

SGI Sustainable
Governance
Indicators

2014 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, although not perfect. Information on governmental 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 policymaking indicate that an interest in politics has been in general on the increase, and young Finns are especially more interested in politics during the review period than in 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 and thus better (and wider) knowledge, other issues less media-friendly or stimulating pass largely unnoticed.

Citation:

YLE News, 29.09.2012, 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/Julkaisujatutkimuksia

Iceland

Score 9

Icelandic citizens seem to be generally well informed about government policy. In local surveys, most citizens have been familiar with policies in general, and more so with respect to policies that either interested them or directly affected their everyday lives. This has been more true of domestic policies than international politics, in part because Iceland's political landscape is not highly complex. It is relatively easy to develop a comprehensive overview of the politics, parties, and the issues. Iceland is a small country with extensive interpersonal networks, and its relatively isolated island status contributes to its citizens' inward-looking domestic focus.

Some of the voters' immediate responses to the economic collapse in 2008 show an ability to adapt quickly to changed circumstances, as shown in a survey performed in connection with the parliamentary elections in 2007 and 2009. In this survey, the percentage of voters agreeing with the claim that the country was mainly governed in accordance with the popular will declined from 64% in 2007 to 31% in 2009. The authors of an article in an Icelandic scientific journal in Iceland (*Samtíð*) recently argued that the general defeat of the four traditional nationwide political parties in the 2010 local-government elections could at least partly be explained by a dramatic decline in trust in politicians and political institutions following the collapse. In the biggest municipalities, almost all nationwide parties lost a considerable share of votes in 2010, and in Reykjavik and Akureyri, parties outside the traditional system came to power. It was argued that this trend was made more dramatic by the publication of the parliament's Special Investigation Committee (SIC) report only six weeks before the elections, which put scathing criticism of politicians and political institutions into the public eye. In the parliamentary elections in April 2013, the Progressive Party (*Framsókn*) made the largest proportionate gains, going from 14.8% of the vote in the previous parliamentary elections to 24.4%. This was clearly due to the party's clear proposal to write off up to 20% of Icelandic homeowners' mortgage debts, something the 2009 – 2013 coalition government had been reluctant to do. In the same election, the governing coalition lost more than half of its seats in the Althing, and the new coalition government is led by the Progressive Party.

As another example, the two national referenda on the Icesave agreement between Iceland, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands in 2009 and 2011 triggered an outburst of public debate, suggesting strong interest in the issue among ordinary people. Similarly, the national referendum on the constitutional bill in 2012 attracted 49% of the electorate to the polls despite a lack of encouragement from the traditional political parties, which offered

little or no support for the referendum. Even so, some observers complain that unprecedentedly low trust in politicians, especially after the crash, has turned many voters away from politics and the news, making them less well informed about political choices and national affairs than previously.

Citation:

Önnudóttir, E.H. and Hardarson, Ó. Th. (2009): Óánægðir lýðræðissinnar: Afstaða Íslendinga til lýðræðis. (Dissatisfied democrats: The Icelanders' attitudes towards 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>)

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.

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 in Ireland – 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 level of debate on the economic and financial crisis has been fairly high. Technical issues concerning 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.

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. 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 benefitted. 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.

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 referendums), but turnout at elections for the European Parliament are much lower than for national ones (turnout for EU elections in 2009 was 59.5%), 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 24 April 2013).

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 market research agency TNS EMOR, in 2012, 81.3% of the adult population reads at least one newspaper, and the average number of printed media outlets regularly read per person was six. Extensive media consumption suggests that citizens are well informed on major policy topics. Estonians also frequently use the Internet is also and they are guaranteed free Internet access in public libraries.

Israel

Score 8

Israel's citizens, as compared to those of other countries, are highly interested in policy but are in fact informed to a somewhat lesser extent. For example, in a 2012 survey, approximately 67% of respondents in the country agreed that they were interested in politics. Consumption of television and print-media news is very high compared to other countries. In 2004, the Knesset Channel was established to broadcast parliamentary sessions. It is also available online today.

In the last few years, Israel's government has done a great deal of additional work to allow citizens to follow ministries' work over the Internet. In 2011, Israel joined the Open Government Partnership; the following year, it was recognized by a United Nations survey for making outstanding progress in the area of e-government.

The government has officially committed itself to "promote transparency and accountability and to provide the citizens information with public value." Since 2006, the government has made the annual agenda of each ministerial office publically available, including goals and deadlines.

Citation:

Ahren, Rephael, "Israel Wins UN Prize for 'Outstanding Progress' in e-government," *The Times Of Israel* (2012)

"The Media and Public Trust in the Political System," *Israel Democracy Institute* (2010)

"2012 Work Plans," *Prime Minister Office website*

Herman, Tamar. "The Israeli Democracy Index 2012," Israel Democracy Institute (2012)
 "Joining the Open Government Partnership and the Nomination of the 'Open Government Israeli Forum'," Prime Minister Office website (2012)

Luxembourg

Score 8

As a condition for political understanding and participation, citizens should have a good command of the three official languages: Luxembourgish, French and German. These language skills indeed correlate with societal and political participation. Some 43% of residents are foreigners and multilingualism is the "compétence légitime" in Luxembourg. There is a distinct wish of foreigners to participate in policy planning through the three initiatives: Luxembourg 2030, Société Luxembourgeoise de l'Evaluation et de la Prospective (SOLEP) and "5 fir 12." The interest in Luxembourg's public life and political commitment depends on political empowerment and active participation in social life. Hence, voting rights are extremely important because an active influence in decision-making promotes interest and commitment.

Citation:

CEFIS (2011), Bilan des inscriptions sur les listes électorales communales 26 septembre 2011
http://cefis.lu/files/confe0301rence-presse-2011_mise-en-page.pdf
 Fetzer, J. S. (2011), Luxembourg as an Immigration Success Story. The Grand Duchy in Pan-European Perspective, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth (UK)
 Fehlen, F. (2013), Les langues sur le marché de l'emploi in Conférence de présentation de l'ouvrage collectif Le travail frontalier au sein de la Grande Région Saar-Lor-Lux:
<http://www.statistiques.public.lu/fr/actualites/population/travail/2013/03/20130308/20130308.pdf>
<http://www.2030.lu/en/home/>
 European Commission (2012), Special Eurobarometer 386, European and their Languages, Report:
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_en.pdf
 Stoldt, J. (2012), Mehr Demokratie wagen?, in: Forum, 11/2012, pp. 19-20

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 – 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://zacadat.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp?object=http://zacadat.gesis.org/obj/fStudy/ZA3950>

International Social Survey Programme 2007: Leisure Time and Sports:

<http://zacadat.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp?object=http://zacadat.gesis.org/obj/fStudy/ZA4850>

New Zealand Election Study, University of Auckland, 2011-12.

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 by Hanspeter Kriesi 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.

In a 2005 analysis, Kriesi argued 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.

Australia

Score 7

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.

Germany

Score 7

Empirical analyses of the German population's levels of political knowledge show an inconsistent development over time (cf. in the following Glantz, Bathelt, Maier 2012). On the one hand, the supply of independent political information has improved considerably in recent years. 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, and broadcasters, radio stations and newspaper publishers have adapted to the new circumstances by providing a great deal of their services online. 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, the development of accurate policy knowledge requires that high-quality information sources be selected. Such a selection can only be made if the necessary cognitive and motivational conditions are met. Although cognitive capabilities have increased considerably on aggregate, the population's motivation to pay attention to political issues has declined in recent years. Older people are more interested in politics than are younger generations, and social status plays a key role as well. Decreasing

confidence in parties and politicians is undermining the motivation to stay informed. As a consequence, political knowledge has not risen per se, as factors moving in opposite directions partially cancel each other out. Germans rate their own political knowledge as extensive in international comparison.

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% NHK and newspapers are reliable sources of information.

In addition, the 3/11 disasters and their consequences significantly increased public doubts about the reliability of policy information provided by the government. With respect to the planning and operation of the nuclear power plants, for instance, it has since become known that the choice of the original reactor architecture was probably suboptimal, that locations were extremely carelessly chosen, and that regulatory oversight was not effective.

United Kingdom

Score 7

The British government provides a lot of information to its citizens through detailed websites, both on the core executive and the ministerial level. They contain general information, progress reports and statistical data. Government does not, however, make much of an effort to ensure that citizens actually use that 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 more citizens have voted in certain television talent competitions than 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>

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 the same question was not asked in the subsequent survey, in general data shows Belgians' trust in political and judicial institutions is either slightly above or close to the European average. Time spent listening to or watching political news is 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.

Making political parties or the government accountable is difficult however because of the country's complex institutional structure and high degree of proportionality: dispersed votes mean that there is a lot of joint responsibility and few parties in opposition. The national government is composed of Socialists (left), Christian Democrats (center, conservative), and Liberals

(right). Opposition parties include Greens, Flemish nationalists (New Flemish Alliance (N-VA), conservative, right-wing), Vlaams Belang (Flemish far-right), and two representatives of two populist parties.

At the regional level, the Flemish government is composed of Socialists, Christian Democrats, and the N-VA. Thus this group rules without Liberal parties that are part of the national government, but instead with the N-VA, which is in the national opposition. Similarly, the Walloon government rules without Liberal parties but with the Greens (Ecolo). Excepting the far-right and smaller parties, almost all parties with an elected representative are in government in some capacity. Since economic outcomes result from decisions made both at the national and the regional levels, individual accountability is very limited.

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. Given the complexity of most public policy issues, the lack of expert consensus, and the understandable higher priority of work and family, it is not surprising that most citizens do not devote themselves to obtaining the information and knowledge needed to evaluate government policymaking adequately.

In the 2006 edition of the World Values Survey, only 11.7% of Canadians stated that politics was “very important” to their life, which was below the average of 14.6% of all countries surveyed, but comparable to other Western economies. Canada is falling particularly behind with respect 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&doc_ument=index&lang=e

Czech Republic

Score 6

While detailed information on government policies is relatively easily available to all interested citizens, the policy knowledge of citizens is limited. However, many citizens appear capable of reaching informed evaluations of controversial reforms. An interesting example is pension reform. Details were criticized by members of the commission established to formulate the plan and President Klaus vetoed part of the proposal on the grounds that there was no consensus among experts, political parties or the population. His veto was overruled by Parliament, but a number of pension funds indicated that they would not take part in the voluntary second pillar. Moreover, the public could reasonably fear that any reform would soon be revised. The failure of the government and private banks to convince more than 10% of citizens to join this voluntary pillar might be interpreted as a sign of a public well-informed enough to act rationally in view of uncertainties over the desirability and future of a particular reform.

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. Interim 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 are able to 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 surveys, only 15% of the population feels that they can influence decision-making. The Enterprise Register (UR) estimates that just 25,000 individuals in the country belong to one of 57 political parties, representing 1.2% of the population.

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 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, 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-politis-kajas-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

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.

Netherlands

Score 6

Dutch respondents claim to spend slightly more time than the average European respondent gathering political information via television, radio or newspapers. 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, as there are abundant information sources, and thresholds to accessing information are low. As 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. A recent study by Verhoeven elaborates on this issue. Four types of citizens are distinguished regarding their degree of political involvement: "wait-and-see" citizens (25%), impartial citizens (17%), dependent citizens (23%) and active citizens (35%). Active citizens show the highest motivation to become actively involved in public debate and – if possible – decision-making. Members of this groups are usually very well-informed, although their knowledge is often focused on specific areas of government policy.

Citation:

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

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

http://www.scp.nl/Publicaties/Alle_publicaties/Publicaties_2010/COB_Kwartaalbericht_2010_1

Continu Onderzoek Burgerperspectieven, Burgerperspectieven 2012/4
(www.scp.nl/dsresource?objectid=33426&type=org)

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 available information has increased, the policy knowledge of the population has suffered from the rising public disenchantment with politics and the political elite, especially after the so-called “Gorilla Affair” in 2012, which showed that corruption and cronyism have prevailed among politicians of all camps.

South Korea

Score 6

Many citizens are well-informed on the details of a few hotly debated government policies. However, many other important policy fields, particularly in the economic and social realms, show much lower knowledge levels. The quality of information available is often limited, because political questions are often personalized, and thus 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 spread 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 the government, while the younger generation is less politicized and less informed about political issues.

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 a variety of polls, levels of interest in politics have remained stubbornly low, and expressions of complete disinterest in politics are more widespread among Spaniards than among citizens of any other western European country.

Nevertheless, and due to the economic crisis, the attitudes toward politics and the policymaking process have started to change, with citizens demanding a higher level of knowledge. Recent polls conducted by the official sociological research institute (the Barometer 2981 of the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, CIS, in March 2013) show that almost 54% of Spanish society can now be considered as somewhat or very attentive to political information (up from only 30% in 2010). Although less than 20% of Spaniards follow politics by reading newspapers regularly – as compared to a western European average that fluctuates near 60% – the motives and

implications of government policy decisions are now better explained in the media than before the crisis. Finally, many social movements (most notably the 15-M or Indignants' Movement) have launched protests and other initiatives demanding better policies and more accountability.

Citation:

http://www.cis.es/opencms/ES/NoticiasNovedades/InfoCIS/2013/Documentacion_2981.html

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 and pension reform. Yet a large share of population is excluded from 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 structures of the media in Chile distort the political options offered to citizens. Disinformation and manipulations hinder public policy discussions.

In addition to these defects in news coverage, citizens in general show low interest in policymaking. The higher socioeconomic part of the population is also generally not that interested in policymaking discussions as long as public policies do not substantially affect their lifestyle in a nearly completely privatized environment (except discussions regarding fiscal redistribution). 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.

France

Score 5

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 is provoking 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/>

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 elections of June 2013, turnout dropped to 62.5%. This was symptom 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 had systematic personal contact or 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 MPs 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. In 2011 – 2013 this practice was probably curbed, as government funds had been depleted. There is no tradition of voicing policy opinions to politicians either, unless of course one refers to claims made by organized interest groups.

In 2011 – 2013 there was wide coverage of the austerity policy measures accompanying Greece's bailout. Yet, the speed, complexity and amount of legislation passed in order to satisfy the conditions imposed on Greece by the EC–ECB–IMF Troika were immense. The Memoranda of Understanding signed between the Greek government and the Troika – which contained the government measures implemented in the fields of economy, taxation, incomes, pensions and labor relations – were extensive, detailed and

complicated. Eventually, citizens got only a rare glimpse at the content of policy measures, which they in any case perceived through the distorting lens of polarized party conflict 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.ypes.gr/v2012b/publi c/#"cls": "main", "params":](http://ekloges.ypes.gr/v2012b/publi c/#). 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. Moreover, the Ministry of Economy has launched an open-data initiative in order to better exploit the potential of government data for business purposes.

Citation:

Reference to the Report of Transparency International:

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%20to bulinimo%20programa&p_tr2=2.

Mexico

Score 5

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.

Poland

Score
value_6

Despite recent attempts to improve access to government information, on average a Polish citizen's knowledge of government policy remains limited. Reasons include a tendency toward infotainment in many media outlets, the populist propaganda of oppositional parties as well as citizens' general detachment from politics. Moreover, political parties, trade unions and most other professional associations do not properly perform their socialization function, and fail to improve the policy knowledge of their members.

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.

Slovenia

Score 5

Slovenian citizens' knowledge of government policymaking is rather limited. While both print and the 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 the frustration and disenchantment of the major part of the population. According to European Social Survey data, in 2012 no more than 6% of Slovenes trusted national politicians and political parties.

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 shares government success stories; but in general, the government is not held accountable when its policies fail. 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; which has not, until recently manifest 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, people don't believe that the media is 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. For example, the last nationwide referendum to amend the constitution in September 2010 demonstrated that many voters didn't know what exactly the referendum was about; thus significant improvements are needed with regard to the public information policy of the Turkish government and parliament.

Poor communication undermines public trust in government as well as the effective implementation of government policies. E-government might provide one solution; in April 2012, the government adopted several regulations to provide basic public services and to inform citizens about new policy initiatives online.

Citation:

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

Meseleyi Kamuoyuna İyice Anlatamadık, 2.6.2013, http://www.ulusalstrateji.com/haber/gundem/meseleyi_kamuoyuna_iyi_anlatamadik_1261.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. Many would argue the U.S. public's lack of informed attention has significant adverse consequences for policymaking. In any case, the widespread lack of information is not in doubt.

Bulgaria

Score 4

The distribution of knowledge about government policies in Bulgaria is highly uneven. Citizens who are active, especially by participating in non-governmental organizations or grassroots activities, seem to have a very strong grasp of the ongoing policies in their sphere of interest. The general public, however, seems distrustful and uninterested. Their 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. These factors contributed to the widespread demonstrations in February 2013, which led to the resignation of the GERB government and the calling of early elections in May 2013.

Croatia

- Score 4** In Croatia, citizens' policy knowledge has been limited. For one thing, the political interest of most citizens itself is limited. For another, the media situation makes it difficult to get detailed information on specific government policies.

Cyprus

- Score 4** A high 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. A sharp decline in participation rates has recently been observed, with abstention rates doubling in 2011 (21%) and 2013 (17%) as compared to elections five years earlier. According to Eurobarometer, faith in institutions fell also sharply between 2010 and 2012. The share of citizens saying they had trust in political parties fell from 23% to 9%, while trust in the government fell from 43% to 16%, and trust in parliament fell from 40% to 15%.

These outcomes could be connected with the realities of Cyprus life. Television is the top source of public information, commanding the highest share of trust of any media category, at 52%. However, the quality of broadcast information is generally low, with in-depth analysis rare if not non-existent. Moreover, debates between the political figures who monopolize the news and current-affairs programs have little substance beyond populist appeals, endless arguments and incessant finger-pointing. As modern media play an important role in information-gathering, it is interesting to note that people in Cyprus make less use of the Internet (38%) than is the average across the European Union as a whole (54%).

The declining state of the economy and lack of clear policies in the period under review were coupled with government procrastination and contradictions between announcements and actions. Political leaders' efforts to blame one another only spread more confusion. As a result, citizens found it difficult to obtain reliable information on the country's real situation, the exact implications of policies, or the positions of political leaders and the government. However, the public did express its strong support for any course that could bring the period of uncertainty to a close.

Romania

Score 4

Few citizens in Romania are well-informed about government policies: according to a public opinion survey following the 2012 parliamentary elections, less than a third of respondents correctly identified the government's support for lowering the VAT on basic products and less than 5% were aware that the opposition Right Romanian Alliance (ARD) proposed lower corporate taxes, while almost 28% wrongly credited the governing Social Liberal Union (USL) for that proposal. In part, this problem is due to the growing disenchantment of Romanian citizens with the political process and the corresponding lack of interest in politics: thus, according to the same survey, only 3% of respondents were very interested in politics, compared to 31% who were completely uninterested and an additional 47% who expressed low interest in politics. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that both political parties and the mass media focus primarily on personality issues (often in the form of personal attacks against their partisan opponents) thereby leaving limited scope for debates focusing on concrete policy differences between political competitors. While Prime Minister Ponta has adopted a much more active role than his predecessors in informing the public about government policies, the potential gains in the public's knowledge about specific policies are limited by the inconsistencies in the actual messages as well as by their biased coverage in much of the mass media.

Citation:

Romanian Electoral Study (2012). Change and Stability in Romanian Electoral Behaviour, 2009-2014. <http://resproject.wordpress.com/> (Data from the post-electoral survey fielded from 15/12/2012-14/01/2013).

Hungary

Score 3

The policy knowledge of Hungarian citizens is poor. Reasons include a growing political apathy among citizens, the biased information policies of the government through an ever-growing propaganda complex and the increasing centralization and non-transparency of policy-making. The media on both sides of the political spectrum have concentrated on making scandals of political issues and on 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, who will support the party almost unconditionally.

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Contact:

Bertelsmann Stiftung
Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256
33311 Gütersloh

Dr. Daniel Schraad-Tischler
daniel.schraad-tischler@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Najim Azahaf
najim.azahaf@bertelsmann-stiftung.de