

SPECIFIC ETHICS PROTOCOL

FOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AT THE FACULTY OF PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES OF GHENT UNIVERSITY

Version from 8 September 2025

Ethics Committee, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences,

Ghent University,

Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Gent

ec.pp@ugent.be

Please check on our [webpage](#) that you are using the last version of our documents (Specific Ethics Protocol, Informed consent template and General Ethics Protocol).

Please fill in this document completely in English. All attached documents must also be in English, except for documents in Dutch (e.g., information letter and consent form) that are presented to Dutch speaking participants (or parents, teachers, ...). For documents in another language presented to participants in their own language, please provide an English translation.



CHECKLIST

In order to ensure the completeness of the application file and to make the application process as smooth as possible, please check and tick the following list.

	Yes	n/a
We took note of the General Ethics Protocol for Scientific Research at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of Ghent University	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
We have added the relevant information letter(s) and consent form(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have added all documents presented (on paper, on screen, orally) to participants prior to participation (flyers, invitation letter, welcome screen, post on a social network, ...)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have added a data management plan (if a DMP is mandatory for this study). If you are unsure whether a DMP is required for this study, please visit this webpage for further explanation.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have added the GDPR record (only if question 23a below is answered with 'yes').	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have added a detailed justification regarding the use of public interest as the legal basis for processing personal data (only if question 23b below is answered with 'yes')	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have added an agreement to share (personal) data with collaborators outside Ghent University. If you are unsure whether this is required, please visit this webpage for further explanation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We took note of the Ghent University policy on Human Rights & Dual-Use Research ?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
We have checked that there are no discrepancies between the SEP, GDPR record, DMP, information letter and consent form.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
We have informed ourselves of the distinction between anonymized and pseudonymized data , and our application appropriately reflects this distinction	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
We took note of the relevant guidelines for research with participants	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

REQUEST TO THE ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR ADVICE CONCERNING THE FOLLOWING RESEARCH PROPOSAL

1. Title of the research project

Title	The paradox of democracy in the 21st century: Why do people turn away from a political system that contributes to their mental health?
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2. Name of the researcher(s)

Name researcher(s):	Dr. Joachim Waterschoot
Name supervisor(s):	Prof. Dr. Maarten Vansteenkiste
Department name:	Developmental-, Personality- and Social Psychology
Department code:	PP07
E-mail address contact person (only one!): In case the main researcher is a master student, the contact person is the supervisor.	Joachim.waterschoot@ugent.be

The supervisor (if any) and all above-mentioned researchers must be included in cc when applying.

By sending this request, all above-mentioned researchers confirm that:

- the information provided in this application is consistent with the facts as known when submitting;
- they adhere to the specific ethics protocol as approved by the Ethics Committee;
- if in the course of the project ethical problems arise that are not covered by this request, the Ethics Committee will be contacted again.

3. Is this an application for a standalone master thesis?

(I.e., not part of a broader project that already received ethical clearance)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes. If yes, please add the "Unilateral Declaration of confidentiality". More info here .

4. Is there a financial sponsor for this project?

<input type="checkbox"/>	No
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes
Name sponsor:	BOF
Project code*:	BOF/PD0/2025/011
Start date*:	01/11/2025
End date*:	01/11/2028

* If available; In case of financial sponsorship by the FWO, this must be filled in.

5. Is the project part of any cooperation beyond the faculty?

<input type="checkbox"/>	No		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes		
	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>If yes, which institutions are involved:</td> <td>See full list below with institutions, sorted alphabetically, with mentioned country and continent</td> </tr> </table>	If yes, which institutions are involved:	See full list below with institutions, sorted alphabetically, with mentioned country and continent
If yes, which institutions are involved:	See full list below with institutions, sorted alphabetically, with mentioned country and continent		

A–D

School of Psychology, Faculty of Medicine and Health, University of New England (Australia, Oceania)

Australian Catholic University (Australia, Oceania)

IMC Krems, University of Applied Sciences (Austria, Europe)

Medical University Innsbruck (Austria, Europe)

Ghent University (Belgium, Europe)

Universitätsklinikum Heidelberg (Burkina Faso, Africa)

Faculty of Education, Centre for the Study of Educational Leadership and Policy (CSELP) (Canada, North America)

ESG UQAM (Canada, North America)

Université Laval (Canada, North America)

Carleton University (Canada, North America)

Universidad de Chile (Chile, South America)

Business School, Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez (Chile, South America)

School of Business, Southern Connecticut State University (China, Asia)

(appeared also for other countries, but kept once per instruction)

George Mason University (China, Asia)

The University of Alabama (China, Asia)

Luxembourg School of Business, Zagreb School of Economics and Management (Croatia, Europe)

Masarykova univerzita (Czech Republic, Europe)

University of Southern Denmark (Denmark, Europe)

E–I

Institute of Sport Sciences and Physiotherapy, University of Tartu (Estonia, Europe)

Fiji National University (Fiji, Oceania)

Aalto University (Finland, Europe)

Tampere University, Faculty of Education and Culture (Finland, Europe)

Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne (URCA) & Université de Tours (UT) (France, Europe)

University of the Gambia (Gambia, Africa)

Leibniz University Hannover, Division of Empirical Educational Research (Germany, Europe)

FHNW School of Applied Psychology (Germany, Europe)

Otto-von-Guericke-Universität Magdeburg, Institute of Psychology (Germany, Europe)

University of Ghana and Ghana Atomic Energy Commission (Ghana, Africa)

University of Ghana & Northumbria University (Ghana, Africa)
University of Crete, Department of Psychology (Greece, Europe)
Institute of Psychology, University of Szeged (Hungary, Europe)
University of Iceland (Iceland, Europe)
National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru (India, Asia)
UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta (Indonesia, Asia)
University of Tabriz (Iran, Asia)
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (Israel, Asia)
Achava Academisch College (Israel, Asia)
University of Rome Tor Vergata (Italy, Europe)
Sapienza University of Rome (Italy, Europe)
University of Messina, Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine (Italy, Europe)
Università degli Studi della Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli" (Italy, Europe)

J–N

Toyo University (Japan, Asia)
Waseda University (Japan, Asia)
Yamanashi Eiwa College (Japan, Asia)
Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Department of Computer Science (Kazakhstan, Asia)
Moi University, Eldoret (Kenya, Africa)
Riga Stradins University (Latvia, Europe)
University of Tripoli (Libya, Africa)
Lithuanian Sports University, Department of Physical and Social Education (Lithuania, Europe)
Klaipeda University (Lithuania, Europe)
Luxembourg School of Business (Luxembourg, Europe)
Sunway University (Malaysia, Asia)
University of Technology, Mauritius (Mauritius, Africa)
University Ibn Zohr, Faculty of Humanities, Department of Sociology (Morocco, Africa)
Utrecht University (Netherlands, Europe)
Department of Psychology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (Nigeria, Africa)
University of Ibadan (Nigeria, Africa)
Olabisi Onabanjo University (Nigeria, Africa)
Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State (Nigeria, Africa)
Federal Polytechnic of Oil and Gas, Bonny, Department of Social Sciences and Humanities (Nigeria, Africa)
Medecins Sans Frontieres – Nigeria Mission (Nigeria, Africa)
Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje (North Macedonia, Europe)
University of South-Eastern Norway (Norway, Europe)

Norwegian University of Science and Technology (Norway, Europe)

O–S

Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (Peru, South America)

De La Salle University (Philippines, Asia)

The Maria Grzegorzewska University (Akademia Pedagogiki Specjalnej) (Poland, Europe)

University of Warsaw, Faculty of Psychology (Poland, Europe)

Institute of Applied Psychology, Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education (Poland, Europe)

CIDEFES, Universidade Lusófona, Lisboa (Portugal, Europe)

Universidade Lusófona, Lisboa (Portugal, Europe)

Babeş–Bolyai University, Applied Psychology Department (Romania, Europe)

Polyclinique du Plateau (Rwanda, Africa)

Universitätsklinikum Heidelberg (Senegal, Africa)

Faculty of Law and Business Studies Dr Lazar Vrkatic, Union University Belgrade (Serbia, Europe)

Department of Psychology, University of Pretoria (South Africa, Africa)

University of Pretoria (South Africa, Africa)

University of the Western Cape (South Africa, Africa)

University of Zaragoza (Spain, Europe)

University of Valencia, Faculty of Psychology and Speech Therapy (Spain, Europe)

Umeå University, Department of Psychology (Sweden, Europe)

University of Geneva (Switzerland, Europe)

T–Z

Ming Chuan University (Taiwan, Asia)

Wenzhou-Kean University, School of Psychology (Thailand, Asia)

Ondokuz Mayıs University (Turkey, Asia/Europe)

Recep Tayyip Erdogan University (Turkey, Asia/Europe)

Pamukkale University (Turkey, Asia/Europe)

American University in Dubai (United Arab Emirates, Asia)

University of Sheffield (United Kingdom, Europe)

University of Bath (United Kingdom, Europe)

Durham University (United Kingdom, Europe)

Illinois Institute of Technology (United States, North America)

University of Oklahoma (United States, North America)

Carnegie Mellon University / Virginia Commonwealth University (United States, North America)

Clarkson University (United States, North America)

Southern Connecticut State University (United States, North America)

Leeds School of Business, University of Colorado Boulder (United States, North America)

University of Maryland School of Nursing (United States, North America)

The University of Alabama (United States, North America)

Monash University (Vietnam, Asia)

Zimbabwe Open University (Zimbabwe, Africa)

6. Why do you submit your study to the Ethics Committee?

Check all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/>	It is required by the funding agency
<input type="checkbox"/>	It is required by a journal
X	Because our study falls under some of the items listed in Section 3.1 of the General Ethics Protocol
	Why?
<input type="checkbox"/>	We use deception (see GEP, Art. 21)
<input type="checkbox"/>	The research concerns vulnerable populations (e.g., prisoners, children with a disability or persons in a dependent situation)
<input type="checkbox"/>	The research is likely to result in pain or more than mild discomfort
<input type="checkbox"/>	Incidental findings (relating to mental or physical health) are likely
X	We collect sensitive information (zie 'Richtlijn voor Classificatie van Informatie en Data', p. 6)
<input type="checkbox"/>	We have doubts about the acceptability of our research
X	Third parties are involved for collecting personal information disseminating a link
<input type="checkbox"/>	External data processors are involved in the collection of personal information
<input type="checkbox"/>	We deviate from the GEP
	Please explain:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other
	Please explain:

If you apply only because you think you may later need an approval letter, then please consider the possibility of requesting a waiver when the approval letter is required (see Section 3.5 of the GEP).

7. Evaluations by ethics committees

A. Has the research (or parts thereof) mentioned in the current application previously been assessed by an ethics committee? (at Ghent University or another institution).

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes. If yes, which committee, which parts and what was the outcome?

B. Is the research described in the current application presently being assessed by another ethics committee?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes. If yes, which one and why?

8. Are there reasons to consider a review by a committee for medical ethics?

Consult the [GEP](#) for a list of situations where a review by a committee for medical ethics is advisable.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes. If yes, please specify and justify why you are not seeking review by a committee for medical ethics:

9. Are there reasons to consider a review by the Committee on Human Rights Policy & Dual use?

<input type="checkbox"/>	No
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes. If yes, please specify and justify why you are not seeking review by the Committee on Human Rights Policy & Dual-Use Research: Our project examines how people perceive democratic functioning, personal and group-based psychological need satisfaction, and well-being across countries. Although the research touches on political attitudes and perceived legitimacy of democratic versus autocratic governance, it does not involve the development, testing, or dissemination of tools, interventions, or strategies that could be used to influence, manipulate, or destabilize political systems or populations. The project is survey-based and relies exclusively on self-reported perceptions. The purpose of the project is explanatory and descriptive, aiming to understand why democratic conditions contribute to well-being, when people may feel alienated from democratic institutions, and how perceived threats shape these responses. The study does not involve individual-level political profiling, behavioural interventions, or outputs that could enable targeted political manipulation or coercion. The survey data are collected fully anonymously, with no IP addresses, metadata, geolocation data, or device identifiers recorded. At the end of the survey, participants may optionally provide an email address solely to be contacted for possible follow-up surveys. These contact details are stored separately within Ghent University and linked to an internal UGent-only code for re-contact purposes. They are never shared with international collaborators and cannot be used to identify, access, or link survey responses. While the study addresses attitudes related to democracy and governance, it does not generate knowledge that could reasonably be considered dual use as defined by the Committee (e.g., knowledge enabling surveillance, repression, behavioural manipulation, or algorithmic targeting). All results are analysed and reported exclusively in aggregated form. The project involves an international online survey conducted in countries with diverse political and regulatory contexts. We acknowledge that in some settings, online activities or participation in research touching on societal or democratic topics may be considered sensitive. To mitigate any potential human rights or dual-use risks, the study is designed with strict privacy-by-design safeguards:

- No IP addresses, metadata, geolocation data, or device identifiers are collected (Qualtrics IP logging is disabled).
- Participation does not require registration, login, or authentication.
- The survey includes only attitudinal self-report items and avoids questions about voting behaviour, party affiliation, political activism, or behavioural intentions.
- Local research partners only disseminate the survey link and have no access to participant data or information about who participated.
- Only anonymised and simplified datasets are shared with collaborators, and results are reported exclusively in aggregated form.

Given these safeguards and the descriptive nature of the research, a separate review by the Committee on Human Rights Policy & Dual-Use Research is not deemed necessary at this stage. However, in line with the precautionary principle, advice will be sought from the Ghent University Human Rights & Dual-Use Policy officer should any uncertainty arise regarding secondary use or dissemination of the data.

More info see:

- <https://www.ugent.be/en/ghentuniv/mission/human-rights>
- <https://www.ugent.be/en/research/research-strategy/dual-use.htm>

Note that submitting to the [Committee on Human Rights Policy & Dual-Use Research](#) does not preclude submitting to our Ethics Committee.

10. Explain the background of the study. What are the aims and objectives of the study? (Max 250 words)

Across the world, democratic institutions are assumed to promote citizens' well-being through fair procedures, protection of rights, and inclusive decision-making. Yet recent global trends show growing democratic backsliding, declining trust, and rising support for more autocratic solutions, especially in times of perceived threat. Psychological research suggests that how people experience their social and political environment may be as important as the objective quality of that environment. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory, emerging work, including evidence from the COVID-19 crisis, indicates that contexts supporting individuals' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness foster greater well-being, trust, and societal engagement, whereas need frustration can fuel alienation, hostility, and a desire for more controlling governance. However, it remains unclear how these psychological processes operate across diverse political systems.

This project investigates the psychological mechanisms linking democratic functioning and well-being in a large, international, multi-country design. It examines how citizens perceive the degree to which their societal and democratic context supports or frustrates their basic psychological needs, and how these perceptions shape both well-being and preferences for democratic versus autocratic governance. By integrating country-level indicators of democratic quality with individual-level experiences, the project seeks to clarify when and why democratic conditions are experienced as meaningful, fair, and autonomy-supportive, and why some individuals may turn away from democratic principles under strain or threat.

The overarching aim is to map the psychological foundations of democratic resilience, identify risk factors for democratic disengagement, and provide evidence that can inform policies promoting both human flourishing and democratic stability.

11. Provide a brief overview of the study and the research methods used

Please provide here a general description of what will happen in practice during the research, from recruitment to reporting, in a way that is understandable to people who are not familiar with the subject matter. Details of data collection, recruitment and remuneration can be provided in questions 12, 13 and 14. Therefore, this overview can be very brief if the answers to questions 12-14 cover all aspects of your study.

An application may describe several sub-studies only if there is methodological overlap between them (see GEP, Sec. 3.3). In that case, specify your plans for each sub-study. This distinction between sub-studies must be kept throughout all subsequent questions. If there is no methodological overlap between the sub-studies, then please submit multiple applications.

This project examines how people across the world experience their society, its democratic functioning, and their psychological well-being. The study is coordinated internationally and involves multiple local academic research partners. These partners only disseminate the online survey link within their country (e.g., via social media, institutional mailing lists, or community networks). Local partners do not collect data, do not have access to responses, and do not store participant information. They also do not provide incentives, vouchers, course credits, or other forms of compensation.

All data are collected through a secure online questionnaire hosted on Qualtrics and stored exclusively on a Ghent University-managed server. Qualtrics IP address logging is disabled. The questionnaire does not collect names, phone numbers, IP addresses, or other direct identifiers.

The study consists of two components:

- (1) a cross-sectional online survey conducted in each participating country, and
- (2) an optional follow-up survey several months later for participants who explicitly consent to be re-contacted.

Optional re-contact and longitudinal linkage (UGent only)

At the end of the questionnaire, participants may optionally provide an email address only if they wish to be contacted for a possible follow-up wave. Providing an email address is entirely voluntary and not required to participate in the study.

For participants who opt in:

- The email address is stored securely and separately within the Ghent University environment.
- An internal UGent-only participant code is used exclusively to manage re-contact and longitudinal linkage of future surveys.
- The file containing email addresses and internal codes is accessible only to the principal investigator and authorised UGent researchers.
- Local research partners and international collaborators never have access to email addresses, internal codes, or linkage files.

Participants who do not opt in remain fully anonymous, as no contact information is collected.

Data sharing and anonymisation

Only anonymous survey data are shared with collaborators outside Ghent University. Any shared datasets:

- are cross-sectional (single wave only),
- do not include longitudinally linked data,
- do not contain internal UGent participant codes or any contact information.

Before data sharing, any internal codes used for UGent-only follow-up procedures are removed and replaced with newly generated anonymised random identifiers that cannot be linked back to participants, email addresses, or other survey waves. This procedure is explicitly communicated in the informed consent.

All analyses are conducted at Ghent University, and results are reported exclusively in aggregated form.

Additional safeguards against re-identification

To further minimise any risk of re-identification, datasets shared with collaborators outside Ghent University are not only anonymised but also simplified prior to sharing. This includes:

- categorisation of continuous variables (e.g., age into broad age brackets),
- collapsing or removing categories with very small cell sizes,
- suppression of rare combinations of demographic characteristics.

These measures ensure that shared datasets cannot be used to identify individuals or small subgroups, even through indirect inference.

12. How will you collect the data?

If relevant, please include information about

- the data collection method (questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, observation, behavioural experiments/manipulations, EEG, neuroimaging, brain stimulation, audio/video recording, online/web-based activities, ...)
- the design (number of groups, cross-sectional or longitudinal, ...)
- the time it will take participants to partake in the study
- sensitive questions or information
- who will collect the data

If you use a questionnaire, please provide it as a separate document to this application (if possible). Otherwise describe it or provide some representative questions.

Data will be collected using an online questionnaire hosted on Qualtrics and stored directly on a secure UGent server. The study primarily uses a cross-sectional design in 61 participating countries (target: ~300–500 respondents per country).

Participants access the survey through a link disseminated by local research partners. These partners only distribute the link and cannot access responses. All data flow directly to UGent.

Identifiers and privacy:

- The questionnaire does not collect names, phone numbers, or IP addresses (Qualtrics IP logging is disabled).
- At the end of the survey, participants may optionally provide an email address for follow-up purposes. This email address is stored separately within UGent and linked to a pseudonymised participant code solely for longitudinal follow-up (see Q11).

After informed consent, participants complete a ~20-minute questionnaire containing:

- Sociodemographic information is collected in a privacy-preserving manner. Age is collected as a continuous variable for analytical purposes. Prior to data sharing, age is categorised into broad age brackets to prevent re-identification. Ethnic or cultural background is measured using broad categories and always includes a “prefer not to say” option. No open-ended demographic questions are used.
- Perceived societal threat
- Perceived democratic functioning
- Primary goods
- Basic psychological need satisfaction and frustration
- Group-based need satisfaction and frustration
- Well-being indicators
- Ill-being indicators (depressive and anxiety symptoms)

All items are attitudinal self-reports. Participants may skip any question without explanation. No experiments, manipulations, interviews, recordings, or behavioural tasks are involved.

13. Please describe the participants and their recruitment

If relevant, please include information about

- obtaining the contact information of potential participants
- who will recruit the participants, how, and where
- approaching participants for inclusion and obtaining informed consent (who, when, where, how)
- inclusion and exclusion criteria; how will excluded participants be informed?

- target sample size
- poster, flyer or online ad used for recruitment (please include it as annex)
- role of any organisation involved in the recruitment
- possible distinction between participants vs. collaborators/partners/stakeholders

The study will recruit non-clinical adult participants (18+) from multiple countries. There are no specific exclusion criteria beyond being under 18 or not providing informed consent.

Recruitment is indirect, via local research partners who disseminate the survey link through their networks. These partners do not collect data, do not access participant information, and do not manage contact details.

Consent and withdrawal

The first page of the survey provides clear information about:

- the study aims,
- voluntary participation,
- anonymity and confidentiality,
- the right to skip any question,
- the option to provide an email address for follow-up,
- and data sharing in anonymised form with third parties.

Participants can stop participation at any time before submitting the questionnaire.

Because survey responses are collected anonymously, individual responses cannot be deleted after submission.

For participants who opt in for follow-up by providing an email address, it is possible to request removal of their contact details from the re-contact list at any time.

Sample size

The project aims to collect data in approximately 61 countries, with a target of 300–500 participants per country, depending on feasibility. No incentives, payments, vouchers, or course credits are provided.

14. Please explain if and how participants are remunerated

If relevant, please include information about

- reason for remuneration (cost reimbursement, compensation, reward for good performance, ...);
- remuneration scheme (same amount for everyone? what if a participant withdraws? ...);
- information for participants about the remuneration scheme;

If students participate for course credits, please provide information about the educational value of the study, how the issue of power imbalance is addressed, the alternative task, etc. (see GEP, Section 2.4).

Participants receive no remuneration. Participation is voluntary, anonymous, and requires only a limited time investment. This is clearly communicated in the informed consent.

15. Does the research project present any threats to the participants' physical or mental health?

<input type="checkbox"/>	No
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes. If yes, please specify:

	<p>Although the study poses no physical risk and involves no manipulation, some questions concern societal threat, democratic functioning, and psychological well-being, which may be experienced as sensitive in certain contexts. The study is therefore considered minimal risk.</p> <p>Risk mitigation measures include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey privacy-by-design: no names, phone numbers, or IP addresses are collected. • Optional follow-up under pseudonymisation (UGent only): email addresses are collected only with explicit consent and linked to a pseudonymised code. • Restricted access: only authorised UGent researchers access contact and linkage data. • Safe data sharing: only anonymised, cross-sectional datasets are shared with third parties. • Voluntary participation: participants may skip questions or stop at any time. • Aggregated reporting: no reporting of identifiable individuals or small subgroups.
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16. Do the participants have any known difficulties? Are they a vulnerable population?

<input type="checkbox"/>	No.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>If yes, please specify whether the research project could interfere with these difficulties and what precautions you would take:</p> <p>The study does not target vulnerable populations. However, given the international context, some participants may live in environments where political perceptions are sensitive. Strong anonymity and data-protection measures ensure that participation does not expose individuals to social or political risk.</p>

17. Are the participants adults who are incompetent to give their consent?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>If yes, from whom is consent sought?</p>

18. Are the participants minors (under 18 years of age)?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>If yes, from whom is consent sought?</p>

19. Will deception be used during the research project?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No.		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Yes.</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 30%;">If yes, please explain:</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	If yes, please explain:	
If yes, please explain:			

Justify why this is necessary for the purposes of the study:	
Do the participants have the possibility to withdraw after being informed of deception?	

20. Debriefing

A. Will the participants be informed about the results of the research project?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No. Please justify: Participants do not receive individual results. Aggregated findings will be made publicly available via a UGent-hosted project website and open-science repositories (e.g., OSF). This procedure is explained in the informed consent, in line with the anonymous nature of the study.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes. Please specify (written, oral, via email or post. Right after participation or later. Individual or collective. For everyone or on request. Individual results or aggregated results):

B. Do you provide support to participants with negative feelings after participation?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Not applicable Although the survey is minimal risk, some items relate to well-being (e.g., vitality, depletion, depressive and anxiety symptoms). As a precaution, the debriefing page includes a short note advising participants that if completing the questionnaire triggers concerns about their emotional or psychological well-being, they may seek support from local mental health services, general practitioners, or national helplines. No personal information is collected, so no individual follow-up is possible.
<input type="checkbox"/>	No. Please justify:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes. Please specify:

21. Will students be involved in the recruitment of participants, data collection or data processing?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
	If yes, please specify:
	What steps are taken to prepare and guide students?

Remember that students must sign and respect a 'Unilateral declaration of confidentiality'. More info [here](#).

22. Is there a data management plan (DMP)?

<input type="checkbox"/>	No
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes

Maintaining a DMP is considered good practice for any research project involving data processing. If you are unsure whether a DMP is mandatory for your project, this [webpage](#) provides further explanation.

23. Personal data

A. Are personal data collected?

For more information about personal data and special categories of personal data, see this [webpage](#).

<input type="checkbox"/>	No
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Yes. If yes, a GDPR record must be created and added to this application. For more details see this webpage.</p> <p>Yes. The study collects anonymous sociodemographic and psychological data. For participants who opt in for follow-up, email addresses are collected and processed as personal data under GDPR.</p> <p>No direct identifiers are collected in the questionnaire, and Qualtrics IP address logging is disabled.</p>

B. Do you deviate from the legal ground of 'consent' when collecting personal data?

For more information about lawful grounds to process personal data, see this [webpage](#).

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes. If yes, a detailed justification must be added to this application. For more information see this webpage

24. In the current state of the research project, do you expect other difficulties concerning the general ethical principles as written down in the general ethics protocol?

<input type="checkbox"/>	No	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes	
	If yes, please specify:	<p>Because the study spans multiple countries, including contexts where perceptions of democracy or governance may be sensitive, there is a contextual ethical risk. This risk is mitigated through a combination of strict anonymity, optional pseudonymised follow-up within UGent, and careful data minimisation.</p> <p>Specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No IP addresses or metadata are collected. • Participation is voluntary and questions may be skipped. • Demographic variables are collected in categorised form. • Shared datasets are anonymised and further simplified through recoding and cell suppression to prevent re-identification. <p>These measures ensure that participation does not expose individuals to social, political, or legal risk.</p>
	Justify why the research should be done in this way:	Justify why the research should be done in this way:

	Understanding how democratic conditions are psychologically experienced across countries is essential for strengthening democratic resilience and well-being. Because political contexts vary greatly, a multi-country design is necessary. The chosen approach, fully anonymous, decentralised recruitment and centralised secure data handling, ensures that important scientific research can be conducted without placing any participant at personal, social, or political risk.
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25. Attachments

Please fill a line in the table below for **each** file attached to your application.

Please do not merge several documents into a single file.

Please use short and self-explanatory names for each file. Use these names in all documents when referring to a file.

Mention when documents pertain to multiple studies.

Please check that there is no discrepancy between SEP, GDPR record, DMP, information letter and consent form.

File name	Short description
<i>DMP.pdf</i>	<i>GDPR record + Data Management Plan</i>
<i>SEP.pdf</i>	<i>Specific Ethics Protocol</i>
<i>IC.pdf</i>	<i>Informed consent</i>
<i>Survey.pdf</i>	<i>Survey (in English)</i>