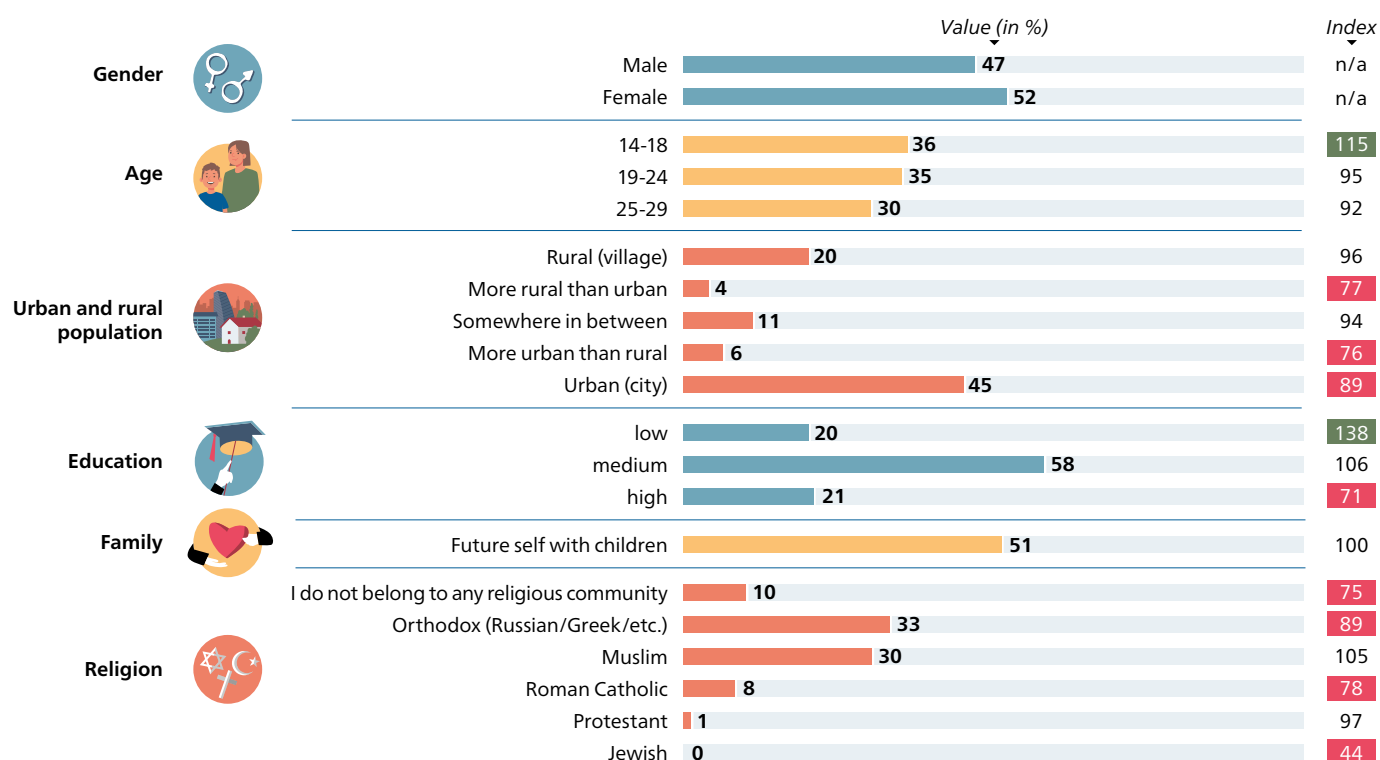
Despite these challenges, they maintain a connection to traditional values. These adolescents often balance school or vocational training with some form of paid work, reflecting a sense of responsibility and early engagement with the workforce.

While they are still young and many are not yet eligible to vote, they show an emerging interest in politics and social issues, along with a desire to participate in political activities and civic initiatives. However, their trust in institutions is uneven. They have relatively high levels of trust in political parties, parliament and the government, but display scepticism towards the army, NATO and the European Union. Unlike some other groups, they do not strongly advocate for democratic governance as the ideal political system, suggesting a more critical or ambivalent perspective.

Their outlook is further shaped by a lack of hierarchical values or a strong emphasis on protecting their own culture. Instead, they hold inclusive

Fig. 11 Segment three: ambitious but anxious strivers

#### Overview of the defining characteristics



#### How to read the graph

Understanding what matters most: a simple index system. To see which questions had the biggest impact on young people's political views, we used a simple score system. We set 100 as the average – this helps us to compare everything easily:

- if something scored more than 100, it was more important than average;

- if it scored less than 100, it was less important.

To make things clearer, we used colours:

- **Green** = more important than average
- **Red** = less important than average
- **Black** = about average

This way, we could quickly spot which topics really matter with regard to young people's political attitudes.

views, believing that women, ethnic minorities and LGBTQ communities do not have sufficient rights. This indicates progressive tendencies in their social attitudes. At the same time, they harbour significant concerns about the future, particularly regarding terrorism and the potential negative consequences of artificial intelligence, indicating a growing awareness of global and technological challenges.

Interestingly, despite their financial struggles, this group places considerable importance on wearing branded clothing, revealing a materialistic streak that contrasts with their economic reality. This behaviour probably reflects an aspiration for status, recognition or belonging, demonstrating

the complex interplay between their circumstances and their desires.

In summary, this segment embodies a mix of ambition and uncertainty, shaped by their financial hardships, evolving social attitudes and materialistic tendencies. Their progressive views on social rights and interest in political engagement highlight their potential as future civic participants, even as their economic challenges and concerns about the future temper their aspirations.

Fig. 12 Dimension position for segment three: **ambitious but anxious strivers**

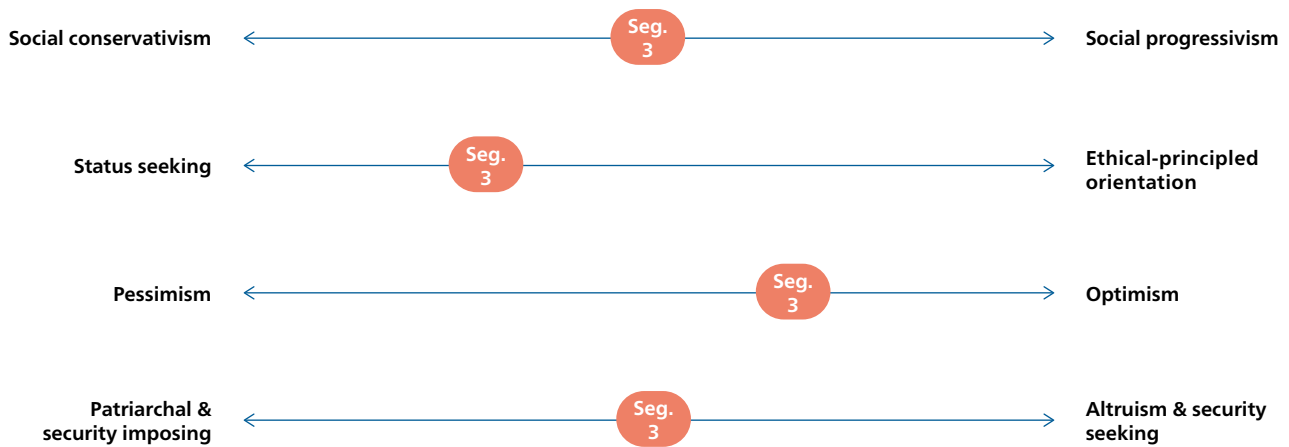




Fig. 13 Interests and views of segment three: ambitious but anxious strivers

What do '%' and 'Index' mean in these tables?

#### Index

A score that measures whether certain item is good at predicting if a respondent belongs to a group or not. For a more detailed explanation of the 'index' see p.9.

#### % (Percentage)

This shows how many people in this segment gave a positive answer.

#### Average number of hours spent on activities

	h	Index
Schooling / education	1.1	88
My work (paid activities)	0.9	74
Reading internet newspapers, informative portals	0.7	105
On social networks like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc.	1.4	77

#### Interest in & knowledge of politics

	%	Index
Interest in politics	16.4	73
Knowledge about politics	25.1	88
Representation of young people's interests in politics	13.1	104
Willing to participate in politics	27.0	97

#### Europe

	%	Index
leave EU/do not join EU	33.2	122
stay in EU/join EU	66.8	92

#### I see myself as...

	%	Index
...a national of my country	72.4	94
...a European	31.1	85

#### Satisfaction

	%	Index
Satisfaction with life in general	29.7	129

#### Personal future

	%	Index
Worse than now	13.5	120
Same as now	18.2	124
Better than now	68.3	92

#### Political orientation

	%	Index
1 far-left	3.0	51
2	3.2	101
3	5.0	80
4	6.9	84
5	21.9	98
6	26.9	114
7	13.5	113
8	9.6	117
9	4.7	103
10 far-right	5.4	89

#### Values

	Avg. Share	Index
Democracy	9%	122
The rule of law	8%	97
Human rights	17%	89
Economic welfare of citizens	12%	93
Employment	11%	98
Social equality	9%	124
Gender equality	6%	108
Security	17%	95
Individual freedom	10%	95

#### Society's future

	%	Index
Worse than now	35.2	92
Same as now	29.2	110
Better than now	35.6	102

Fig. 14 Segment three: Opinions, Views & Political Beliefs of ambitious but anxious strivers

What do '%' and 'Index' mean in these tables?

#### Index

A score that measures whether certain item is good at predicting if a respondent belongs to a group or not. For a more detailed explanation of the 'index' see p.9.

#### % (Percentage)

This shows how many people in this segment gave a positive answer.

Trust in political institutions	%	index
Political parties	17.4	166
National Parliament	22.9	136
National Government	22.0	121
Local government	21.2	106
Media in your country	18.3	128
Army	35.1	79
Police	32.1	90
Judiciary (courts)	24.3	103
NATO	27.3	86
European Union	26.8	81
Civil society organizations	22.5	92
Trade unions	18.2	117
Your church	31.5	85

Important values	%	index
Being independent	65.9	82
Having a successful career	64.8	87
Taking responsibility	62.4	82
Graduating from university	54.7	88
Getting/being rich	52.7	99
Wearing branded clothes	40.1	175
Looking good	55.6	90
Getting/being married	51.5	91
Having children	58.4	88
Doing sports	60.4	95
Healthy eating	65.0	91
Being active in politics	37.2	171
Participating in civic actions/initiatives	40.8	133

Behaviours viewed as socially acceptable	%	index
Accepting/giving a bribe	6.5	127
Cheating on taxes if you have a chance	6.7	116
Using connections to 'get things done'	10.6	128
Abortion	9.5	62
Homosexuality	8.4	58

Groups viewed as having too many rights	%	index
Young people	8.0	98
Poor people	5.6	100
Women	10.7	92
LGBTQIA+ community	21.0	63
Ethnic minorities	15.8	75

Groups viewed positively as neighbours	%	index
LGBTQIA+ people	16.3	63
Drug addicts	9.5	121
Christian people	47.3	75
Jewish people	23.1	63
Roma people	22.4	84
Muslim people	43.0	83

Societal views	%	index
When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women	13.9	108
On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do	13.3	75
There is a natural hierarchy between black and white peoples	12.4	79
Same-sex couples should have the right to marry	14.6	64
Same-sex couples are as good parents as other couples	14.0	70
Immigrants enrich our culture	12.6	80
We must protect our own culture from the influence of other cultures	27.9	57
Jews have too much influence in our country	12.5	86
Democracy is a good form of government in general	44.5	76
Democracy is always and under all circumstances preferable to any other kind of government	42.6	79
Young people should have more possibilities to speak out in politics	44.1	65
Democracy is the best possible system of government only when it can deliver economic security for people	40.9	78
Sometimes civil liberties should be restricted to better protect citizens from terrorism or other threats	37.0	94
I would sacrifice some civil liberties to secure higher standards of living	32.0	92
We should have a strong leader who does not have to bother with Parliament or elections	39.0	98
Under certain circumstances dictatorship is a better form of government than democracy	28.4	129

## 4. Segment four: engaged and protective traditionalists

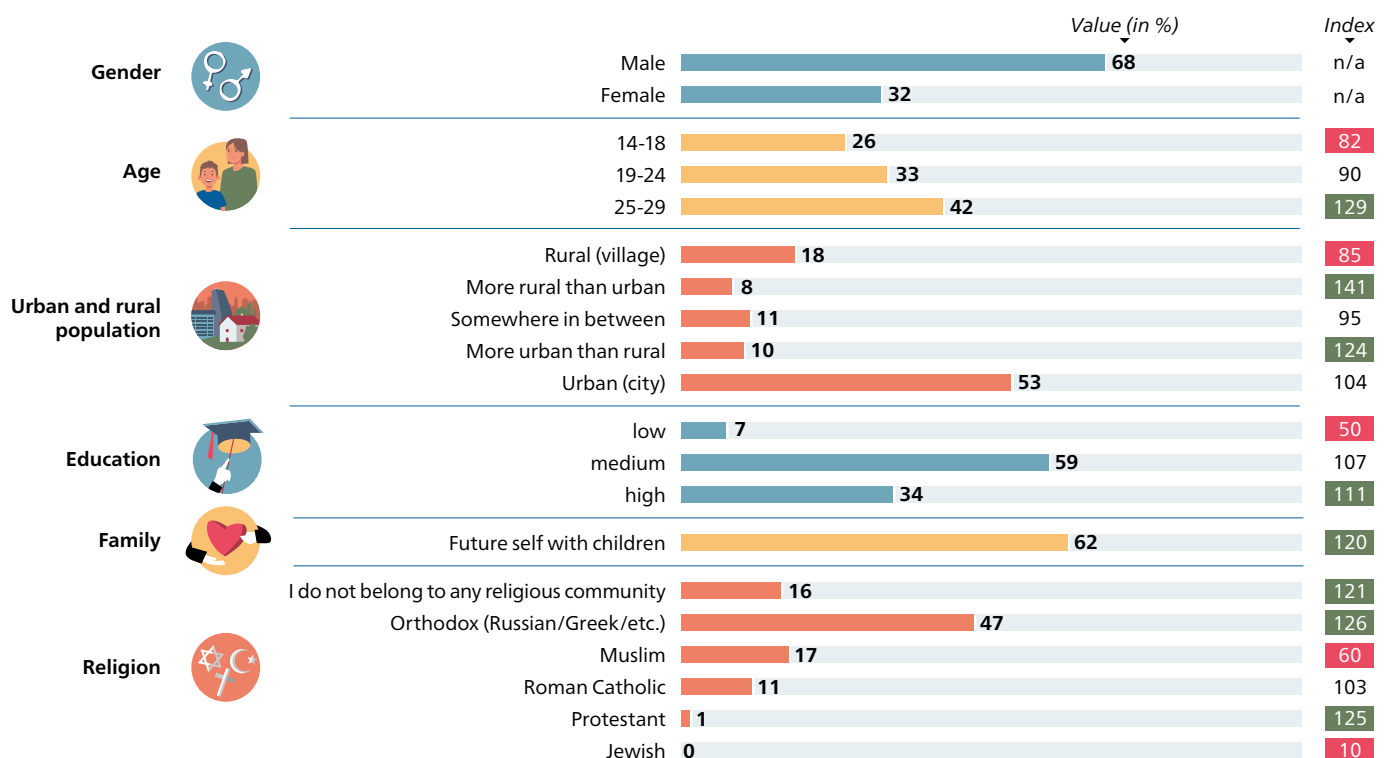
This segment comprises primarily men aged 25 to 29, many of whom have higher education and are already raising families. This segment is largest in Serbia (26%), followed by North Macedonia (24%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (24%). They reside in both urban and rural areas and enjoy financial stability, allowing them to afford occasional luxuries. As the primary providers for their families, financial motivation drives them, including aspirations for better paying jobs abroad.

Politically, they tend to be right-wing, with conservative and nationalistic views that prioritise protecting their cultural identity. They believe, in line with their traditional and exclusionary values, that ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ communities have been granted too many rights. Religion is a significant influence in their lives, many of them identifying as Orthodox Christians. However, they are critical of religious institutions, perceiving them as wielding excessive power and influence.

Despite their distrust of both local and international institutions, this group is notably politically active. They are willing to participate in demonstrations and other forms of engagement, driven by concerns about their country's future. Key is-

Fig. 15 Segment four: engaged and protective traditionalists

Overview of the defining characteristics



### How to read the graph

Understanding what matters most: a simple index system. To see which questions had the biggest impact on young people's political views, we used a simple score system. We set 100 as the average – this helps us to compare everything easily:

- if something scored more than 100, it was more important than average;

- if it scored less than 100, it was less important.

To make things clearer, we used colours:

- Green = more important than average
- Red = less important than average
- Black = about average

This way, we could quickly spot which topics really matter with regard to young people's political attitudes.

sues they worry about include corruption, emigration of skilled workers, declining population numbers, quality of public services, and the perceived challenges posed by immigration. These anxieties reflect their deep-rooted concern for the long-term stability and prosperity of their nation.

This group embodies a blend of traditional and future-oriented perspectives. While their strong nationalistic and conservative values guide their worldview, their distrust of authority and institutions fuels their active political engagement. They are motivated by economic pressures, both as providers for their families and as individuals seeking better opportunities. Ultimately, this segment is defined by a desire to protect their cultural identity while addressing the challenges they believe threaten their country's stability.

Fig. 16 Dimension position for segment four: engaged and protective traditionalists

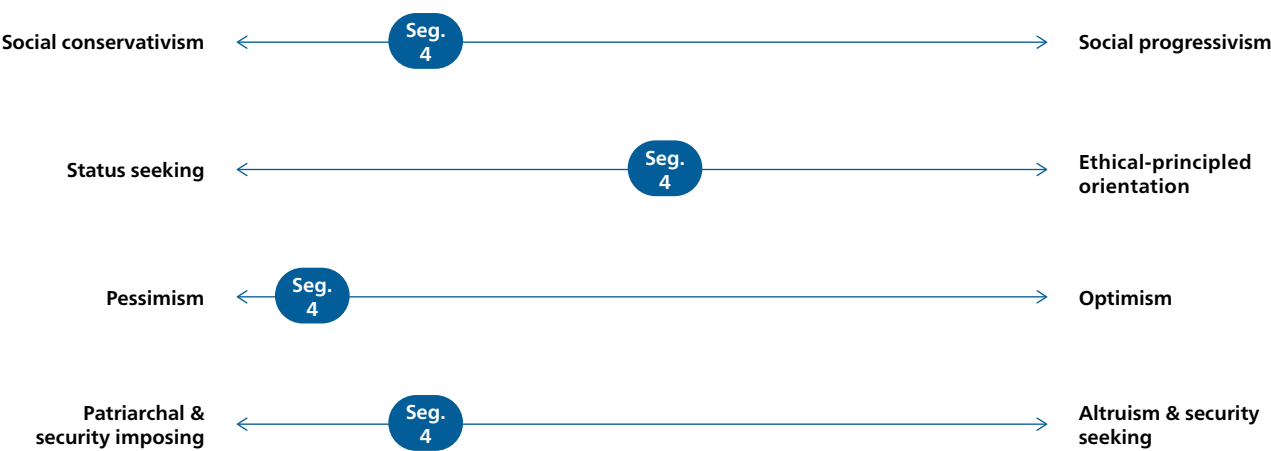


Fig. 17 Interests and views of segment four: engaged and protective traditionalists

What do '%' and 'Index' mean in these tables?

#### Index

A score that measures whether certain item is good at predicting if a respondent belongs to a group or not. For a more detailed explanation of the 'index' see p.9.

#### % (Percentage)

This shows how many people in this segment gave a positive answer.

#### Average number of hours spent on activities

	h	Index
Schooling / education	1.1	85
My work (paid activities)	1.4	114
Reading internet newspapers, informative portals	0.7	105
On social networks like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc.	1.8	99

#### Interest in & knowledge of politics

	%	Index
Interest in politics	34.9	156
Knowledge about politics	38.5	135
Representation of young people's interests in politics	9.6	76
Willing to participate in politics	40.0	143

#### Europe

	%	Index
leave EU/do not join EU	45.1	165
stay in EU/join EU	54.9	75

#### I see myself as...

	%	Index
...a national of my country	79.1	103
...a European	25.4	69

#### Satisfaction

	%	Index
Satisfaction with life in general	14.7	64

#### Personal future

	%	Index
Worse than now	11.9	106
Same as now	10.7	72
Better than now	77.4	105

#### Political orientation

	%	Index
1 far-left	4.1	71
2	2.6	83
3	5.5	87
4	8.9	110
5	20.3	91
6	23.6	100
7	12.5	106
8	9.6	116
9	5.8	128
10 far-right	7.1	117

#### Values

	Avg. Share	Index
Democracy	6%	86
The rule of law	11%	142
Human rights	18%	95
Economic welfare of citizens	14%	113
Employment	11%	94
Social equality	6%	83
Gender equality	3%	51
Security	19%	111
Individual freedom	11%	104

#### Society's future

	%	Index
Worse than now	57.7	150
Same as now	19.3	73
Better than now	23.0	66

Fig. 18 Segment four: Opinions, Views &amp; Political Beliefs of engaged and protective traditionalists

What do '%' and 'Index' mean in these tables?

**Index**

A score that measures whether certain item is good at predicting if a respondent belongs to a group or not. For a more detailed explanation of the 'index' see p.9.

**% (Percentage)**

This shows how many people in this segment gave a positive answer.

Trust in political institutions	%	index
Political parties	5.1	48
National Parliament	9.4	56
National Government	10.0	55
Local government	14.0	70
Media in your country	4.9	34
Army	38.1	86
Police	24.7	70
Judiciary (courts)	16.0	68
NATO	18.0	57
European Union	16.7	51
Civil society organizations	19.4	80
Trade unions	9.2	59
Your church	35.9	96

Important values	%	index
Being independent	91.0	113
Having a successful career	77.6	104
Taking responsibility	84.3	111
Graduating from university	52.5	85
Getting/being rich	53.3	100
Wearing branded clothes	12.1	53
Looking good	59.6	97
Getting/being married	60.8	107
Having children	76.9	116
Doing sports	69.6	109
Healthy eating	70.8	100
Being active in politics	17.7	82
Participating in civic actions/initiatives	25.9	84

Behaviours viewed as socially acceptable	%	index
Accepting/giving a bribe	3.1	60
Cheating on taxes if you have a chance	5.0	88
Using connections to 'get things done'	7.8	95
Abortion	11.2	73
Homosexuality	4.1	28

Groups viewed as having too many rights	%	index
Young people	4.6	56
Poor people	1.5	26
Women	14.6	125
LGBTQIA+ community	59.7	178
Ethnic minorities	35.6	170

Groups viewed positively as neighbours	%	index
LGBTQIA+ people	10.2	40
Drug addicts	2.6	33
Christian people	70.6	112
Jewish people	29.3	80
Roma people	17.6	66
Muslim people	40.7	78



Societal views	%	index
When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women	16.3	127
On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do	31.2	177
There is a natural hierarchy between black and white peoples	13.0	83
Same-sex couples should have the right to marry	9.0	39
Same-sex couples are as good parents as other couples	4.9	25
Immigrants enrich our culture	4.4	28
We must protect our own culture from the influence of other cultures	70.9	144
Jews have too much influence in our country	21.9	150
Democracy is a good form of government in general	54.5	93
Democracy is always and under all circumstances preferable to any other kind of government	50.9	94
Young people should have more possibilities to speak out in politics	75.3	112
Democracy is the best possible system of government only when it can deliver economic security for people	50.9	97
Sometimes civil liberties should be restricted to better protect citizens from terrorism or other threats	36.7	93
I would sacrifice some civil liberties to secure higher standards of living	35.3	102
We should have a strong leader who does not have to bother with Parliament or elections	43.5	110
Under certain circumstances dictatorship is a better form of government than democracy	23.8	108

## 5. Segment five: complex and curious conservatives

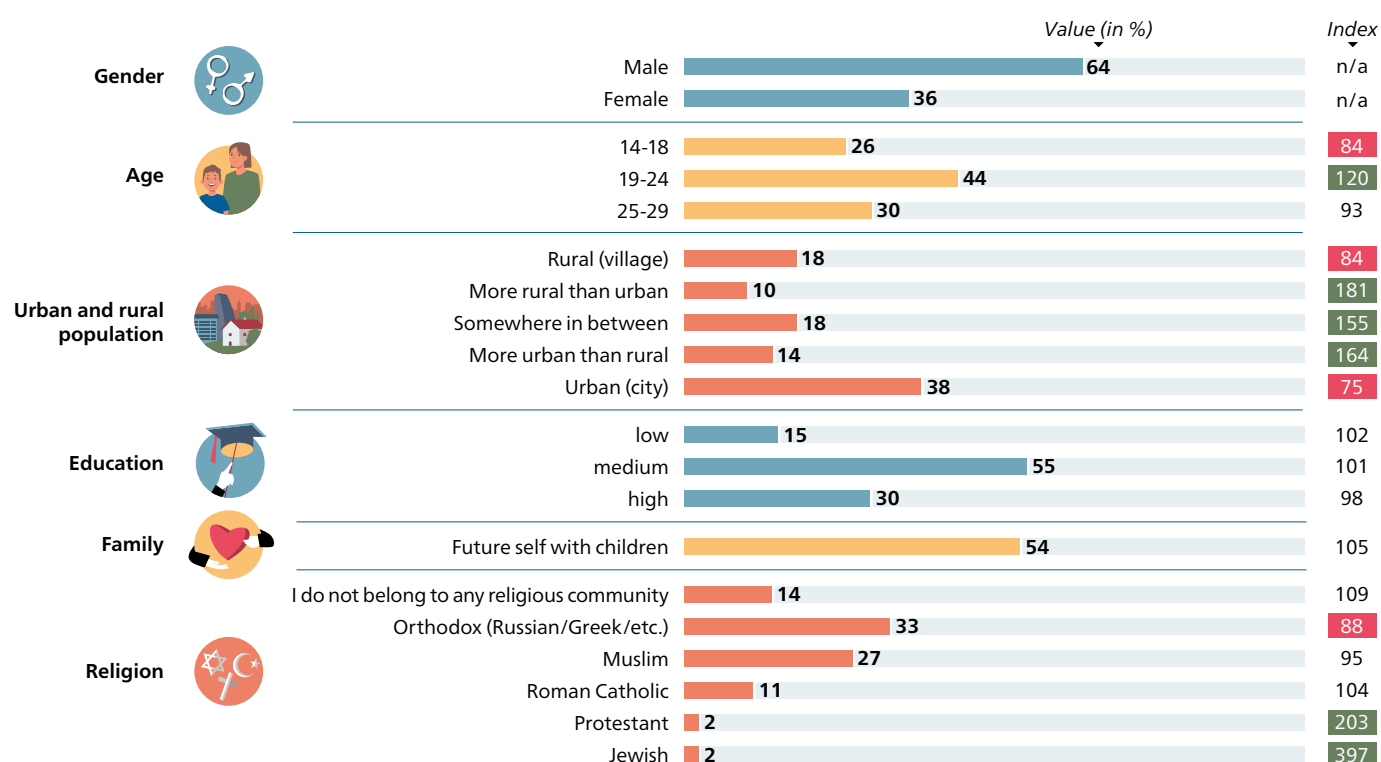
This segment is composed primarily of young men aged 19 to 24 from Bulgaria, Romania and Türkiye. They are generally less affluent. Many of them struggle to meet basic needs, reflecting significant financial challenges. While economic stability is important to them, their motivations go beyond mere financial concerns. Many within this group express a strong desire to travel or live abroad, driven by a sense of adventure and the pursuit of new experiences rather than solely seeking economic improvement. Domestically, however, their economic difficulties are reflected in a pragmatic

willingness to engage in corrupt activities for personal benefit, revealing a complex relationship with morality and survival.

Politically, this group leans heavily to the right, embracing conservative and, in some cases, even autocratic ideologies. They display strong trust in authority figures and institutions, but remain sceptical towards democratic government, favouring autocracies, which they perceive to be more effective. Despite their conservative leanings, they are not passive, however. They are actively engaged in political debate and demonstrate a high level of self-reported political knowledge and interest. Their passion for securing a better future drives their willingness to challenge the status quo through active political participation.

Fig. 19 Segment five: complex and curious conservatives

### Overview of the defining characteristics



#### How to read the graph

Understanding what matters most: a simple index system. To see which questions had the biggest impact on young people's political views, we used a simple score system. We set 100 as the average – this helps us to compare everything easily:

- if something scored more than 100, it was more important than average;

- if it scored less than 100, it was less important.

To make things clearer, we used colours:

- **Green** = more important than average
- **Red** = less important than average
- **Black** = about average

This way, we could quickly spot which topics really matter with regard to young people's political attitudes.

Socially, this segment exhibits a preference for traditional hierarchies and believes strongly in inherent differences between the sexes and ethnicities. They view minorities as having excess rights and advocate for a more stratified society, rooted in their strong national identity and a desire to preserve cultural heritage and values. Despite their nationalistic and conservative perspectives, they are less xenophobic than those in segment four, showing openness toward immigrants and same-sex couples. This nuanced outlook reflects a balance between their traditional views and a limited embrace of libertarian tendencies, particularly regarding personal freedoms and scepticism of excessive government intervention.

Overall, this segment is defined by its duality: conservative and hierarchical, but also adventurous and politically active. They prioritise preserving their cultural identity while seeking opportunities for personal growth, often looking beyond their financial struggles for a broader sense of purpose and fulfilment. Their engagement in political and social matters, coupled with their nuanced views on personal freedom, make them a complex and dynamic group.

Fig. 20 Dimension position for segment five: complex and curious conservatives

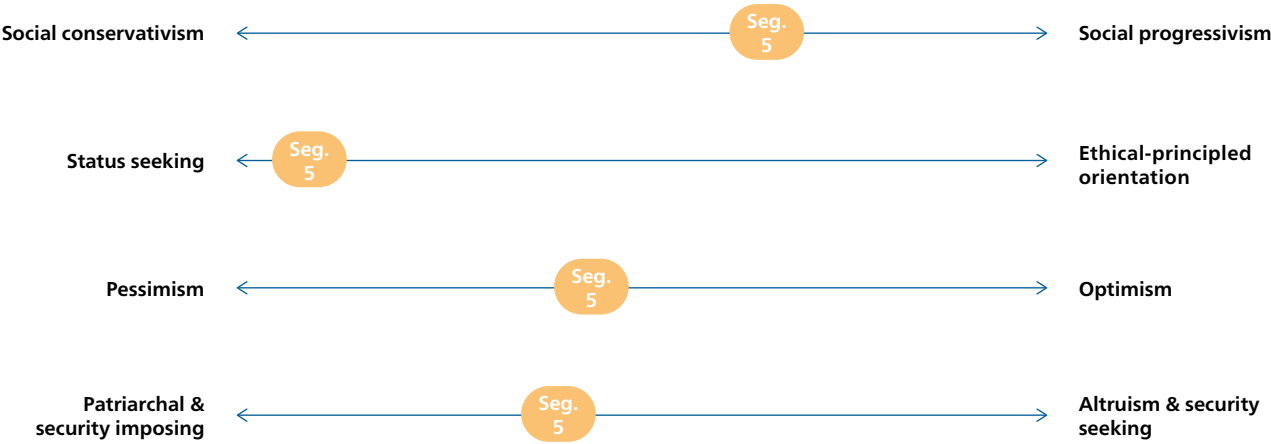


Fig. 21 Interests and views of segment five: complex and curious conservatives

What do '%' and 'Index' mean in these tables?

#### Index

A score that measures whether certain item is good at predicting if a respondent belongs to a group or not. For a more detailed explanation of the 'index' see p.9.

#### % (Percentage)

This shows how many people in this segment gave a positive answer.

#### Average number of hours spent on activities

	h	Index
Schooling / education	1.2	97
My work (paid activities)	1.2	97
Reading internet newspapers, informative portals	1.1	161
On social networks like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc.	1.5	79

#### Interest in & knowledge of politics

	%	Index
Interest in politics	27.2	122
Knowledge about politics	41.2	145
Representation of young people's interests in politics	29.2	232
Willing to participate in politics	42.0	150

#### Europe

	%	Index
leave EU/do not join EU	36.6	134
stay in EU/join EU	63.4	87

#### I see myself as...

	%	Index
...a national of my country	61.8	81
...a European	39.3	107

#### Satisfaction

	%	Index
Satisfaction with life in general	24.5	106

#### Personal future

	%	Index
Worse than now	17.8	158
Same as now	30.5	207
Better than now	51.8	70

#### Political orientation

	%	Index
1 far-left	2.8	48
2	2.1	67
3	3.6	57
4	5.5	68
5	18.7	84
6	22.1	94
7	14.9	126
8	13.6	165
9	8.9	196
10 far-right	7.8	127

#### Values

	Avg. Share	Index
Democracy	10%	138
The rule of law	8%	106
Human rights	15%	82
Economic welfare of citizens	10%	78
Employment	11%	100
Social equality	9%	127
Gender equality	9%	161
Security	15%	83
Individual freedom	10%	100

#### Society's future

	%	Index
Worse than now	31.0	81
Same as now	34.8	131
Better than now	34.2	98

Fig. 22 Segment five: Opinions, Views & Political Beliefs of complex and curious conservatives

What do '%' and 'Index' mean in these tables?

#### Index

A score that measures whether certain item is good at predicting if a respondent belongs to a group or not. For a more detailed explanation of the 'index' see p.9.

#### % (Percentage)

This shows how many people in this segment gave a positive answer.

Trust in political institutions	%	index
Political parties	27.8	266
National Parliament	31.7	188
National Government	32.6	180
Local government	32.7	164
Media in your country	30.4	212
Army	44.8	101
Police	38.8	109
Judiciary (courts)	34.9	149
NATO	36.5	115
European Union	38.3	116
Civil society organizations	36.3	149
Trade unions	31.1	199
Your church	40.3	108

Important values	%	index
Being independent	52.2	65
Having a successful career	51.2	69
Taking responsibility	49.0	65
Graduating from university	45.6	74
Getting/being rich	44.6	84
Wearing branded clothes	38.4	168
Looking good	47.6	77
Getting/being married	45.4	80
Having children	47.4	71
Doing sports	48.0	76
Healthy eating	48.6	68
Being active in politics	37.8	174
Participating in civic actions/initiatives	39.0	127

Behaviours viewed as socially acceptable	%	index
Accepting/giving a bribe	13.9	270
Cheating on taxes if you have a chance	14.8	257
Using connections to 'get things done'	13.5	163
Abortion	15.9	104
Homosexuality	15.5	107

Groups viewed as having too many rights	%	index
Young people	25.0	304
Poor people	23.7	423
Women	27.5	236
LGBTQIA+ community	36.2	108
Ethnic minorities	30.0	143

Groups viewed positively as neighbours	%	index
LGBTQIA+ people	33.9	132
Drug addicts	29.7	376
Christian people	49.4	78
Jewish people	37.3	102
Roma people	34.2	129
Muslim people	48.8	94

Societal views	%	index
When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women	22.2	172
On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do	22.6	128
There is a natural hierarchy between black and white peoples	22.1	141
Same-sex couples should have the right to marry	26.1	115
Same-sex couples are as good parents as other couples	25.3	127
Immigrants enrich our culture	22.2	142
We must protect our own culture from the influence of other cultures	24.3	49
Jews have too much influence in our country	22.4	154
Democracy is a good form of government in general	43.2	74
Democracy is always and under all circumstances preferable to any other kind of government	40.9	76
Young people should have more possibilities to speak out in politics	44.7	66
Democracy is the best possible system of government only when it can deliver economic security for people	40.3	77
Sometimes civil liberties should be restricted to better protect citizens from terrorism or other threats	39.5	100
I would sacrifice some civil liberties to secure higher standards of living	38.6	111
We should have a strong leader who does not have to bother with Parliament or elections	38.0	96
Under certain circumstances dictatorship is a better form of government than democracy	36.0	164

## 6. Segment six: socially engaged progressives

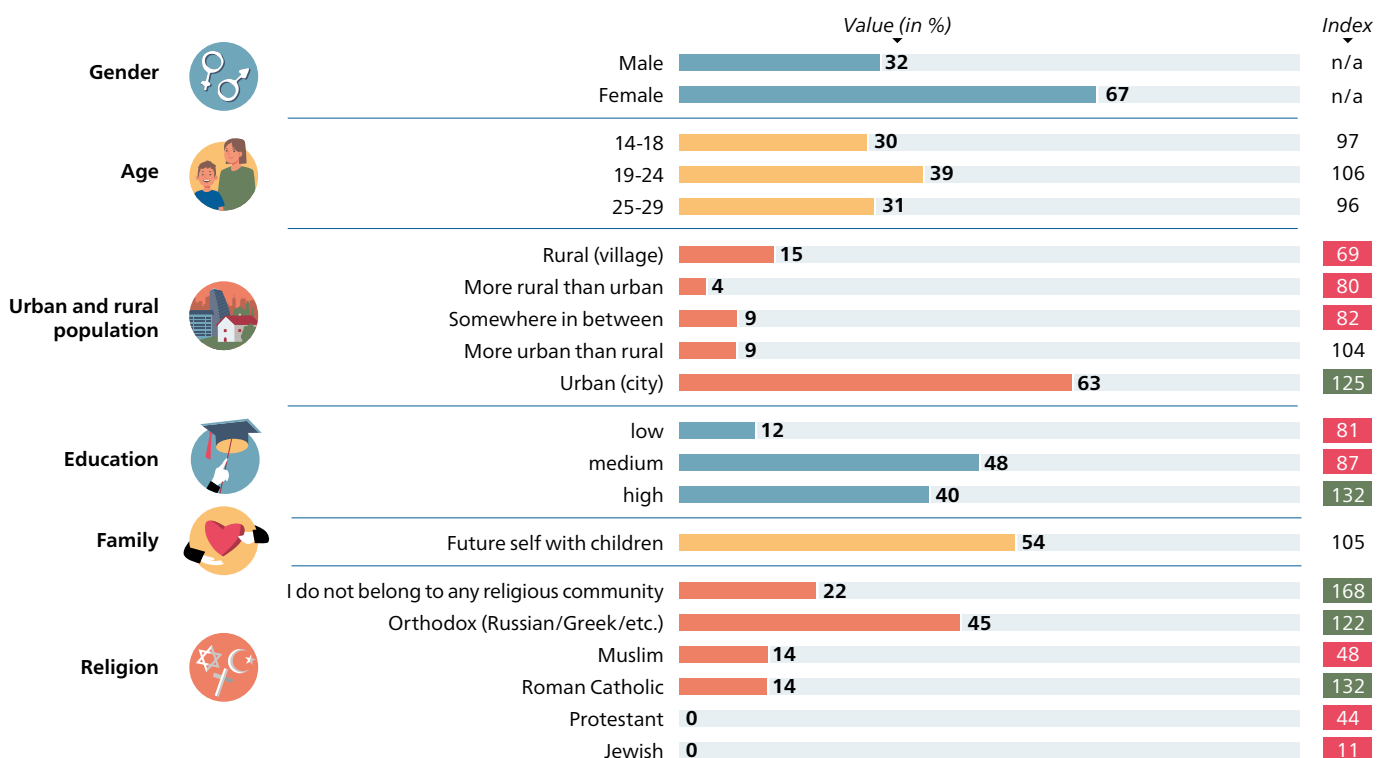
This segment represents highly educated women living in urban areas, often from families with a strong tradition of education. They are financially comfortable, capable of affording certain luxuries, although significant purchases such as cars or apartments remain out of reach. These women are deeply dedicated to their personal and professional growth, balancing rigorous academic pursuits—whether as undergraduate or postgraduate students—with demanding careers that often require long hours.

Despite their busy lives, they remain connected to social media and stay informed about current events, although their engagement with the news is sometimes limited by their schedules. They express a strong desire to emigrate, driven not solely by economic motivations but by a yearning for cultural enrichment, personal growth, and broader opportunities. This desire reflects their global outlook and a commitment to exploring new perspectives.

Socially and politically conscious, these women hold strong convictions about government accountability and societal well-being. They are vocal about critical issues such as brain drain, the quality of public services, demographic decline,

Fig. 23 Segment six: socially engaged progressives

Overview of the defining characteristics



### How to read the graph

Understanding what matters most: a simple index system. To see which questions had the biggest impact on young people's political views, we used a simple score system. We set 100 as the average – this helps us to compare everything easily:

- if something scored more than 100, it was more important than average;

- if it scored less than 100, it was less important.

To make things clearer, we used colours:

- **Green** = more important than average
- **Red** = less important than average
- **Black** = about average

This way, we could quickly spot which topics really matter with regard to young people's political attitudes.



corruption, inequality and threats to democracy. They advocate for human rights, individual freedom, gender equality and social justice, aligning with a pro-European Union stance and a strong European identity. However, their trust in other institutions and authorities tends to be low, suggesting a critical but hopeful perspective on government.

Their concerns about societal issues extend to pressing global challenges such as climate change, which they view as a significant threat. However, they remain largely unafraid of personal risks such as violence, economic hardship or illness, demonstrating a sense of resilience and security in their personal lives. Their worldview is shaped by open-mindedness and tolerance, as they champion equal rights for diverse groups, including LG-BTQIA+ persons and religious minorities. They support progressive policies on issues such as same-sex marriage and abortion, reflecting their alignment with modern and inclusive values.

Religiously, they are either non-religious or Catholic, with varying levels of engagement in religious practices. Their stance on social equality and gender equality underscores their commitment to creating a more inclusive and equitable society.

Overall, this segment is characterised by its intellectual rigor, social awareness and progressive outlook. These women strive for independence and responsibility, combining their academic and professional ambitions with a strong commitment to addressing societal and global challenges. Their blend of urban sophistication, open-mindedness and proactive engagement positions them as forward-thinking advocates for positive change.

Fig. 24 Dimension position for segment six: socially engaged progressives

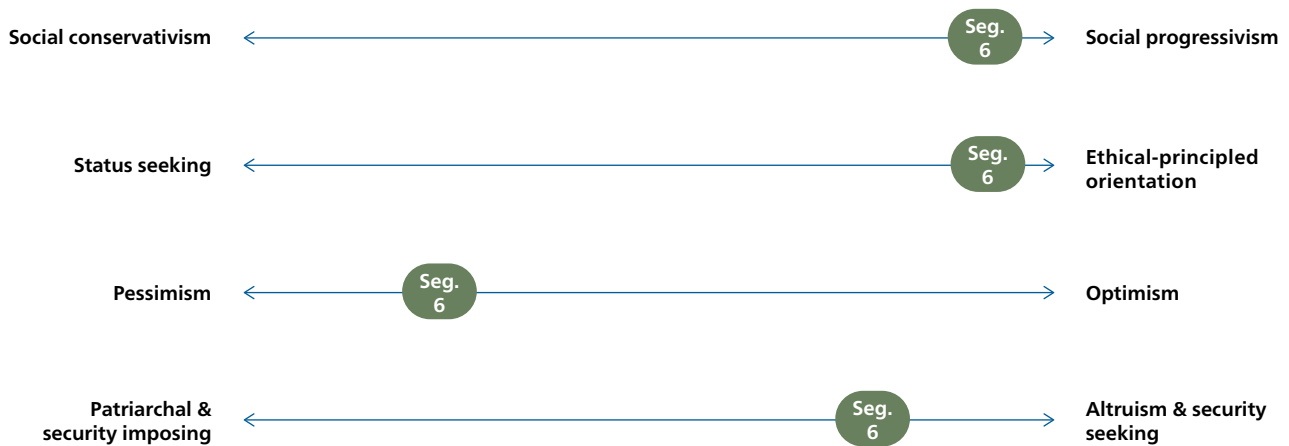


Fig. 25 Interests and views of segment six: socially engaged progressives

What do '%' and 'Index' mean in these tables?

#### Index

A score that measures whether certain item is good at predicting if a respondent belongs to a group or not. For a more detailed explanation of the 'index' see p.9.

#### % (Percentage)

This shows how many people in this segment gave a positive answer.

#### Average number of hours spent on activities

	h	Index
Schooling / education	1.7	130
My work (paid activities)	1.5	120
Reading internet newspapers, informative portals	0.6	83
On social networks like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc.	2.0	111

#### Interest in & knowledge of politics

	%	Index
Interest in politics	29.1	131
Knowledge about politics	30.0	105
Representation of young people's interests in politics	5.0	40
Willing to participate in politics	23.7	85

#### Europe

	%	Index
leave EU/do not join EU	13.0	48
stay in EU/join EU	87.0	120

#### I see myself as...

	%	Index
...a national of my country	77.4	101
...a European	57.3	157

#### Satisfaction

	%	Index
Satisfaction with life in general	16.3	71

#### Personal future

	%	Index
Worse than now	10.1	90
Same as now	11.5	78
Better than now	78.4	106

#### Political orientation

	%	Index
1 far-left	6.9	120
2	4.5	144
3	12.4	197
4	14.3	176
5	25.0	112
6	20.7	88
7	9.3	78
8	4.8	59
9	1.0	21
10 far-right	1.1	18

#### Values

	Avg. Share	Index
Democracy	7%	94
The rule of law	7%	85
Human rights	25%	131
Economic welfare of citizens	12%	93
Employment	7%	64
Social equality	8%	105
Gender equality	6%	112
Security	15%	84
Individual freedom	14%	136

#### Society's future

	%	Index
Worse than now	44.9	117
Same as now	27.2	102
Better than now	27.9	79

Fig. 26 Segment six: Opinions, Views &amp; Political Beliefs of socially engaged progressives

What do '%' and 'Index' mean in these tables?

**Index**

A score that measures whether certain item is good at predicting if a respondent belongs to a group or not. For a more detailed explanation of the 'index' see p.9.

**% (Percentage)**

This shows how many people in this segment gave a positive answer.

Trust in political institutions	%	index
Political parties	3.3	31
National Parliament	7.1	42
National Government	9.3	51
Local government	15.0	75
Media in your country	8.4	59
Army	39.0	88
Police	26.5	75
Judiciary (courts)	20.4	87
NATO	33.1	105
European Union	42.6	129
Civil society organizations	27.9	115
Trade unions	11.5	74
Your church	18.6	50

Important values	%	index
Being independent	94.5	117
Having a successful career	82.6	111
Taking responsibility	88.1	116
Graduating from university	75.8	122
Getting/being rich	51.4	96
Wearing branded clothes	10.1	44
Looking good	60.9	99
Getting/being married	40.4	71
Having children	56.0	84
Doing sports	62.1	98
Healthy eating	77.3	109
Being active in politics	19.0	87
Participating in civic actions/initiatives	33.3	108

Behaviours viewed as socially acceptable	%	index
Accepting/giving a bribe	1.1	21
Cheating on taxes if you have a chance	2.1	37
Using connections to 'get things done'	3.5	42
Abortion	39.5	259
Homosexuality	51.1	353

Groups viewed as having too many rights	%	index
Young people	3.7	45
Poor people	1.3	23
Women	3.2	28
LGBTQIA+ community	7.3	22
Ethnic minorities	12.0	57

Groups viewed positively as neighbours	%	index
LGBTQIA+ people	67.2	262
Drug addicts	4.0	50
Christian people	77.6	123
Jewish people	63.7	174
Roma people	34.5	130
Muslim people	61.6	119

Societal views	%	index
When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women	2.9	23
On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do	5.5	31
There is a natural hierarchy between black and white peoples	7.7	49
Same-sex couples should have the right to marry	68.9	303
Same-sex couples are as good parents as other couples	62.8	315
Immigrants enrich our culture	28.1	179
We must protect our own culture from the influence of other cultures	33.8	68
Jews have too much influence in our country	7.3	50
Democracy is a good form of government in general	79.5	136
Democracy is always and under all circumstances preferable to any other kind of government	73.7	137
Young people should have more possibilities to speak out in politics	85.2	127
Democracy is the best possible system of government only when it can deliver economic security for people	65.2	125
Sometimes civil liberties should be restricted to better protect citizens from terrorism or other threats	29.6	75
I would sacrifice some civil liberties to secure higher standards of living	26.1	75
We should have a strong leader who does not have to bother with Parliament or elections	28.0	71
Under certain circumstances dictatorship is a better form of government than democracy	7.8	36

# 4. Segment size per country and in the entire region

At a regional level, the largest segment is segment one (tradition-oriented believers) with 23.7%, followed by segment three: ambitious but anxious strivers (18.0%) and segment two: disengaged conservative optimists (16.6%). The remaining segments include complex and curious conservatives (14.0%), socially engaged progressives (16.0%), and engaged and protective traditionalists (11.7%).

Looking at the national level, we also observe differences in youth composition across Southeast Europe. One of the most notable patterns is the dominance of segment two – disengaged conservative optimists in Kosovo and Albania, where they make up the largest share of the youth population. Albania and Kosovo have younger populations than most other Southeast European countries which may partly explain the presence of a more youthful, socially conservative, yet generally optimistic segment.

Segment six – socially engaged progressives is found mainly in EU Member States such as Greece, Slovenia and Romania, but is surprisingly almost absent in Bulgaria. Segment one – tradition-

oriented believers appears in significant numbers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Montenegro, indicating how gendered social roles and expectations continue to influence young women in parts of the Western Balkans.

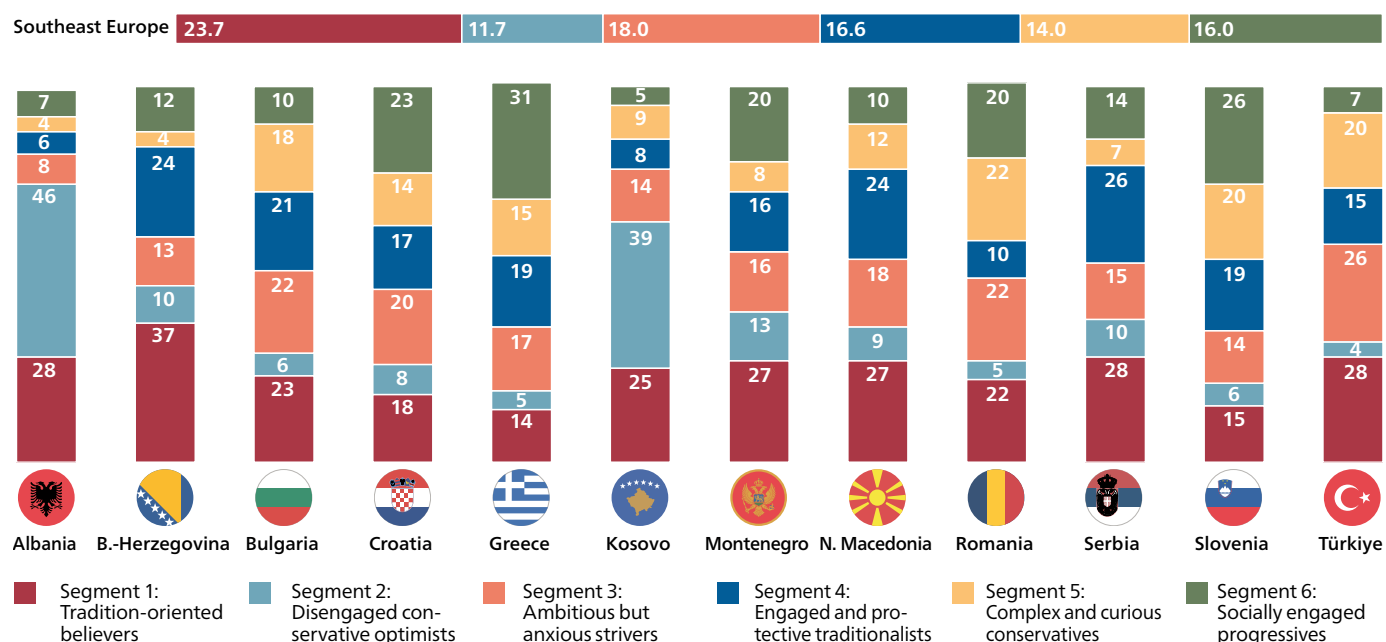
Segment three – ambitious but anxious strivers and segment four – engaged and protective traditionalists are more evenly distributed across the region, reflecting a broad group of young people navigating uncertainty with a mixture of aspiration and caution.

Finally, segment five – complex and curious conservatives shows a relatively stable presence across countries (although it is quite small in Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina) representing a group that is dissatisfied with the current situation but not necessarily progressive in orientation, often leaning toward conservative values while still seeking change.

This rich variation in youth profiles underscores the need for nuanced, country-specific approaches when designing policies or initiatives aimed at engaging young people in democratic life.

Fig. 27 Segment sizes for Southeast Europe and per country

Values in %



## 5

## Discussion of results

While some countries have made notable progress on the Youth Study Southeast Europe 2024, this paper presents a detailed segmentation analysis, identifying distinct subgroups within the youth population. By examining survey data through the lens of these clusters, we gain deeper insights into young people's attitudes, concerns and behaviours across Southeast Europe. This segmentation enables direct comparisons between groups, highlighting both divergences and shared perspectives. These insights not only inform strategic policymaking but also offer valuable guidance for social democratic parties in the region with regard to how to engage different segments of young people effectively.

### Socio-economic worries and their connection to socio-political views

The results of our survey show that economic disparities significantly impact the experiences of young people in the region. Approximately one-third of young people lack access to education or vocational training because of financial barriers and insufficient infrastructure. Many young people perceive corruption as a widespread issue, manifesting in various forms such as paying bribes for better academic grades, biased curriculum development and inequitable distribution of resources. Furthermore, precarious employment is the dominant form of work among young people

in the SEE region, many of whom are trapped in unstable, low-paying jobs that do not match their educational qualifications and skills.

The segmentation analysis refines these findings, offering a more granular understanding of socio-economic challenges. For instance, segment three (ambitious but anxious strivers) consists primarily of teenagers with low to medium levels of education, many of whom face financial hardships that in all probability shape their political and societal views. This segment is the largest in Türkiye (26%), Romania (22%), Bulgaria (22%) and Croatia (20%). At a regional level, segment three includes 18% of all respondents.

While material aspirations are important to them, their economic reality remains starkly different. Despite valuing traditional norms, this group demonstrates inclusive social attitudes, supporting greater rights for women, ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ communities. They express an

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**Segment Three youth value traditional norms but hold inclusive social attitudes—a seeming contradiction and an opportunity for engagement..**

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emerging interest in politics and civic participation, even though they do not strongly advocate for democratic government.

These seemingly contradictory findings suggest an opportunity for social democratic parties to engage with this segment by addressing their socio-economic concerns with concrete policy solutions, while reinforcing trust in democracy. Additionally, ensuring higher political participation among the youngest cohort of voters is crucial. Studies indicate that people who cast a ballot in their first eligible election are more likely to develop a habit of voting throughout their lives.<sup>12</sup> The formative years hypothesis argues that political values and voting patterns crystallise in early adulthood and remain relatively stable over time. This theory implies that investing in youth engagement now could have long-term electoral benefits, as those persuaded early may remain

loyal voters.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, once this window closes, shifting their political preferences later in life may prove significantly more challenging.

Generational dynamics also play a key role in shaping voting behaviour. Older generations, such as those from the interwar and boomer cohorts, were socialised during a period of strong ideological divides and a relatively stable party system, making their voting habits more deeply rooted in these long-standing structures. In contrast, younger generations, having grown up in an era of post-cleavage politics, tend to be more influenced by short-term political dynamics and shifting trends.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, young voters are not just more responsive to electoral fluctuations; they often act as political trendsetters, with their preferences and behaviours gradually influencing older generations as well.<sup>15 16</sup>

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**To earn young people's trust, policy-makers must deliver on education, jobs, and integrity in public institutions.**

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To earn the trust and lasting support of young people in Southeast Europe, social democratic policymakers must prioritise free and accessible education and training, crack down on everyday corruption in institutions, and create stable, well-paid job opportunities, while actively engaging first-time voters through participatory platforms that reflect their inclusive values and growing political curiosity

## Gender gaps and socio-political views

Our survey highlights significant gender disparities in employment, education, political knowledge and perceptions of representation. Segmentation analysis reveals that many segments are defined along gender lines. This phenomenon is not unique to Southeast Europe; globally,

gender gaps in political orientation have widened, as young men increasingly shift to the right, while young women increasingly align with progressive ideologies.<sup>17</sup>

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**Gender disparities shape youth experiences across employment, education, political knowledge, and representation.**

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A closer examination of specific segments clarifies these observations. Segment four (engaged and protective traditionalists) consists predominantly of young men aged 19 to 24 who lean heavily to the right, embracing conservative and, in some cases, autocratic ideologies. They exhibit strong trust in authority figures and institutions while expressing scepticism toward democratic governance, often viewing autocracies as more effective. This group is highly engaged in political discourse and claims a high level of self-perceived political knowledge and interest. Notably, while political interest has risen modestly across the sample as a whole compared with previous research waves, this increase is most pronounced among young men supporting right-wing ideologies.

Segment two (disengaged conservative optimists) shares some similarities with cluster four, as it comprises young men from rural areas with lower educational attainment. While they report lower levels of political interest and knowledge, they exhibit pronounced political polarisation. Social media consumption probably exacerbates this divide by reinforcing echo chambers and gendered ideological splits. Social democratic and progressive parties must counter the dominant presence of right-wing messaging, which thrives on emotionally charged, incendiary content amplified by social media algorithms. To engage young people effectively, progressive parties need both immediate and long-term strategies. In the short term, political communication must be clear, relatable and engaging. Complex policies should be translated into accessible messages that resonate with young people's daily realities, with storytelling emphasising tangible issues such as tuition fees, job insecurity and mental health.

However, sustainable digital engagement requires deeper structural changes. Social media platforms thrive on polarising content, and without intervention, this dynamic will continue to distort democratic discourse. Addressing these challenges necessitates advocating for greater algorithmic transparency and limiting incentives for pushing divisive content. Rather than retreating from digital spaces, progressives must actively shape them into environments that foster constructive political dialogue and meaningful engagement.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, social democratic parties in Southeast Europe should focus on delivering concrete policy solutions that address young people's most pressing concerns, particularly socio-economic issues, which remain their top priority in the region.<sup>19</sup> Investing in education and job opportunities while bridging urban–rural divides will play a crucial role in engaging young people and steering them away from right-wing ideologies. Equally important is fostering their interest in politics in an effort to ensure they feel represented and motivated to participate in democratic processes.

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**Social-democratic parties in Southeast Europe should focus on delivering concrete policy solutions that address young people's most pressing concerns.**

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In contrast to the previously discussed segments, segment six (socially engaged progressives) consists primarily of highly educated women living in urban areas, often from families with a strong tradition of education. This group is deeply invested in government accountability and societal

well-being, voicing concerns over critical issues such as brain drain, the quality of public services, demographic decline, corruption, inequality and threats to democracy. They strongly advocate for human rights, individual freedoms, gender equality and social justice, aligning with a pro-European Union stance and a strong sense of European identity.

Their values closely align with those of social democrats, particularly in their commitment to equal rights for marginalised groups, including LGBT-QIA+ people and religious minorities. They support progressive policies on issues such as same-sex marriage and abortion and are actively concerned about climate change. However, a key challenge is their high willingness to migrate, often seeking better personal and professional opportunities abroad.

For progressive parties in the region, engaging this group requires concrete policies that enhance their prospects at home. This includes investing in career development opportunities, fostering inclusive and forward-thinking work environments, and creating incentives for circular migration, allowing for professional growth abroad while maintaining strong ties and opportunities in their home countries. Without such efforts, the ongoing brain drain could weaken both the social fabric and the progressive political landscape in the region.

The complexity of youth experiences in Southeast Europe extends even beyond just gender divisions, with notable disparities emerging even within gender groups themselves. This distinction becomes particularly clear when comparing educational attainment and economic prospects between segment one (tradition-oriented youth) and segment six (socially engaged progressives). Despite comparable educational attainment, these groups face different economic prospects. Socially engaged progressives pursue professional careers and consider migration for advancement and cultural enrichment, while tradition-oriented



youth are more anxious about their professional prospects. One possible explanation is that this is because of regional and cultural constraints. This suggests that policy approaches focused solely on educational access may be insufficient. Effective interventions probably need to address multiple barriers simultaneously, ranging from regional economic development to workplace policies that accommodate family responsibilities. Understanding these distinctions within demographic groups can help policymakers to develop more targeted economic inclusion strategies.

To effectively engage young people in Southeast Europe, social democratic politicians and activists must invest in targeted employment and education policies that address the distinct realities of rural young men and urban progressive women—such as subsidized vocational training, rural job creation, and career development programmes that encourage talented youth to stay or return

Furthermore, to effectively engage young people in Southeast Europe, social democratic politicians and activists must invest in targeted employment and education policies that address the distinct realities of rural young men and urban progressive women, such as subsidised vocational training, rural job creation and career development programmes that encourage talented young people to stay or return. At the same time, they must actively counter far-right narratives by building a strong, values-driven digital presence that promotes inclusive messages, challenges algorithm-driven polarisation and translates progressive policies into relatable, everyday language.

## Conclusion

This segmentation study offers valuable insights into the diverse societal and political attitudes of young people in Southeast Europe. Addressing their needs requires nuanced, data-driven policy solutions that resonate with their lived experiences. Social democratic parties must actively engage these distinct segments through tailored strategies that foster economic security, political trust and meaningful civic participation. Doing so will not only secure long-term electoral support but also contribute to a more inclusive and democratic future for the region.

## Recommendations

Young people in Southeast Europe (SEE) are not a monolithic group. They are navigating complex realities shaped by economic hardship, distrust in institutions, political polarisation and shifting social norms. The 2024 Youth Segmentation Study identifies six distinct segments of young people, each with unique attitudes, needs and aspirations.

How can progressive and social democratic activists and politicians engage these groups of young people, while acknowledging their differences and crafting policies and messaging that speak directly to their lived experiences?

## Strategic objectives

- 1. Build trust and engagement across socio-political divides by addressing economic and social concerns in tailored ways.**
- 2. Translate progressive values into tangible, everyday benefits relevant to each youth segment.**
- 3. Invest in inclusive digital engagement and grassroots infrastructure to counter right-wing narratives and political disengagement.**

## Key segments and engagement strategies

### 1. Tradition-oriented believers

*Conservative, religious, family-focused, anxious about economic and societal instability.*

**Strategy:**

- Promote family-friendly social policies: accessible child care, flexible work conditions and social security safety nets.
- Ensure safe, culturally sensitive spaces for engagement, such as women-led community centres or programmes involving religious networks.
- Highlight how progressive governance protects families, reduces violence and ensures social cohesion, values they strongly care about.

### 2. Disengaged conservative optimists

*Low education, economically inactive, politically disengaged yet polarised, high trust in institutions.*

**Strategy:**

- Launch youth employment and skill-building programmes in rural areas, especially in agriculture, trades and green jobs.
- Use community-based storytelling that speaks to pride, respect and opportunity without condescension.
- Bridge gaps through peer-led civic education, sports clubs or digital mentorships to rebuild political interest slowly.

### 4. Engaged and protective traditionalists

*Conservative, family-oriented, patriotic, economically stable but politically frustrated.*

**Strategy:**

- Respect national identity and cultural pride while focusing on anti-corruption and public service reforms.
- Position social democratic governance as protecting national stability and working-class families.
- Engage them in citizen forums or issue-based campaigns (for example, health care, brain drain) where they can voice frustrations constructively.

### 5. Complex and curious conservatives

*Financially struggling but adventurous, politically active, conservative-authoritarian leanings.*

**Strategy:**

- Offer structured participation paths in public life, such as civic labs, youth parliaments or digital innovation hubs.
- Address economic needs without moralising, such as anti-corruption measures framed around fairness and efficiency, not ideology.
- Highlight social mobility stories that resonate with ambition and identity, focusing on independence and making a contribution.

### 3. Ambitious but anxious strivers

*Teenagers, financially vulnerable, inclusive values, politically curious but institutionally sceptical.*

#### Strategy:

- Provide access to vocational training, digital skills and internship opportunities.
- Frame democracy as a tool for opportunity and fairness, using influencers and youth leaders from similar backgrounds.
- Acknowledge and validate their material aspirations while linking them to broader societal goals (for example, 'You deserve more — and politics can help you get it').

### 6. Socially engaged progressives

*Educated, socially engaged, pro-EU, environmentally conscious, high migration intent.*

#### Strategy:

- Invest in career development, research and leadership opportunities to anchor them locally.
- Support inclusive workplace policies, startup ecosystems and public service reforms.
- Promote circular migration frameworks so they can go abroad without cutting ties, for example, EU-backed fellowships with return incentives.

### Cross-segment recommendations

#### 1 Unifying policy pillars across all groups

- Economic dignity: fair wages, stable jobs, and affordable education.
- Anti-corruption and institutional reform: framed differently, but demanded across the board.
- Safe and responsive governance: strong services, community safety and cultural respect.

#### 2 Digital strategy

- Develop youth-focused content tailored to segment-specific fears, humour and platforms.
- Actively counter far-right and authoritarian messaging by occupying digital spaces with emotionally resonant progressive narratives.
- Push for algorithmic transparency and ethical content regulation, both as policy and advocacy.

#### 3 First-time voter mobilisation

- Implement a 'Vote Young, Stay Strong' campaign, emphasising long-term impact.
- Partner with schools, influencers and NGOs to reach under-18s before they disengage permanently.
- Make voting social and visible, turning it into a collective, positive identity marker.

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## **Imprint**

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