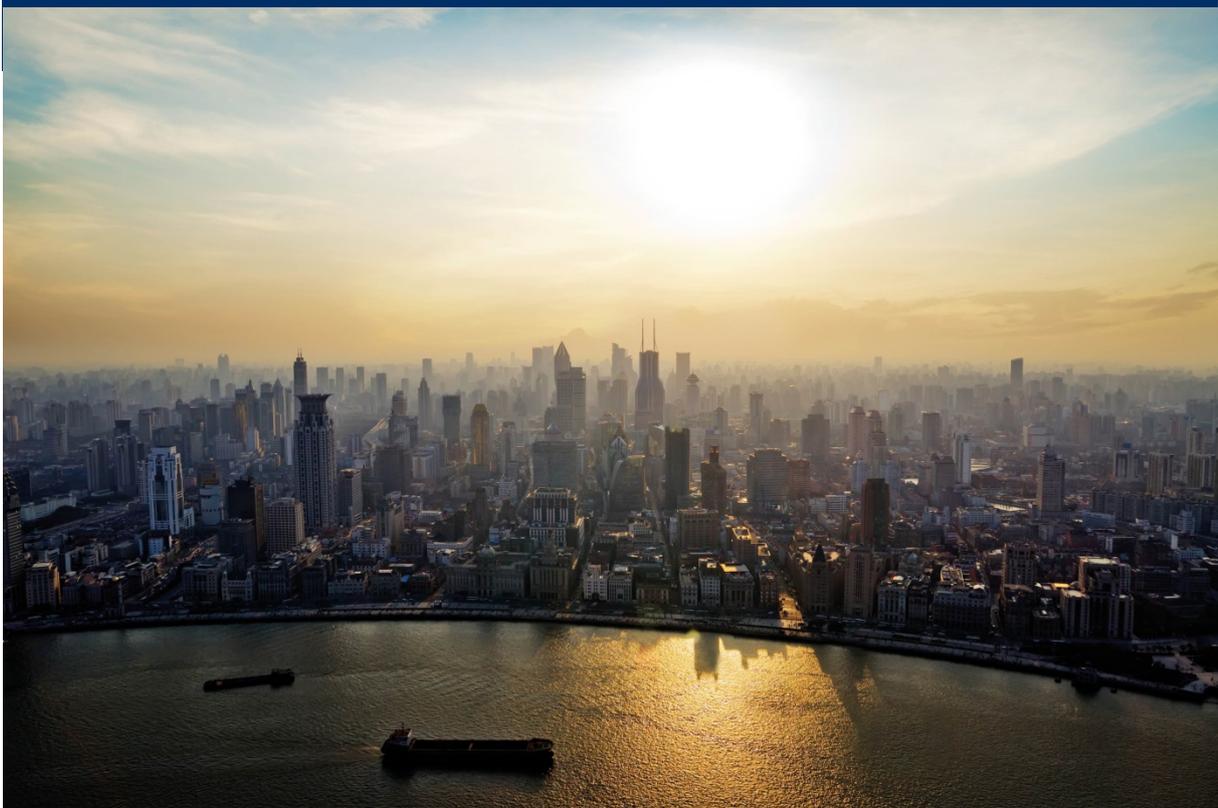


**SGI** Sustainable  
Governance  
Indicators

2015 Citizens' Participatory  
Competence Report  
Policy Knowledge



Indicator

## Policy Knowledge

Question

### To what extent are citizens informed of government policymaking?

41 OECD and EU countries are sorted according to their performance on a scale from 10 (best) to 1 (lowest). This scale is tied to four qualitative evaluation levels.

- 10-9 = Most citizens are well-informed of a broad range of government policies.
- 8-6 = Many citizens are well-informed of individual government policies.
- 5-3 = Few citizens are well-informed of government policies; most citizens have only a rudimentary knowledge of policies.
- 2-1 = Most citizens are not aware of government policies.

### Finland

Score 9

Democracy requires that the public and its representatives have the means to hold government accountable. In this respect Finnish democracy is effective, though not perfect. Information on government policies and decisions is widely available online and many policy fields are debated at great length on television or in other media. Newspaper readership is also very high in Finland. A weak spot, however, is the public's evaluative and participatory competencies. Surveys about the extent to which citizens are informed of government policy-making indicate that an interest in politics has largely increased and, especially, young people are more interested in politics now compared to the early 2000s. Trust in political institutions has been also increasing. Social media and the 2012 presidential campaign in particular have had a marked impact on the participation of younger citizens in politics. Yet there are probably significant differences between policy issues in this respect. Whereas some issues are widely debated in the media and attract general attention, other less media-friendly or stimulating issues pass largely unnoticed.

Citation:

YLE News, 29.09.2012, [http://yle.fi/uutiset/politiikka\\_ki\\_innostaa\\_nuoria\\_yha\\_enemman/6310622](http://yle.fi/uutiset/politiikka_ki_innostaa_nuoria_yha_enemman/6310622) .

Demokratiapuntari 2012: Yhteenveto. Ministry of Justice/MTV3/tnsGallup, 02/2012. [http://www.kansanvalta.fi/Etusivu/T\\_utkimusjakehitys/Julkaisujajatutkimuksia](http://www.kansanvalta.fi/Etusivu/T_utkimusjakehitys/Julkaisujajatutkimuksia)

### Iceland

Score 9

Iceland's citizens are well informed about government policy. In local surveys, most citizens demonstrate familiarity with public policies, especially with respect to policies that either interest or directly affect them. This is more true of domestic policies than international politics, because the complexity of Iceland's political landscape is comparatively low. By international standards, it is relatively easy to develop a comprehensive overview of the politics, parties and policy issues in

Iceland. The extensive interpersonal networks between citizens and the geographical isolation of the country, contributes to the domestic focus of Iceland's politics.

The immediate responses of some voters, to the 2008 economic collapse, demonstrates an ability on the part of some to quickly adapt to changed circumstances. In surveys connected to the 2007 and 2009 parliamentary elections, the percentage of voters agreeing with the statement that Iceland was mainly governed in accordance with the popular will declined from 64% in 2007 to 31% in 2009. Furthermore, the defeat of the four traditional national parties in the 2010 local government elections followed a dramatic decline in public trust in politicians and political institutions. In the biggest municipalities, Reykjavik and Akureyri, non-traditional parties were elected to power. This trend was accentuated by the publication of the highly critical Special Investigation Committee report six weeks before the elections. In the 2013 parliamentary elections, the Progressive Party (Framsóknarflokkurinn) made the largest proportionate gains, increasing their vote share from 14.8% to 24.4%. This increase was due to the party's election pledge to write off up to 20% of homeowners' mortgage debts. In the same election, the previous governing coalition lost more than half of their combined seats. The new government is led by the Progressive Party.

The public debate surrounding two national referenda, in 2009 and 2011 concerning the so-called Icesave policy, suggest strong public interest in the issue. Similarly, the 2012 national referendum on the constitutional bill secured a turnout of 49% of the electorate, despite the disparaging attitude of the traditional political parties. Yet, the low levels of public trust in politicians and the associated increase in political apathy, has led to a noticeable decrease in how well informed citizens are about national and international affairs. In the 2014 local government elections, voter turnout declined further. In 2006, voter turnout had been 78.7%, in 2010 it declined to 73.5% and in 2014 it dropped to 66.5%. Turnout among people aged 18 to 25 years old is especially low.

Citation:

Önnudóttir, E.H. and Hardarson, Ó. Th. (2009): Óánægðir lýðræðissinnar: Afstaða Íslendinga til lýðræðis. (Dissatisfied democrats: The Icelanders' attitudes toward democracy). In Gudmundsson, H.S. and Ómarsdóttir, S. B. (2009) Rannsóknir félagsvísindum X. Reykjavík, Háskólaútgáfan.

Eythórsson, G & Kowalczyk, M (2013): Explaining the low voter turnout in Iceland's 2010 local government elections. In: Samtíð. An Icelandic journal of society and culture. Vol 1. 2013. (<http://samtid.is/index.php/samtid/article/view/2>)

Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands (2014): Sveitarstjórnarkosningarnar 2014: Hverjar eru ástæður dræmrar kjörsóknar? (Which are the main reasons for the low voter turnout in the Local Government elections in 2014?).

## Ireland

Score 9

Although turnout is not a guide to how well-informed voters are, it is worth noting that the turnout at the 2011 general election was 70.1%, which is the highest at any general election since 1987 and a big increase on the lowest turnout of 62.6% seen in 2002. Concern over the economic crisis and a desire to punish the politicians

believed to have been responsible for the mismanagement of the economy may have been behind the increased turnout. The high turnout indicates interest in the political process and a belief in the value of voting. It is possible that the 6% drop in turnout for the May 2014 local and European parliamentary elections relative to the comparable 2009 elections reveals some fall-off in this belief.

The proportion of Irish respondents claiming to have heard of various European institutions is consistently higher than the EU average. The level of personal familiarity with elected politicians is very high – it has been claimed that a majority of the electorate have actually been canvassed by at least one person seeking election to the national parliament.

The quality of debate on policy issues is fairly high. Technical issues regarding bank solvency, sovereign debt and fiscal policy are now discussed in newspapers and on the airwaves in greater detail and with more sophistication than would have been imaginable in the past. The ongoing public debate over the installation of domestic-water meters has also revealed a reasonable grasp of the relevant policy issues.

## Norway

Score 9

The Norwegian public is generally well-informed about government policies, measures and operations. This is partly attributable to the country's small size, but also to the population's high level of education, the very high circulation of newspapers and the widespread access to Internet and television. Moreover, the Scandinavian tradition of transparency in government helps the free press to report accurately about public policies.

## Sweden

Score 9

The Swedish population has a strong interest in politics. Election turnout is still very high by most international comparisons. The turnout in the 2014 general elections was 85.8 percent which was an increase of 1.2 percentage points from the previous election. Swedish voters tend to decide very late for which party to vote, which may be interpreted as the voters' desire to gather as much information on political parties as possible before they make their final decision.

The definition of high or low levels of political knowledge is obviously a relative measure. Official data on the knowledge level of Swedish voters is not available. It can, however, be assumed that voters here are not significantly more – or less – knowledgeable than their colleagues in comparable countries.

Recent studies suggest that if voters had been more knowledgeable on political issues this would have changed their party allegiance. Increasing levels of

knowledge should reduce the support for the two major parties – the moderates and the Social Democrats – while most of the other, smaller parties would have benefited. This is a purely hypothetical study, as the perfectly informed voter does not exist.

Citation:

Oscarsson, H. and S. Holmberg (2013), *Nya svenska väljare* (Stockholm: Norstedts Juridik).

Oscarsson, H. (2007), "A Matter of Fact? Knowledge Effects on the Vote in Swedish General Elections, 1985-2002", *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30:301-322.

## Denmark

Score 8

Citizens get most of their information on government policy developments through television, radio and newspapers, which are, of course, selective in their reporting. Computer access is widespread. Government documents are, as a rule, freely accessible via the internet, and published work is also often free. Documents can further be read in public libraries, of which there are many. Mail from the public will increasingly go to Digital Post mailboxes. These are now mandatory for businesses, and they are becoming mandatory for citizens. Already many public services require online applications using a so-called easy ID (NemID).

In addition to the formal access to information, there is the critical question whether the information available is in a form comprehensible by most citizens. In many policy areas the level of technicalities and complexities is rather high, which is a barrier for citizens to adequately assess government policymaking. This is partly solved via independent institutions like the Economic Council and the Panel on Money and Pensions which serve an agency role on the part of citizens in terms of assessing government policymaking.

Election campaigns serve the purpose of presenting and debating the policies of the government as well as the opposition. A very high turnout during national elections (the turnout for the 2011 election was 87.74%) suggests a high degree of interest and enough knowledge to consider voting important. In the EU context, Danes are considered among the most knowledgeable about EU issues (partly due to the use of referenda), but turnout at elections for the European Parliament are much lower than for national ones (turnout for EU elections in 2014 was 56.32%), presumably because the issues in the former are considered less important. The bread-and-butter questions of national Danish politics – jobs, health, education, pensions and so on – inspire citizens to seek information and take part in politics.

Citation:

Lise Togeby et al., *Power and Democracy in Denmark. Conclusions*. Århus: Magtudredningen, 2003.

"Voter turnout data for Denmark," <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=63> (accessed 22 October 2014).

"Denmark mandates digital postboxes," [http://www.itnews.com.au/News/365479\\_denmark-mandates-digital-postboxes.aspx](http://www.itnews.com.au/News/365479_denmark-mandates-digital-postboxes.aspx) (accessed 22 October 2014).

## Estonia

**Score 8** Regular and massive consumption of news via daily newspapers and public broadcasting has long been a feature of Estonian society. According to the TNS EMOR market-research agency, 81.3% of the adult population read at least one newspaper in 2012, and the average person regularly read a total of six print-media publications. Extensive media consumption suggests that citizens are well informed on major policy topics. Estonians also frequently use the Internet, and are guaranteed free Internet access in public libraries.

Survey data on public awareness of policymaking institutions and processes is fragmented and lacks validity; thus, its conclusions must be viewed with caution. According to a national survey on gender-equality policy (2012), about 40% of respondents were able to name relevant legal acts, and about half were aware of the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner. The European Quality of Life Survey (2007, 2011) asked respondents to evaluate the quality of public services in seven areas. Findings show that Estonian respondents' satisfaction with the quality of public services in 2011 had declined since 2007, which may reflect austerity measures taken by the government during the economic recession.

## Israel

**Score 8** Compared to other countries, Israeli citizens show high levels of interest in politics. In a 2013 survey, 66.1% of respondents characterized themselves as “very interested” or “somewhat interested”. Israel also has one of the region’s highest rates of internet usage (71% in 2013) and a lively, pluralistic and independent news media. While Israeli citizens continuously exhibit high levels of engagement, this does not automatically translate to knowledge and information regarding policymaking. In recent years, the government expanded its efforts toward policy transparency by broadcasting parliamentary sessions and publishing special reports and yearly audits as well as yearly plans online . In 2011, Israel joined the Open Government Partnership and was recognized the following year by a United Nations survey for making outstanding progress in the area of e-government. Equally contributive to public discourse is the work by academia and NGOs offering their insights on policy initiatives and implementation through official reports, conferences and debates in social networks.

Citation:

Ahren, Rephael, “Israel wins UN prize for ‘outstanding progress’ in E-government,” *The Times Of Israel* 2012 (Hebrew)

Herman, Tamar et al. “The Israeli Democracy Index 2013,” Israel Democracy Institute (2013): <http://www.idi.org.il/media/2720078/Democracy%20Index%202013.pdf>

“Israel: Freedom of the press 2014”, Freedomhouse: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom->

press/2014/israel#.VEjqKiueWro.

“Joining the Open Government Partnership and the nomination of the ‘Open Government Israeli Forum’”, Prime Minister Office website 2012 (Hebrew)

“The media and public trust in the political system,” Israel Democracy Institute (2010) (Hebrew)

“2014 work plans,” Prime Minister Office website (Hebrew)

## Luxembourg

Score 8

Citizens are expected to have a good command of the three official languages: Luxembourgish, French and German, in order to facilitate social inclusion. About 45% of residents are foreigners, and multilingualism is the “compétence légitime” in Luxembourg. However, knowledge of Luxembourgish has a prominent role in political participation, as most political debate and information distribution takes place in this specific national language. This may make it more difficult for non-speakers to participate in the political sphere. Foreigners have expressed a distinct wish to participate more substantially in policy development. This interest in Luxembourg’s public life and political commitment depends on political empowerment and active participation in social life. Hence, not only voting rights but also the distribution of multilingual political information is extremely important in promoting active political participation and enabling influence in decision-making.

Citation:

Fetzer, J. S. (2011), Luxembourg as an Immigration Success Story. The Grand Duchy in Pan-European Perspective, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth (UK)

Stoldt, J. (2012), Mehr Demokratie wagen?, in: Forum, November, pp. 19-20

<http://www.2030.lu/en/home/>

[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_386\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_en.pdf)

<http://www.statistiques.public.lu/fr/actualites/population/travail/2013/03/20130308/20130308.pdf>

<http://www.statistiques.public.lu/fr/actualites/conditions-sociales/politique/2013/05/20130130/presentationetudeCEFIS.pdf>

Willems, H. (2012), Bestimmungsfaktoren und Probleme der politischen Partizipation von Migranten. <http://www.landtag.rlp.de/landtag/vorlagen/2-57-16.pdf>

## New Zealand

Score 8

The most recent comparative data set which includes information on New Zealand policy knowledge is the International Social Survey Program. In the 2004 edition, New Zealand respondents overwhelmingly (69%) felt that they had a good or very good understanding of important political issues. Only about 13% of respondents said that most people are better informed about government and politics. The 2007 edition of the survey however did not include this question. Regarding the question, “How interested would you say you personally are in politics?” there was a slight decline of political interest in New Zealand between 2004 and 2007. According to survey data from the New Zealand Election Study of 2011, approximately two-thirds of respondents expressed satisfaction with the state of their democracy.

While levels of party membership and voter turnout have been in sharp decline – voter turnout dropping from the 80s and low 90s percentiles for much of the postwar period to 74% in 2011 with a minor increase in 2014 to 78% – there is evidence to suggest that levels of political knowledge and engagement are not as worryingly low as figures might suggest. This said, participation rates among the young suggest that generational disaffection during the review period is at an all-time high.

Citation:

International Social Survey Programme 2004: Citizenship:  
<http://zocat.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp?object=http://zocat.gesis.org/obj/fStudy/ZA3950>.  
 International Social Survey Programme 2007: Leisure Time and Sports:  
<http://zocat.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp?object=http://zocat.gesis.org/obj/fStudy/ZA4850>.  
 New Zealand Election Study, University of Auckland, 2011-12.  
 Voter turnout: [http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse\\_for\\_stats/snapshots-of-nz/nz-social-indicators/Home/Trust%20and%20participation%20in%20government/voter-turnout.aspx](http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/snapshots-of-nz/nz-social-indicators/Home/Trust%20and%20participation%20in%20government/voter-turnout.aspx) (accessed October 9, 2014).

## Switzerland

### Score 8

There is some debate as to whether citizens are well informed in Switzerland. One of the first studies on the issue, based on surveys conducted after popular votes, found that only one out of six voters had a high level of policy knowledge. Studies based on larger data sets and relating to more recent data have showed that about 50% of citizens have good knowledge on public policy issues (i.e., they know the issue at hand and can provide reasons for their decisions). A recent study concluded that roughly equal shares of the citizenry lack civic competences, have medium competence and have a high level of competence. The intensity of the campaign around a given issue is of crucial importance in terms of public knowledge of the content of a bill.

Another recent study found that just 42% of Swiss citizens knew how many parties were in the government (which at the time of the survey had not changed during the previous five decades). Moreover, 36% knew how many signatures were needed to trigger a referendum, and about 45% knew the number of EU member states.

In a 2007 comparative study called *Citizenship and Involvement in Europe*, Swiss citizens scored at the same level as their counterparts in the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway with regard to the importance attributed to politics and interest in politics in general. These four countries demonstrated the highest scores among the 11 countries under study. In another recent study on political interest and sophistication, Switzerland was ranked in sixth place (behind Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Germany) among the 21 European countries examined in the European Social Survey.

An analysis in 2005 showed that citizens are relatively well informed and rational when making their decisions in direct-democratic votes. Either they consider

arguments and counterarguments, or rely on reasonable heuristics. Thus, in general it seems fair to say that Swiss citizens are as well informed about policies as citizens in other mature and rich democracies.

## Czech Republic

**Score 7** With the increased accessibility of online information, information on government policies is increasingly available to all Czech citizens. However, citizens remain less informed of important reform details, and have a limited ability to come to informed decisions. This reflects weaknesses in media coverage and the limited range of trusted expert opinions. In 2013 and 2014, the Reconstruction of the State campaign organized by various anti-corruption organizations succeeded in increasing transparency in political decision-making by keeping citizens informed over the adoption of anti-corruption legislation. This increased policy knowledge helped to keep the issue of corruption prevention on the agenda and to bring parliamentary members to vote in line with electoral promises in the 2013 campaign.

## Japan

**Score 7** There is a substantial amount of information about policies and policymaking available in Japan. For instance, ministries regularly publish so-called white papers, which explain the current conditions, challenges and policies being implemented in certain policy areas in great detail.

However, while there is plenty of official government information, this does not necessarily mean that citizens feel satisfied or consider the information trustworthy. A 2007 survey found that no more than a respective 38% and 37% consider NHK and newspapers as reliable sources of information. Since then, the 3/11 disasters and their consequences have significantly increased public doubts about the reliability of policy information provided by the government.

## United Kingdom

**Score 7** The British government provides considerable information to its citizens through detailed websites, both at the core-executive and the ministerial level, and this flow has been progressively enhanced in recent years. These sites contain general information, progress reports and statistical data. However, the government does not make much of an effort to ensure that citizens actually use this information. The most important source of knowledge for citizens is therefore TV broadcasting, followed by newspapers and radio.

According to an opinion poll by Ipsos MORI in 2010, 53% of those asked said that they had “a great deal” or “a fair amount” of knowledge about politics; 47% answered that they had “not very much” knowledge or knew “nothing at all.” The share of those claiming knowledge has risen over the previous decade by about 10 percentage points, indicating a subjectively better understanding of politics by citizens in the United Kingdom. A telling figure is that the proportion of citizens voting in certain television talent competitions is higher than in many national elections.

Citation:

Ipsos MORI 2011: Knowledge of Politics 2003-2010; <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/2757/Knowledge-of-Politics-20032010.aspx?view=wide>

## Australia

Score 6

Opinion surveys indicate Australians have a moderate level of understanding of government policies, and that their level of knowledge increases substantially during election campaigns when they pay greater attention to policy matters. Media coverage tends to be limited due to the lack of diversity in Australian media, which is potentially a contributing factor hindering citizens’ policy knowledge. On the other hand, voting in elections of all levels of government is compulsory in Australia, which on balance is likely to increase the general level of awareness of government and opposition policies. Furthermore, media coverage of policy platforms during election campaigns is substantial.

However, Australian citizens have shown a declining interest in political issues. In June 2014, more than a quarter of voters showed dissatisfaction with the democratic system and over 55% indicated that in their view there is no difference between the two big political parties. In the last election, three million voters (20%) either failed to enroll, did not show up or cast an invalid vote.

Citation:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-08-11/poll-data-reveals-waning-interest-in-politics/5662568>

## Austria

Score 6

A minority of Austrian citizens are well informed, but the majority is informed only within rather narrow limits. In large part, this is because political parties (and the government) do not provide full information on decision-makers’ debates and strategic thinking. However, a majority of Austrians show limited interest in politics, a characteristic perhaps reinforced by the comparatively minimal opportunity for direct participation within the political system.

One thread of political discourse in Austria has focused on increasing citizens’ direct

role within decision-making processes, a discussion that helped lead to the popular referendum in 2013 over the future of the military draft. In this, a majority opted for keeping the draft system rather than creating a professional army. In spite of the non-binding character of this consultation, all political parties agreed that the result should be respected.

## Belgium

### Score 6

According to data from the European Social Survey 2008, Belgian citizens have an average knowledge of political issues. When asked whether “politics is too complicated to understand,” 40% of respondents said “regularly” or “frequently,” as compared to 21.2% in Denmark or 30.1% in Germany. Belgium instead is on par with the United Kingdom (39.2%), Spain (39.5%), Romania (41.7%) and Portugal (42%).

While that question was not asked in the subsequent surveys, in general data shows Belgians’ trust in political and judicial institutions is either slightly above or close to the European average (their trust in the parliament is above that expressed by the Germans or the French toward their respective legislatures, but below that of the Swiss or Danes, for instance). Time spent listening to or watching political news is slightly above average. Belgians are in principle among some of the most well-informed and politically involved people globally, also given the strength of the country’s political parties and a citizen’s voting obligation. Importantly purely populist parties (that is, counting the N-VA as not being a purely populist party) lost ground in the last election, which contrasts with many other EU countries.

An important question is whether voters are then able to make parties accountable to their actions. A problem is that the proportional election system and the layers of federal, regional, provincial and local governments have typically made this very difficult, in particular during the period under review, since all main parties were in government “somewhere.” The most recent election created a starker outcome, with right-wing parties and the Flemish Christian democrats at the Federal government and at the Flemish government, and the Socialists and Walloon Christian democrats at the Walloon government, and the green parties being in the opposition everywhere. This increased polarization, but should also improve accountability.

## Canada

### Score 6

Few citizens are well informed about government policies. Indeed, most citizens have only a rudimentary knowledge of key public policy issues, as revealed by public opinion polls. A 2013 comparative study of 10 countries found that Canada is ahead of the United States but lags behind European countries in terms of political knowledge. The same study also found a significant gender gap: Canadian women

scored 30% lower on average than did Canadian men when tested on their knowledge of hard-news items. Canada is particularly falling behind with regard to young voters' political literacy. A study by Milner (2007) showed that young Canadians' political knowledge was only slightly higher than that of their American counterparts, and was low compared with that of European youths. It concluded that European nations are better at disseminating the information and skills needed to turn their young people into participating citizens. In a 2011 survey on youth voting by Statistics Canada, 11% of eligible voters between 18 and 24 years of age cited a lack of interest as a reason for not voting, while 12% declared a lack of knowledge as the primary cause for abstaining.

Citation:

Milner, H (2007). Political Knowledge and Participation Among Young Canadians and Americans, Institute for Research on Public Policy working paper No. 2007-1.

Elections Canada (2011), National Youth Survey Report, available at <http://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=rec/part/nysr&document=index&lang=e>

Curran, James et al. (2013) Gender Matters Globally: An Examination of Gaps in Political Knowledge in a 10-Nation Comparative Study.

## France

Score 6

Citizens' interest in politics and their participation in the political process have been on the decline in recent decades. Obtaining their information primarily from television, most citizens are poorly informed. Television stations devote little time to any political topic and tend to prefer talk shows where people express their views, rather than using prime-time hours for political information which is seen as uninteresting to larger audiences. Information follows mobilization, rather than the other way around. Information is often provided on a certain topic once a group of citizens or political activists have succeeded in attracting media attention.

One of the problems with government information is that politicians tend to hide the truth or to minimize harsh realities. Since the Socialist government's economic policy U-turn in 1983, governments have tried to hide necessary measures or reforms behind a veil of euphemistic language. As an example, President Hollande's tough budget policy has been renamed "budgetary seriousness" to avoid accusations of "austerity"; even the wording "rigueur" (the tight control of public spending), used by the Socialist government in 1983, is banned. This kind of action "by stealth" may initially be successful, but it does not enhance political awareness among citizens, and it fuels populist feelings too. At the same time, opinion polls suggest that French voters are aware of the budgetary situation, as 81% think that the best way to resolve the country's economic problems is to reduce public spending (Pew Institute poll).

Citation:

Pew Institute; <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/05/13/chapter-1-dispirited-over-national-conditions/>

## Germany

**Score 6** Empirical analyses of German citizens' level of political knowledge point to inconsistencies. On the one hand, the supply of independent political information is high. Germany has a diversified media-ownership structure and comparatively pluralistic and decentralized television and radio markets. Although the nationwide print-media market is dominated by five leading daily newspapers, the Internet has become an increasingly important medium for citizens to gather information. Broadcasters, radio stations and newspaper have adapted to the new circumstances by providing a great deal of their services online. Nevertheless, television news programs are the main source of information for most citizens. High-quality news broadcasts have comparatively large audiences. According to one survey, around half of the population watches a news program every day.

However, a recent survey indicates a dramatic decline in public interest in politics and in parliamentary debates in particular. Only 25% of the public express interest in politics and follow debates regularly (compared to about 50% 30 years ago). According to the study, mostly younger cohorts were not able to mention any parliamentary debate they followed with interest. Furthermore, only about 50% of respondents knew that the grand coalition consists of the CDU/CSU and the SPD. In addition, decreasing confidence in parties and politicians is undermining the motivation to stay informed. Political knowledge is continually decreasing and the informed evaluation of government policies seems extremely difficult for ordinary citizens. Compared to other European countries such as Great Britain, German citizens' knowledge of politics is substantially lower.

Citation:

<http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/bundestag-nur-wenige-buerger-interessieren-sich-fuers-parlament-a-1006678.html>;

<http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/themen/aktuelle-meldungen/2014/dezember/bundestagsdebatten-mehrschlagabtausch-unterm-bundesadler/>.

## Italy

**Score 6** Existing public opinion studies indicate that only a minority of citizens (about 35%) are significantly interested in politics and that about a similar percentage talks regularly about politics and follows TV programs featuring political debate. A large majority (85%), however, regularly follows the TV news where political news has a significant weight. While data show that the level of sophistication and knowledge about parties, personnel and composition of government is not low, data concerning levels of information about policies were not easily available. They probably vary greatly depending on the policy field.

On certain policies (concerning major economic and fiscal aspects, education, health

care, foreign policy) which parties use to define their position, levels of information are fairly high. On other policies they drop significantly. As Italian politics are fast changing, not very stable and strongly personalized it should be difficult for the citizens to be well informed about the contents of government policymaking. Television – by far the main information source in Italy – can't give in-depth information.

Citation:

Vincenzo Memoli, How Does Political Knowledge Shape Support for Democracy? Some Research Based on the Italian Case, in *Bulletin of Italian Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2011, 79-102

## Latvia

### Score 6

There is no local survey data indicating the extent to which citizens are informed of government policymaking decisions. Data from a study on NGO participation in policy planning, commissioned by the government office in 2012, show that NGOs (which are predisposed to participation) are able to: obtain the information and knowledge required to understand the motives, objectives, effects and implications of policy proposals; and make their opinions known through the existing system. NGOs note that information is available to those who seek it out, but is not easily accessible to the general public.

Individuals are slow to engage with the political process. According to a 2013 survey by Latvia's Civic Alliance, only 17% of the population feels that they can influence decision-making (up from 15% in 2011). The Enterprise Register estimates that just 25,000 individuals or 1.2% of the population are members of a political party. This is the lowest level of party membership in the EU.

The rise of social media and the increasing use of the internet have placed new tools at the disposal of citizens wishing to participate in the political process. A social-media-style website enables citizens to engage in direct communication with members of parliament. An e-petition tool lets any group of 10,000 or more citizens place issues on the parliamentary agenda.

Citation:

1. Latvian Facts (2011), Public Opinion on the NGO Sector in Latvia, p.7, Available at (in Latvian): [http://www.nvo.lv/site/uploads/veci\\_e\\_faili/Zinojums\\_lv\\_27\\_04\\_2011.pdf](http://www.nvo.lv/site/uploads/veci_e_faili/Zinojums_lv_27_04_2011.pdf), Last assessed: 20.05.2013

2. Baltic News Service (2011), Latvian Political Parties and Associations Estimated to have around 25 thousand Members, Article available at (in Latvian): <http://www.delfi.lv/news/national/politics/latvija-partijas-un-politiskajas-apvienibas-varetu-but-apmeram-25-tukstosi-cilveku.d?id=39523183>, Last assessed: 21.05.2013.

3. State Chancellery (2013) Unpublished Data on NGO involvement in the Mechanisms of the Cabinet Decision-Making Process

4. Latvian Civic Alliance (2014), Overview of the NGO Sector in Latvia 2013. Available at: [http://providus.lv/article\\_files/2718/original/Petijums\\_Parskats\\_par\\_NVO\\_sektoru\\_LV\\_2013-1.pdf?1415008066](http://providus.lv/article_files/2718/original/Petijums_Parskats_par_NVO_sektoru_LV_2013-1.pdf?1415008066), Last assessed: 04.11.2014

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## Malta

Score 6 Each ministry includes a customer care office, an information office and a communications office. The level of information available for citizens on policies is high and in general easily accessible. The government provides data on policy areas, and if a certain set of data is not available, it can be requested. The National Statistics Office and the Department of Information also makes information available to citizens. Some of the more complete reports assessing government policy however come from the European Commission. Yet most citizens follow political party-controlled media in their evaluation of policy objectives, their effects and implications. At the same time, political debate is widespread, which does help citizens to examine different aspects of policy. Government policies are also discussed in different civil society organizations as well as criticism published in the independent press, not to mention as part of active online discussions. However, local opinion surveys are rarely carried out with the intention of evaluating policy proposals but to seek citizens' perceptions on issues which may be ripe for policy development.

## Mexico

Score 6 Socioeconomically, Mexico is a very internally divided, which translates into uneven policy knowledge across the population. Due in part to its poverty levels, Mexico has the lowest performing students in the OECD and up to a third of the population has little more than primary education. However, at the other end of the scale, literally millions of Mexicans attend universities, and hundreds of thousands of Mexicans have attended foreign universities. There is, therefore, a marked split between a highly educated "developed" Mexico, which is concerned with the finer details of politics and policy, and a less politically and intellectually sophisticated Mexico composed of people who are mostly trying to get by. That being said, most Mexicans do at least share a distrust of government and political authority. As a trend, the level of information sharing is certainly growing, with policy knowledge becoming better and better. Moreover, there are a lot of independent media outlets, which make it possible for citizens to get informed by other sources than the government. The trend, albeit a slow one, seems to be toward a gradual increase in the public's policy knowledge due to the long-term effects of democratization and the increasingly open political atmosphere.

## Netherlands

Score 6 Dutch respondents claim to spend slightly more time than the average European respondent political information. Nevertheless, the broader public does not seem to be well-informed on a wide range of government policies. This is due not to a lack of

information, but many people find political information complicated and/or uninteresting, they often do not pay attention to it. The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Sociaal-Cultureel Planbureau, SCP) found in a 2012 survey that 28% thought politics was too complicated for themselves, while 60% thought it was too complex for most others. Verhoeven distinguishes four types of citizens regarding their degree of political involvement: “wait-and-see” citizens (25%), impartial citizens (17%), dependent citizens (23%) and active citizens (35%). Research by Bovens and Wille finds that differences in education levels have become increasingly salient factors when it comes to citizens’ competence in processing policy information, political judgments about the EU, issues of immigration and integration, and political leadership.

Citation:

Rob-RFv, *Vertrouwen op democratie*, Den Haag, 2010.

Verhoeven, *Burgers tegen beleid: een analyse van dynamiek in politieke betrokkenheid*, dissertatie, UvA, 2009.

M. Bovens, and A. Wille, 2011. *Diplomademocratie. Over spanningen tussen meritocratie en democratie*, Bert Bakker

Continu Onderzoek Burgerperspectieven, *Burgerperspectieven 2014/3* ([www.scp.nl](http://www.scp.nl), consulted 27 October 2014)

## Slovakia

Score 6

Since the Radičová government has obliged all state, regional and municipal offices to publish their contracts, invoices and purchase orders on the Internet, access to information about government policymaking has substantially improved. This information, designed to show how the government spends public money, has helped the media, NGOs and activists to uncover the dubious expenses of state offices and state-run companies. While the quantity of available information has increased, the population’s overall policy knowledge has suffered from the public disenchantment with politics and the political elite. Moreover, the Fico government has followed a very selective information strategy. As Prime Minister Fico has stated several times, his government does not attribute significant weight to broad inclusion of the public in policymaking processes.

## South Korea

Score 6

Many citizens are poorly informed about the details of most government policies, particularly concerning economic and social issues. The quality of information available is often limited, because political questions are often personalized and interpreted as power struggles between ambitious individuals. The political spectrum remains very narrow, limiting the scope of political discussion and making it hard for citizens to develop their own opinion. The low trust in government announcements and in the mainstream media provides fertile ground for the dissemination of rumors. There is also a difference between the generations. The generation that grew up

during the Korean War filters information through an anti-communist lens. The generation socialized during the struggle for democracy is highly politicized and has a general mistrust of government, while the younger generation is less politicized and less informed about political issues. Under the Park administration, the gap in the perception of major issues between Blue House and mass public became wider.

## Spain

### Score 6

Traditionally, Spaniards have shown little interest in politics. Considering that most of them do not even follow the details of government composition or power struggles, it is easy to conclude that the attention to specific policies is quite low. According to empirical evidence, levels of interest in politics have remained stubbornly low during the entire democratic period, and expressions of complete disinterest are more widespread among Spaniards than among citizens of any other western European country. Nevertheless, due to the economic crisis, attitudes toward politics and the policymaking process have started to change, with the public demanding a higher level of knowledge. To be sure, the motives behind and implications of government policy decisions are now better explained in the media than was the case six years ago.

Recent research conducted by the official sociological institute CIS demonstrates that attentiveness to political information within Spain has improved. For example, the CIS Barometer 3041, published in October 2014, reports that 25% of Spaniards talk about politics very often when meeting with friends (up from only 14% in January 2008). According to the same polls, most Spaniards regularly follow politics by listening to the TV news. But even if those who extend their news-gathering habits beyond the TV are few when compared to the western European average, their number has significantly increased during the crisis; in 2014, 20% of CIS survey respondents said they read the political sections of newspapers every day (compared to 16.5% in 2008), while 17% used Internet sites on a daily basis to obtain political information (compared to 6.5% in 2008).

Citation:

2008 CIS poll: [www.cis.es/cis/export/sites/default/-Archivos/Marginales/2740\\_2759/2749/e274900.html](http://www.cis.es/cis/export/sites/default/-Archivos/Marginales/2740_2759/2749/e274900.html)

2014 CIS poll: [www.cis.es/cis/export/sites/default/-Archivos/Marginales/3040\\_3059/3041/es3041mar.pdf](http://www.cis.es/cis/export/sites/default/-Archivos/Marginales/3040_3059/3041/es3041mar.pdf)

## Bulgaria

### Score 5

The distribution of knowledge about government policies in Bulgaria is highly uneven. Citizens who are active, especially through participation in non-governmental organizations or grassroots activities, seem to have a very strong grasp of current policies in their sphere of interest. The general public, however, seems distrustful and uninterested. Citizens' knowledge of how the government is actually

organized and works, the division of competencies and the way decision-making and implementation proceeds is also not high. However, general interest in how the government operates and how policies are formulated and implemented rose significantly in the wake of the protests in summer and autumn 2013, and the Oresharski government subsequently operated under an unusually high level of citizen scrutiny.

## Chile

**Score 5** Print-media discussion of policy-reform proposals and government programs is relatively widespread, including discussion of reform proposals and options presented by the ad hoc policy-reform commissions, as was seen with the issues of education, pension, fiscal and labor reform. New forms of public communication regarding government policymaking, in many cases through web sites and social networks, are on the rise. Yet a large share of population is excluded from such discussion due to its low level of education, limited understanding of in-depth analysis, and/or lack of exposure to media other than television. In addition, the oligopolistic media structures in Chile distort the political options offered to citizens (e.g., policymaking regarding ethnic minorities and the associated conflicts). Disinformation and manipulations hinder public policy discussions. In addition to these defects in news coverage, citizens in general show low interest in policymaking. Policy interest within the socioeconomic elite is also generally fairly limited, at least as long as public policies do not substantially affect their lifestyle in a nearly completely privatized environment (discussions of fiscal redistribution, as during the 2014 fiscal reform, represent a notable exception). Those parts of the middle class that are interested in these debates tend to get only the low-quality information mentioned above and the socioeconomically lower-class population often only knows about the specific public subsidies system which they use but they do not know about public policies and public policymaking in general terms.

## Cyprus

**Score 5** Strong public interest in politics and a high rate of attachment to political parties were until recent years combined with low rates of abstention in elections. However, participation rates have fallen sharply, with the abstention rate in parliamentary and presidential elections doubling between 2006 and 2013. According to Eurobarometer, levels of faith in institutions are very low, particularly with regard to politicians and the political parties. The government and the parliament are rated slightly better.

These phenomena reflect the realities of Cyprus life. Television is the top source of information, and is trusted by 52% of survey respondents, more than is true of any

other media. However, the quality of information is generally low, lacking in-depth analysis. Moreover, debates in which political figures monopolize the stage are characterized by populist appeals, meaningless arguments and incessant finger-pointing. Even though people in Cyprus make less use of the Internet (38%) than the EU average, new media is an important source of information and a forum for discussion.

The government has made a sustained effort to keep the public informed about important decisions and policies. Despite incidental contradictions and problems in policy implementation, citizens appear to be aware of and have an opinion on the main issues driving government policies. Although opposition to specific policies and measures is common, the public acknowledges the need for implementing them.

## Greece

### Score 5

Before the economic crisis, voter turnout in Greek parliamentary elections was very high and steadily exceeded 70% of all those registered to vote, but in the most recent parliamentary elections of June 2012, turnout dropped to 62.5%. This was symptomatic of the political estrangement felt by Greek voters who blamed Greece's political elites for the ills the country has faced since 2010. Moreover, even before the crisis, citizens did not really obtain enough information on government policymaking, as the media leaned towards infotainment, while individual members of parliament rarely discussed substantive policy issues with their voters in the electoral districts which they represented.

In Greece there is a tradition of appealing to government ministers or members of parliament in order to obtain favors such as accelerating the award of a pension or facilitating the hiring of a family member in the public sector. However, since 2010 this practice has probably been curbed, as the government succeeded in achieving fiscal consolidation at all costs in 2013-2014.

Some, but not many, individuals voice policy opinions to politicians either through writing letters on policy issues to the press or through participating in the open electronic consultation on new government measures which each ministry announces and sustains before drafting a bill of law. On the other hand, there is a strong tradition of organized interest groups voicing opinions on policy matters relevant to their material interests.

Since the onset of the crisis, citizens have acquired a more precise view of the reforms agreed on between the Greek government and the country's creditors. Yet they have not been able to fully follow developments. The Memorandums of Understanding signed by the Greek government and the Troika – which have included government measures to be taken in economic, tax, income, pension and labor relation areas – were extensive, detailed and complicated. Citizens have had

only rare glimpses at the precise content of policy measures, which are filtered through the distorting lens of polarized party conflicts between the pro-Memorandum and anti-Memorandum political parties.

Citation:

The Ministry of Interior reports turnout in elections. The relevant percentage figures are available at the Ministry's website [http://ekloges.yves.gr/v2012b/public/#"cls":;"main";"params":](http://ekloges.yves.gr/v2012b/public/#). Accessed on 03.06.2013.

## Lithuania

### Score 5

Citizens have access to some government information, but the public in large part lacks the civic awareness and policy knowledge that enables an adequate understanding of government policymaking and facilitates participation. In 2011, Transparency International indicated that 44% of citizens surveyed said there was too much information not made publicly available by state and local institutions.

Several initiatives aimed at improving the citizens' access of information do exist, however. The Public Management Improvement Program is designed to achieve this goal by defining the scope and content of public information to be made accessible, and by centralizing the provision of information about the government's performance. In addition, the Lithuania 2030 Strategy envisions the implementation of programs devoted to educating responsible citizens. A focused review of open-government practices has been launched as part of the Lithuania-OECD Action Plan.

Citation:

Reference to the Report of Transparency International:

[http://transparency.lt/media/filer\\_public/2013/01/22/informacijos\\_prieinamumas\\_lietuvoje.pdf](http://transparency.lt/media/filer_public/2013/01/22/informacijos_prieinamumas_lietuvoje.pdf)

Reference to the Public Management Improvement Program:

[http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc\\_l?p\\_id=418407&p\\_query=vie%F0ojo%20valdymo%20tobulinimo%20programa&p\\_tr2=2](http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=418407&p_query=vie%F0ojo%20valdymo%20tobulinimo%20programa&p_tr2=2).

## Poland

### Score 5

Despite recent attempts to improve access to government information, the average level of knowledge regarding government policy within the Polish public remains limited. Reasons include a tendency toward infotainment in many media outlets, the populist propaganda produced by opposition parties, and a general detachment from politics among the citizenry. Moreover, political parties, trade unions and most other professional associations do not properly perform their socialization function, and fail to improve their members' policy knowledge.

Citation:

Kotnarowski, M., R. Markowski, M. Wenzel, M. Żerkowska-Balas. 2014. Democratic Audit of Poland 2014. (available in Polish at [www.dap.swps.pl](http://www.dap.swps.pl)),

## Portugal

**Score 5** The economic recession and the bailout have increased citizens' attention and interest in policy matters. However, this greater demand for policy knowledge does not appear to translate into a corresponding increase in actual knowledge, with policy knowledge remaining limited and unevenly distributed. The factors that limit citizens' policy knowledge include: insufficient and partial explanation of policy by the government; partial and insufficient explanation of policy alternatives by the opposition; the media system tends to focus more on short-term issues and scandals than on in-depth policy analysis; presentation of policy in terms that tend to be exclusionary for most citizens; and a weak civil society that is unable to socialize and educate citizens on policy issues.

## Turkey

**Score 5** The government generally does not adequately inform citizens about the content and development of government policy. In his monthly TV appearance, the prime minister only shares government success stories. Government officials highlight policies as a promising objective, but do not offer follow-up details. While there are no surveys that review how citizens get information over government policy, it is evident that policymaking in Turkey is not transparent or participatory.

Citizens often learn of policies only after their implementation process has begun. The public's level of knowledge about government affairs is low, as is the public's level of satisfaction with the government; however, this has not until recently manifested itself in public unrest. According to a 2011 survey, the media is the public's first source of information, including information on government policies; however, many people also believe the media is not entirely reliable. Even the participatory mechanisms set up to assist government policymaking do not work effectively. Civil-society organizations are not able to inform their members or society at large about ongoing developments. Policy plans are mainly kept secret or are subject to last-minute changes, and the parliament's tendency to pass important measures as a part of omnibus legislative packages has been subject to increasing criticism, because it confuses the public.

Citation:

'HES'leri yeterince anlatamadık', 9.11. 2011, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/Ekonomi/2011/11/09/hesleri-yeterince-anlatamadik>.

Meseleyi Kamuoyuna İyi Anlatamadık, 2.6.2013,

[http://www.ulusalstrateji.com/haber/gundem/meseleyi\\_kamuoyuna\\_iyi\\_anlatamadik\\_126](http://www.ulusalstrateji.com/haber/gundem/meseleyi_kamuoyuna_iyi_anlatamadik_126)

Naim Karakaya, Hande Özhabeş (2013) 'Judicial Reform Packages: Evaluating Their Effect on Rights and Freedoms', TESEV Democratization Program Policy Report No. 5, Istanbul: TESEV.1.aspx

## United States

**Score 5** The U.S. public is generally severely uninformed, not only by the standards of academic elites, but also according to empirical data. While comparing citizens' level of governmental knowledge across political systems is an imperfect science, as one knowledgeable observer recently put it: "The political ignorance of the American voter is one of the best-documented findings in political science."

Two examples illustrate this: In spring 2013, nearly 90% of the public favored legislation requiring background checks for the purchase of guns. Republicans in Congress blocked Democratic proposals for such a measure. Yet, when asked whose approach to gun control they preferred, the public split almost evenly between President Obama and congressional Republicans. At the same time, about 40% of the public believed that Obama's health care reform had in fact been repealed. Republican politicians have been promising to repeal it, but with Democratic control of the presidency and the Senate, it has never been a realistic prospect. Political scientists debate the issue of whether and how a generally uninformed public can discharge the tasks of citizenship effectively. A 2014 Ipsos MORI cross-national survey found U.S. citizens to show the second-highest level of inaccuracy among 14 countries with regard to factual knowledge about a variety of social issues.

Citation:

<https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/3466/Perceptions-are-not-reality-10-things-the-world-gets-wrong.aspx>

## Croatia

**Score 4** Citizens' policy knowledge in Croatia is limited. Most citizens show only minimal political interest. Moreover, the media situation makes it difficult to obtain detailed information on specific government policies. However, some steps have been taken to improve the openness of government processes. In 2011, Croatia joined the Open Government Partnership. Through this initiative, the government has developed an action plan to introduce measures in the areas of fiscal transparency, access to information, the use of information technologies, and citizen and civil-society participation.

## Hungary

**Score 4** Policy knowledge among the Hungarian public is rather weak. Reasons include political apathy, the biased and spin-filled information policies of the government, and the centralization and lack of transparency characterizing policymaking. The media on both sides of the political spectrum have concentrated on scandals instead

of analyzing issues, and have focused their reporting on persons rather than on policies. The strong political polarization means that many citizens are not really interested in policy details. The governing Fidesz party, for example, can count on a large number of hard-core followers, estimated at up to 20% of the electorate, that support it almost unconditionally. It is characteristic that Fidesz had no program for the 2014 parliamentary elections; rather, Orbán simply declared, “We will continue.” However, the 2014 protests against the Internet tax, the “turn to the East” in foreign policy, and the cuts in university budgets have prompted increasing political interest.

## Romania

**Score 4** The majority of Romanian citizens have very limited knowledge about government policies. This trend has not been reversed in the last two years. The 2014 presidential campaign, which was characterized by the press as the dirtiest of the post-communist era, did little to address this deficit, as candidate statements and media coverage alike were aimed at manipulating rather than informing the electorate.

## Slovenia

**Score 4** Slovenian citizens’ knowledge of government policymaking is rather limited. While both print and electronic media provide adequate information, certain segments of the population lack media literacy, and a majority of citizens is simply not interested in the details of policymaking. The recurring corruption and political scandals have led to frustration and disenchantment for a majority of the population. According to a survey conducted in June 2014, only 1% of respondents trusted political parties, and just 4% trusted the national government.

Citation:

Politbarometer survey, Faculty of Social Sciences, June 2014, available at: [http://www.cjm.si/ul/2014/PB\\_6\\_14.pdf](http://www.cjm.si/ul/2014/PB_6_14.pdf).

This country report is part of the Sustainable Governance Indicators 2015 project.

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