

ARE YOU RULED BY “THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE”?

**A majority of nations in Western Europe and America say ‘No’,
50% in USA, 49% in UK, 57% in Germany and 53% in Italy.**

Gallup International Releases its 8th Global Health of Democracy Report

March 13, 2025

Vienna, March 13, 2025

The Gallup International Association has today released the key findings from its 8th Global Health of Democracy Report. The Report is based on a statistically representative survey of around 44,000 respondents in 43 countries across the globe. This is the 8th in a series of polls conducted by the Gallup International; initiated at the turn of the millennium in the year 2000.

Research Methodology

1. The global sample for the latest Report covers 43 representative nations from all continents which comprise 66% of the world population, 75% of its Gross National Income and more than 80% of the world's manufacturing, research and development expenditure and international trade.
2. The **Gallup International Report on Health of Democracy** deals with two aspects of democracy, substantive and procedural.

Substantive democracy is measured by seeking public opinion on whether citizens in a country consider their government to be subject to “rule by the will of the people”.

Procedural democracy is measured by seeking public opinion on whether governments in their country are “elected through free and fair elections”.

The findings of the survey are provided country wise as well as grouped into key regions of the world. The regional grouping allows for distinguishing between the group of countries in Western Europe and North America, known to be early adopters of liberal democracy, and other nations of Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe which embraced democracy in the second half of the 20th century.

Key Findings

Skepticism about substantive democracy among its early adopters in Western Europe and North America.

Except for the four Scandinavian nations of Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland, most of the populations of Western Europe, UK and USA believe they are not ruled by the will of the people. The only exception outside Scandinavia is Switzerland. The average per capita Gross National Income (GNI) of the 18 countries listed below, representing the new first world, is measured to be around 51000 USD, at *purchasing power parity* (ppp). See Table #1.1 and 1.2

Notwithstanding their skepticism about substantive democracy most of these nations retain their trust in their procedural democracy. The figures provided in the Tables below are illustrative.

Table #1.1

Views about Democracy in The New First World

USA, UK, Japan & European Union	<i>Percent saying we are ruled by the will of the people</i>	<i>Percent saying our governments are elected through free and fair elections</i>
USA	43%	60%
United Kingdom	45%	70%
Japan	37%	46%
Germany	39%	69%
Italy	47%	60%
Austria	38%	70%
Spain	39%	62%
Portugal	54%	85%
Poland	30%	60%
Bulgaria	13%	19%
Latvia	14%	46%
Lithuania	35%	64%
Estonia	25%	56%

Source: Gallup International Association, END OF YEAR (EOY) SURVEY, 2024

Table #1.2

Scandinavia and Switzerland	Percent saying <i>we are ruled by the will of the people</i>	Percent saying <i>our governments are elected through free and fair elections</i>
Switzerland	69%	79%
Finland	72%	91%
Sweden	62%	90%
Denmark	53%	84%
Norway	59%	88%

Source: Gallup International Association, END OF YEAR (EOY) SURVEY, 2024

Political self-assertion among the rising economies of the former third world

8 of 43 nations polled by Gallup International belong to a group which were traditionally seen as third world or developing nations of Afro Asia, Latin America and parts of Eastern Europe. Over the last quarter of a century many of them upgraded their economic and political status. Most of them now sit as equals in the same forums as the nations which were traditionally seen as great powers or democracies belonging to the first world. The average per capita Gross National Income of this group of countries is measured to be around 24000 USD, at *purchasing power parity* (ppp). Among them India is an exception, as its per capita Gross National Income (GNI), is around 7000 USD only, however its other strengths make it a leading member of the group.

The latest Gallup International poll shows that the countries in this group have, beyond achieving economic success become self-assertive about the legitimacy of their political systems. The citizens of these countries give their governments high scores on both substantive and procedural aspects of democracy. In some cases, their self-assertion owes itself to their political recognition as leaders of their regions, even if the economic success of the country is doubtful. The Table below is illustrative.

Interestingly, **the new second world**, as we might call the countries included in this group is equally assertive about the success which its member countries have achieved regarding the procedural aspects of democracy. The relevant table is provided below.

Table #2

Views about Democracy in
The New Second World

The Upward Mobile Afro-Asia, Latin America & Russia	<i>Percent saying we are ruled by the will of the people</i>	<i>Percent saying our governments are elected through free and fair elections</i>
China	87%	90%
India	64%	69%
Indonesia	70%	81%
Malaysia	66%	67%
Mexico	58%	60%
Argentina	59%	74%
Russia	34%	61%
Republic of Korea	32%	55%

Source: Gallup International Association, END OF YEAR (EOY) SURVEY, 2024

Note : Russia and Republic of Korea in terms of Income per capita at PPP have more in common with Tier 1 countries . They have been added in Tier 2 as the classification is a mix of political and economic consideration.

The traditional third world comprising Afro Asia, Latin America and parts of Eastern Europe continues its struggle to catch up with the new second world.

Of the 43 nations polled by Gallup International 16 belong to a group which might be labelled as **the new third world**. The average per capita Gross National Income (GNI) of the countries included in the group listed below is measured to be around 13000 USD at *purchasing power parity* (ppp), a figure which might conceal fairly wide disparity of incomes within the group. Many of them are rapidly catching up while others continue to lag behind. In some cases, the status of their catching up behavior is mirrored in their self-assertion, or the lack of it, in their political system.

The following Table shows the views of this group about the substantive as well procedural aspects of democracy in the operations of their governments

Table #3

Views about Democracy in
The New Third World

The Left Behind Afro Asia, Latin America & parts of Eastern Europe	<i>Percent saying we are ruled by the will of the people</i>	<i>Percent saying our governments are elected through free and fair elections</i>
Bangladesh	67%	32%
Iran	59%	66%
Iraq	50%	37%
Kazakhstan	23%	34%
Armenia	38%	46%
Georgia	48%	55%
Kosovo	61%	79%
Bosnia & Herzegovina	10%	14%
Kenya	38%	33%
Colombia	34%	42%
Ecuador	52%	51%
Pakistan	39%	31%
Peru	38%	36%
Philippines	65%	57%
Serbia	23%	27%
Ukraine	40%	56%

Source: Gallup International Association, END OF YEAR (EOY) SURVEY, 2024

Commentary on poll findings by

Michael Nitsche, President Gallup International Association, Johnny Heald and Bilal Gilani, comprising the Gallup International global polling team:

While free and fair elections to elect governments can be measured by neutral experts, such as those from the Freedom House or the European Union Election observers' team, the feeling of being ruled by the will of the people is highly subjective; it can be gauged best by seeking its "feel" from those who experience it. The series of global polls conducted by Gallup International since the turn of the millennium, year 2000, have found out that democracy interpreted as "being ruled by the will of the people" means different things to different groups of people. This is what we measure. Gallup International's periodic Reports provide an Index of "felt democracy".

*Introducing the 8th poll in this series which began in the year 2000, our observation is that as the gap in the economic and military power of nations has visibly narrowed, new interpretations of democratic rules are being asserted by their practitioners. Thus, when 64% of Indians, 70% of Indonesians and 87% of Chinese assert that they are being "ruled by the will of the people", it might not necessarily mean the same as the 43% of Americans who say they are being ruled by the will of the people. Mindful of this dimension, our Report does not present one global figure for felt democracy and has instead grouped the results of the survey for three groups of countries which we have defined as the **new first**, the **new second** and the **new third world countries**.*

We greatly welcome further debate on the subject of "felt democracy".

Note to Editors:-

Sample Size and Mode of Field Work:

A total of 44,168 persons were interviewed globally in 43 countries on the question of will of the people and 42,756 in 42 countries on quality of elections. In each country a representative sample of around 1000 men and women was interviewed during October-February 2025 either face to face, via telephone or online. The margin of error for most country level surveys is between $\pm 3-5\%$ at 95% confidence level. For more details regarding methodology please contact : Bilal I Gilani , Board Member Gallup International on email : bilal.gilani@gallup.com.pk

About Gallup International

Gallup International Association (GIA) is the leading global independent association in market research and opinion polling.

For over 75 years Gallup International members have demonstrated their expert ability to conduct multi-country surveys on a comparable basis and deliver the highest quality. Our more than 100 members and partners are leading national institutes with a profound local knowledge of research methods and techniques, statistical sources, customs and culture differences of its own country and carefully selected by the Association Board. With only one member agency per country, members work together on a daily basis to share knowledge, new research techniques and tools, as well as to provide the most appropriate solutions to international research projects and service our clients to the best of our abilities.

For more information:

Michael Nitsche (in Vienna) +43664 1230060

Bilal Gilani (in Islamabad) +92 302 8554656

Kancho Stoychev (in Sofia), +359 88 8611025

Johnny Heald (in London), +44 7973 600308

Dr Munqith Dagher (in Baghdad) +962 7 9967 2229

Torbjorn Sjostrom (Stockholm) +4672 0700200

Ani Lortkipanidze (Tbilisi) +995 591 033311

For further details see website: www.gallup-international.com