

eupinions brief | February 2019

Je t'aime. Moi non plus.

When Emmanuel Macron won the French presidential election with a risky strategy and against all odds in May 2017, spring seemed to break out in Paris. New faces, new dynamics, and the promise to do many things differently and thus better, were in the air and inspired large swathes of the French public. But the protests of the "yellow vests" have in their intensity and perseverance now shaken the last optimist. And they've reminded us of how deep the trenches between the political interests in France are – as well as how much energy and effort it takes to navigate them.

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assessment of the personal situation of respondents, as well as to the state of the European Union.

What measurable effects have the political developments of the past two years had on the French public opinion? We will explain this with the eupinions research that we have conducted since July 2015. The core questions are asked at every stage of the survey, every three months since the beginning of 2018. They can be found at www.eupinions.eu/trends.

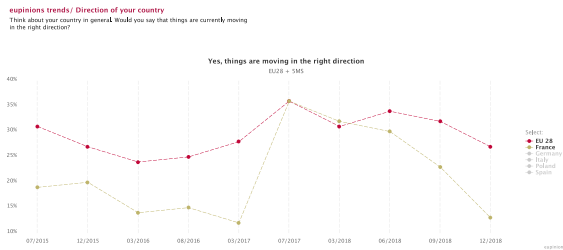
The key issues analyzed here are the attitudes to the political system of one's own country, to the

Here are the five questions:

- 1) Do you think that your country is going in the right direction?
- 2) Do you believe that democracy works in your country?
- 3) How has your personal economic situation evolved over the past two years?
- 4) What do you see in your personal future?
- 5) Do you think that the European Union is going in the right direction?

These five graphics show the development of the results from July 2015 to December 2018 for the EU as a whole and for France.

Figure 1) Do you think that your country is going in the right direction?

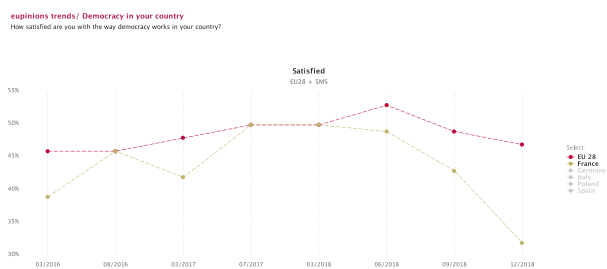


First of all, we can see that the view of the condition of one's own country is currently very negative throughout the EU. The proportion of Europeans who find their country heading in the right direction has ranged between 25 and 35 percent since 2015.

Conversely, that means that a large majority of Europeans (between 65 and 75 percent) do not think their country is heading in the right direction.

In France, the findings are much worse and much more volatile. In July 2015, the proportion of French people who felt their country was heading in the right direction was only 19 percent. This slid to 12 percent by March 2017, and then jumped to 36 percent between March 2017 and July 2017. This level of approval spent just over a year above the 30 percent mark to fall by 7 percentage points between June 2018 and September 2018. It dropped another 10 percentage points between September 2018 and December 2018, reaching its March 2017 low again. In December 2018, only 13 percent of French people believed their country was heading in the right direction.

Figure 2) Do you believe that democracy works in your country?

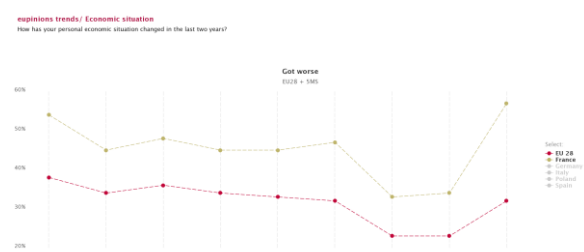
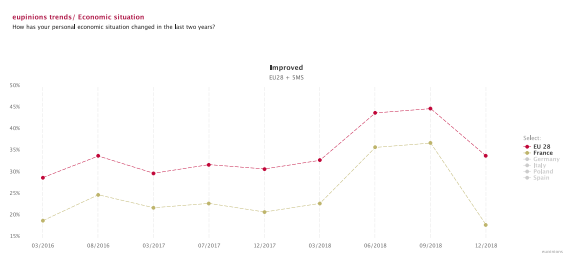


A similar pattern can be observed in the question on the state of democracy in one's own country. Overall, the Europeans appreciate the state of democracy in their own country more than do the French, responding more positively.

Nevertheless, in March 2016 only 46 percent of Europeans felt that democracy in their country was working satisfactorily. As a result, this value rose slightly, surpassing the 50 percent mark and reached 53 percent in June 2018.

Since then, it has moved back down slightly across the EU. In France, on the other hand, in December 2018 approval crashed to a low during the measurement period. Only 32 percent of the French in December 2018 still believed that democracy works in France. This crash was preceded -- as in the assessment of the direction of their own country -- by a brightening of the mood. From March to July 2017, the value had risen from 42 percent to 50 percent, remained at that level for about a year and then started to decline. Between September 2018 and December 2018, it slipped 11 percentage points: from 43 to 32 percent.

Figure 3) und 4) How has your personal economic situation changed in the last two years?



Now we turn to the questions about the development of the personal situation.

Graphs 3 and 4 show the course of two answer options to the question: "How has your personal economic situation evolved over the past two years?" Graph 3 shows those who stated that their personal economic situation had improved. Chart 4 shows those who stated that their personal economic situation had deteriorated. Again, the assessments of the French in relation to their fellow Europeans are altogether much more negative. Only 22 percent of the French said in March 2016 that their economic situation had improved. By contrast, 38 percent said they had deteriorated – thus repeating the pattern we witnessed in the other areas. Initially, the values only develop slightly, then jump upwards or downwards, and then plummet again between September 2018 and December 2018 back to the initial level. It is particularly impressive how drastic the view of one's own economic situation has become. In December 2018, 57 percent of the French felt that their personal economic situation had deteriorated in the near past.

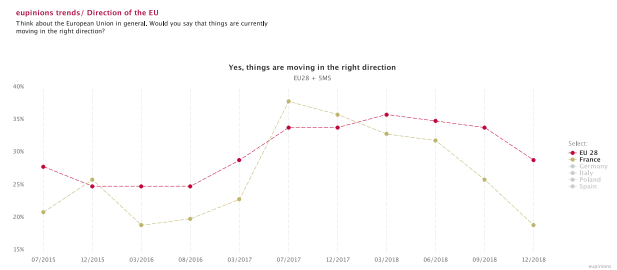
Figure 5) und 6) What do you see in your personal future?



Graphs 5 and 6 show two options for answering the question about the assessment of personal future. Again, it is noticeable that the French look much more negatively into their future than do

Europeans as a whole. Again, it is striking that from December 2015 to March 2017 that this situation hardly changes: after March 2017 it is significantly positive and then crashes between September 2018 to December 2018. In March 2017, 34 percent of the French looked positively into their future; 66 percent looked negatively into their future. In September 2018, 62 percent of the French looked positively into their future, while 38 percent remained negative. In December 2018, 30 (!) percent had changed sides. Now only 32 percent had a positive lookout for the future against 68 percent, which were now negative.

Figure 7) Do you think the European Union is going in the right direction?



The attitudes to the European Union are not unaffected by this larger trend. This is shown here with the question of whether the EU is moving in the right direction or not. Strikingly, again, the French are more negative compared to other Europeans. Also interesting is how much the tide turns between March and July 2017. It is telling indeed that the mood returns to the starting point in December 2018.

So, what's next with public opinion in France? Much seems to depend on whether President Macron is able to repeat the feat that brought him into the Elysée and whose positive power expanded in his first year in office: enough to convince the French that he will be able to improve their personal situation and those of the country. Anyone who remembers the assertiveness and persuasive power of campaigner Macron may be inclined not to declare it impossible. Nevertheless, the starting point is clearly different. Emmanuel Macron is no longer a blank slate. Many who had just begun to hope returned to their negative attitudes. It will

take a lot of on-the-ground legwork and citizen's debates to change it again.

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For more European trends please check here:
www.eupinions.eu/trends

Data note:

The samples with a size of $n > 10.000$ were drawn by Dalia Research between July 2015 and December 2018 across all 28 EU Member States, taking into account current population distributions with regard to age (14-65 years), gender and region/country. In order to obtain census representative results, the data were weighted based upon the most recent Eurostat statistics. Calculated for a sample of this size and considering the design-effect, the margin of error would be $\pm 1.1\%$ at a confidence level of 95 %.

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