

# Understanding the state of liberal societies: Researchers release open-access dataset to the public

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Liberal societies are under pressure worldwide: internally eroded by right-wing populist electoral victories and growing economic inequality,

externally challenged by the power play of autocratic governments.

The survey, "Public Attitudes towards the Liberal Script" (PALS), conducted in 30 countries with over 60,000 participants, provides a crucial basis for future research. The resulting dataset offers insights into attitudes toward liberal principles and institutions and is now available to the public.

The global comparative public opinion [survey](#) "Public Attitudes towards the Liberal Script" (PALS), conducted by the Comparative Survey research group of SCRIPTS between December 2021 and February 2023, examines how people view the [core values](#), principles, and institutions of the liberal script.

The survey investigated the attitudes of more than 60,000 people in 30 countries regarding key liberal components such as self-determination, market economy, and rule of law.

"PALS aims to enable a better understanding of what people think about the liberal societal model from a global perspective in order to look for crucial patterns regarding differences between countries as well as [social groups](#)," says Dr. Heiko Giebler, head of the "Comparative Survey" research group.

The datasets and documentation from the first and second waves of the survey are now freely accessible for non-commercial use and individual analyses via Refubium, Freie Universität Berlin's institutional repository.

## **Initial findings**

According to the PALS team, the results of the [survey](#) are already looking promising. In order to produce an initial analysis, the research team developed an index measuring respondents' support for core pillars

of the liberal script.

While a higher socio-economic development level correlates with stronger approval, traditionally liberal countries such as France, the United Kingdom, and the United States rank more in the middle. Authoritarian values and a feeling of social marginalization lead to a rejection of the liberal script in all countries.

In a question where respondents were asked to select topics that they considered a major threat to their respective country and its population, issues like gender inequality and immigration were chosen significantly less frequently than [economic inequality](#) or hunger and poverty on a global scale. This suggests that the prevalence of the former topics in media coverage does not necessarily reflect the actual concerns of the population.

## Ongoing studies

Karoline Estermann, a doctoral candidate at the Berlin Graduate School for Global and Transregional Studies (BGTS), has already used the PALS data to typologize patterns of liberal attitudes. Her study is guided by two questions: Are democracy and its principles such as self-determination, equality, rule of law, and progress perceived as desirable on a global scale? And what freedoms do people grant their fellow human beings?

She considers the preliminary results surprising. "While I expected global political crises to indicate more illiberal attitudes and polarization, the mood reflects moderate differences of opinion alongside widespread support for democratic core principles."

Lukas Antoine and Rasmus Ollroge, doctoral candidates and members of the "Comparative Survey" research group, have also been able to utilize

the PALS study for their own research. For his investigation into the acceptance of state surveillance measures, which heavily relies on PALS data, Antoine particularly appreciated "the global range of PALS, which includes countries from the Global South, covering more than just 'the usual suspects.'"

Ollroge, who is using the data for his dissertation on the winners and losers of globalization, highlights the high sample quality and methodological transparency, describing the open-source project as "groundbreaking for future research."

**More information:** Heiko Giebler et al, Public Attitudes towards the Liberal Script (PALS) Survey, *Freie Universität Berlin* (2024). [DOI: 10.17169/refubium-41374](https://doi.org/10.17169/refubium-41374)

PALS Datasets and Documentation: [www.scripts-berlin.eu/research...mentation/index.html](http://www.scripts-berlin.eu/research...mentation/index.html)

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