

# INFORMATION LETTER AND CONSENT FORM

Target audience: adult volunteers

Legal ground: consent

Language: English

All text depicted in orange is explanation for the researcher and should be replaced or deleted in the document used for participants.

Example texts are always preceded by "E.g.". These are for illustrative purposes only and may therefore be replaced, deleted or modified.

## PART 1 – INFORMATION LETTER

### **Title of study: Understanding How People Around the World Experience Democracy and Societal Threats**

This study is conducted by Ghent University in collaboration with an international consortium of universities across more than 60 countries. In your country, Ghent University collaborates with **[local institution]**, with **[name of local partner]** acting as local contact person. Local partners only disseminate the survey link and do not collect, access, or store any participant data.

The researchers responsible are:

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### **A. Information about the study**

Dear participant,

You are invited to take part in an international scientific study hosted at Ghent University (Ghent, Belgium). Please read this information carefully before deciding whether to participate. If anything is unclear, you may contact the researchers at any time. You may take as much time as you need to decide.

#### ***Purpose of the study***

This research aims to understand how people across the world experience democracy, societal challenges, and periods of threat, and how these perceptions relate to psychological well-being and basic psychological needs (such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness).

More specifically, the study examines:

- how people evaluate democratic versus more autocratic forms of governance,
- how perceptions of societal threats (e.g., economic, health-related, environmental) shape these evaluations,
- how people's psychological experiences relate to well-being and societal attitudes.

The results will contribute to scientific knowledge on democracy, well-being, and societal resilience across different countries.

### ***Ethical approval***

This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of Ghent University on XX/XX/XXXX (approval reference: 2025-188).

Approval by the Ethics Committee does not imply any obligation to participate. Participation is entirely voluntary.

## **B. Information regarding participation**

### ***What does participation involve?***

Participation consists of completing an online questionnaire, which takes approximately 20-30 minutes.

You will be asked questions about:

- perceptions of democracy and political decision-making,
- perceptions of societal challenges or threats,
- psychological experiences and well-being,
- demographic information, including: age, gender, country/region, education, employment status, ethnic/cultural background, relationship status, parental status, political orientation, subjective socioeconomic status, and living environment (urban/rural).

### ***Voluntary participation***

- Participation is entirely voluntary.
- No question is mandatory. You may skip any question without providing a reason.
- You may stop participating at any time before submitting the questionnaire by closing the survey window.

Because the questionnaire is collected anonymously, once you submit your responses, it is not possible to remove individual answers.

### ***Optional follow-up***

The questionnaire data are collected fully anonymously. At the end of the questionnaire, you will be given the option (not an obligation) to provide an email address only if you wish to be contacted for a possible follow-up survey at a later time. Providing an email address is entirely voluntary and not required to participate in the current study.

If you choose to provide an email address for follow-up contact, this email address is collected separately and stored independently from your questionnaire responses within Ghent University. An internal code is used by Ghent University only to manage follow-up invitations over time. This code is not shared with international collaborators and cannot be used to identify, access, modify, or delete your questionnaire responses.

### ***Feedback on results***

Because the study is anonymous, we cannot provide individual feedback. A summary of the main study findings will be made publicly available on a project website [**website to be added**] once the study is completed.

### ***Risks***

There are no known physical risks associated with participation. Some questions relate to societal challenges or threats, which may cause mild discomfort for some participants. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer.

No information that could directly identify you (such as your name, IP address, or location data) is collected.

### ***Benefits***

You will not receive a direct personal benefit from participating. However, your participation contributes to scientific research aimed at understanding democracy and well-being across diverse societies.

### ***Compensation***

Participation is voluntary and not financially compensated.

## **C. Information on Privacy and Personal Data**

### ***Your personal data will be handled according to:***

- the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR),
- the Belgian Law on the Protection of Natural Persons regarding Personal Data (2018),
- the Ghent University Generic Code of Conduct for processing personal data.

### ***What personal data are collected?***

The following personal data will be processed:

- Demographic data: age, gender, country/region, education, employment, ethnic/cultural background, relationship status, parental status, political orientation, subjective SES, living environment (urban/rural).
- Responses to questionnaires on perceptions of democracy, psychological needs, well-being, and societal issues
- E-mail address by your own consent if you want to be invited for a follow-up survey. Providing your e-mail address does not involve the obligation to participate the follow-up survey, but solely to be able to be invited. Your e-mail address will be kept separate from the research data.

### ***Why are these data collected?***

These data are necessary to:

- analyse how people across countries perceive democracy,
- examine how differences across demographic groups relate to these perceptions,
- contact you again for follow-up surveys only if you consent.

### ***Legal ground for data processing***

Your personal data will only be processed based on your consent, given by signing this form.

You may stop participating at any time before submitting your responses by closing the survey.

### ***Who has access to my (personal) data?***

The questionnaire responses are collected and stored by Ghent University. Only the research team at Ghent University has access to the full dataset.

If you voluntarily provide an email address to be contacted for a possible follow-up study, this contact information is stored separately from your questionnaire responses, within the secure Ghent University environment, and is accessible only to the principal investigator and authorised UGent researchers. Email addresses are used solely for re-contacting participants and are never shared with local partners or external researchers.

For scientific collaboration, only anonymised and simplified datasets are shared with researchers outside Ghent University. If data are transferred outside the European Union, this will occur only under appropriate safeguards.

These shared datasets:

- do not contain contact information,
- do not include longitudinally linked data,

- do not contain internal codes used by Ghent University, and
- are processed in such a way (e.g., categorisation of variables, removal or merging of small groups) that participants cannot be identified or traced.

### ***Reuse of data***

Data may be reused for scientific research on related topics, such as political psychology, well-being, or democratic functioning. Such data reuse by other partners than Ghent University will only involve datasets from which all identifying and re-identifiable information has been removed, ensuring that individual participants cannot be identified in any way.

### ***Rights***

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may stop participating at any time, without giving a reason, by closing the survey. Because the data are collected anonymously, it is not possible to withdraw specific responses after submission, nor to access, correct, or delete individual data entries, as they cannot be traced to a particular participant.

The anonymous data collected in this study will be used solely for scientific research purposes and will be processed in an aggregated manner.

If you voluntarily provide an email address for follow-up contact, you may request that your email address be removed from the contact list at any time by contacting the principal investigator. This only affects future invitations and does not allow changes to previously submitted questionnaire responses.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study or about data protection, you may contact the research team via [Joachim.waterschoot@ugent.be](mailto:Joachim.waterschoot@ugent.be)

### ***Complaints***

If you would like to file a complaint about the way your personal data is handled or if you have any questions regarding your personal data in the context of this study, you may contact Ghent University's Data Protection Officer at [privacy@ugent.be](mailto:privacy@ugent.be) or T 09 264 95 17.

You may also file a complaint with the Data Protection Authority, Drukpersstraat 35, 1000 Brussels (e-mail: [contact@apd-gba.be](mailto:contact@apd-gba.be)) and/or the Vlaamse Toezichtcommissie (e-mail: [contact@toezichtscommissie.be](mailto:contact@toezichtscommissie.be)).

## PART 2 – CONSENT FORM

### A. Consent regarding participation in the study

Please tick the appropriate bullet	Yes	No
I voluntarily participate in this scientific study.		
I know that I may stop participating from the study at any time without giving a reason for this decision and that this will not in any way affect my further relationship with the researcher.		
I have read the information form and received sufficient explanation about the nature, purpose, duration, and anticipated effects of the study. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and I received satisfactory answers to all my questions.	o	o

### B. Consent regarding the processing of personal data

Please tick the appropriate bullet	Yes	No
I know that I have rights to safeguard my privacy (including access, correction, deletion) and to whom I should turn to exercise these rights.		
I give permission to the researchers to collect, process, store, analyse and report on my (personal) data for the purposes of this study.	o	o
I agree that I understand that I have the voluntarily opportunity to provide my email address to be contacted for possible follow-up studies. Then, I understand my email address will be stored separately and can be removed upon request.		

Name of participant	Name of researcher
	Dr. Joachim Waterschoot
Date:	Date:
Signature:	Signature: