

Is representative democracy in Europe under pressure? Investigating the attitudinal and behavioural facets of citizens' political disaffection

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Abstract: Representative democracy in Europe is currently said to be under pressure. Public wisdom tells us that citizens are less motivated to engage with politics, that they are highly critical and not very supportive of political institutions and actors. However, democratic political systems and even more, representative democracies where political actors are supposed to represent citizens' interests, need support for democratic institutions and actors as well as some level of involvement by the citizenry. However, we do not have a good knowledge about citizens' political disaffection in Europe. This is due to the fact that previous research tends to downplay both the behavioural components of citizens' political disaffection and the qualitative way of dealing with political disaffection. To overcome this problem, we provide a conceptual framework to study the attitudinal and behavioural facets of citizens' political disaffection in different European countries? Empirically, we draw on a mixed methods design, confronting data collected within the through 16 focus groups conducted in June 2023 with a novel public opinion survey from early 2024. Based on these two data sources collected within the HorizonEurope funded ActEU project, we are finally able to detect blind spots that have been so far rather ignored in the study of political disaffection. Our findings give us a better understanding of the question whether representative democracy in Europe is indeed under pressure. Moreover, our findings will enable researchers to better deal with the blurry concept of citizens' disaffection with politics and provide solutions for policymakers on possible remedies.