Ref. Ares(2025)7055260 - 31/08/2025

More than a joke: humor in times of dictatorships

Deliverable 1.3
Report on survey's results

Document Identification & Project Details			
Project Acronym	MENTOR	***Grant agreement***	101196805
Project start date	01/03/2025	***Project duration***	24 months
Document status		***Related WP***	WP1
Version	V. 1	***Reference***	D1.3
Call identifier	CERV-2024-CITIZENS-REM		

Table of contents

Executive summary 4
Purpose & scope 4
Methodology in brief 4
Sample profile 4
Key findings 4
Cross-cutting insights 5
Limitations 5
1. Introduction 6
2. Methodology 6
2.1. Drafting the survey 6
2.2. Pilot survey 6
2.3. Finalizing the questionnaire 7
2.4. The final survey questionnaire 7
2.5. Dissemination 10
3. Findings 10
3.1. Sample composition 10
3.2. Experiences related to authoritarianism 12
3.3. Attitudes toward freedom of expression 13
3.4. Humor in democratic politics 16
3.5. Humor under dictatorship 17
4. Summary discussion 17
Appendix 1: The final questionnaire (English version) 19

More than a joke

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

List of tables and figures

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by Gender 10
Table 2. Distribution of respondents by age group 10
Table 3. Educational background of the respondents.....11
Figure 1. Share of survey responses by country ('Other' countries are excluded) 11
Table 4. Distribution of respondents by Country where they were living.....11
Table 5. Categories of persons who lived under dictatorhip or authoritarian regime.....12
Table 6. Relation to family members who lived under dictatorship or authoritarian regimes 12
Table 7. Participation in resistance movements by age group.....13
Figure 2. Attitudes toward freedom of expression (mean) 14
Figure 3. Speech Tolerance Index (STI) by age group.....15
Figure 4. Speech Tolerance Index (STI) by Gender 15
Figure 5. Attitudes regarding humor in democratic politics (percent of agreement) 16
Table 8. Most effective forms of political humor.....16
Table 9. Perceived risks of using humor in politics.....16

More than a joke

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Executive summary

Purpose & scope

This deliverable reports on WP1 of the MENTOR project, which investigates: (i) personal/familial experiences with dictatorship/authoritarianism; (ii) involvement in resistance; (iii) attitudes toward freedom of speech; (iv) perceptions of humor and its democratic role; (v) views on "limits" to humor; and (vi) awareness of humor's use under authoritarian regimes. The instrument was drafted, piloted, and finalized for EU-wide dissemination with ethics approval and data-protection safeguards.

Methodology in brief

A multi-language (EN/DE/EL/IT/ES/FR) online questionnaire (25 items) combined socio-demographics, dichotomous experience items with conditional open fields, a six-item Likert block on free speech, and a set of questions on political humor (importance, forms, limits, risks), plus items connecting humor to authoritarian contexts. The pilot surfaced clarity/usability issues that were subsequently corrected (e.g., ISCED education, consent placement, country dropdown). Final fielding yielded **N=419** completed by end-August 2025.

Sample profile

Respondents skew female (~63%) and highly educated; age is centered in the 20–35 and 36–50 brackets; geography reflects partner networks with notable concentrations (e.g., Greece, Austria) and a long tail of EU and non-EU countries. These features indicate a **non-probability sample**, suitable for analytical contrasts and hypothesis generation, not population estimation.

Key findings

1. **Freedom of expression: principled support with targeted limits.**
   - Strong rejection of press censorship; broad support for public expression.
   - High support for **legal consequences** for targeted online insults.
   - Low tolerance for **historical-denial speech** (e.g., Holocaust denial).

   Interpretation: Respondents express a **rights-affirming yet harm-sensitive** approach consistent with EU fundamental rights frameworks.
2. **Speech Tolerance Index (STI) and subgroup patterns.**
   - STI (1–5, higher = more permissive) averages around **3.0**; internal consistency is **modest** (α≈0.40), which supports descriptive—but not scale-strict—use.
   - **Gender:** Men exhibit **higher speech tolerance** than women; this gap **persists** after controlling for age, education, country, and authoritarian experience.
   - **Age:** Raw means rise with age, but the gradient becomes **non-significant** in multivariate models.
   - **Item-level:** Largest gender gaps appear on **online-insult sanctions**, **forbidding insulting cartoons**, and **historical-denial permissiveness**—with men more permissive across these domains.

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

3. **Authoritarian experience and resistance.**
    - **56%+** report self/family experience under dictatorship/authoritarianism; **27%+** report involvement in resistance.
    - Language-aware glossing of open responses shows most experiences located in **parents** and **grandparents**, aligning with historical periods of repression in parts of Europe.
    - Authoritarian proximity shows **weak positive** association with speech tolerance descriptively; this attenuates with controls.
4. **Humor in democratic politics: value and risks.**
    - Overwhelming agreement that humor **matters in democracy** and can **challenge the status quo**.
    - Most-valued forms: **satire, parody, irony** (cognitive/critical), far outpacing slapstick.
    - Main risks: **trivializing serious issues** and **distracting from real problems**, followed by **offense** and **credibility loss**.
      Interpretation: Stakeholders should design political-humor interventions that **foreground critique** while **mitigating trivialization** and **distraction**.

Cross-cutting insights

- The combination of **harm awareness** (online abuse, denialism) and **rights endorsement** produces a **bounded-liberal** profile that is practicable for policy and pedagogy: uphold expression as the default while articulating the **rationale** for limited, proportionate boundaries.
- The **heritage of humorous resistance** has tangible presence in family memory. This provides a culturally grounded entry point for **storytelling, education, and public events** that connect democratic practice today with past experiences of repression.

Limitations

- **Sampling:** Convenience sampling with country clustering and high education levels; results are **not** EU-representative.
- **Measurement:** The STI is a **broad composite** with modest internal consistency; item-level interpretation remains important.

More than a joke

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

1. Introduction

MENTOR project's WP1 aims to collect information regarding (i) whether the respondents and their families have experienced periods of dictatorships/authoritarian regimes; (ii) whether the respondents/their families have been involved in resistance; (iii) perception of the freedom of speech; (iv) perception of the term "humor" and what is its role in nowadays democracy; (v) whether humor shall have limits; (vi) awareness about the use of humor in dictatorships. To complete this task, a questionnaire has been drafted and tested before opening to the public. In this paper we present the methodology of the survey, the questions included and survey's dissemination plan, along with the results of the survey and the relevant analysis of the answers.

2. Methodology

The methodology followed to complete the survey of WP1 followed the following steps:

- Drafting the survey
- Pilot survey
- Finalizing the questionnaire
- Opening the survey to the public

In the following sections we will present the abovementioned steps.

2.1. Drafting the survey

The survey instrument was drafted to serve Work Package 1 (WP1) objectives defined in the Grant Agreement: to capture perceptions about freedom of speech and its democratic relevance, gauge views on humor and its "limits," measure awareness of humor as resistance under dictatorships, and gather preliminary indications of willingness to engage with the project. The draft was prepared in English for subsequent dissemination and translation by partners, with the English version foreseen for EU-wide distribution.

More than a joke

2.2. Pilot survey

To evaluate the instrument's usability and clarity prior to fielding, the team conducted a structured pilot comprising 16 items covering four domains: General Usability, Clarity of Questions, Suggestions for Improvement, and Final Thoughts. The pilot was issued to 36 invitees (plus the survey administrator) on 14 May 2025, with reminders on 19 and 26 May 2025; partners also re-alerted their nominees on 26 May to ensure correct identification of the pilot. The target-group composition was intentionally diverse – particularly stakeholders across partner countries and the EU (academia, NGOs, youth-focused professionals, and policymakers) – with the remainder balanced among young adults (19–29), first/second-generation migrants, and the general public. Participation by group was: stakeholders (n=21), migrants (n=5), general public (n=6), and young adults (n=4). Of 36 invitees, 14 completed the pilot and nine started but did not finish; one opted out.

Usability findings were positive: respondents found navigation very easy (64%) or somewhat easy (36%); no technical issues were reported; layout/design was rated Good (57%) or Excellent

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

(43%); and instructions were clear. Nevertheless, 43% flagged confusing or potentially ambiguous items, including agreement-scale labeling, double negations in Section 3, wording on experiences with dictatorship/authoritarianism, and concerns about neutrality in emotionally loaded items (e.g., a Holocaust denial statement). Reviewers also recommended adding definitions/examples (e.g., humor types), aligning education categories to ISCED, clarifying terms like "insult" in legal-consequences questions, and converting the country item into a drop-down. A minority proposed exploring broader issues such as media gatekeeping and audibility of dissenting views. Overall satisfaction was high: 86% were satisfied or very satisfied; two were neutral.

2.3. Finalizing the questionnaire

Informed by pilot evidence, the team implemented targeted refinements: (i) comments and clarifying text were added where useful; (ii) the education item was re-specified to the UNESCO/Eurostat ISCED framework; (iii) the country question became a drop-down listing all 27 EU Member States with an "Other" option and free-text field; and (iv) informed-consent information was relocated beneath the welcome message with a single acknowledgment checkbox and links to the Privacy Policy and Legal Notice. Certain items – purposefully designed to detect radicalized or boundary-testing attitudes (e.g., on Holocaust denial, absolute free-speech claims) – were retained unchanged to preserve construct sensitivity, and no new items were added where suggestions lacked operational specificity. The finalized instrument was produced in six languages (EN/DE/EL/IT/ES/FR) and made available for deployment (Appendix 1).

This three-step approach ensured methodological rigor – iterative drafting grounded in WP1 objectives, empirical pre-testing of form and content, and evidence-based revision – while maintaining the analytical integrity required to address sensitive attitudes central to the project's aims.

More than a joke

2.4. The final survey questionnaire

This section presents the structure and content of the finalized questionnaire. The instrument is an online, anonymous survey (LimeSurvey) approved by Panteion University's Research Ethics Committee and open to all EU citizens. It comprises 25 items organized into five thematic sections that together elicit respondents' background, attitudes toward freedom of speech, views on political humor in democracies, and knowledge of humor under authoritarian contexts.

Section 1 – Basic Information

The first section collects core socio-demographic and contextual variables using single-response categorical items. It records gender (Male, Female, Other, Prefer not to answer) and age group (under 20, 20–35, 36–50, 51–65, over 65), enabling age- and gender-disaggregated analysis while preserving respondent anonymity. Educational attainment is captured with ISCED-aligned categories, ranging from no formal education through doctoral level, permitting harmonized reporting across EU settings. Country of residence is elicited via an enumerated list of the 27 EU Member States plus an "Other" option that triggers a follow-up free-text field, allowing coverage

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

of non-EU cases or mobility situations while retaining comparability for EU-focused analysis. Collectively, these items provide the minimum descriptive frame for weighting, subgroup analysis, and the interpretation of attitudinal patterns in subsequent sections.

Section 2 – Personal or Family Background

Section 2 introduces two experience-based, dichotomous questions with conditional open-ended prompts. First, respondents indicate whether they or an immediate family member have lived under a dictatorship/authoritarian regime; a "Yes" response opens a brief free-text field to contextualize the experience. Second, respondents report whether they or a family member participated in resistance movements; again, a "Yes" response triggers a short narrative elaboration. These items are designed to situate later attitudes within relevant life histories and intergenerational memories while maintaining parsimony. A written reminder reiterates the anonymity of participation, which is appropriate given the sensitivity of the topic.

Section 3 – Attitudes Toward Freedom of Speech

This section employs six Likert-scale statements (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to profile normative orientations toward free expression, offensive speech, and the permissibility of legal or policy constraints. The items cover: (i) whether cartoons that insult religious groups should be forbidden; (ii) whether censorship of journalists is always wrong; (iii) whether people should be free to deny historical events (e.g., the Holocaust); (iv) whether everyone should be able to say what they want in public; (v) whether people who insult others online should face legal consequences; and (vi) whether limiting free speech is sometimes necessary. The set balances absolute and conditional claims, taps tolerance for controversial or harmful speech, and introduces a digital-platform dimension (online insults). The symmetrical response format supports reliability and permits construction of thematic indices (e.g., speech absolutism vs. conditionality) in downstream analysis.

More than a joke

Section 4 – Humor and Democracy

Section 4 examines how respondents perceive humor's political functions and boundaries within democratic life through a mix of single-choice, multiple-choice, and attitudinal questions. It first asks whether humor is important in politics (Yes/No), then invites respondents to select the types of political humor they consider most effective – Satire, Irony, Sarcasm, Parody, Slapstick – using a multi-select format that accommodates plural preferences. Next, a question on whether humor can effectively challenge the political status quo (Yes/No/Not sure) explores perceived efficacy. A multi-select item on "risks of using humor in politics" (Offending people, Trivializing serious issues, Undermining credibility, Distracting from real problems, Other) captures perceived externalities and includes an "Other" write-in for specificity. Two concluding single-choice items probe whether humor contributes to a healthy democracy and whether there should be limits to humor in a democratic society (Yes/No/Not sure). This section therefore maps both instrumental beliefs (effectiveness, risks) and normative boundaries (limits), enabling fine-grained segmentation by humor type and by respondents' tolerance for transgression.

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Section 5 – Humor under Dictatorship

The final section returns to the project's core historical and comparative focus by asking whether respondents know of examples in their country where humor was used to resist or cope with dictatorship/authoritarianism (Yes/No). An affirmative answer opens a brief free-text description field to capture concrete cases (e.g., jokes, satire, cartooning, coded performances) and their perceived role. A follow-up question asks whether the respondent or a family member was involved in such acts, helping to distinguish direct, familial, or purely vicarious knowledge. These items link the survey's contemporary democratic frame to lived or remembered practices under repressive regimes, encouraging collection of short, qualitative exemplars that can be thematically coded and cross-referenced with demographic and attitudinal variables.

Instrument Features and Design Considerations

Across sections, the instrument combines closed-ended formats (single-choice, multiple-choice, Likert scales) with strategically placed open fields triggered by skip logic ("Yes" or "Other" conditions). This design maintains brevity while allowing contextual nuance where most policy-relevant (e.g., personal experiences of authoritarianism; concrete examples of subversive humor; unlisted risk perceptions). The Likert block in Section 3 is deliberately balanced to include strongly "absolutist" statements and "conditional" boundary-setting statements, which facilitates the derivation of composite measures for subsequent analysis (e.g., indices of speech permissiveness or intolerance for harmful/offending content). The inclusion of ISCED-style education categories and the comprehensive EU Member State list ensure harmonized, cross-national reporting in line with EU comparability standards. Ethical safeguards – explicit REC approval and anonymity – are clearly indicated within the instrument flow.

Analytical Utility

The questionnaire's architecture supports multiple levels of analysis for the project's objectives. Section 1 variables enable demographic weighting and subgroup comparisons (e.g., age-cohort differences in tolerance for controversial speech; education gradients in perceptions of humor's risks). Section 2's experiential items allow testing whether personal/familial proximity to authoritarianism correlates with stricter or looser boundaries around speech or political humor. Section 3's Likert items can be factor-analyzed or composited to distinguish clusters of respondents (e.g., "speech absolutists," "contextual restrictivists"). Section 4 operationalizes beliefs about humor's democratic value and its potential harms, with item formats that permit both prevalence estimates and typological profiling by humor form. Section 5 adds concise qualitative data to anchor historical and national specificities, which can be thematically coded (e.g., oral joke cycles, cartooning traditions, satirical theatre) and, where relevant, triangulated with respondents' attitudes. In sum, the instrument is compact yet methodologically rich, aligning descriptive breadth with targeted depth on the project's central themes.

More than a joke

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Overall, the finalized questionnaire offers a coherent, ethics-compliant, and analysis-ready basis for assessing attitudes toward free speech and political humor, and for documenting the remembered or transmitted practices of humorous resistance in authoritarian contexts across the EU.

2.5. Dissemination

A special online event was held on Wednesday 2 July 2025, to present the survey to the public. Links to the survey were posted on the project's website and social media on a regular basis to increase visibility of the project and the survey. Until the end of August 2025 419 complete answers were collected.

3. Findings

The dataset comprises N = 419 responses. Valid-N varies by question due to partial completion. Substantive items show robust response volume (e.g., each Likert item has N≈413–414 valid).

3.1. Sample composition

Almost two out of three respondents (≈63%) were female (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by Gender

Gender	N	%
Female	260	62.8
Male	144	34.8
Other	3	0.7
Prefer not to answer	7	1.7
Total	**414**	**100.0**

More than a joke

Most respondents were middle aged (36.7%) or young adults (34.8%) (Table 2) and had a highly educated profile: 46.5% held a Master's Degree, 24.3% a Bachelor's, and 17.3% a Doctorate (Table 3).

Table 2. Distribution of respondents by age group

Age group	N	%
under 20	7	1.7
20–35	144	34.8
36–50	152	36.7
51–65	91	22.0
over 65	20	4.8
Total	**414**	**100.0**

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Table 3. Educational background of the respondents

Educational background	Count	%
Primary education	5	1.2
Lower Secondary Education	2	0.5
Upper Secondary Education	20	4.9
Post-secondary non-Tertiary Education	9	2.2
Short-cycle tertiary education	13	3.2
Bachelor's degree or equivalent tertiary education level	100	24.3
Master's or equivalent level	191	46.5
Doctoral degree or equivalent tertiary education level	71	17.3
Total	**411**	**100.0**

Citizens from twenty EU countries and fifteen non-EU countries completed the questionnaire. While respondents from participating countries were in most cases at the top of the chart, answers from Portugal and Romania were also numerous, because of their experiences of dictatorships and authoritarian regimes (Figure 1 and Table 4). Serbia ranks at the top of the non-EU (i.e., 'Other') countries.

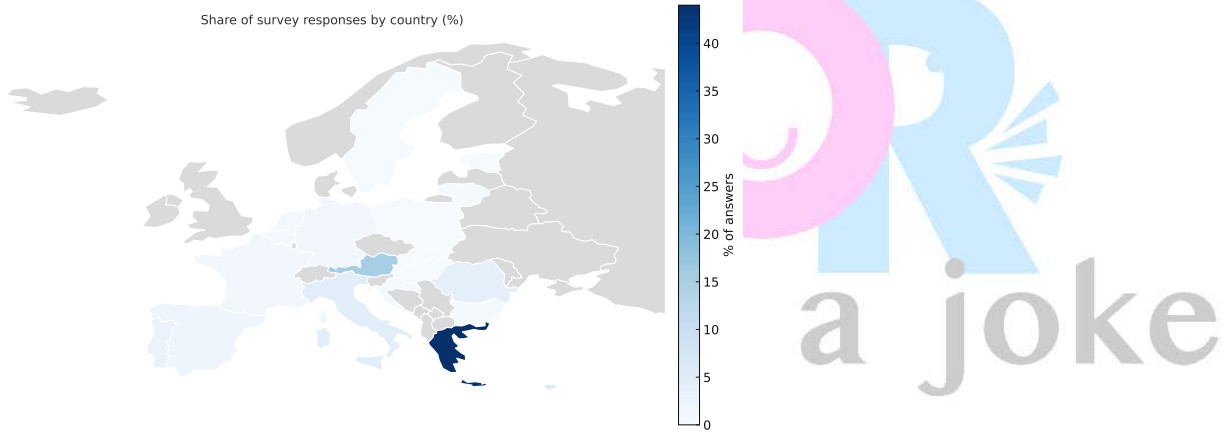

Figure 1. Share of survey responses by country ('Other' countries are excluded)

Table 4. Distribution of respondents by Country where they were living

Country	N	%
Austria	62	15.3
Belgium	5	1.2
Bulgaria	3	0.7
Croatia	3	0.7
Cyprus	24	5.9
Estonia	1	0.2
France	6	1.5
Germany	6	1.5

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Greece	178	44.0
Hungary	2	0.5
Italy	20	4.9
Lithuania	3	0.7
Malta	2	0.5
Netherlands	4	1.0
Poland	1	0.2
Portugal	12	3.0
Romania	16	4.0
Slovakia	1	0.2
Spain	9	2.2
Sweden	2	0.5
Other	45	11.1
Total	**405**	**100.0**

These distributions reflect a convenience sample anchored in partner networks; as such, inferences should be framed as analytical (theory-driven and comparative) rather than statistically representative of EU populations.

3.2. Experiences related to authoritarianism

More than half of the respondents (56.3%) mentioned that they or someone in their immediate family lived under a dictatorship or authoritarian regime.

We used machine translation to recognize and normalize kinship terms and self-pronouns from other languages into English, which is crucial for classification (who experienced it, and what relationship). The rest of the text remains in the original language to preserve nuance and avoid over-interpreting without a full machine translation system.

In several cases the explanation included brief mentions like country names, time periods, or regime labels without pronouns or kin terms. It was usually the parents or grandparents of the respondent who experienced such a regime (Table 5 and Table 6).

Table 5. Categories of persons who lived under dictatorhip or authoritarian regime

Category	**N**
Family	100
Respondent	18
Respondent (and family)	6
Unclear	108

Table 6. Relation to family members who lived under dictatorship or authoritarian regimes

Relation to family members	**N**	**%**

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Parents	82	63.6
Grandparents	33	25.6
Spouse or partner	9	7.0
Children	4	3.1
Siblings	1	0.8
Total	**129**	**100.0**

Almost half of them (27.4%) mentioned that they or someone in their immediate family participated in resistance movements. The older the respondents the higher their personal involvement in resistance movements (Table 7).

Table 7. Participation in resistance movements by age group

Age group	Family	Respondent	Respondent and family	Unclear	Total
under 20	0.0	0.0	33.3	66.7	100.0
20–35	45.6	4.4	0.0	50.0	100.0
36–50	44.7	7.4	4.3	43.6	100.0
51–65	36.8	10.5	5.3	47.4	100.0
over 65	20.0	10.0	0.0	70.0	100.0

This comparatively high experiential proximity (by EU standards) likely reflects regional composition (Southeast/Central-Eastern Europe) and the project's topic salience in partner networks.

3.3. Attitudes toward freedom of expression

The responses to the block of questions regarding attitudes toward freedom of expression indicate a clear pattern (Figure 2):

- Strong support for sanctions on online insults (highest mean),
- Broad rejection of press censorship and general support for open expression,
- Low tolerance for Holocaust denial and limited support for forbidding insulting cartoons.

More than a joke

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

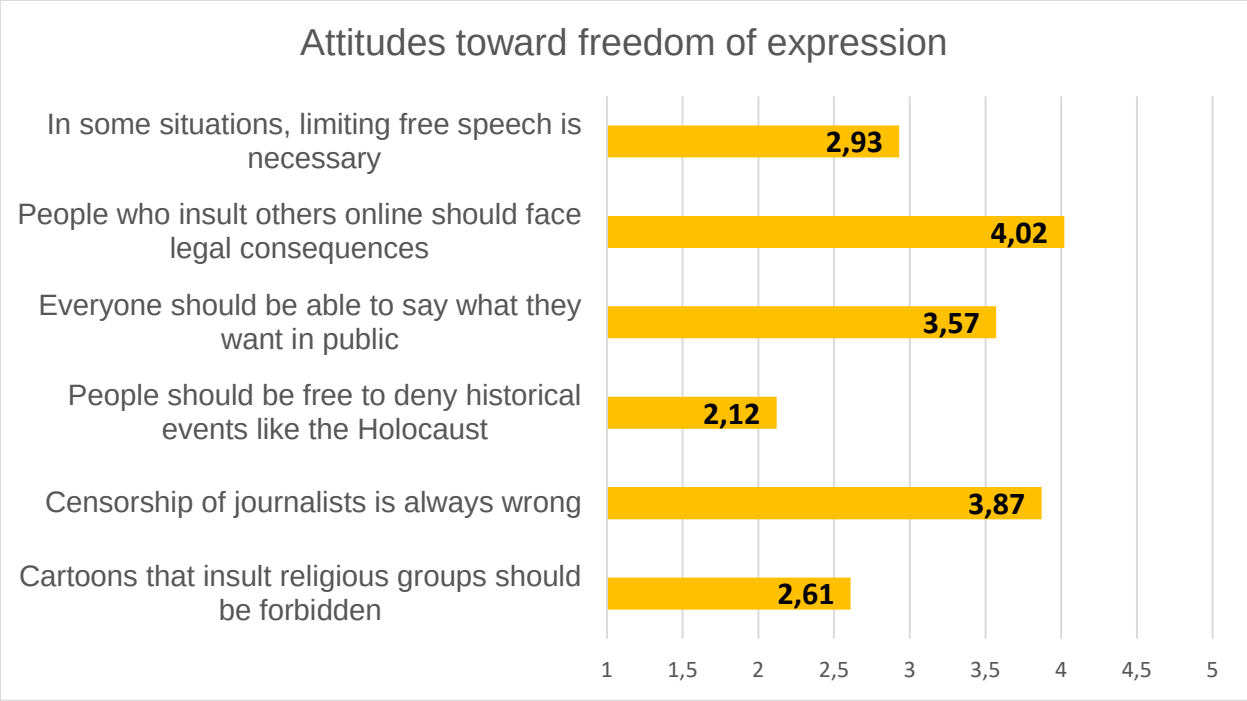

Figure 2. Attitudes toward freedom of expression (mean)

Together, these results suggest a public that values free expression in principle but endorses specific boundaries where speech is perceived as harmful (e.g., targeted online abuse, historically injurious denialism).

To synthesize the six items, a *Speech Tolerance Index* (STI) was computed (higher = more permissive of speech). Restrictive items were reverse-coded ("forbid cartoons," "legal consequences," and "limiting speech necessary"). The index yields mean = 3.00 (SD = 0.66) with Cronbach's α = 0.403. The alpha indicates modest internal consistency: the items capture distinct facets of speech attitudes rather than a single strong latent factor, so the index is best used descriptively (group contrasts) rather than as a high-reliability scale.
The STI rises with age (Figure 3) indicating that older respondents tend, on average, to endorse a more permissive stance on speech, though the effect is gradual rather than sharp.

More than a Joke

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

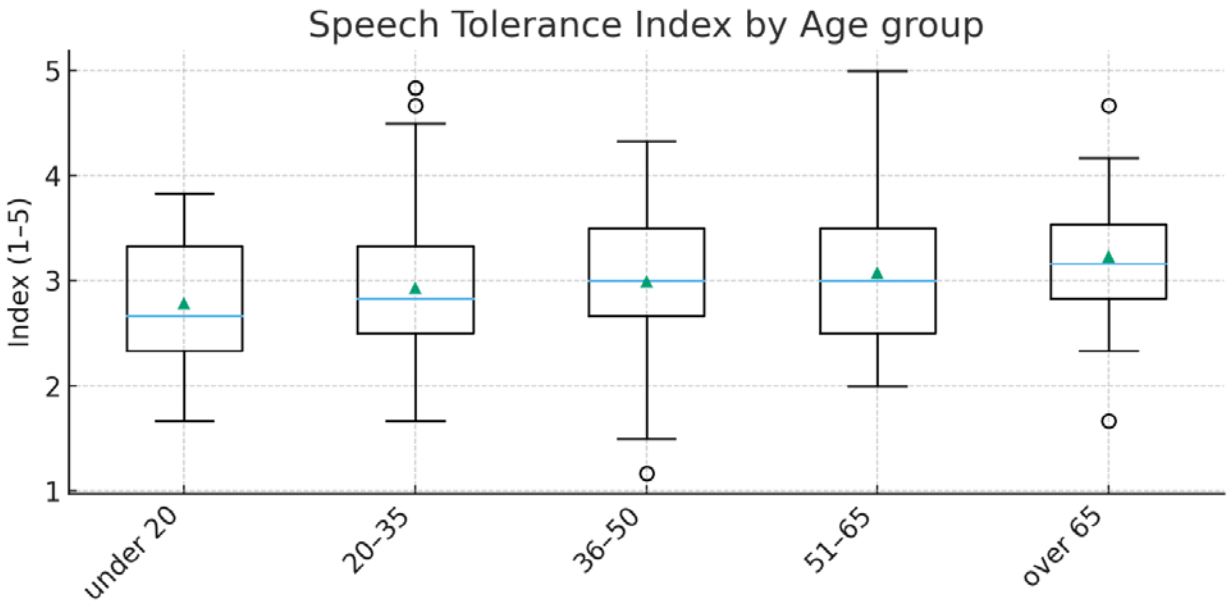

Figure 3. Speech Tolerance Index (STI) by age group

Men, on average, take a more speech-permissive position than women in this sample (Figure 4). The difference is noticeable in the boxplot but not huge; given the convenience sample and unequal group sizes, it should be interpreted as indicative.

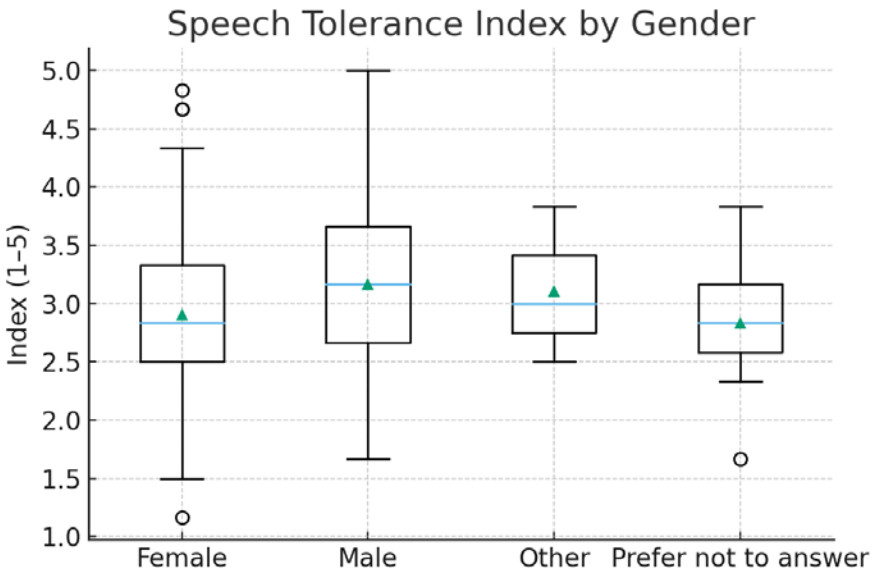

Figure 4. Speech Tolerance Index (STI) by Gender

We used Multivariate Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression using STI as dependent variable and Age and Gender (Model 1), or Age, Gender, Education, Country and Dictatorship experience (Model 2) as independent variables. In both models, the gender difference in speech tolerance is

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

robust to controls; the age gradient visible in raw means does not reach conventional significance once we adjust for covariates.

3.4. Humor in democratic politics

Four statements on the importance and efficacy, as well as the contribution of humor in democracy and its limits, were proposed asking respondents to agree or disagree. Respondents overwhelmingly value humor in democratic life and see it as politically efficacious, yet a slim majority favors some limits—again revealing a principled-but-bounded orientation (Figure 5).

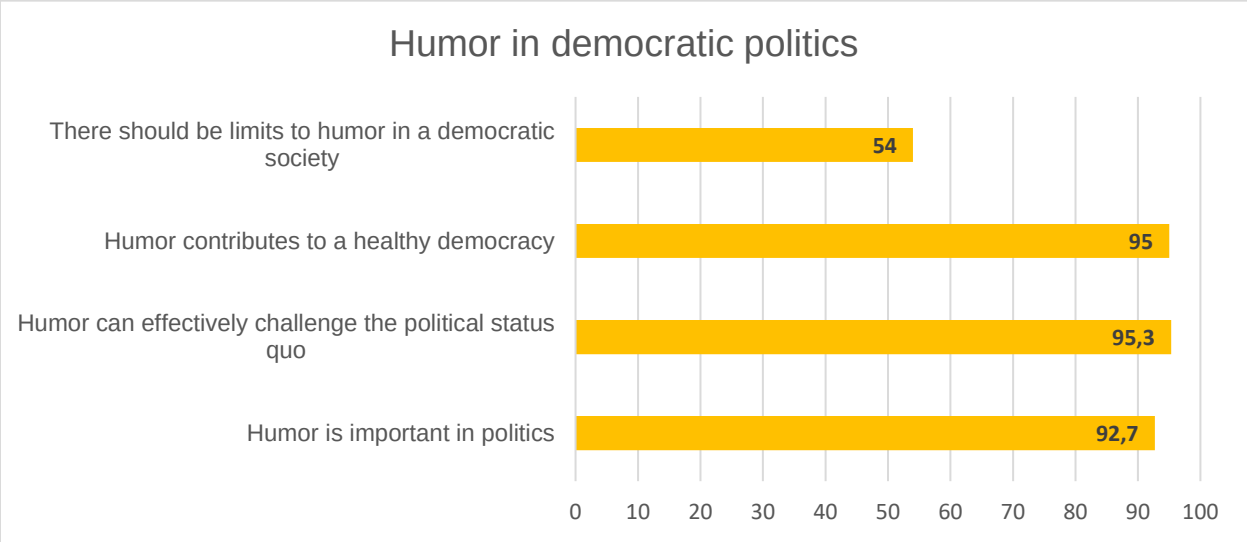

Figure 5. Attitudes regarding humor in democratic politics (percent of agreement)

When asked to select the most effective forms of political humor, respondents prioritize cognitive/critical forms (satire, parody, irony) over physical slapstick (Table 8). This aligns with the project's focus on humor as critique and resistance

More than a joke

Table 8. Most effective forms of political humor

Humor type (multiple selection)	**N**	**%**
Satire (exposing and criticizing through wit and exaggeration)	347	82.8
Parody (imitation for comic effect or criticism)	210	50.1
Sarcasm (sharp or cutting remarks, often with mocking intent)	207	49.4
Irony (saying the opposite of what is meant, often for humorous or emphatic effect)	197	47.0
Slapstick (physical comedy based on exaggerated actions)	86	20.5

The risk profile clusters around issue dilution and agenda distraction, with a secondary concern for offense and credibility loss (Table 9).

Table 9. Perceived risks of using humor in politics

Risks of using humor in politics (multiple selection)	**N**	**%**

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Trivializing serious issues	251	59.9
Distracting from real problems	220	52.5
Offending people	192	45.8
Undermining credibility	148	35.3
Other	17	4.1

3.5. Humor under dictatorship

Among those answering who mentioned that they know examples where humor was used to resist or cope with dictatorship or authoritarianism in their country, brief descriptions highlight jokes, satirical songs, plays, and references to various authoritarian regimes (terms like regime, communist, Greek Junta, songs/plays feature prominently in frequency counts).

4. Summary discussion

The survey offers a coherent picture of respondents who, while strongly endorsing freedom of expression in principle, support **targeted boundaries** where speech is perceived to inflict tangible harm. This dual orientation is visible across multiple indicators. First, respondents reject censorship of journalism and generally affirm the right to speak; second, they favor **legal consequences for targeted online insults** and show **low tolerance for denial of historical atrocities**. Together, these responses point to a normative stance that is simultaneously **rights-affirming** and **harm-aware**, and that resonates with EU jurisprudence on balancing expression with protection from incitement and discrimination.

Experiential proximity to authoritarianism is comparatively high in the sample: over half report that they or an immediate family member lived under a dictatorship/authoritarian regime, and more than a quarter note involvement in resistance. Qualitative follow-ups—as normalized via the language-aware glossing you implemented—show that such proximity is most frequently located among **parents and grandparents**, with fewer references to spouses/partners, siblings, or descendants. This pattern comports with the historical timelines of authoritarian rule in several participating or adjacent countries and helps explain why awareness of humorous resistance (jokes, satire, coded performance) is not merely abstract but anchored in **intergenerational memory**. While bivariate contrasts suggested slightly higher speech tolerance among those with authoritarian experience, **multivariate models** indicate that the **gender difference** (men > women) remains robust after adjusting for age, education, country, and experience, whereas the age gradient attenuates to non-significance. These results recommend treating “experience” as a **contextual moderator** rather than a simple linear driver of speech permissiveness.

On attitudes toward political humor in democratic life, respondents attribute **clear democratic value** to humor (both intrinsic and instrumental) and identify **cognitive/critical forms**—satire, parody, irony—as the most effective. At the same time, they are attentive to risks, especially **trivialization** and **agenda distraction**. This risk profile is important for future WP activities: it

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

suggests that **communication design** should foreground clarity of purpose and audience sensitivity, and that evaluation frameworks should track both democratic benefits (voice, critique, engagement) and potential externalities (misinterpretation, offense, message dilution).

Methodologically, the Speech Tolerance Index (STI) provides a **descriptive composite** ($\alpha \approx 0.40$), useful for group comparisons but not a high-reliability scale. Item heterogeneity—mixing absolutist and conditional statements—likely reflects the **multidimensional** nature of speech norms (e.g., platform governance vs. historical denialism vs. offense to religious groups). This heterogeneity is a feature rather than a flaw for a scoping WP: it surfaces **where** permissiveness is elastic and **why** respondents differentiate across contexts. We therefore recommend retaining item-level analysis in downstream work and, where needed, developing **second-order sub-indices** (e.g., "harm-sensitive tolerance," "absolutist orientation") for targeted modelling.

Limitations should temper interpretation. The sample is a **convenience sample** with country clustering (notably Greece and Austria) and a highly educated profile; as such, inferences should be framed as **analytical** rather than representative of EU publics. Valid-N varies slightly by item, and some open-ended responses lack explicit self/kin markers even after glossing. Notwithstanding these constraints, the dataset is **fit for purpose** in WP1: it validates construct coverage, reveals meaningful cross-group contrasts (especially by gender), and provides a bank of **qualitative exemplars** linking humor and resistance that can inform materials, case selection, and stakeholder engagement in later WPs.

Implications for the project and EU-facing recommendations.

1. **Design of engagement materials:** Emphasize satire/parody/irony while providing **contextual cues** that mitigate trivialization (e.g., framing devices, content warnings, explanatory captions).
2. **Pedagogical and policy interfaces:** Build modules that articulate **why** some boundaries command wide support (e.g., targeted online abuse, denialism), connecting to EU legal-ethical standards without turning the exercise into compliance training.
3. **Evaluation and learning:** Track **audience reception** across demographics, especially gender, and test whether **co-presenting** rights-based arguments with harm-reduction rationales improves acceptance.
4. **Heritage of resistance:** Curate short, country-specific vignettes of humorous resistance (drawn from the open-ended corpus) to preserve **historical memory** and to model legitimate, non-violent dissent practices.

More than a joke

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Appendix 1: The final questionnaire (English version)

MENTOR Project: "More than a joke: humour in times of dictatorships"

MENTOR Project is researching the use of humor in times of dictatorships. All EU citizens are welcome to complete the questionnaire.
The survey has been approved by Panteion University's Research Ethics Committee.

MENTOR Project

There are 25 questions in this survey.

SECTION 1: BASIC INFORMATION

A few things about yourself

Gender

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female
- ◯ Other
- ◯ Prefer not to answer

Age group

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- ◯ under 20
- ◯ 20–35
- ◯ 36–50
- ◯ 51–65
- ◯ over 65

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Educational background

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- ◯ No formal education
- ◯ Primary education
- ◯ Lower Secondary Education
- ◯ Upper Secondary Education
- ◯ Post-secondary non-Tertiary Education
- ◯ Short-cycle tertiary education
- ◯ Bachelors degree or equivalent tertiary education level
- ◯ Master's or equivalent level
- ◯ Doctoral degree or equivalent tertiary education level

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Country where you live

If you choose 'Other' please also specify your choice in the accompanying text field.
Please choose **only one** of the following:

- ◯ Austria
- ◯ Belgium
- ◯ Bulgaria
- ◯ Croatia
- ◯ Cyprus
- ◯ Czech Republic
- ◯ Denmark
- ◯ Estonia
- ◯ Finland
- ◯ France
- ◯ Germany
- ◯ Greece
- ◯ Hungary
- ◯ Ireland
- ◯ Italy
- ◯ Latvia
- ◯ Lithuania
- ◯ Luxembourg
- ◯ Malta
- ◯ Netherlands
- ◯ Poland
- ◯ Portugal
- ◯ Romania
- ◯ Slovakia
- ◯ Slovenia
- ◯ Spain
- ◯ Sweden

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

◯ Other

Which

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Other' at question ' [Q003]' (Country where you live)

Please write your answer here:

SECTION 2: PERSONAL OR FAMILY BACKGROUND

Have you or someone in your immediate family lived under a dictatorship or authoritarian regime?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

◯ Yes
◯ No

If yes, please briefly explain

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question ' [Q561854]' (Have you or someone in your immediate family lived under a dictatorship or authoritarian regime?)

Please write your answer here:

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Have you or a member of your family participated in resistance movements?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

◯ Yes
◯ No

If yes, please briefly explain

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question ' [Q767906]' (Have you or a member of your family participated in resistance movements?)

Please write your answer here:

Reminder: your response to the questionnaire is anonymous.

SECTION 3: ATTITUDES TOWARD FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements (Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree | 5 = Strongly agree)

Cartoons that insult religious groups should be forbidden

Please choose **only one** of the following:

◯ 1
◯ 2
◯ 3
◯ 4
◯ 5

Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree | 5 = Strongly agree

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Censorship of journalists is always wrong

Please choose **only one** of the following:

◯ 1
◯ 2
◯ 3
◯ 4
◯ 5

Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree | 5 = Strongly agree

People should be free to deny historical events like the Holocaust

Please choose **only one** of the following:

◯ 1
◯ 2
◯ 3
◯ 4
◯ 5

Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree | 5 = Strongly agree

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Everyone should be able to say what they want in public

Please choose **only one** of the following:

◯ 1
◯ 2
◯ 3
◯ 4
◯ 5

Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree | 5 = Strongly agree

People who insult others online should face legal consequences

Please choose **only one** of the following:

◯ 1
◯ 2
◯ 3
◯ 4
◯ 5

Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree | 5 = Strongly agree

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

In some situations, limiting free speech is necessary

Please choose **only one** of the following:

◯ 1
◯ 2
◯ 3
◯ 4
◯ 5

Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree | 5 = Strongly agree

SECTION 4: HUMOR AND DEMOCRACY

Do you think humor is important in politics?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

◯ Yes
◯ No

Which type of humor do you think is most effective in politics?

Select all that apply
Please choose **all** that apply:

☐ Satire (exposing and criticizing through wit and exaggeration)
☐ Irony (saying the opposite of what is meant, often for humorous or emphatic effect)
☐ Sarcasm (sharp or cutting remarks, often with mocking intent)
☐ Parody (imitation for comic effect or criticism)
☐ Slapstick (physical comedy based on exaggerated actions)

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Can humor be used effectively to challenge the political status quo?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

◯ Yes
◯ No
◯ Not sure

What are the risks of using humor in politics?

Select all that apply
Please choose **all** that apply:

☐ Offending people
☐ Trivializing serious issues
☐ Undermining credibility
☐ Distracting from real problems
☐ Other

If you chose 'Other', please explain

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was at question ' [Q867561]' (What are the risks of using humor in politics?)

Please write your answer here:

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Do you believe humor contributes to a healthy democracy?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Not sure

Should there be limits to humor in a democratic society?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Not sure

SECTION 5: HUMOR UNDER DICTATORSHIP

Do you know of examples where humor was used to resist or cope with dictatorship/authoritarianism in your country?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

If yes, please describe briefly

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question ' [Q867565]' (Do you know of examples where humor was used to resist or cope with dictatorship/authoritarianism in your country?)

Please write your answer here:

Were you or a family member involved?

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:
Answer was 'Yes' at question ' [Q867565]' (Do you know of examples where humor was used to resist or cope with dictatorship/authoritarianism in your country?)

Please choose **only one** of the following:

◯ Yes
◯ No

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY!

If you wish to receive further notice or volunteer for the project, please

Submit your survey.
Thank you for completing this survey.

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.