

Focus on Sweden

European Sovereignty

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

EUROPA



FRIEDRICH
EBERT
STIFTUNG

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

SOVEREIGNTY: A FAIRLY POSITIVE AND CONSENSUAL VIEW IN SWEDEN

For centuries, the kingdom of Sweden has been politically structured as a constitutional monarchy. Does Sweden have a specific perception of sovereignty, and by extension, of European sovereignty?

The term »sovereignty« was overall viewed slightly more positively in Sweden than in the eight countries in the survey as a whole. The term evokes something »fairly positive« to half of the Swedes interviewed (56%, as against a European average of 46%). Some 6% have a »negative« view (as against a European average of 17%), while 25% are »neither positive nor negative« (against an average of 31%) and 13%

have »no opinion at all« (as against 6%). The proportion of those with a positive view grows with age (47% among 18–34-year-olds, 53% among 35–49-year-olds, 59% among 50–59-year-olds and up to 65% among the over-60s), and with income category (54% among those on low incomes, 58% among people on average incomes, and 64% among those on above-average incomes). While Sweden lags some way behind the countries most favourable to the idea of sovereignty (73% of respondents have a positive view in Germany, 69% in Poland, 61% in Latvia and 60% in Romania), it is well ahead of the more sceptical countries (France, with 29% positive views, Spain with 28% and Italy with 21%).

The perceptions associated with the concept of »sovereignty« confirm its rather positive and consensual reception. The notion is perceived as »modern« by 23% of the Swedes, as rather »outdated« by 22% of them, and as »neither one nor the other« by a relative majority of 39% of the panel (16% expressed no opinion). Half of the respondents do not associate it with a political affiliation (it is perceived as »neither left-wing nor right-wing« by 49%), even though sovereignty is, as elsewhere in Europe, marginally more associated with the right (21%) than with the left (7%).

When asked to choose two words they associate with the concept of »sovereignty« from a list, Swedes most often choose »self-determination« (62% in Sweden, as against a European average of 34%), »independence« (47% in Sweden, 42% on average) and, to a lesser extent, »freedom«

(34 %, 28 %). Below-average were Swedish associations with the words »power« (22 % in Sweden, 37 % on average) and »nationalism« (20 % in Sweden, 31 % on average). These results, as well as the fact that a majority are undecided between »modern« and »outdated« and do not associate sovereignty with a political affiliation, suggest that the concept of sovereignty may be less divisive in Sweden than elsewhere, especially in comparison with Southern Europe. Sweden is also the country that associates it the most with the idea of »cooperation freely agreed with partners« (52 %, against a European average of only 35 %). Sovereignty is almost equally associated with the idea of »independence from others« (55 % in Sweden, 58 % on average), »living in accordance with one's own values and preferences« (48 % in Sweden, 57 % on average), and »the ability to assert one's own interests« (45 % in Sweden, 51 % on average).

EUROPEAN SOVEREIGNTY: OVERALL A POSITIVE VIEW IN SWEDEN, EVEN THOUGH MANY EXPRESS NO OPINION

As we can see, in every country of the panel the perception of the term »sovereignty« influences how the associated expressions »national sovereignty« and »European sovereignty« are understood and assessed. Some 71 % of the Swedes thus declare they understand »well« what »national sovereignty« means (as against 75 % in Germany and only 56 % in Italy), and 60 % of them declare they understand the meaning of »European sovereignty« (69 % in Germany, 45 % in Italy). »National sovereignty« evokes »something positive« to 58 % of the Swedes (64 % in Germany, 47 % in Italy), and »European sovereignty« evokes the same among 48 % of them (63 % in Germany, 37 % in Italy). It should be noted that, as in the case of sovereignty, favourable views of European sovereignty grow with age and income category: ranging from 42 % in the younger generation to 53 % in the oldest, and from 43 % among those on low incomes to 57 % among those on the highest incomes. Furthermore, supporters of the main two traditional political parties are more enthusiastic (62 % favour European sovereignty among the Social Democrats, and 66 % among the Moderates) than those on the right (40 % among supporters of the Sweden Democrats) or on their left (41 % amongst the Vänsterpartiet).

People's understanding of »European sovereignty«, however, appears to be fairly vague in Sweden, with a higher score than elsewhere for the neutral answer »neither positive nor negative« (33 %, as against an average of 22 %). We can observe something similar in relation to »strategic autonomy«: only 30 % of Swedes declare they have a good understanding of what it means (as against a European average of 61 %), and only 29 % of them have a positive view of the notion, while the majority sees it as »neither positive nor negative« (54 %, 11 percentage points above the European average).

The majority of Swedes, however, do not seem to see any contradiction between »national sovereignty« and »Europe-

an sovereignty«: 59 % consider it possible to link »sovereignty« and »Europe« »because European sovereignty and national sovereignty are complementary«, while 41 % support the opposite view, namely that the two terms are contradictory because »sovereignty refers first and foremost to the nation«.

EUROPEAN SOVEREIGNTY TO CONTROL BORDERS AND FIGHT TERRORISM

Swedes (61 %), alongside Poles (65 %) and Romanians (63 %), are most convinced that European sovereignty already exists. Accordingly, they are a little less demanding than their neighbours regarding the list of qualities necessary for Europe to be sovereign. The order of importance of these qualities also differs among countries.

Two-thirds of Swedes (66 %) deem it »essential« that »the controls its external borders«. An equivalent share (64 %) thinks that Europe has to have »common instruments to fight external interference«. These two elements are mentioned most often in Sweden, but are ranked only sixth and seventh in the other countries (mentioned by 59 % and 58 %, respectively). Swedes opt next for »safeguards on European production in such strategic areas as food and health« (56 %), albeit with less intensity than the European average (65 %). Half of the Swedes deem it essential that Europe has »a common security and defence policy«, »strong defence of its own values – democracy, rule of law – both internally and externally« and »control over strategic infrastructure (ports, airports, energy, etc)«. Those three items are chosen by 50 % in Sweden, as against 67 %, 61 % and 52 %, respectively by European average. All the other propositions are deemed »important but not essential«. A »strong economy«, for instance, is generally first on the list in Europe: 69 % of those surveyed consider it »essential«, as against only 45 % in Sweden. The same goes for the idea that the EU should have »its own energy resources«, which is considered essential by 60 % of Europeans on average, but only by 40 % of the Swedes.

The majority of Swedes consider that European sovereignty already exists, but two-thirds (64 %) also think it needs to be strengthened. This, however, is the second lowest score in Europe – only Italy's is lower, at only 60 %. It also differs most from the score recorded for national sovereignty, considered essential by 74 % of Swedes (+10 percentage points).

The reasons given for strengthening European sovereignty are the same as elsewhere, in terms of both ranking and intensity: »the terrorist threat« is at the top of the list (mentioned by 43 % in Sweden, as against a European average of 37 %), before »the challenge of climate change« (34 %, 34 %). Swedes fear »China's great-power ambitions« somewhat more (27 %, 20 %) and the »threat to health« somewhat less (26 %, 31 %) than its European counterparts. After Latvia (31 %) and Poland (30 %), Sweden also sees the strengthening of European sovereignty as a means of opposing »Russia's great-power ambitions« (22 %, as against an average of 13 %).

As for the obstacles to such strengthening, Swedes mostly mention the fact that »some countries are led by nationalists« (38 %, against an average of 23 %), and to a lesser extent, about »cultural differences between countries« (24 %, 16 %). »Pressure from certain foreign countries in whose interest it is that Europe does not become stronger« is quoted by less than a fifth (17 %), and only 13 % – the lowest score of all eight countries – chose »the weakness of the European institutions (Commission, Parliament) as they stand today«.

IMPRINT

© Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2021
International Policy Analysis
Hiroshimastraße 28, 10785 Berlin, Germany

Responsible for this publication in the FES:
Catrina Schläger | Head of Department International Policy Analysis

Cover picture: Jan Scheunert | picture alliance / ZUMAPRESS.com

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Commercial use of media published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is not permitted without the written consent of the FES. Publications by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung may not be used for electioneering purposes.