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Pierre Bréchon

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The Invisibles: A Very Relative Attachment to Democratic Values

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Usually the social class of the poor and often marginalized has not yet been in the focus of surveys so that this group can be seen as "invisibles" to research in a certain way. Nevertheless, questions like these arise: Are there differences in value patterns of this group compared to other social classes? Do they have a specific value system? And if so, is this system structured enough to be efficient in all European countries? The European Values Study allows to take a closer look at several value patterns of the precarious, for example concerning the attachment to democratic values.

The social position of individuals was measured by the International Socio-Economic Index (ISEI), a synthetic linear index constructed from the occupations held, the level of income and the level of education modulated by age.¹ The scale, recoded in quartiles, can be cross-tabulated with all the value dimensions used in the European Values Study. The following text focuses on democratic values.

Precarious people less attached to democracy than other social classes

At first glance, democratic values seem to be well established, since 61% of Europeans choose the highest score on a scale of 1 to 10 to indicate the extreme importance they attach to this political system. However, the precarious are clearly less attached to it than the more privileged.

Importance of democratic government compared to support for other political systems

	Social position				Average
	Very low	Rather low	Rather high	Very high	
Democratically governed country: absolutely important (10)	51	57	65	71	61
A good political system					
a democracy	91	94	97	98	95
a government of experts	59	57	51	49	54
a strong leader (without parliamentary and electoral constraints)	36	34	24	16	28
that the army rules the country	17	14	8	4	11
Finding good at least 2 undemocratic political systems	31	29	20	12	23

In %

Source: EVS 2017

Figure: B. Veit

When several political systems are taken into account, it is surprising to discover that, for many Europeans, finding democracy good does not prevent them from also being attracted to other types of political systems, a government of experts who make

decisions, an authoritarian leader, a military government. In total, only 40% of Europeans appear as "exclusive democrats", 37% admit to at least one non-democratic system and 23% find at least two of them good. Once again, we observe that the precarious are clearly less attached to democracy than the more privileged categories.

A democratic deficit of the disadvantaged in all European countries

When we consider these differences in values according to the country of residence, it becomes clear that the lesser democratic attachment of the precarious to democracy is found in all parts of Europe, whether in the old democratic countries or in those that live largely in an illiberal context.²

Finding very or fairly good at least two undemocratic political systems

Social position	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	Southern Europe	Nordic countries	Average
Very low	30	39	27	20	31
Rather low	24	41	27	19	29
Rather high	18	29	21	11	20
Very high	10	21	14	8	12
Average	20	34	23	14	23

Reading: Out of 100 Western Europeans of very low social position, 30 find at least two undemocratic political systems very or fairly good.

Western Europe: Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, The Netherlands
 Eastern Europe: Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia
 Southern Europe: Italy, Portugal, Spain
 Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden

In %

Source: EVS 2017

Figure: B. Veit

Regardless of the national context, disadvantaged people seem to be significantly less democratic than others. Their lower level of education could be the reason³, as international surveys have long shown that the more educated people are, the more they tend to value democracy. Education develops a taste for expressing one's ideas, which is favored by democratic systems and often repressed in authoritarian regimes. It can also be argued that to like democracy, one must not only be sufficiently educated, but also have a sufficient standard of living and security to be able to value post-materialist values and quality of life more.⁴

Pierre Bréchon

Note: This text is an abridged version of a contribution to the volume "Values - Politics - Religion", which will be published by Springer in fall 2022.