



# Citizens' Participatory Competence Report

Policy Knowledge

## Sustainable Governance Indicators 2017

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 still high in Finland. A weak spot, however, is the public's evaluative and participatory competencies. Surveys on the extent to which citizens are informed of government policymaking indicate that the public's interest in politics has increased, and that young people in particular are more interested in politics today as compared to the early 2000s. Trust in political institutions has somewhat increased, and the social media have had a marked impact on younger citizens' rates of participation in politics. Yet the degree of interest and participation probably varies significantly across policy issues. Whereas some issues are widely debated in the media and attract general attention, other less media-friendly or stimulating issues pass largely unnoticed.

### 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. However, in Norway, as in many other countries, media habits are rapidly changing and the various media platforms attract different readers and consumers. Although media pluralism is growing, the informational

basis for a shared and common understanding of events and developments is weakening.

## 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%, 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:

Olsson, J., H. Ekengren Oscarsson and M. Solevid (eds.) (2016), *Eqvilibrium* (Gothenburg: The SOM Institute).

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 is increasingly going to Digital Post mailboxes. These are now mandatory for businesses and for citizens (with a few exceptions for the latter). Already most 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 (87.74% of eligible voters turned out for the 2011 election and 85.89% for the 2015 election) 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 referendums), 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?CountryCode=DK> (accessed 8 October 2015)

“Denmark mandates digital postboxes,” <http://www.itnews.com.au/News/365479,denmark-mandates-digital-postboxes.aspx> (accessed 22 October 2014).

## Estonia

Score 8

The regular and active consumption of news via online portals and public broadcasting services is a fundamental feature of Estonian society. According to the TNS EMOR market-research agency, members of the adult population in 2014 – 2015 spent a daily average of 3.5 hours listening to the radio, and about 3 hours watching television. The major online portals Delfi and Postimees each have more than 500,000 unique visitors weekly. Extensive media consumption suggests that citizens may be well informed on major policy topics.

Survey data on citizens' policy knowledge are scarce and fragmented. One of the few available surveys (December 2015) revealed that only 14% of population knew correctly when Estonia will be holding the presidency of the EU Council. On the other hand, 57% reported that they are well informed about Estonian interests and priorities in the EU, and this figure has constantly been increasing.

Citation:

Government Office (2015). *Elanikkonna suhtumine ja teadlikkus Euroopa Liidu küsimustes*. Faktum & Ariko. [https://riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/uuringud/el\\_toetusuuring\\_2015\\_aruanne.pdf](https://riigikantselei.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/uuringud/el_toetusuuring_2015_aruanne.pdf) (accessed 04.11.2016)

## Iceland

### Score 8

Iceland's citizens are generally well informed about government policy. In local surveys, most citizens demonstrate familiarity with public policies, especially with respect to policies that either interest them 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. Extensive interpersonal networks between citizens and Iceland's distance from other countries contribute to the domestic focus of Icelandic politics.

The immediate response 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 two of 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 Commission report six weeks before the elections. Even so, in the 2013 parliamentary elections, the Progressive Party (Framsóknarflokkurinn) made the largest proportionate gains, increasing its 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 at foreign expense. In the same election, the previous governing coalition lost more than half of their combined seats. The cabinet that came to power in 2013 was led by the Progressive Party.

Public debate surrounding two national referendums, in 2009 and 2011, concerning the so-called Icesave dispute, suggests 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. Declining levels of public trust in politicians and the associated increase in political apathy coincide with a noticeable deterioration in how well-informed citizens are about national and international affairs. In the 2014 local government elections, voter turnout declined further from 2010. In 2006, voter turnout had been 78.7%. In 2010, it declined to 73.5% and in 2014 it dropped to 66.5%. At 79%, voter turnout in the parliamentary election of 2016 was the lowest recorded since the early years of the 20th century. Turnout among people aged 18 to 25 years old is especially low. Most current electoral research indicates that a significant proportion of young people do not vote due to apathy and lack of interest in politics.

#### 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) Rannsóknirí 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? (What are the main reasons for the low voter turnout in the Local Government elections in 2014?).

Eythórsson, G.T. and Önnudóttir, E.H. (2016): Abstainers reasoning for not voting in the Icelandic Local Government Election 2014. To be published in "Íslenska Þjóðfélagið" in autumn 2016.

Eythórsson, G.T. and Önnudóttir, E.H. (2016): Abstainers reasoning for not voting in the Icelandic Local Government Election 2014. Work in progress.

## Ireland

**Score 8** In the 2016 general election, electoral turnout dropped to 65.2% from 70.1% in 2011. This fall in turnout reflects economic recovery and strong rates of economic growth.

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. In addition, the quality of debate on policy issues is high.

The Citizens' Assembly held its inaugural meeting in October 2016 and is independently chaired by Justice Mary Laffoy. The assembly will consider a range of issues over the coming year, the first being the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution.

## Israel

**Score 8** Compared to other countries, Israeli citizens show high levels of interest in politics. In a 2014 survey, 61.5% of respondents characterized themselves as "very interested" or "somewhat interested." Israel also has one of the region's highest rates of Internet usage with 71.5% in 2014 and a lively, pluralistic and independent news media.

Nevertheless, while Israeli citizens continue to exhibit high levels of political engagement, this does not automatically translate to knowledge and information regarding policymaking. In recent years, the government expanded its efforts on policy transparency. 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. In 2016, the government announced the launching of a program designed to open all government databases to

public viewing. This continues the policy of gradually increasing transparency by expanding the authority of the Governmental Unit for Freedom of Information and financing its projects. In 2015, the Knesset approved the creation of the Special Committee for the Transparency and Accessibility of Government Information, functioning as the parliamentary auxiliary for the implementation of the Freedom of Information Law. This special committee resolved to place all Knesset committee protocols and decisions online as well as enable direct contact to committee directors.

A significant effort to inform the public about government policy has been undertaken by the Public Knowledge Workshop (“Hasadna”), an NGO that releases public information to “enhance democracy and to empower citizens.” Equally contributive to public discourse has been the work of other NGOs and academia, offering their insights on policy initiatives and implementation through official reports, conferences and debates on 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 2014,” Israel Democracy Institute (2014):

[http://en.idi.org.il/media/3823043/democracy\\_index\\_2014\\_Eng.pdf](http://en.idi.org.il/media/3823043/democracy_index_2014_Eng.pdf)

“Israel: Freedom of the press 2014”, Freedom house: <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)

“Yearly Report on the Implementation of the Law of Freedom of Information 2014” Ministry of Justice website – The Governmental Unit for Freedom of Information (Hebrew):

<http://index.justice.gov.il/Units/YechidatChofeshHameyda/Report2014/index.html>

“The Special Committee for the Transparency and Accessibility of Government Information”, The Knesset Website (Hebrew):

<http://main.knesset.gov.il/Activity/Committees/GovInfo/Pages/default.aspx>

The World Bank Internet Users Data <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.P2>

“The Knesset Presents: Advanced Committee Web Portals Now Available” <http://www.ch10.co.il/news/110674/#.V8R-rv19670> (Hebrew)

“We live in the 21st Century, The Publics demand for information is legitimate” <http://www.themarker.com/news/1.3045001> (Hebrew)

“The Government approved today the publication of all governmental databases” <http://www.themarker.com/news/politics/1.3053541> (Hebrew)

Hermann, Tamar et al., *The Israeli Democracy Index 2016*, The Israel Democracy Institute, Jerusalem 2016.

<https://en.idi.org.il/media/7811/democracy-index-2016-eng.pdf>

## Luxembourg

Score 8

Citizens are expected to have sufficient knowledge of the three official languages of Luxembourg to facilitate social inclusion. About 47% of residents are foreigners and multilingualism is the “compétence légitime” in Luxembourg. However, knowledge of Luxembourgish has an important role in political participation, as most political debates 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:

Bilan de la participation électorale aux élections communales d'octobre 2011. Centre d'étude et de formation interculturelles et sociales, 2011. [www.statistiques.public.lu/fr/actualites/conditions-sociales/politique/2013/05/20130130/presentationetudeCEFIS.pdf](http://www.statistiques.public.lu/fr/actualites/conditions-sociales/politique/2013/05/20130130/presentationetudeCEFIS.pdf). Accessed 21 Feb. 2017.

Europeans and their Languages. European Commission, 2012. [ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_386\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_en.pdf). Accessed 21 Feb. 2017.

Fetzer, Joel S. Luxembourg as an Immigration Success Story: The Grand Duchy in Pan-European Perspective. Lexington Books, 2011.

"Sprachenpolitik in der Großregion SaarLorLux." Die Grossregion Saarlorlux: Anspruch, Wirklichkeiten, Perspektiven, edited by Wolfgang H. Lorig, Sascha Regolot, and Stefan Henn, Springer VS, 2016, pp. 73 – 94.

Stoldt, Jürgen. "Mehr Demokratie wagen?" Forum.lu, Nov. 2012, [www.forum.lu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/7507\\_323\\_Stoldt.pdf](http://www.forum.lu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/7507_323_Stoldt.pdf). Accessed 21 Feb. 2017.

Willems, Helmut. Bestimmungsfaktoren und Probleme der politischen Partizipation von Migranten. Université du Luxembourg, 2012. [www.landtag.rlp.de/landtag/vorlagen/2-57-16.pdf](http://www.landtag.rlp.de/landtag/vorlagen/2-57-16.pdf). Accessed 21 Feb. 2017.

## 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 2014, 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. According to OECD data, however, children in New Zealand are more civically engaged than on average in the OECD. In New Zealand, 84.4% of 14-year olds intend to vote in elections when they are adults, compared to the OECD average of 78.7%.



From time to time, matters of constitutional importance or public interest are put to voters by way either of citizen- or government-initiated referendums. In 2015 – 2016, for example, the government conducted a two-stage referendum on whether New Zealand should replace its national flag.

Citation:

International Social Survey Programme 2004: Citizenship:  
<http://zacad.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp?object=http://zacad.gesis.org/obj/fStudy/ZA3950>.

International Social Survey Programme 2007: Leisure Time and Sports:  
<http://zacad.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp?object=http://zacad.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).

OECD Better Life Initiative: How is Life in New Zealand? Update from 31 May 2016.  
<http://www.oecd.org/statistics/better-life-initiative.htm#Countrynotes> (accessed June 30, 2016).

## 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 titled “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 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 decisions in direct-democratic votes (Kriesi 2005). 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 wealthy democracies.

There are, however, limitations to this cue-taking as an effective means of political decision-making. For example, since 2014 a large share of citizens believe claims by right-populist politicians that the EU is so invested in Switzerland, that it must renegotiate the bilateral agreements to allow for the constitutional amendment limiting immigration. Based on this argument, a majority of citizens supported the new constitutional amendment. From the very beginning, however, the EU made clear that it would not enter negotiations over the free movement of labor. Hence, limited political knowledge on the part of citizens, common to all democracies, and ideological contentions by political elites, used as reliable cues by knowledge-poor citizens, may lead to political cul-de-sac situations in a direct democracy.

Citation:

Hanspeter Kriesi, 2005: Argument-Based Strategies in Direct-Democratic Votes: The Swiss Experience, *Acta Politica* 40: 299-316.

## Belgium

Score 7

There are few sources of data that allow one to assess the citizenry's level of information with precision. However, it is possible to surmise that individuals' policy knowledge must have increased under this government, if only because some measures are controversial, and controversy attracts media attention. The last legislative elections created a starkly divided outcome, with right-wing parties and the Flemish Christian Democrats in power at the federal level and in the Flemish government, and the Socialists and Walloon Christian Democrats controlling the Walloon government (together with a French regionalist party in Brussels). The Green parties are in the opposition everywhere. This increased polarization, but should also improve accountability. Belgian citizens have access to an independent press, and government meddling with information is limited to the usual pressure to try and emphasize favourable news.

## Czech Republic

Score 7

With the increasing accessibility of online information, information on government policies is increasingly available to all Czech citizens. However, exacerbated by the deteriorating state of the Czech media landscape and its increasing populist tendency, citizens are often poorly informed regarding important policy issues and have a limited ability to come to informed decisions. They tend to refrain from voicing opinions to government officials and turnout in parliamentary elections is relatively low. In terms of battling corruption, watchdog NGOs and advocacy groups remain organized and unified, pushing the government to act in line with its electoral promises and to implement the reforms outlined in the 2015 Anti-corruption Action Plan. Important progress was made in 2016 with respect to transparency, oversight of

party and campaign financing, and conflict of interest. This progress can be partially attributed to the systematic campaign of a watchdog NGO alliance.

## 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. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, trust in government reached a low point after the 3/11 disasters. It has recovered somewhat since, but in 2016 stood at only roughly 40%, still 11 points lower than in pre-disaster 2011.

Citation:

David Blecken, High cynicism among Japanese over long-term future, says Edelman Trust Barometer, PR Week, 11 February 2016, <http://www.prweek.com/article/1383085/high-cynicism-among-japanese-long-term-future-says-edelman-trust-barometer>

## United Kingdom

### Score 7

The UK government provides considerable information to its citizens through detailed websites, both at the core-executive and the ministerial level. This flow of information has been enhanced in recent years. These websites contain general information, progress reports and statistical data. As part of its online material, the government makes some effort to ensure that citizens use this information by targeting specific groups. For example, a digital voter registration toolkit was developed in conjunction with a single-parent charity, while the “Rock Enrol!@” pack was designed to engage young people. The most important source of knowledge for citizens is 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, while 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.

Australian citizens have shown a declining interest in political issues in recent years. During the 2013 federal election, 20% of adults did not vote, because they were not enrolled or failed to cast a valid vote. However, in recent years, the Australian Electoral Commission has made a concerted effort to increase enrolment, which has increased enrollment of the adult population from 92% in 2013 to 95% in 2016. That said, 9% of enrolled voters did not cast a valid vote at the 2016 election, a record high since voting became compulsory in 1925.

Citation:

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/election-2016-voter-turnout-lowest-since-compulsory-voting-began-in-1925-20160808-gqni2.html>

## 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. The public discourse generally favors more direct democratic participation. And some particularly sensitive topics, such as the possibility of Turkey's EU membership, lead to promises by most or all political parties to have binding popular consultations before government and parliament determine Austria's final position.

## 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 Elections 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. Information follows mobilization, rather than the other way around, evidenced by the protest movements against TTIP and CETA. 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 Party 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 also fuels populist feelings. Since coming into office in 2014, Prime Minister Valls has adopted a more frank style, trying to clearly point out the challenges and needs for reform to the public. However, this style is contested within the ranks of the governmental party. Meanwhile, opinion polls suggest that French voters are both well aware of the problems and reluctant to accept change when their specific interests are at stake.

## 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. The Internet has become an increasingly important medium for citizens to gather information. Broadcasters, radio stations and newspapers 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. According to one survey, around half of the population watches a news program every day.

However, a 2014 survey by the Bertelsmann Stiftung indicates a dramatic decline in public interest in politics and in parliamentary debates in particular. Only 25% of the respondents expressed interest in politics and regularly followed debates (compared to about 50% 30 years ago). Disproportionally younger cohorts were unable 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 SPD. In addition, decreasing confidence in parties and politicians is undermining the motivation to stay informed. Compared to other European countries such as the United Kingdom, 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>;

<http://www.infratest-dimap.de/umfragen-analysen/bundesweit/umfragen/aktuell/wenig-vertrauen-in-medien-berichterstattung/>.

## 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 is 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.

The government and in particular Prime Minister Renzi are campaigning vigorously and directly informing citizens about their ambitious reform agenda. This is particularly evident with respect to the constitutional reform. Public opinion polls indicate an increasing level of information among citizens on this issue. Though a very sizeable proportion of respondents express approval or disapproval for the government rather than for a specific constitutional issue.

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.

According to USAID's 2015 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia, the government has a positive attitude toward NGOs and NGOs provide significant input to the policymaking process. In 2015, NGOs participated in roughly 1,400 working groups. Latvia scored 2.6 and ranked 3 out of 29 countries in the Central Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia region, behind Estonia and Poland, and equal to the Czech Republic.

Individuals are slow to engage with the political process. According to a 2015 survey, 50% of respondents claim that they would be able to protect their rights and

interests through government or municipal institutions, while 38% claimed they could not. However, 54% of respondents stated that they did not believe that they could influence politics through civic engagement. The most popular methods of participation are online commentary (16%); signing petitions (12%); contacting politicians or state officials (11%); boycotting products, services or organizations (7%); and participating in an NGO (6%). In addition, 60% of respondents stated that referenda were a good method for deciding important political issues. 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 European Union.

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. An e-petition tool lets any group of 10,000 or more citizens place issues on the parliamentary agenda. In its three years of operation, eight initiatives launched on this site have been successful in initiating parliamentary action. An initially successful social-media-style website that enabled citizens to engage in direct communication with members of parliament was shut down in 2014 due to a lack of financing.

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
5. Van Biezen, Ingrid, Peter Mair and Thomas Poguntke (2012), Going, going...gone? The decline of party membership in contemporary Europe, *European Journal of Political Research*, 51, 21-56.°
6. Research center SKDS, Survey on central government's image, Available (in Latvian): [http://petijumi.mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/file/VKanc\\_Valsts\\_parv\\_klientu\\_apmerinat\\_petij.pdf](http://petijumi.mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/file/VKanc_Valsts_parv_klientu_apmerinat_petij.pdf), Last assessed 07.11.2016

## Malta

Score 6

The level of information available for citizens on policies is relatively 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 under the Freedom of Information Act. However, the restrictions placed on this act result in information not always being available. Access to contracts between government and private investors remains problematic. The National Statistics Office and the Department of Information regularly make information available to citizens. Some of the more



complete reports assessing government policy however come from the European Commission. Competition between media outlets has improved public access to information with leading media outlets hosting their own investigative television series. Although most citizens follow political party-controlled media in their evaluation of policy objectives, political debate is nevertheless widespread and enables citizens to examine different aspects of policy. Policy discussions happen in regular civil society forums and are reported on by the media. However, local opinion surveys are rarely used to evaluate policy proposals.

## Mexico

**Score 6** Socioeconomically, Mexico is a very internally divided country, 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 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. There is a gradual tendency toward more sophisticated public debates. Nevertheless, most Mexicans share a distrust of government and political authority. However, there are many independent media outlets, which make it possible for citizens to get informed by other sources than the government. Furthermore, the use of social media is increasing rapidly, particularly among younger Mexicans. Finally, the high level of insecurity and violence has increased public demand for political information.

## Netherlands

**Score 6** Dutch respondents claim to spend slightly more time than the average European respondent on collecting 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% of respondents thought politics was too complicated for them to understand, 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' powers in processing policy information, political judgments about the European Union, issues

of immigration and integration, and political leadership. The SCP recently found that Dutch citizens split evenly over the issue of more or less direct influence by citizens. It is the less well-educated who demand more political influence, whereas higher educated citizens, especially those with tertiary qualifications, far less support for the idea. A recent study into citizen attitudes to the European Union, undertaken by TNS/Kantar Nipo and commissioned by the GreenLeft party, found that Dutch citizens are caught in a dependence-cum-distrust situation: they instinctively distrust the European Union and would resist transferring more national powers to the EU-level, but simultaneously believe that the European Union should have greater influence over most policy domains. This “want-your-cake-and-eat-it-too” attitude demonstrates a confusion and unwillingness to think through one’s political preferences, and to take responsibility for them.

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)

SCP, *Continu Onderzoek Burgerperspectieven, Burgerperspectieven 2016|1* ([scp.nl](http://scp.nl), consulted 10 November 2016)

NRC-Handelsblad, *Nederlandse kiezer wil meer en minder Europe tegelijk*, 20 October 2016

## Slovakia

Score 6

While the liberal legislation on access to public information has improved the availability of information about policymaking, the population’s overall policy knowledge has suffered from the public disenchantment with politics and the political elite. The second Fico government followed a very selective information strategy. Fico’s main message to the public was that the government takes care of the people’s everyday worries as well as the national interests of Slovakia. By pursuing this kind of paternalism, the Fico government discouraged citizens from political participation and seeking independent, alternative information.

## South Korea

Score 6

The 2016 parliamentary election saw an increase in voter turnout by 4 percentage points, although overall turnout remained relatively low at 58%. Since that time, scandals have driven a significant increase in the incidence of political activism. On 5 November 5 2016, tens of thousands of citizens demonstrated against the president, calling for her resignation. At the same time, 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 level of 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. However, the younger generation is less politicized and less informed about political issues.

Citation:

Korea Center for Freedom of Information and Transparent Society at <http://www.opengirok.or.kr/>

## Spain

### Score 6

Although levels of interest in politics have traditionally been low in Spain as compared with other Western European countries, the crisis and the deep changes in the political landscape (with the emergence of Podemos and Ciudadanos) have somewhat changed Spaniards' attitudes toward the policy process. The public now demands more information, and the motives behind and implications of government policy decisions are now better explained in the media than was the case in the old two-party system. Research conducted by the official sociological institute CIS demonstrates that attentiveness to political information within Spain has improved. For example, the CIS Barometer 3114, published in October 2015, reports that 22.5% of Spaniards talk about politics very often when meeting with friends (up from only 14% in January 2008). With regard to specific public services and policies, the empirical evidence also shows a recent increase in participation and thus knowledge. For example, a survey on public opinion and fiscal policy published by the CIS in 2016 indicated that 51.2% of Spaniards talk about public services very often or often (as compared to 44.2% in 2008).

Citation:

CIS Survey 3146 (Barometer) July 2016

[http://www.cis.es/cis/export/sites/default/-Archivos/Marginales/3140\\_3159/3146/Es3146mar.pdf](http://www.cis.es/cis/export/sites/default/-Archivos/Marginales/3140_3159/3146/Es3146mar.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. Businesses are also well informed of government policies concerning their field of operation. 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.

Citation:

Frailé, M. (2013). Do information-rich contexts reduce knowledge inequalities? the contextual determinants of political knowledge in europe. *Acta Politica* 48(2), 119-143.

Grönlund, K., H. Milner (2006): The determinants of political knowledge in comparative perspective. *Scandinavian Political Studies* 29(4): 386-406.

## 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. This has been recently displayed following the proposal of education, pension, fiscal and labor reforms. New forms of public communication regarding government policymaking, in many cases through websites and social networks, are on the rise. Yet a large share of the population is excluded from such discussion due to low levels of education, limited understanding of in-depth analysis and/or its lack of exposure to media other than television. For instance, a study conducted by the National Cultural Council in 2011 (Consejo de la Cultura) indicated that 84% of Chileans of all ages did not have an adequate understanding of content they had read. This observation was confirmed by a 2015 PISA study on the reading comprehension of adolescents. Furthermore, Chile's oligopolistic media structures 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 deficits 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 took place during the 2014 fiscal reform, represent a notable exception). Those elements of the middle class that are interested in these debates tend to have access only to the low-quality information sources mentioned above, while members of the socioeconomically lower-class population often know only about the specific public-subsidy systems they use, and lack broader familiarity with public policies and public policymaking.

Citation:

[www.uchile.cl/2Fdocumentos%2Festudio-sobre-el-comportamiento-lector-a-nivel-nacional\\_110593\\_2\\_2405.pdf&usg=AFQjCNHhAyEyR819xPkhH1ch5LLI0dIGJQ&sig2=yRzmtJFaAIB-Bf3ltxYgsw](http://www.uchile.cl/2Fdocumentos%2Festudio-sobre-el-comportamiento-lector-a-nivel-nacional_110593_2_2405.pdf&usg=AFQjCNHhAyEyR819xPkhH1ch5LLI0dIGJQ&sig2=yRzmtJFaAIB-Bf3ltxYgsw)

<http://radio.uchile.cl/2011/12/14/solo-el-84-de-los-chilenos-entiende-lo-que-lee>

## Cyprus

### Score 5

The Cypriot public's traditionally strong interest and participation in politics and very low rates of abstention in elections have collapsed in recent years. Increasing abstention rates in national elections tripled from 2006 to 2016 (33%), while only 20% of young people register to vote. Citizens' trust in institutions is also in sharp decline to very low levels. Even the judiciary draws high levels of distrust,

The above phenomena are coupled with a generalized disengagement of citizens from institutions and politics. Among the problems that affect public perception is the low quality of available information, communication standards adopted by politicians, while people face persistent serious problems. Delays in the administration of justice are also a serious problem.

The government's initial efforts to keep the public informed during the crisis may have weakened opposition to specific policies and measures, as the public acknowledged their need. As time has passed, however, the increasing alienation and declining institutional credibility may lead to a tacit disapproval of policies, or even create a situation where large portions of the public no longer consider it worthwhile to stay informed on politics. Many people's experience of daily life problems clearly contrasts with the portrayal of successful fiscal policies, which accentuates their alienation.

#### Citation:

1. Opinion poll on trust in institutions, CYMAR, January 2016, <http://www.cymar.com.cy/en-gb/results/cyprus-institutions-january2016/>
2. Cyprus goes to the polls on Sunday, Cyprus Mail, 21.05.2016 <http://cyprus-mail.com/2016/05/21/cyprus-goes-polls-sunday-choose-new-parliament/?hilite=new+voters>

## 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%. In the elections of September 2015 turnout fell even further (down to 56.6%). 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 toward 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. Owing to the depletion

of state funds in 2010-2014 this tradition was somewhat curbed, but the tendency to forge patronage based on citizen-government relations was renewed after the elections of January 2015, when Syriza and ANEL formed a coalition government which was open to such clientelistic appeals by party supporters. The parties wanted to staff ministerial cabinets, boards of directors of public entities, if not also the lower echelons of public bureaucracy, with their supporters.

In the past, most parties made unrealistic pledges to voters about alleviating austerity policy measures, thus obfuscating civic policy knowledge. The same tendency was observed in the electoral campaign for the parliamentary elections of January 2015. Less unrealistic pledges were made prior to the elections of September 2015, when the governing coalition of Syriza-ANEL had approved an economic adjustment program for Greece which was similar, if not more demanding, than the corresponding programs agreed between governments of PASOK or ND and the country's lenders during 2010-2014.

A small number of individuals voice policy opinions to politicians either through writing letters on policy issues to the press or by participating in the open electronic consultation on new government measures which each ministry announces and sustains before drafting a bill. On the other hand, there is a strong tradition of organized interest groups voicing opinions on policy matters relevant to their material interests. After the futile referendum of July 2015, which the Syriza-ANEL government launched to increase its political legitimacy and popular support vis-à-vis Greece's lenders, the austerity policy adopted by the same government made citizens realize that, in conditions of very low economic performance and chronic indebtedness, i.e., the conditions of the Greek economy, very few policy choices are available. Salary and pension cuts and welfare spending cuts, implemented by the Syriza-ANEL government in the period under review, are of course not welcome by citizens but are probably viewed as a necessary step for further fiscal consolidation and for restarting the economy – if, of course, the government radically changes its usual reluctance toward private investments.

Thus, in the period under review, having learned the hard way how a modern, dependent and frail market system works, Greek citizens did not upgrade, nor were they ever let to upgrade, their political participation in decision-making, but acquired a more precise view of Greece's constraints and options.

Citation:

The Ministry of Interior reports turnout in elections. The relevant percentage figures are available at the Ministry's [http://ekloges.ypes.gr/current/v/public/index.html#“cls”:"main",“params”:](http://ekloges.ypes.gr/current/v/public/index.html#“cls”:). Accessed on 03.11.2015.

## Hungary

Score 5

While media freedom and the access to information have declined and the government has led huge disinformation campaigns, the policy knowledge of the Hungarian public has paradoxically increased. In the fields of health care and

education, the protracted crisis has provoked social movements and everyday discussions within the larger public. There has been a vivid public discourse about the situation of these sectors and the reasons for their continuous decline with poor services. Political apathy still exists, reinforced by the biased information policies of the government and the lack of transparency characterizing policymaking. However, the everyday situation is so bad in these vital fields that ordinary people discuss policy issues in detail based on direct experiences. Independent policy institutes such as Policy Agenda, Political Capital and Policy Solutions have provided detailed policy knowledge for the public at large, as have many professional NGOs.

## 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. Only 34% of the population received information on the activities of municipalities and other local authorities in 2013.

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. Despite this, Lithuania still faces substantial challenges with regard to increasing its citizens' participatory capacity. In its review of Lithuania's open-government programs, the OECD recommended supporting the development of Lithuania's civil society through capacity building and collaboration with the activities of the newly established NGO Council, with the ultimate aim of engaging citizens more deeply in government policymaking processes.

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)

OECD, Public Governance Review Lithuania- Fostering Open and Inclusive Policy Making Key Findings and Recommendations. 2015.

## 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 the government party, 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. However, a segment of society has become more interested in politics as government reforms reducing checks and balances increased feelings of alienation. This group protests against these developments on the streets and elsewhere.

Citation:

Czeński, M., A. Kwiatkowska, R. Markowski (2016): Co Polacy wiedzą o polityce? Niewiele, in: *Polityka*, April 26.

Falkowski, M. (2016): Die Antiregierungsproteste in Polen. *Polen-Analysen* Nr. 184, Bremen (<http://www.laender-analysen.de/polen/pdf/PolenAnalysen184.pdf>).

## Portugal

### Score 5

Portugal's bailout increased citizens' interest in public policy, as did the general election during the previous review period. During the current period under review, the situation appears to have regressed, as the bailout and ensuing austerity measures recede from public consciousness. In a May 2016 Eurobarometer survey, 50% of respondents in Portugal expressed a "strong" or "medium" interest in politics, a five-percentage point decrease vis-à-vis a similar survey in May 2015. Moreover, this is the lowest reported rate of interest in any EU member state and well below the EU average of 63%. Equally, 34% of respondents expressed no interest in politics in May 2016, a six-percentage point increase compared to May 2015.

This result further indicates the limited and unevenly distributed public knowledge of public policy. 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; a media system that 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.

During the period under review, this was reflected in the 2016 presidential election campaign, which was marked by a highly personal campaign and the almost total absence of policy topics.

Citation:

Eurobarometer 83 (Annex), May 2015. Available online at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/66899>

Eurobarometer 85 (Annex), May 2016. Available online at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/74267>



## Romania

### Score 5

The majority of Romanian citizens have very limited knowledge about government policies. This reflects both the low quality of media reporting and a far-reaching lack of trust in the political system. The massive protests and demonstrations that shook Romania in 2015 and 2016 have not improved policy knowledge. Following the deadly nightclub fire in October 2015, attention focused on top-level political corruption. Throughout 2016, citizens demonstrated greater interest in corruption prevention initiatives of individual political parties and the government's failure to provide adequate salaries and working environments in education and health care. The focus on corruption and government wrong doing had ambivalent impacts. On the one hand, it has ushered in unprecedented levels of political participation, while, on the other, it has favored a strong distrust in elected officials and a general disenchantment with the political process. As a result, voter turnout in local elections in Romania hit a record low in 2016. In the June 2016 elections, only 8.8 million of 18 million registered voters (just 48.4% of the population) cast a ballot. By contrast, the 2012 local elections saw a voter turnout of 56.4%. Urban areas saw a voter turnout of 40.77%, significantly less than the rural area turnout of 61.25%, with Bucharest seeing the poorest turnout at 33%.

## 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.

Although citizens in Turkey do reflect critically about politics in general, they often learn of policies only after their implementation process has already 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. 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.

Social media has become a widespread tool, even for the government in its public relations. Ministeries and municipalities use social media frequently, though there are some fake accounts spreading disinformation. Academic studies concluded that

people consider social media a mechanism able to influence views and developments in two directions: government can inform its citizens and the people can influence government policies. In other words, social media can facilitate input-output and implementation and feedback in governmental processes. Sometimes ministers, mayors and other decision-makers share their policies through social media. However, the recent restrictions and bans on social media on the one hand and its limited presence on the other make it ineffective. Furthermore, as is the case demonstrated in other countries, social media may inform people, but it also tends to re-affirm biased views and opinions among the public. As a result, social media may underline or even exacerbate polarization tendencies in Turkey.

Citation:

Meseleyi Kamuoyuna İyi Anlatamadık, 2.6.2013, [http://www.ulusalstrateji.com/haber/gundem/meseleyi\\_kamuoyuna\\_ iyi\\_anla\\_tamadik\\_126](http://www.ulusalstrateji.com/haber/gundem/meseleyi_kamuoyuna_ iyi_anla_tamadik_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. [http://tesev.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Judicial\\_Reform\\_Packages\\_Evaluating\\_Their\\_Effect\\_On\\_Rights\\_And\\_Freedoms.pdf](http://tesev.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Judicial_Reform_Packages_Evaluating_Their_Effect_On_Rights_And_Freedoms.pdf) (accessed 27 October 2015)

Volkan Göçoğlu and Mehmet Devrim Aydın, Kamu Politikası ve Sosyal Medya İlişkisinin Toplumsal Hareketler Bağlamında İncelenmesi, Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi, 2015, 8(37): 880-901.

Mahmut Korkmaz, Sosyal Medya-Kamu Politikaları Etkileşimi: Gezi Parkı Olayları Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme, MA Thesis, Hacettepe University, 2014.

## United States

Score 5

The U.S. public is generally quite uninformed by the standards of political elites. Comparing citizens' levels of governmental knowledge across political systems is difficult. Nevertheless, as one scholar has written: "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, roughly 40% of the public believed that Obama's health care reform had in fact been repealed – an unrealistic prospect given the Democratic control of the presidency and the Senate. 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.

## 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.

## Slovenia

### Score 4

Slovenian citizens' knowledge of government policymaking is rather limited. While both print and electronic media provide mostly 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 2016 Eurobarometer survey, only 7% of respondents trusted political parties (EU28 average 15%), and just 16% trusted the national government (EU28 average 27%).

Citation:  
European Commission (2016): Standard Eurobarometer 85 Survey. Brussels  
([http://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2130\\_85\\_2\\_STD85\\_ENG](http://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2130_85_2_STD85_ENG)).

## Address | Contact

Bertelsmann Stiftung  
Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256  
33311 Gütersloh  
Germany  
Phone +49 5241 81-0

**Dr. Daniel Schraad-Tischler**  
Phone +49 5241 81-81240  
daniel.schraad-tischler@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

**Dr. Christian Kroll**  
Phone +49 5241 81-81471  
christian.kroll@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

**Dr. Christof Schiller**  
Phone +49 5241 81-81470  
christof.schiller@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

**Pia Paulini**  
Phone +49 5241 81-81468  
pia.paulini@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

[www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de](http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de)  
[www.sgi-network.org](http://www.sgi-network.org)