



# Citizens' Participatory Competence Report

Political Knowledge, Open Government

## Sustainable Governance Indicators 2022

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Indicator

## Political Knowledge

Question

### To what extent are citizens informed of public policies?

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 public policies.
- 8-6 = Many citizens are well-informed of individual public policies.
- 5-3 = Few citizens are well-informed of public policies; most citizens have only a rudimentary knowledge of public policies.
- 2-1 = Most citizens are not aware of public 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 rates are still high in Finland. Nevertheless, while some issues are widely debated in the media and attract broad general attention, other less media-friendly or stimulating issues pass largely unnoticed.

The public's evaluative and participatory competencies constitute a weak spot. Survey results suggest that the level of political knowledge among young people, particularly those with a low level of education, is rather low. At the same time, evidence suggests that the degree of interest and participation varies significantly across policy issues and levels of authority. Results indicate, for instance, that young cohorts tend to be familiar with supranational politics, while women are familiar with matters close to people's everyday lives. Recently, the extensive use and consumption of social media for the purposes of political and everyday communication has been said to enhance the public's political knowledge while also endangering the production of independent and broad-based information.

Finnish people have high levels of trust in the media. Nevertheless, the country is not immune to the fragmenting news landscape. Among certain parts of the population, people trust social media influencers more than they do the mainstream media (Heikkilä 2020).

During the pandemic, the government has persistently explained its policy measures and why it was choosing specific measures. This has included communication describing the crisis assessments underlying specific policy measures and timelines. The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare has also provided information for the

general public. Information has been communicated via press conferences, social media posts, websites and press releases.

As with other areas of the government's crisis management, the communication of the measures taken has in a sense been a victim of its own success. The repeated press conferences, and the communication of detailed and complex information related to COVID-19, have increased the population's psychological distress. The government has never been satisfied with the population's reactions and behavior. Consequently, it has intensified its communications, adopting an increasingly paternalistic tone in communicating its measures.

Citation:

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Heikkilä, Melissa, 2020. Influencer to fight Corona Virus. Accessed, 28.12. 2020.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/finland-taps-influencers-as-critical-actors-amid-coronavirus-pandemic/>

## Ireland

Score 9

In the 2016 general election, electoral turnout dropped to 65.2% from 70.1% in the previous election in 2011. This fall in turnout came after economic recovery and strong rates of economic growth. In 2020, turnout declined again to 62.9% (down 2.2%) despite the election being held on a Saturday for the first time since 1918.

The proportion of Irish respondents claiming to have heard of various European institutions is consistently higher than the EU average, in part explaining why Irish support for the European Union remains among the highest in the European Union. Brexit reinforced existing trends in this regard. 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, and media coverage of politics impartial and generally very fair.

## Norway

Score 9

The Norwegian public is generally attentive, and well-informed about government policies, measures and operations, and citizens tend to trust decision-makers. This is attributable to the country's small size and high levels of social capital, as well as 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, the pace and

complexity of policymaking is increasing, while 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 is generally politically engaged. 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. In 2018, the turnout increased even further to 87.2%, which is remarkably high compared to other European countries (Valmyndigheten, 2021). 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 (Andersson et al., 2018; Oscarsson, 2007; Oscarsson, and Holmberg, 2014).

#### Citation:

Andersson, Ulrika, Anders Carlander, Elina Lindgren, Maria Oskarson. (eds.) 2018. "Sprickor i Fasaden." Gothenburg: The SOM Institute.

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

Oscarsson, Henrik and Sören Holmberg. 2014. "Svenska väljare." Stockholm: Wolters Kluwer.

Valmyndigheten. 2021. "Valresultat." <https://www.val.se/valresultat.html>

## Denmark

### Score 8

Citizens get most of their information on government policy developments through television, radio, newspapers, news websites and social media. 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, easily accessible across

the country. Mail from the public is nearly exclusively 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 (MitID). There is ongoing discussions about whether the information provided is comprehensible to most citizens, given the technicalities and complexities involved.

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 (84.5% in the 2019 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 (66.08% in 2019). European Parliament elections tend to be perceived as second order elections. The issues most important for voters, including healthcare, social services, pensions and education, are largely national issues.

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

Extensive media consumption and high internet penetration suggest that citizens may be well informed on major policy topics. Besides news media, the websites of ministries and executive state agencies inform citizens about forthcoming policy changes (e.g., the reform of second-pillar pension funds). At the same time, extensive use of social media by various advocacy groups and radical social movements likely increases the dissemination of biased information and fake news. The recent discussions on foreign and domestic policy issues indicate that information is often trivialized and manipulated for political purposes. A few recent surveys have suggested that a significant proportion of citizens act ad hoc or overestimate their awareness (Turu-Uuringute AS 2020). For example, 41% of respondents in a representative opinion poll (Turu-Uuringute AS 2019) stated that they planned to withdraw their money from pension funds when allowed after the forthcoming pension reform, despite 77% of respondents stating that they would have no idea what to do with the money.

Citation:

Turu-Uuringute AS 2020. COVID-19 teemaline küsitlus, det. 2020.



## 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 truer of domestic policies than of 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 among citizens and Iceland's distance from other countries contribute to the domestic preoccupation of Icelandic politics.

The immediate response to the 2008 economic collapse demonstrates an ability on the part of some voters to quickly adapt to changed circumstances. In voter surveys during 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. This trend was accentuated by the publication of the scathing Special Investigation Committee report in 2010. 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 a new constitution secured a turnout of 49% of the electorate, despite the negative attitude of some of Iceland's 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. At 79%, voter turnout in the parliamentary election of 2016 was the lowest recorded since the beginning of the 20th century. Turnout among people aged 18 to 25 years old is especially low, as is the case in many Western democracies. Most current electoral research indicates that a significant proportion of young people do not vote due to a lack of interest. In the parliamentary elections in 2017 (81.2%) and 2021 (80.1%), voter turnout exceeded 80% again.

#### Citation:

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

Eythórsson, G., and Kowalczyk, M. (2013), "Explaining the low voter turnout in Iceland's 2010 local government elections," *Samtíð*. An Icelandic journal of society and culture, Vol. 1.

Eythórsson, G. T., Önnudóttir, E. H., Hardarson, Ó. T., Valgardsson, V. O., Jónsdóttir, G. A., Björnsdóttir, A. E., and

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Eythórsson, G. T., and Önnudóttir, E. H. (2017), "Abstainers reasoning for not voting in the Icelandic Local Government Election 2014," *Íslenska Þjóðfélagið*, Vol. 8, No. 1. <http://thjodfelagid.is/index.php/Th/article/view/86>. Accessed 4 February 2022.

## Israel

### Score 8

Compared to other countries, Israeli citizens show high levels of interest in politics and political participation. In the Israeli Democracy Index published by the Israel Democracy Institute, the Political Participation Index published by the Economist, and other international comparative indices, Israeli citizens were found to participate widely and be highly interested in politics. Israel also has one of the region's highest internet-penetration rates (according to one source, reaching 82% as of January 2019); a lively, pluralistic and independent news media market; and a politically heterogeneous and active civil society.

That being said, the Israeli public appears to be, to put mildly, "unimpressed" by the government's capabilities and its levels of transparency. The Israeli Democracy Index 2020 recorded the lowest point in a decade in the public's trust in public institutions and government officials (particularly in the Knesset and the Supreme Court), as well as substantial erosion in the public's sense of social solidarity (Israel Democracy Index 2020). Indeed, in 2021, the Israeli public reported the highest level of trust in the army, and the lowest level of trust in government, parliament and political parties (Israel Democracy Index 2021).

Citizens usually rely on the media rather than official (government) information channels for information about public policies. Indeed, according to several surveys published in January 2019 prior to the first round of elections in April 2019, over 50% of all respondents use traditional news media outlets to access political information, while about 20% of all respondents use social media.

#### Citation:

Arlozorov, Meirav. "For the First Time: The Grade the Government Gave Itself in Achieving Goals." The Marker website. <https://www.themarker.com/news/politics/1.4002747>. April 6th, 2017 (Hebrew)

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Data Israel Survey Database of the Guttman Center for Public Opinion and Policy Research. Source for data of the surveys for the Eli Hurvitz Conventions. <https://dataisrael.idi.org.il/>

Digital 2019: Israel. A slideshow about Israel's state of telecommunications, by We Are Social and Hootsuite, thinktanks. Retrieved from <https://www.slideshare.net/DataReportal/digital-2019-israel-january-2019-v01>

"Freedom of the Press: Israel 2017," Freedom House, 2017 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/israel>

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>

Israel. The State Comptroller. "The Government's Transparency – Actions to Promote the Open Government," Annual Report, 68(3), 2018, Jerusalem, vol. 1, pp. 5-71. (also available here: [http://www.mevaker.gov.il/he/Reports/Report\\_627/6dd1ae66-0117-438b-bef5-241d493c6f01/101-shkifut.pdf](http://www.mevaker.gov.il/he/Reports/Report_627/6dd1ae66-0117-438b-bef5-241d493c6f01/101-shkifut.pdf)) (Hebrew)

"Joining the Open Government Partnership and the nomination of the 'Open Government Israeli Forum,'" Prime Minister Office website 2012 (Hebrew)

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

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

"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 State Comptroller's official website in English. Numerous reports are in English and Arabic. <http://www.mevaker.gov.il/En/Pages/default.aspx>

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

"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>

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Tamar Hermann, "Democracy in Crisis? Israeli Survey Respondents Agree to Disagree," 13.12.2018, Podcast: <https://en.idi.org.il/podcasts/25310>

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Tamar Hermann, 2021. "The Israeli Democracy Index"; [https://en.idi.org.il/media/17276/final-madd-d2021-eng\\_web.pdf](https://en.idi.org.il/media/17276/final-madd-d2021-eng_web.pdf)

The Israel Democracy Institute, 2021, "IDI's 2020 Democracy Index: Public Trust, Social Solidarity and Democracy in Danger"; <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/33415>

## Luxembourg

Score 8

In Luxembourg, people can play an active part in democratic life of the country by participating in individual activities (voting, public petitions), or by getting involved in civic associations. Institutions encourage people to take part in public decision-making.



For example, in the 2021 State of the Nation address, the prime minister announced the creation of a Citizen's Council on Climate (composed of a hundred representative members of the population), with the goal of giving people the opportunity to debate climate issues alongside the experts. The starting point for discussions will be the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan. Xavier Bettel said: "More than ever, we need a social consensus on how we want to tackle the climate crisis together."

Citizen' can submit petitions (written in French, German or Luxembourgish) on the website of the Chamber of Deputies. To ensure acceptance, at least 4,500 signatures are required. Thereafter, the petition will be discussed in a public debate, broadcast on ChamberTV and streamed on the parliament website. In 2021, 285 public petitions were submitted to the Chamber of Deputies, one of which sought to promote a referendum on constitutional matters. As the total number of valid signatures (7,413) was much less than 25,000 signatures required, the proposal to bring the revision of Chapter VI of Luxembourg's constitution to a public vote was not successful.

Other examples of people taking action in Luxembourg include protests over the lack of affordable housing, with several demonstrations held in Esch-sur-Alzette and Luxembourg City in 2020 and 2021, as well as protests bringing together several thousand participants held by Luxembourg's branch of the global environmental movement "Youth for climate," inspired by the Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, which carried out climate protests in 2020 and 2021.

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.

"Press release by the prime minister, Minister of State, on the result of the signature collection for a referendum on the proposal to revise Chapter VI of the Constitution." Official elections website of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (5 January 2022). <https://elections.public.lu/en/actualites/2022/resultat-signatures-referendum.html>. Accessed 14 January 2022.

"State of the Nation 2021." Xavier Bettel (12 October 2021). [https://gouvernement.lu/en/gouvernement/xavier-bettel/actualites.gouvernement%2B%20en%2Bactualites%2Btoutes\\_actualites%2Bdiscours%2B2021%2B10-octobre%2B12-etat-de-la-nation.html](https://gouvernement.lu/en/gouvernement/xavier-bettel/actualites.gouvernement%2B%20en%2Bactualites%2Btoutes_actualites%2Bdiscours%2B2021%2B10-octobre%2B12-etat-de-la-nation.html). Accessed 14 January 2022.

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XR Luxembourg. <https://www.extinctionrebellion.lu/>. Accessed 14 January 2022.

## 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. In cases where the public feels insufficiently informed, it votes against change. The power of a “no” heuristics was demonstrated by the 2017 vote on tax reform in which three-quarters of respondents said they had difficulties understanding the proposal (which was of eminent importance to the economy) and a third of those who voted “no” cited their lack of knowledge as a reason for voting against the proposal. The intensity of a campaign is another key factor in the extent to which the public is informed of a bill’s content and in explaining their voting behavior on the relevant issue.

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. A survey in 2017 showed that 35% of all respondents were able to choose the correct answer about the goal-setting institution of the European Union from a list of four possible answers.

Stucki et al. (2018) show that voters are willing and able to actively seek information in making their decision. 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. An analysis by Colombo (2016) found that Swiss citizens have considerable political knowledge and – in particular – are able to logically explain their vote choice. However, the extent and depth of their political sophistication remain unclear.

There are limitations to cue-taking as an effective means of political decision-making. For example, since 2014, a large share of citizens believes claims by right-wing populist politicians that the European Union 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 European Union made clear that it would not enter negotiations over the free movement of labor. Notwithstanding these clear messages, in 2017, 56% of Swiss citizens thought that the Swiss government could have brokered a better deal in negotiations with the European Union. Hence, limited political knowledge on the

part of citizens (common to all democracies) and ideological contentions by political elites (trusted as reliable cues by knowledge-poor citizens) may lead to political dead ends in a direct democracy.

With regard to subjective knowledge, about 28% of Swiss citizens claim to be very or quite interested in politics, as well as being at least quite able to take an active political role in a political party and to be at least quite confident in their own ability to participate in politics. This percentage is similar to that found in neighboring Germany (31%) and Austria (27%), but clearly more than that seen in France (16%) or Italy (16%) (European Social Survey 2018).

Citation:

ARMINGEON, Klaus and Philipp Lutz 2022: Citizens' response to a non-responsive government: The Case of the Swiss Initiative on Mass Immigration, unpublished manuscript

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European Social Survey 2018, 9th wave, published November 2019

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## Belgium

### Score 7

There are few sources of data that allow one to assess the citizenry's level of information with precision. Furthermore, the web of overlapping competencies between different layers of government reduces accountability. Finally, the trend toward less and less coherent communication, as described under "Policy Communication," makes it increasingly difficult for citizens to distinguish between true and fake news. Nonetheless, it is quite clear that, over the last year, the population has become considerably more active in demanding specific policies from the various governments in Belgium.

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, the decisions made by the government in the National Security Council and then the consultation committee were announced and justified in press conferences that included representatives of all relevant country entities, with the goal of projecting unity. While this exercise was justified when there were big announcements to be made that would affect whole areas of life, it became less and less justified when more marginal decisions were taken, drawing criticism from some experts and feeding the perception that these events had become a TV show rather than an instrument of transparency and information.

Citation:

<https://www.lesoir.be/371155/article/2021-05-09/des-experts-critiquent-le-comite-de-concertation-un-defile-de-ministres-pour>

## Germany

Score 7

Recent empirical analyses indicate a decline in public interest in politics and parliamentary debates in Germany. Younger cohorts in particular were unable to mention any parliamentary debate they had followed with interest (Bundestag 2017). Media use is intense among the younger age groups, but has shifted away from the consumption of information to that of entertainment, which means that an increasing share of the public remains relatively uninformed about politics. Schools have been unable to compensate for those deficiencies. In addition, policy knowledge correlates strongly with family social status and the socioeconomic environment. Recent studies indicate that the rise of populist sentiments has been reversed, but that there is a risk of further right-wing radicalization (Vehrkamp and Merkel 2020). Ecological movements like “Fridays for Future” have increased the younger generation’s political awareness on climate policies. Comparative research indicates that policy knowledge in Germany remains at a level comparable to that found in Scandinavian countries (Jensen and Zohlnhöfer 2020).

Citation:

Bundestag (2017): Politisches Bewusstsein von Kindern und Jugendlichen sowie ihre politische Beteiligung. Online: <https://www.bundestag.de/blob/531098/1b8f7a13a4e384584fefcbcb07e6c28d/wd-9-035-17-pdf-data.pdf>

Jensen, Carsten and Reimut Zohlnhöfer (2020): Policy knowledge among ‘elite citizens,’ *European Policy Analysis* 6 (1), 10-22.

Vehrkamp, Robert and Wolfgang Merkel (2020): *Populismusbarometer 2020, Zukunft der Demokratie*, 02.2020, BertelsmannStiftung.

## Japan

Score 7

A substantial amount of information about policies is available in Japan. For instance, ministries regularly use so-called white papers to explain the current parameters and content of policies in many areas, often in great detail.

However, this does not necessarily mean that citizens feel satisfied with the information available or consider it trustworthy. According to the Edelman Trust

Barometer, only 42% of participating Japanese citizens said in 2020 that they trusted the government; only Russia exhibited a lower score among the 26 countries covered. Voter apathy also reflects the public's lacking confidence in the government to bring about changes. The voting turnout in the most recent lower house election in November 2021 was barely 56%, the third lowest in the postwar history.

Citation:

Edelman, 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer – Japan, <https://www.slideshare.net/EdelmanJapan/2020-edelman-trust-barometer-japan-full-version>

Japan's Election Turnout Third Lowest in Postwar Era, Nippon.com, 2 November 2021, <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h01156/>

## New Zealand

### Score 7

Many New Zealanders appear to appear to be relatively well informed about political issues. According to the 2017 New Zealand Election Study (the latest NZES survey available), 33% of respondents were “very interested” in politics, 49% “somewhat interested.” Roughly two-thirds of citizens make use of the news media to inform themselves about political issues. Asked how often they had followed election news on TVNZ 1, 65% of respondents replied either “often” or “sometimes.” The figure is similar for online sources, with 62% of respondents declaring that they had turned to the internet at least once to find information about the 2017 election. The figures for the 2017 NZES also reveal that political interest and knowledge had increased since 2014.

Early data from the NZES study of the 2020 election shows that 81% of respondents were very or somewhat interested; however, given that this question is likely strongly affected by response rates, we need to be cautious in using it as an outcome variable (NZES.net). However, the voter turnout rate in the 2020 election (as a percentage of total enrolled citizens) was the highest since 1999 at 81.5% (Elections NZ).

The extent of citizens' participation in public consultation processes depends heavily on the issue in question. For example, the Smoke-free Environment (Tobacco Plain Packaging) Amendment Bill received more than 15,600 public submissions, while the recent draft dealing with history curriculum in schools received only 488 submissions (Ministry of Education 2021). The bill to ban conversion therapy also triggered strong interest, with a record-breaking 106,700 submissions made to parliament's Justice Committee during the four-week submission window, compared to 40,000 received on the End of Life Choice Bill, which had held the previous record. The Marriage Amendment Bill, which made same-sex marriage legal in 2013, received 21,500 submissions. These issues were also supported by strong and widespread social media campaigns that are believed to have mobilized public input (Stuff 2021).



Citation:

Elections New Zealand, <https://elections.nz/democracy-in-nz/historical-events/2020-general-election-and-referendums/voter-turnout-statistics-for-the-2020-general-election/>

Ministry of Education (2021) Aotearoa New Zealand's histories: Findings from the public engagement on the draft curriculum content. <https://assets.education.govt.nz/public/Documents/Aotearoa-NZ-histories/1a.-ANZH-Findings-from-the-public-engagement.pdf>

New Zealand Election Study 2017 ([http://www.nzes.org/exec/show/2017\\_NZES+Results](http://www.nzes.org/exec/show/2017_NZES+Results))

New Zealand Election Study, nd, nzes.net

Stuff (2021) <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/126378262/recordbreaking-number-of-submissions-on-law-proposing-to-ban-conversion-therapy>

## South Korea

### Score 7

South Korea's civil society is one of the most vibrant in Pacific Asia. Civil society organizations (CSOs) and engaged citizens are active in monitoring and holding accountable the public and private sectors. The 2016-2017 candlelight protests which ultimately led to the impeachment of former President Park Geun-hye, as well as the 2019 protests both for and against former Minister of Justice Cho Guk, revealed a high level of political information and interest among the Korean public. In particular, many young people and students participated in these protests. Younger generations are also responsible for the bulk of the more than 1 million petitions that have been filed with the Blue House since the presidential petition system was launched in 2017. The Korean public, civil society organizations and the media are vigilant and ready to protest top-level abuses of power effectively. The #MeToo movement has also brought many abuse-of-power cases to light.

Nevertheless, many citizens remain poorly informed about the details of some government policies. Political discussions are often conducted emotionally, and are focused on personalities rather than policy. The spectrum of published political opinions remains very narrow, limiting the scope of political discussion and making it hard for citizens to develop their own opinion. The immense pressure to do well on exams in schools and at universities has left political education and discussions underdeveloped. The low level of trust in government announcements and in the mainstream media provides fertile ground for the dissemination of rumors, including via proliferating channels of fake and/or unverified news. Misinformation spreads quickly in Korea, as was evident in the online campaigns against refugees from Yemen in 2018. The discussion about refugees also revealed that the public generally knows less about international topics or the international context than it does about purely domestic subjects.

CSOs are diversified and cover the whole range of the society from labor unions to human rights groups and environmental NGOs. Access by CSOs to formal state decision-making processes often depends on their loyalty to the government. CSO

staffers have often gone on to government jobs, particularly in administrations led by progressive presidents, for instance under the Moon government. Unfortunately, the cooptation of CSOs by governments tends to undermine their independence, as personal loyalty often comes to matter more than ideals. Despite successes, the overall level of social trust remains relatively low, and there is a general expectation that it is the government's role to fix problems.

Citation:

Cho, Min-jung. '현대판 신문고' 靑 국민청원 4년...104만개 청원에 2억명 동의.. Yonhap News, August 17, 2021. <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20210816058900001>.

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

Share Hub. One out of every two Seoul citizens has heard of "Sharing City" policy – results of a survey of the public awareness of Sharing City Seoul policy. July 19, 2016

<http://english.sharehub.kr/one-out-of-every-two-seoul-citizens-has-heard-of-sharing-city-policy-results-of-a-survey-of-the-public-awareness-of-sharing-city-seoul-policy/>

## 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. Throughout the pandemic, the government went to considerable lengths to keep the public informed. Public information campaigns involved frequent advertisements explaining through simple messages (e.g., "stay home, protect the NHS, save lives") what the government expected, and both ministers and scientific advisers gave frequent briefings – daily when the pandemic was at its worst.

The share of those claiming knowledge of politics rose during the 2010s by about 10 percentage points, indicating a subjectively better understanding of politics by citizens in the United Kingdom. A 2018 Ipsos MORI "peril of perception" poll found the United Kingdom to be at the higher end of knowledge of widely discussed issues, though behind the better-informed Nordic countries. Significant efforts were made to track opinion on matters relating to the pandemic and given airtime in political programs aired on terrestrial channels.

Nevertheless, a telling figure is that the proportion of citizens voting in certain television talent competitions is higher than in many national elections.

Citation:

<https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/perils-perception-2018>

## 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 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. The robust and successful lobbying efforts of interest groups, including the business community, may have contributed to a weakening of confidence in the political system and in the country's political class.

Citation:

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

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-07/why-do-we-have-compulsory-voting/7484390>

<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/one-nation-immigrants-in-inner-west-and-south-west-shift-support-to-pauline-hansons-party/news-story/78152502617feb5659ac54ca6313dc97>

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/sep/04/the-big-tune-out-few-australians-follow-politics-closely-guardian-essential-poll-shows>

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/oct/11/australia-is-in-trouble-majority-media-and-lobbying-destroy-trust-in-politics-garnaut-says>

<https://grattan.edu.au/news/vested-interests-money-and-the-democratic-deficit/>

## Canada

Score 6

Most Canadian citizens have only a moderate level of knowledge of public policy issues but many are well-informed on a select few issues such as the environment. Roughly three-quarters of Canadians say they follow the news (Howe, 2010: 44). From a comparative perspective with other advanced-industrialized democracies, Canadians are in the middle of the pack on measures of political attentiveness (Howe, 2010:44). A significant issue is the poor political knowledge of younger Canadians (18-34), including knowledge of policy issues, in comparison to Canadians 35 years of age or more, which has been linked to lower voter turnout in this young age group (Stockemer and Rocher, 2017).

Citation:

Paul Howe, *Citizens Adrift: The Democratic Disengagement of Young Canadians*. Vancouver: UBC, 2010.

Stockemer, Daniel and Francois Rocher. Age, political knowledge and electoral turnout: a case study of Canada *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* Vol. 55 (1), 2017.

## Czechia

**Score 6** With the increasing accessibility of online information, information on government policies is available to all Czech citizens. According to surveys, however, only half of the Czech population has a general interest in politics, a share that has remained more or less stable over the last 10 years. Moreover, media sources are themselves polarized between those presenting simplistic views and/or broad support for Prime Minister Babiš and those providing a more balanced approach or even demonstrating open opposition to Babiš. The political polarization reflected in the media landscape has deepened societal divisions.

## 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 the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). Information is often provided on a certain topic once a group of citizens or political activists have succeeded in attracting media attention. Unfortunately, social networks tend to have substituted for traditional media in this information process. This contributes to the diffusion of unverified and fake news to such a point that, as in many countries, the overall information issue becomes a problem for the proper functioning of democracy. There is also a strong bias in favor of petty news or scandals to the detriment of more complex informative pieces concerning, for example, healthcare policy or the fight against poverty.

One of the problems with government information is that politicians tend to hide the truth or minimize harsh realities. This kind of action “by stealth” may initially be successful, but it does not enhance political awareness among citizens, and subsequently fuels populist feelings at both ends of the political spectrum as people lose trust in politics. During his electoral campaign and in his first months in office, President Macron introduced a new approach by “speaking truth to people.” In practice, this triggered harsh criticism, and was perceived by many as a manifestation of technocratic arrogance and indifference to the situation of the poor. In January 2019, in reaction to the Yellow Vest riots, Macron launched a vast operation organizing 10,000 local citizen debates paired with other (e.g., online) possibilities for citizens to express themselves (Grand débat national). Nearly 2 million citizens contributed to this debate. This pedagogic exercise worked, since the

executive was able to end the riots and recover a modicum of popular consensus. Another initiative was the launch of a Citizen's Convention on Climate Policy, an assembly of 150 citizens chosen by random and installed in October 2019, tasked with discussing measures that the country might implement to address climate change. However, the government transposed only a part of the 149 propositions presented by the convention in June 2020, and the fundamental question regarding the compatibility of such participatory elements with the principles of representative democracy remains unanswered. Furthermore, the convention might be suspected of being another personal strategy by the president enabling him to overcome the Yellow Vest protests. The idea of complementary forms of citizen consultation is interesting and could be explored further, but it should be placed on a more regular basis, and not be seen as a discretionary instrument used at the whim of the government or serving president.

Finally, governmental and bureaucratic methods have changed little, aside from the use of a more pedagogic approach during the pandemic. A traditional feature of French politics has also persisted: much of the public prefers protest to participatory methods.

## 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 are not easily available. They probably vary greatly depending on the policy field.

In certain areas used by parties to define their positions (especially major economic and fiscal issues, education, healthcare, immigration and foreign policy), levels of information are fairly high. On other policies, the amount of knowledge drops significantly. As Italian politics are fast-moving, unstable and strongly personalized, it is naturally difficult for citizens to be well informed about the contents of government policymaking. Television – by far the most significant information source in Italy – does not provide in-depth information. Over the last two years, attention to COVID-19 specific policies has been rather high.

#### 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 specifically indicating the extent to which citizens are informed of government policymaking decisions. 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. However, that same information may not be made available to the general public.

According to USAID's 2019 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. Latvia scored 2.6 and its CSO sustainability was described as "enhanced."

A 2015 Democracy Audit, conducted by researchers at the University of Latvia, noted that overall civic activism in Latvia can be described as poor. The report found that citizens are passive, skeptical, and slow to engage with the political process, and are increasingly alienated from democratic institutions and processes.

The rise of social media and the increasing use of the internet has placed new tools at the disposal of citizens wishing to participate in the political process. An e-petition tool, manabalss.lv, lets any group of 10,000 or more citizens place issues on the parliamentary agenda. In addition, many state institutions are actively using social media channels for communication with the general public.

#### Citation:

1. Rozenvalds, J. (2015) How Democratic is Latvia? Audit of Democracy 2005-2014, Available at: [https://www.szf.lu.lv/fileadmin/user\\_upload/szf\\_faili/Petnieciba/sppi/demokratija/ENG\\_Audit\\_of\\_Democracy\\_2015.pdf](https://www.szf.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/szf_faili/Petnieciba/sppi/demokratija/ENG_Audit_of_Democracy_2015.pdf), Last accessed: 10.01.2022.

2. Latvian Civic Alliance (2021), Public Participation in the Decision-Making Process (2021). Available at: [https://nvo.lv/lv/portfelis/petijumi/public\\_participation\\_in\\_the\\_decisionmaking\\_process\\_20212021-11-04.pdf](https://nvo.lv/lv/portfelis/petijumi/public_participation_in_the_decisionmaking_process_20212021-11-04.pdf), Last accessed: 10.01.2022.

3. ManaBalss (2021), Progress data, Available at: <https://manabalss.lv/page/progress>, Last accessed: 10.01.2022.

## Malta

### Score 6

A relatively large amount of policy information is made available to citizens, and this information is in general easily accessible. There are several channels to access this data. There is a Freedom of Information, but restrictions mean that information requested is not always available. Access to contracts between government and private investors remains problematic. In 2021, 30 government ministries and entities appealed against a decision by the information and data protection commissioner, which ordered the disclosure of information on public expenditure requested by the news media. The data protection commissioner has stated that "the

law allowing public access needs to be amended to remove hurdles.” Information is available through a number of mediums. Parliamentary debates are televised, information leaflets are distributed door to door, and competition between media outlets has improved public access to information with leading media outlets hosting their own investigative television series. The National Statistics Office and the Department of Information regularly make information available to citizens, as do the ombudsman and the National Audit Office. Some of the more complete reports assessing government policy however come from the European Commission. Unfortunately, many use social media to gain information, a highly unreliable medium. A 2019 European Commission paper indicates that percentage of individuals using the internet to interact with government authorities is below the EU average. However, the share of those using it to obtain information is close to the EU average. Consultation documents uploaded on government websites have improved the amount of information available in a highly digitized society.

Citation:

Maltese more likely to trust government than the media study shows, Times of Malta 02/06/17

Standard Eurobarometre 86 Autumn 2016 Media use in the European Union

Standard Eurobarometre 88 Autumn 2017 Media use in the European Union

Over 400 freedom of information requests in three years. Times of Malta 30/11/17

<https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2019-02-20/local-news/Maltese-people-trust-political-parties-more-than-the-written-press-Eurobarometer-survey-6736203951>

Times of Malta 04/09/2019 Central link trees to remain for a little while longer

European Commission Digital Government Fact sheet 2019 Malta

European Commission Standard Eurobarometer 91 June 2019

Reporters without borders 09/02/22 Malta Press freedom groups raise concerns over unprecedented obstructions to freedom of information

Times of Malta 25/05/21 Freedom of information law needs to be revised

Lovin Malta 14/06/2021 Information blackout on St Vincent de Paul contract as three FOI requests get rejected

## Netherlands

### Score 6

Political knowledge depends on levels of trust in politics and patterns of government-enabled and either invited or spontaneous participation. Voter turnout rates in national elections have been stable between 75% and 80% for some time. Turnout rates in European elections are half this level, while for local and provincial elections, they vary between 55% and 60%. Recent political science research has found that a broad majority of voters believe that the March 2021 elections – during the pandemic – were conducted honestly. But respondents expressed doubts as to the reliability of voting by proxy and mail, which were allowed on a larger scale than usual because of coronavirus measures.

Patterns of participation are stable: more than half of the adult population is non-active; 15% of people occasionally write an email to their local government; 14% are politically active on the neighborhood level; 6% are locally active and have many contacts with local government and politicians; and 7% are “all-rounders” who are both politically and societally active. Since the rise of neoliberal politics, the government has shifted participatory opportunities from the beginning to the end of

the policy cycle: from stimulating political participation as an institutionalized and legitimate opportunity for citizens to influence policymaking to regarding societal participation as individual citizens' self-determined responsibility to co-produce policy implementation and public service delivery. This shift is visible even in citizens' appreciation of the judiciary: instead of relying on courts and judges, they are increasingly turning to do-it-yourself justice through mediation procedures.

Dutch citizens claim to spend slightly more time than the average European citizen on collecting political information. But many people find political information uninteresting or too complicated; if not for themselves, then for others. Younger people (15-30 yrs.) have begun to avoid political news; if politically interested, they seek information through social media. The broader public does not seem to be well-informed on a wide range of government policies; particularly in the area of international politics, the Dutch public's knowledge is alarmingly low. This may explain why on the EU, Dutch citizens are caught in a dependence-cum-distrust paradox: 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.

In addition to disinterest and an increasing knowledge gap between educational levels, systematic (foreign- and nationally led) efforts to disseminate conspiracy theories and disinformation and create "fake news," even by members of parliament, have had a polarizing effect on knowledge levels regarding political issues and decision-making. The coronavirus crisis has increased awareness of the impact of government on citizens' daily lives. After a rally-around-the-flag surge, trust in government plummeted as the coronavirus crisis lingered on; exacerbated by public policy failures such as the child benefits scandal, delayed and unfair compensation for earthquake damages in the gas-exploiting areas of Groningen, delays and nondecisions related to the huge levels of nitrogen emissions, and increasingly visible inequality. Ironically, the fact that previous levels of trust were so high has led to disappointment, and this in turn to high levels of distrust, and even disgust and hatred of politics.

Dutch citizens split evenly over the issue of more or less direct influence by citizens. It is the less educated who demand more political influence (through binding referendums), whereas higher educated citizens, especially those with tertiary qualifications, have turned against the idea of referendums, binding or advisory. There has been a wide and broad range of initiatives across all levels of government in all kinds of citizen engagement projects; recently, highly regarded advisory bodies have recommended the use of citizen forums on a national scale for thorny problems like energy transition and (health) care. Thus, belief in participatory options co-exists with low levels of knowledge on policies and widespread discontent with politics and governance. A surge in street protests and large-scale demonstrations – by younger people, climate and animal activists, but also middle-class groups like teachers, nursing personnel, farmers and building-industry employees, has been

evident in the years since 2019; this trend continued during the coronavirus crisis of 2020-21 when social distancing rules were frequently disobeyed in large-scale protests and demonstrations. Overall, it appears that spontaneous, citizen-initiated efforts to exert power outside and beyond institutionalized venues and government-sponsored participatory policy exercises are gaining political traction.

Citation:

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

SCP., van Houwelingen et al., March 2014. *Burgermacht op eigen kracht? Een brede verkenning van ontwikkelingen in burgerparticipatie*, Den Haag

Stichting KiezersOnderzoek Nederland, 2021. *Versplinterde Vertegenwoordiging*.

SCP, *De sociale staat van Nederland*, 2020

Trouw, Visser, 23 August 2020. *Een pandemie is voedsel voor complottheorieën: die bloeien als noot tevoren*.

Trouw, de Wit, 25 June 2021. *Nederlanders lijden aan een rampzalig gebrek aan kennis over internationale betrekkingen*.

SCP, Djunjeva and de Ridder, 8 October 2021. *Dutch citizens' expectations and perception of the EU'*.

NRC, de Koning and Valk, 24 September 2021. *'Mensen willen de politiek wel vertrouwen'*

NRC.next, 20 March 2021. *Klimaattransitie: 'Stel burgerforum rond klimaatbeleid in.'*

NRC, 4 December 2021. *Jensma. Het recht als institutie raakt stilaan uit de gratie bij de burgers*.

## Slovakia

Score 6

Given the liberal legislation on access to public information and the existing media pluralism, information about policymaking is available to all citizens. However, population's overall policy knowledge has suffered from the Fico government's paternalistic approach. Fico's main message to the citizens was that the government takes care of people's everyday worries as well as the national interests of Slovakia, so that there is no need for citizens to engage in politics and to deal with policymaking. Social media have also had a negative impact on citizens' understanding of public policies, as they contribute to the spread of different "alternative" news and conspiracy theories promoted by low-quality media such as *Hlavné správy* and *Zem a Vek*. In the wake of the Kuciak and Kušnírová murders, however, the political interest among broad strata of the population increased, and this contributed to a growing interest in policymaking as well. The interest in environmental issues and the fight against climate change has also risen considerably. More recently, frustration with the quibbling within the center-right government has led once again to an increase in political apathy.

## Spain

### Score 6

Although levels of interest in politics have traditionally been low in Spain as compared with other Western European countries, the deep changes in the political landscape 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 CIS, a public sociological research center, demonstrates that attentiveness to political information within Spain has improved (around 40% of the population indicated that they were very or quite interested in politics at the end of 2021). While levels of political knowledge in Spain are generally low, there are also important socioeconomic and gender differences in levels of knowledge. Knowledge is higher among those with higher levels of education, greater socioeconomic and cognitive resources, and, in particular, among men.

During the pandemic, Spanish citizens showed a high degree of public concern about the dissemination of false information. According to the 2020 Digital News Report, only 36% of Spanish users trust media news, the lowest level since 2015. Trust in information disseminated via social networks (23%) or internet search engines (32%) is also declining. Only 24% of young people trust social networks, 13 percentage points 2019's level, while 63% say they are concerned about not knowing what is true or false on the internet. The majority of Spanish citizens (49%) believe that the government, national politicians and parties are the main sources of disinformation.

#### Citation:

Villena-Alarcón, E.; Caballero-Galeote, L. (2020), COVID-19 Media Coverage on Spanish Public TV – [http://www.tripodos.com/index.php/Facultat\\_Comunicacio\\_Blanquerna/article/view/818/837](http://www.tripodos.com/index.php/Facultat_Comunicacio_Blanquerna/article/view/818/837)

Digital news report España (2020), <https://www.digitalnewsreport.es/>

Mónica Ferrín, Marta Fraile Maldonado (2014): La medición del conocimiento político en España problemas y consecuencias para el caso de las diferencias de género. *Revista de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, Vol. 147. Available at: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=4773592>

## United States

### Score 6

With regards to how government works, and the complexity of the issues addressed by policies and policymaking, the U.S. public is generally quite uninformed. Comparing citizens' levels of governmental knowledge across political systems is difficult. In recent years, observers have become most concerned about the strength of “partisan motivated reasoning” on the part of ordinary citizens. According to the 2019 Annenberg Constitution Day Civics Survey, only 39% of U.S. adults could correctly identify the three branches of government (executive, judicial and legislative). Two years later, according to the 2021 Annenberg Constitution Day



Civics Survey, that figure was 54%, marking a major improvement over a relatively short period.

Citation:

<https://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/americans-civics-knowledge-increases-2019-survey/>

## Austria

### Score 5

A minority of Austrian citizens are well informed; the majority is politically informed only within rather narrow limits. On the one hand, this is because political parties (and the government) do not provide full information on decision-makers' considerations and goals. On the other, it is due to the characteristics of the Austrian print media, with the yellow press (and its often very strong bias) dominating large parts of the print-media market. In particular, the information offered by tabloids, such as *Heute*, and distributed for free tends to be questionable and sometimes misleading. In line with international trends, social media propaganda also contributes to a lot of misinformation among certain strata of the population.

A majority of Austrians show moderate interest in politics, a characteristic possibly favored or reinforced by the limited opportunity for participation in the political process by direct democratic devices. As in other countries, social media reinforces the existing tendency toward fragmentation; information and communication "bubbles" exist through which politically aligned citizens strengthen the opinions of like-minded people. A specific problem is that there is no general civic education curriculum in the Austrian school system – and this deficit has an impact on the general level of political knowledge.

The nexus between institutionalized opportunities to participate, and the level of political interest and knowledge is underscored by a recent study that strongly suggests that interest in politics among young Austrians – who have been able to vote at the age of 16 since 2007 – has significantly increased. Other recent research suggests that even in the absence of more sophisticated political knowledge, young people living in Austria have a decent understanding of complex issues relating to immigration and immigration policies.

Citation:

<https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/AKT/SCHLTHEM/SCHLAG/J2017/185JugendstudieWorkshops.shtml>

<https://science.orf.at/stories/3207052/>

On the role of social media:

<https://www.diepresse.com/5797319/mehr-als-die-haelfte-nutzt-soziale-netzwerke-als-infoquelle>

## 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.

## 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 are emerging, in many cases through websites and social networks. 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 Council for Culture and Arts in 2011 (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, CNCA) found 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 study of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) on the reading comprehension of adolescents, as well as by an OECD comparative study from 2016. 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 manipulation campaigns hinder public policy discussions, especially as social networks have become a key factor with regard to agenda setting and public opinion. In addition to these deficits in in-depth 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. 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:

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Skills Matter – Further Results from the Survey of Adult Skills", 28 June 2016, <https://www.oecd.org/education/skills-matter-9789264258051-en.htm>, last accessed: 13 January 2022.

Universidad de Chile, "El 84% de los chilenos no entiende lo que lee", 14 December 2011, <http://radio.uchile.cl/2011/12/14/solo-el-84-de-los-chilenos-entiende-lo-que-lee>, last accessed: 13 January 2022.

## Croatia

**Score 5** Citizens' policy knowledge in Croatia is limited. Most citizens show only minimal interest in the workings of government and politics. Moreover, the media situation makes it difficult to obtain detailed information on specific government policies. According to a Reuters Digital News Report from 2019, Croatia has the largest percentage of citizens who actively avoid news (more than 50%) among a sample of 30 countries. Moreover, interest in politics has been diminishing along with voter turnout rates, which have declined appreciably over the years.

### Citation:

Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2019): Digital News Report 2019. Oxford ([https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-06/DNR\\_2019\\_FINAL\\_0.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-06/DNR_2019_FINAL_0.pdf)).

## Cyprus

**Score 5** The main feature of citizen participation in politics and elections since 2011 has been apathy and alienation. Political discussions remain largely unproductive, primarily consisting of monologues. Turnout in 2021 elections was 66% (down from 90% 15 years ago), while only 25% of young people registered on electoral rolls.

No opinion surveys record levels of information among citizens. However, public opinion surveys show that negative views about each of the main party leaders are between 70% and 76%, while 55% of people hold a negative view of the president (21% hold a positive view). Public trust in institutions in the spring 2021 Eurobarometer survey receded to 27% for the parliament (34% in 2019) and 31% for the government (36% in 2019).

Despite the picture of mistrust, more Cypriots (54% / 63%) than on average in the EU27 (48% / 48%) appear to be informed about and satisfied with the EU response to COVID-19, according to the special European Parliament Eurobarometer, spring 2021. This might be the result of the government's promotion of the Recovery and Resilience Plan during the campaign for the May 2021 parliamentary elections.

### Citation:

1. Special European Parliament Eurobarometer 95.1, Spring 2021, <https://www.cymar.com.cy/en-gb/results/eb95-1.aspx/>

## Greece

**Score 5** Citizens do not really obtain enough information on government policymaking, as the media is strongly partisan or leans toward infotainment, while individual members of parliament rarely discuss substantive policy issues with voters in the electoral districts which they represent. Moreover, the quality of information disseminated through social media has also been tarnished by extreme polarization.

The cleavage between supporters and opponents of reforms during the economic crisis of the 2010s was coupled by the cleavage between Greece's pro-vaccination majority and anti-vaccination minority in 2020–2021. Such overlapping cleavages have reduced trust in information sources, including government ones. Thus, there was an inability for citizens to participate in meaningful ways in policy debates on the basis of trusted and shared data.

Citizens are not interested so much in government policymaking per se, as in relations of exchange with the state. While citizens' identification with political parties has declined over time, there is still a tradition of turning to government ministers or members of parliament to obtain favors on an individual basis. However, old-fashioned political clientelism may have been curbed. Fiscal consolidation, which was implemented in 2010–2020 to prevent Greece defaulting on sovereign debt, has reduced the propensity among successive governments to increase public employment or to make social transfers based on clientelistic and politicized criteria.

Most citizens are not well-informed about government policies. In this context, political participation in decision-making has not improved.

Citation:

The open-government consultation site is available at [www.opengov.gr](http://www.opengov.gr).

## 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. Therefore, citizens and other external stakeholders rarely engage in policymaking; indeed, less than one-third participate in solving public issues at the municipal level, according to data from the Lithuanian Ministry of the Interior. Voter turnout rates are very low in comparative perspective, and have been declining over time.

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 envisioned 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.

The process of drafting the long-term “Lithuania 2050” strategy has involved significant public consultation with various stakeholders. In addition, the debate on the future of Europe, held within the framework of the EU’s Conference on the Future of Europe, resulted in a number of initiatives by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, academics and the local representatives of the European Commission seeking to involve the general public in discussions about the EU and national policy responses to current challenges.

Citation:

Reference to the Report of the Ministry of the Interior: [vakokybe.vrm.lt/get.php?f.867](http://www.vakokybe.vrm.lt/get.php?f.867) 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.

## Mexico

Score 5

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. While better educated Mexicans are well-informed, poor and less educated citizens lack knowledge and interest in politics. The coronavirus pandemic clearly exposed this information gap in Mexican politics, as many Mexicans proved to be ill-informed about the policy measures needed to contain the pandemic.

In the latest survey by the National Bureau of Statistics (INEGI), 44.5% of respondents said that they were content with the quality of government services in 2017. In the latest National Survey on Political Culture (2012), 65% of respondents stated that they had little to no interest in politics, and 77% thought that government was an instrument of manipulation that benefits only politicians and wealthy people. More recent data is offered by the AmericasBarometer (2021): In Mexico, support for democracy fell from 70.2% in 2004 to 49.4% in 2017, and rose to 63% in 2021. But only 50% of Mexicans are satisfied with democracy as practiced in Mexico. President Peña Nieto and his government left office with historically low approval ratings. President López Obrador started with an extraordinary high level of popular support, reaching 71% in November 2018. After half of his term, he still enjoys the support of 65% of Mexicans (November 2021). However, according to the Latinobarometro Report 2021, important political institutions do not enjoy a high

level of trust in Mexico. Only 24% of the population trusts the judiciary, 22% the police, 22% the Congress, and only 13% the political parties.

Citation:

INEGI (2018). ENCUESTA NACIONAL DE CALIDAD E IMPACTO GUBERNAMENTAL (ENCIG) 2017. [http://www.beta.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/saladeprensa/boletines/2018/EstSegPub/encig2018\\_03.pdf](http://www.beta.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/saladeprensa/boletines/2018/EstSegPub/encig2018_03.pdf)

ENCUP (2012). National Survey on Political Culture. <http://www.encup.gob.mx/>

AmericasBarometer (2018). THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF DEMOCRACY IN MEXICO AND IN THE AMERICAS, 2016/17. [https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/mexico/AB2016-17\\_Mexico\\_Country\\_Report\\_English\\_V1\\_05.15.18\\_W\\_10.25.18.pdf](https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/mexico/AB2016-17_Mexico_Country_Report_English_V1_05.15.18_W_10.25.18.pdf).

INFORME LATINOBARÓMETRO 2018, <http://www.latinobarometro.org/lat.jsp>

## Poland

Score 5

The average level of knowledge regarding government policy within the Polish public is limited. Many citizens have little knowledge regarding major political and public institutions and are unfamiliar with basic political facts (Cześniak/ Wenzel 2018). Reasons for this low level of policy knowledge include a tendency toward infotainment in many media outlets, the populist propaganda produced by the government party, and a general detachment from politics among citizens. Moreover, political parties (most of which lack a broad membership base), trade unions, and most other professional associations do not adequately perform their socialization function and do not work to improve their members' policy knowledge. However, an important segment of society has become more interested in politics due to strong dissatisfaction with the PiS government's policies and the polarization of society. This has become visible, for example, in public participation in demonstrations and campaigns, and the relatively high electoral turnout in the 2020 presidential elections.

Citation:

Cześniak, M, M Wenzel (2018): Wiedza polityczna Polaków w perspektywie porównawczej, in: Athenaeum. Polskie Studia Politologiczne 57: 103-123 (<https://czasopisma.marszalek.com.pl/images/pliki/apsp/57/apsp5706.pdf>).

## Portugal

Score 5

As noted in previous SGI reports, the bailout of 2011-2014 heightened citizens' attention to and interest in policy matters, with this interest subsequently regressing somewhat. In a Eurobarometer survey carried out in June-July 2021, a total of 52% of respondents in Portugal had a "strong" or "medium" interest in politics, a roughly similar proportion to 2017-2019. This was the third-lowest total within the EU-27 with regard to "strong" and "medium" interest in politics, above only France and Spain, and well below the EU average of 64%. Moreover, the proportion of respondents claiming no interest in politics was 37%, the highest such share in the EU alongside Spain; and Portugal has the EU's lowest share of people strongly interested in politics, at only 6%.

This result further strengthens our assessment in previous SGI reports that the Portuguese public's policy knowledge is limited and unevenly distributed. The factors limiting citizens' policy knowledge include the insufficient and incomplete explanation of policy by the government, the incomplete 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.

Citation:

Standard Eurobarometer 95, Spring 2021, Public opinion in the European Union, available online at: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2532>

## Romania

**Score 5** Public knowledge of government policy remains low. Most of the population, especially in rural areas and small towns, have no clue as to what government policies are being proposed or implemented. They might know the name of the president, but not the names of the prime minister and individual cabinet members; they know nothing at all about policy, but judge government activity mostly in ideological terms.

## Slovenia

**Score 5** According to a Eurobarometer survey in May 2017, around 70% of Slovenian citizens think they are well informed about what is going on in the country – though their 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 most citizens are simply not interested in the details of policymaking. However, the Slovenian media are under increased political pressure, which makes objective reporting more difficult and consequently affects the public's level of information. In addition, the journalists' association criticizes the poor working conditions of journalists, which lead to self-censorship. Recurring corruption and political scandals, along with the COVID-19 pandemic, have fostered frustration and disenchantment among a majority of the population. Eurobarometer surveys suggest that public interest in politics and trust in political institutions are at the same low levels as a decade ago, albeit trust in the government increased by seven points between 2018 and 2021. Nevertheless, trust levels in government, parliament, political parties and public administration were all well below the EU-27 average during the period under review, and 68% of the population say things are going in the wrong direction.

Citation:

European Commission (2021): Standard Eurobarometer 95. Brussels (<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2532>).



## Hungary

Score 4 Citizens' policy knowledge has suffered from the government's biased information policies and the lack of transparency that characterizes Hungarian policymaking. The failure of the democratic opposition in the 2018 parliamentary elections initially led to political apathy. Since the municipal elections in October 2019, however, the political interest of many citizens has increased. Fidesz-fatigue has nurtured a thirst for independent news. The primaries held by the opposition parties and the real prospect of voting the Orbán government out of office in the April 2022 elections has increased political mobilization.

## Turkey

Score 4 With the exception of communiqués from the Ministry of Finance and the central bank, the government does not adequately inform citizens about the content and development of government policy. The head of government, ministers and other high government officials highlight success stories and policies, but do not offer follow-up details. Decisions, information and reports are posted on governmental websites, but are not presented in such a way as to adequately inform the public.

Social media does enable some feedback on governmental processes, but is used by politicians to propagate disinformation. The government passed a regulation that imposes serious penalties on broadcasters that criticize the government via social media. The public is increasingly less likely to be aware of political developments beyond the information provided via channels belonging to pro-government media outlets.

Citation:

European Commission. "Turkey Report 2021. Commission Staff Working Document." October 19, 2021. [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/turkey-report-2021\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/turkey-report-2021_en)

Alat, B. 2018. "Türkiye'de İl Belediye Web Sitelerinin İşlevselliği Üzerine Bir Araştırma," Fırat Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi, 28(1), 93-114.

Indicator

## Open Government

Question

Does the government publish data and information in a way that strengthens citizens' capacity to hold the government accountable?

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 = The government publishes data and information in a comprehensive, timely and user-friendly way.
- 8-6 = The government most of the time publishes data and information in a comprehensive, timely and user-friendly way.
- 5-3 = The government publishes data in a limited and not timely or user-friendly way.
- 2-1 = The government publishes (almost) no relevant data.

### Norway

Score 10

The government publishes data and information, making it easy for citizens to be informed and to hold the government accountable.

Statistical data is easily available for free online and lots of public data is made publicly available on the internet. Many ministries and agencies help to interpret raw data and publish summaries to make the key aspects of the data more easily accessible for citizens, without providing too much spin. Most governmental bodies also publish annual reports, which cover financial statements, policy goals and achievements, and risk assessments.

In addition, the annual report from the general auditor, the Transparency Act, weekly parliamentary questions and a lively media landscape ensure that information about government activities (or the lack of activity) is made public.

### United Kingdom

Score 10

The United Kingdom is highly committed to its open government agenda. It is a founding member of the Open Government Partnership, which since its beginning in 2011 has become a major global advocate for citizens' free access to government data. Parliament, the government and the civil service reliably and timely publish all not-restricted documents on their websites.

The UK government has a long history of publishing official statistics, and since 2007 this has been governed by the Statistics and Registration Service Act. The act

created the UK Statistics Authority, a non-ministerial department, with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) as an executive agency within the department (ONS previously reported into HMT). The act also created the Office for Statistics Regulation, which sets the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and oversees the accreditation of “National Statistics.” Beyond the official statistical system, the government publishes a wide array of data and is a world leader in open data. The UK government publishes an extensive array of transparency data (e.g., senior public servants’ salaries, workforce data, special adviser pay, and details of ministerial and senior officials’ meetings) – over 9,000 items on the government website (gov.uk) are categorized as “transparency data” and over 10,000 FOI requests have been published. The government also has a dedicated data portal (data.gov.uk), which makes publicly accessible over 47,000 datasets published by the UK government and other public authorities. Furthermore, the United Kingdom alongside Canada ranked first out of 30 governments in the latest Open Data Barometer (2016 – 2017) and in the OECD’s latest OURdata index (2017) the United Kingdom ranked 4th out of 31 countries.

Committee and working group meetings are streamed via a range of online platforms (e.g., YouTube and FacebookLive). Furthermore, the government provides an efficient online search-engine for government documents (data.gov.uk). Meanwhile, the bi-annual Open Government Action Plans, which set goals and standards for open government in the United Kingdom, are negotiated in cooperation with the UK Open Government Network (OGN), a coalition of active citizens and civil society organizations.

Citation:  
<https://opendatabarometer.org/4thedition/>

## Denmark

### Score 9

All governmental agencies have websites where a lot of information is made publicly available. When new policy initiatives are suggested or approved, the responsible ministers will usually hold press conferences allowing the media – print, online and TV – to inform citizens and debate the proposals. TV2’s dedicated news program, TV2 News, is very good at covering new policy events, and broadcasts several programs during the week in which well-informed journalists and experts debate the news. Important parliamentary debates are covered by the media and sometimes directly broadcast by TV channels. Furthermore, Denmark has the “access to public administration files act” of 1985, which replaced the Public Records Act of 1970.

Citation:  
Jørgen Grønnegård Christensen og Jørgen Elklit (red.), *Det Demokratiske System*. 4. udgave. Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2016.

THE DANISH PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ACT, <https://dfcentre.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/2016-02-29-Ombudsmand-The-Act-of-Public-Administration-1985.pdf> (Accessed 18 October 2019)

## Finland

Score 9

According to the Statistics Act (280/2004), there are four official statistical authorities in Finland.

Statistics Finland, the Natural Resources Institute Finland, the National Institute for Health and Welfare, and Finnish Customs. Each authority is mandated to collect data. In addition, there are a number of other authorities that produce official statistical materials. Statistical figures are published by Official Statistics of Finland, which publishes nearly 300 statistical datasets covering 26 different topics. The basic data of the Official Statistics of Finland is publicly available on the internet, free of charge.

In principle, the government of Finland has tried to publish information actively on the COVID-19 pandemic. It has disseminated up-to-date information on infection rates and their temporal development, the local distribution of infections, details on specific outbreaks, and the indicators upon which it bases its risk assessments. The underlying data has been communicated in plain language. It has published information on its crisis management policies, and in all of its communication, stressed the scientific basis for its coronavirus actions. Furthermore, the government has encouraged citizens to pay attention to updates on its website and the website of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), both of which provide comprehensive and up-to-date information on issues related to the pandemic. The government website contains government decisions, information produced by the ministries on the effects of the coronavirus on different administrative sectors, as well as topical material on the coronavirus produced by all government ministries (OECD 2020).

Other public authorities and research agencies have also actively produced information on the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. For example, the Helsinki Graduate School of Economics established an economic Situation Room, with the aim of supporting rapid decision-making during the coronavirus crisis. The Situation Room consists of leading economists from Helsinki GSE and the VATT Institute for Economic Research, as well as representatives of several public agencies.

However, in the spring of 2020, the leader of an economic expert group appointed by the government publicly complained that the government had not shared the assumptions used in epidemiological models to predict the spread of the virus. Only after extensive public pressure (Lahti, Wallgren, Kulmala 2020) did the government release this information. The affair concerned the R0 number used in statistical models, which is used to predict the way the virus will spread in the future. According to the critics, the government prevented independent epidemiological experts from forming their own assessments of the spread of the virus among the population.

## Citation:

Lahti, Leo & Wallgren, Thomas & Kulmala, Markku (2020): Laskentamallit eivät lähtökohtaisesti ole salassa pidettäviä [Statistical Models are not by Definition Classified Information], Helsingin Sanomat 3.5.2020, <https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000006494641.html>

OECD, 2020. OECD Survey on the STI Policy Response to Covid-19. Accessed 28.12. 2020.

<https://stiplab.github.io/Covid19/Finland.html>Tilastokeskus, "Katsaus kansalliseen tilastotoimeen 2015,"

[https://www.stat.fi/static/media/uploads/org/tilastotoimi/katsaus\\_tilastotoimeen\\_2015.pdf](https://www.stat.fi/static/media/uploads/org/tilastotoimi/katsaus_tilastotoimeen_2015.pdf)

National Statistical Service, [https://www.stat.fi/org/tilastotoimi/index\\_en.html](https://www.stat.fi/org/tilastotoimi/index_en.html)

## Slovenia

Score 9

The Slovenian government launched a new and unified open data government portal, OPSI (Odprti podatki Slovenije), in late 2016. Further upgraded in 2019 and 2021, the portal provides a central catalogue of all the records and databases of Slovenian public bodies, and an extensive range of datasets in machine-readable formats and with an Open Data license. Access to data is largely unrestricted and published in user-friendly formats.

## Sweden

Score 9

Strictly speaking, given the extensive rules about public availability of government documents, the government does not have to actively publish material but rather simply ensure that it is available. Thus, withholding information that would be relevant to an assessment of the government's performance would be difficult. Governmental web sites are updated regularly, and reports are available to the public at no charge. All material (reports, meeting minutes, contact information of public servants, future plans, press releases, transcripts) is available online. This openness on the part of the government was most evident during the pandemic, when a great deal of data and information about various aspects of pandemic policy was made available to the public.

## Switzerland

Score 9

The government and its institutions – in particular the Federal Statistical Office – pursue a highly user-friendly policy of internet-based access to information. Any citizen interested in public policy and having access to the internet will find a large body of qualitative and quantitative data. The transparency act (Bundesgesetz über das Öffentlichkeitsprinzip der Verwaltung, BGÖ) ensures full access to public documents apart from classified information.

The official information bulletin is the most important source of information for citizens to make decisions in direct-democratic votes. Overall, government

information policy can be considered comprehensive and enables citizens to fully inform themselves about most aspects of the political system and its policymaking.

However, as the case in 2019 of the Supreme Court overturning the outcome of a popular vote makes clear, this information policy is not flawless and is subject to close scrutiny in a direct democracy. The mistakes made by the Federal Council in delivering erroneous information regarding a vote on the taxation of couples compelled the Court to annul the referendum.

## United States

Score 9

In addition to data on the activities of government, the U.S. government publishes a vast amount of social, economic and other data. All major departments and agencies collect and publish important series of relevant data. The Budget of the United States Government describes all major programs, their funding and levels of activity, and each agency publishes a substantial annual report describing its operations and various measures of performance and outcomes.

The Trump administration discontinued the publication of various data series on matters that challenged administration priorities, ranging from climate change to mental health. Its actions were described as a “war on data.” The administration often cited national security as an argument for withholding information from the public or Congress.

President Biden repudiated the Trumps administration’s approach by calling for improved access to data. A signed memorandum states that agencies should “ensure governmental and non-governmental researchers can use Federal data to assess and evaluate the effectiveness and equitable delivery of policies and to suggest improvements.”

Citation:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/memorandum-on-restoring-trust-in-government-through-scientific-integrity-and-evidence-based-policymaking/>

## Canada

Score 8

The government of Canada has two offices, the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) and the Office of the Auditor General (OAG), whose mandate is to provide independent analysis on government finances and policies. The PBO is charged with providing impartial information on the state of government finances and its estimates of trends in the Canadian economy. On request, the PBO estimates the cost of any proposal under parliamentary consideration. During the 2019 federal election, the PBO carried out a requested evaluation of the cost of programs contained in the political parties’ campaign platforms. The OAG provides independent information

and expert advice on government programs and activities, and the management of its Crown corporations. Both offices serve parliament, but – since reports usually become public information – they provide ample and objective evidence on the finances and performance of government policies and institutions. The reports are made available online and are often followed with media attention. The quality of information contained in the reports, however, depends heavily on the data obtained by the offices. Government departments and agencies release information in the form of studies and data on their websites, which allows citizens to hold them accountable. Most of this information is available in both official languages in user friendly formats, including for blind people.

In addition, Canada has a large number of non-governmental think tanks, and policy and research institutes that provide additional information, and critique, on a range of policy areas, including social policy, political strategy, economics, technology, industry, business and national defense.

## Estonia

### Score 8

In line with the overall e-government approach, all public institutions maintain extensive web resources for public use. There have been attempts to harmonize the website architecture of ministries and agencies, but these efforts have only succeeded to a limited extent. As a result, the user-friendliness of web resources varies across institutions. Available information is generally extensive and up to date, but often too detailed and sophisticated for citizens' use; retrospective data (both statistics and legal norms) are not always available. Under the current government, journalists have discovered in several cases (e.g., concerning 5G licenses and the investigation into the provision of state aid to Porto Franco) that government officials have classified documents subjectively and without sound reason.

## Germany

### Score 8

The Reuse of Information Act (“Informationsweiterverwendungsgesetz”), which converted the first EU directive into national law, has been in effect since 2006. When the European directive was revised, the Bundestag adopted a newer version of the law in May 2015 but has not changed it substantially since. Overall, the legislation requires that public sector information on social, economic, geographic, climate, tourism, business, patent and education issues be made available to private information suppliers and the general public.

In international comparison, Germany scored 58 out of 100 points in the Open Data Barometer and thus is not one of the leading countries in this field (World Wide Web Foundation 2017). The EU Commission's “Open Data Maturity Report” ranks Germany slightly above the EU average.



Following up on its first National Action Plan on Open Data in 2014, the federal government published a second National Action Plan in September 2019. It also published a comprehensive data strategy in early 2021 (Bundesregierung 2021).

In addition to these legal obligations, each federal and state government has an office of statistics that provide information for the public. These offices provide a wealth of high-quality data on a broad spectrum of issues that help citizens assess their country's performance on a variety of indicators. These statistical offices make their data public by publishing comprehensive reports authored by experts and by publishing readable concise press releases that are frequently cited by the media. Statistical offices in Germany enjoy a high degree of political independence and have a reputation for providing undistorted data.

Citation:

Bundesregierung (2021): Datenstrategie der Bundesregierung. Eine Innovationsstrategie für gesellschaftlichen Fortschritt und nachhaltiges Wachstum, Berlin  
<https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/992814/1845634/f073096a398e59573c7526feaadd43c4/datenstrategie-der-bundesregierung-download-bpa-data.pdf?download=1> (accessed 13 February)

data.europa.eu (2021): Open Data Maturity Report 2021,  
[https://data.europa.eu/sites/default/files/landscaping\\_insight\\_report\\_n7\\_2021.pdf](https://data.europa.eu/sites/default/files/landscaping_insight_report_n7_2021.pdf) (accessed 13 February)

World Wide Web Foundation (2018): Open Data Barometer - Leaders Edition. Washington DC: World Wide Web Foundation. <https://opendatabarometer.org/doc/leadersEdition/ODB-leadersEdition-Report.pdf> (accessed 13 February)

## Japan

Score 8

E-government issues, particularly services aimed at making public information available to citizens in a secure and timely manner, have been on the government agenda since the 2000s. Current efforts are based on the Basic Plan for the Advancement of Utilizing Public and Private Sector Data and the Policy for Open Data, both released in May 2017. The various branches of government make an overwhelming number of statistics, data and reports available, with coordinated access through sites like e-Gov, Data.go.jp and e-Stat.

However, ensuring transparency, usability and security remains an ongoing challenge. In late 2018, it was revealed that the Monthly Labor Survey had used an improper methodology for collecting data since 2004, leading to an overestimation of wage growth. Following this exposure, weaknesses in other government statistical measures also became apparent. In a February 2019 survey, 67% of the population indicated that this incident had eroded their trust in government statistics.

:

Government of Japan, Digital Government in Japan, January 2018, <https://de.slideshare.net/hiramoto/170119-digital-government-in-japan>

English-language access points to major sites: <http://www.e-gov.go.jp/en/>, <http://www.data.go.jp/?lang=english>, <https://www.e-stat.go.jp/en/>

61% think Abe inadequately handles labor survey scandal, The Asahi Shimbun, 19 February 2019, <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201902190053.html>

## Luxembourg

**Score 8** Luxembourgish government administrations and departments are required to publish their documents online, either on their own websites or on the Luxembourgish data platform (in French and English). This procedure reflects a policy of openness to citizens (be they natural or legal persons) with regards to the documents held by government administrations and departments, communes, public sector establishments, legal persons providing public services, the Chamber of Deputies, the Council of State, the Ombudsman, the Court of Auditors and professional chambers. All such documents are provided free of charge, although a small fee may be requested if copies are issued.

This right does not apply to documents pertaining to foreign relations, Luxembourg national security or public order, the safety of persons or their right to privacy, or financial data such as corporate tax breaks (“rulings”).

In most cases, information is available in French, German and English. However, much of the data is provided only in French, which is not easy to understand for Germanophone citizens. Data in Luxembourgish are made available more and more frequently. Nevertheless, journalists and the public often have difficulties in understanding and evaluating the published data.

Citation:

“La plateforme des données luxembourgeoises.” Le Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg. <https://data.public.lu/fr/>. Accessed 14 January 2022.

Statistics portal: <https://statistiques.public.lu/en/> Accessed 14 January 2022.

Statistikportal des Großherzogtums Luxemburg: <http://adem.public.lu/de/marche-emploi-luxembourg/faits-et-chiffres/statistiques/statec/index.html>. Accessed 14 January 2022.

## New Zealand

**Score 8** In global comparison, New Zealand performs relatively well when it comes to publishing data and information as a means to strengthening vertical accountability mechanisms. In the 2018 Open Government Index, published by the Open Knowledge Foundation, New Zealand is ranked 8th out of 94 countries. New Zealand enjoys even higher rankings in the 2019 Open Budget Index (sharing the top ranking) and the 2017 Open Data Barometer, released by the World Wide Web Foundation (sharing 7th place). New Zealand's position is relatively lower in the 2019 OECD OURdata Index on Open Government Data (ranked 12th out of 32 countries); however, New Zealand's score for ensuring public sector data availability and accessibility is still higher than the OECD average. In 2016, the State Services Commission formed a stakeholder advisory group to work with the government on New Zealand's Open Government Partnership processes. In addition, the

government's administrative data, along with census data, has been integrated into the Integrated Data Infrastructure, which researchers can access by application. Additional data sets, co-designed with indigenous peoples have been developed, focusing on capabilities rather than deficits. This data is also publicly available on request.

Citation:

International Budget Partnership (2019) Open Budget Index. <https://www.internationalbudget.org/open-budget-survey/rankings>

OECD (2020) OECD Open, Useful and Re-usable data (OURdata) Index: 2019. <https://www.oecd.org/gov/digital-government/ourdata-index-policy-paper-2020.pdf>

Open Knowledge Foundation (2018) 2018 Open Government Index. <https://index.okfn.org/place/>

World Wide Web Foundation (2017) Open Data Barometer. [https://opendatabarometer.org/?\\_year=2017&indicator=ODB](https://opendatabarometer.org/?_year=2017&indicator=ODB)

## South Korea

Score 8

Korea ranks first among OECD countries on the OECD's OUR Data Index, which examines the issue of open, usable and reusable government data. A government information portal has been introduced to provide access to government data and information. However, some institutions have proved uncooperative in providing access to information requested by members of the public, making the government less accountable. The government seems particularly reluctant to share detailed spending information. Thus, the 2017 Open Data Barometer gives Korea 90 out of 100 points for having a detailed government budget, but only five points with regard to publishing detailed data on government spending.

Citation:

OECD, Government at a Glance 2017 Database, OUR Data Index

The Government of Republic of Korea. 2017. "100 Policy Tasks: Five-year Plan of the Moon Jae-in Administration." Korean Culture and Information Service: Seoul.

"Government at a Glance 2021 – Country Fact Sheet – Korea." OECD. Accessed January 18, 2022. <https://www.oecd.org/gov/gov-at-a-glance-2021-korea.pdf>.

Open Government Partnership. "Republic of Korea Action Plan 2021-2023," September 22, 2021. <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/republic-of-korea-action-plan-2021-2023/>.

## Australia

Score 7

Much government data and information is published online and is readily accessible. Through its data.gov.au initiative, the government has an express commitment to improving the availability and use of government administrative data. That said, it is also the case that there is much information not made available. Ostensibly, this is for reasons such as national security and citizen privacy/confidentiality, but there is little doubt that political factors also play a role.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics, a statutory government agency, provides a considerable and comprehensive amount of data on economic and social conditions in the country, mostly derived from the census conducted every five years and various additional surveys.

## Belgium

### Score 7

In 2011, Belgium launched an open data platform with the aim of making government information readily available to citizens; as of late 2021, this platform (Data.Gov.Be) was making more than 13,000 databases accessible, across a broad span of policy sectors. In general, Belgium is comparable to the average European country in terms of open data policy. However, perhaps due to a lack of communication, Belgium continues to lag behind its European counterparts in terms of the use and impact of open data initiatives.

Belgium is ranked 22nd out of 115 countries in the Open Data Barometer Global Report Fourth Edition (2016) and 22nd out of 94 countries in the Global Open Data Index 2016/2017. The Global Open Data Index highlights Belgium's poor performance regarding the availability of information on government spending, land ownership, election results, draft legislation and national laws.

As a response to the lack of information, Transparencia, a private platform, was created in 2016 with the aim of helping citizens access information held by the government.

Throughout the crisis, the government's Sciensano (the Belgian equivalent of the CDC in the United States) has published comprehensive data updated on a daily basis, and made data available in a user-friendly way (a PDF report with the main graphs and figures, plus regular press conferences). The public can access detailed information on the number of cases, deaths, hospital occupation rates and so on. This has been true for each region and province, broken down by age group and gender. Epidemiological studies performed by Sciensano are also available. However, following a tradition of secrecy regarding official data, Sciensano held on to its raw data and initially refused to share it even with specialized academics. The ones who were eventually appointed to the government's response advisory groups eventually obtained it, but only under strict confidentiality conditions, which prevented them from sharing the data with specialized university research groups that could have detected valuable patterns.

Information on the measures taken, the availability of tests and the way contact tracing is performed, as well as more practical information on how and when to wear a mask, for example, is also provided to the citizens on a dedicated website. All this contributed to the population's quite broad compliance with the measures taken by the government.

Citation:

[http://digitaldashboard.belgium.be/sites/default/files/basic-page/files/2018-03/country-factsheet\\_belgium.pdf](http://digitaldashboard.belgium.be/sites/default/files/basic-page/files/2018-03/country-factsheet_belgium.pdf)

<https://index.okfn.org/place/be/>

[https://opendatabarometer.org/data-explorer/?\\_year=2015&indicator=ODB&lang=en&open=BEL](https://opendatabarometer.org/data-explorer/?_year=2015&indicator=ODB&lang=en&open=BEL)

<https://data.gov.be/fr/info-faq>

Private substitute:

<https://transparencia.be/help/about>

<https://www.sudinfo.be/art/1699151/article/2016-10-19/transparencia-une-plate-forme-bruxelloise-pour-obliger-les-autorites-a-plus-de-t>

Datastudio:

<https://datastudio.google.com/embed/reporting/c14a5cfc-cab7-4812-848c-0369173148ab/page/ZwmOB>

information on the measures and others:

<https://www.info-coronavirus.be/>

Scientists complain about the difficulty to access data:

[https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20201214\\_98115880](https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20201214_98115880)

Coronavirus-dedicated website:

[www.info-coronavirus.be](http://www.info-coronavirus.be)

## Chile

### Score 7

In general terms, the level of digitalization with regard to public information (e.g., commission reports, draft laws, and information on line ministries and government activities) is quite high. Since the implementation of the transparency law of 2008 (Ley de Transparencia), data about the personnel structure and expenditure of public institutions is also publicly accessible. In addition, with the enactment of Law 21,180 on the Digital Transformation of the State (Ley de Transformación Digital del Estado) in 2019, many administrative processes and bureaucratic procedures have been successfully digitalized. Though some delays in publishing relevant information may occur, and – considering the relatively high educational gap – information and data is not always published in a comprehensive way.

Citation:

On the Digital Government-Initiative, <https://digital.gob.cl>, last accessed: 13 January 2022.

## Croatia

### Score 7

Croatia began in mid-2011 its formal participation in the Open Government Partnership (OGP), as a voluntary international initiative that aims to secure commitments from governments to their citizenry to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. A special council known as the Council for the Open Government Partnership Initiative of the government was established as a centralized hub for communication between implementing and monitoring stakeholders. The OGP Council is responsible for the coordination of Croatia's national action plan with expert and administrative support provided by the Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs. The implementation responsibilities are spread among a large group of government institutions, including the parliament. In 2015, the Open Data Portal of Croatia was

established which tried to offer in a single place all data related to public administration and became an integral part of the e-citizens project. Some key institutions that provide publicly accessible data such as the State Audit Office and the Croatian Bureau of Statistics do so in a comprehensive, timely and user-friendly way.

## France

### Score 7

The bureaucratic and political structure of the country overall provides satisfactory information. It is possible to get full access to information directly or through specialized citizens groups, and several media outlets provide critical analyses of governmental action. Public institutions such as the parliament, the Court of Accounts, and various independent authorities or committees not only facilitate access to information, but also offer a critical analysis of government action.

However, the political system, both at the local or national level, offers few instruments to help citizens monitor and oversee their administrative and political authorities. The main issue remains the incapacity of individuals to deal with the massive flows of information provided by public bodies. At the local level, the “information” provided by the ruling party or coalition tends to be mere window-dressing or propaganda in support of the adopted or proposed policy.

## Greece

### Score 7

Before the onset of the Greek economic crisis, there was a problem with reporting statistical and other data regarding government revenue and expenses as well as regarding personnel in the Greek public sector.

The situation has exceptionally improved since then. Barring data on defense and security, which are considered classified, all data produced by the revamped official statistical authority of Greece (Helstat) is accessible. This data is compiled and published according to Eurostat's requirements. Reliable data is also available on public employment, including type of work contract and other information, via a separate website maintained by the Ministry of Administrative Reconstruction (Apografi). Moreover, since 2010, thanks to a law on the issue of transparency, all administrative acts issued by the central, regional and local authorities and other public bodies (the so-called Diavgeia system) have been available online. Though this system is not very user-friendly, accessing the data is possible.

The government that took power in July 2019 established the Ministry of Digital Governance and also founded the new Independent Authority on Transparency (the EAD). In 2020–2021, the new ministry proceeded to digitalize many services offered to citizens and businesses on internet platforms. Particularly during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, the volume of data made available to the public through

digital sources increased. Furthermore, before any bill of law is submitted to parliament, there is a two-week period during which the text of the bill is uploaded onto the website of the competent ministry for citizens to comment on it. That requirement was not always fulfilled before 2019. However, the same government passed new legislation in August 2019 (Law 4624/2019) that expanded the range of restrictions to access official information beyond the restrictions already provided by the European Union's relevant regulation (the GDPR). Nevertheless, overall, all the above measures have over time increased the capacity of citizens to hold the government to account. For instance, nowadays, it is possible for citizens to find out the names of anyone newly appointed to a government or administrative body, as well as details on appointments and on any item of government expenditure.

Citation:

The three platforms, cited in the above response, through which one can access data and information are the following:

<http://www.statistics.gr/en/home/>

<http://apografi.gov.gr/> and

<https://diavgeia.gov.gr/>

## Ireland

Score 7

The government – through governmental departments and institutions such as the Central Statistics Office (CSO), and the Auditor and Controller General – publishes data and information in a comprehensive, timely and user-friendly way. Freedom of information helps this openness, but has sometimes been criticized by journalists in recent years because of allegedly extensive redaction by ministries and state bodies.

## Israel

Score 7

In recent years, the government has expanded its efforts with regard to policy transparency. In 2011, Israel joined the Open Government Partnership and, in 2016, the government announced the launch of a program designed to open all governmental databases to public access. This step is part of an ongoing policy of increasing transparency by expanding the authority of and funding for the Governmental Unit for Freedom of Information.

Most (if not all) governmental authorities have an official website and social media presence, some of which are available in languages other than Hebrew (e.g., English and Arabic). The websites offer a wide range of services, including information services (like press releases, law drafts for public commentary and policy explanations). One important example of this is the official website of the Ministry of Finance, which publishes the state budget (or more accurately its highlights) in a readable and keyword-searchable PDF format. The website also offers tools to observe changes in the budget and to compare it with the budgets from previous years.



The Knesset has a comprehensive website, offering the option to download all of the Knesset's press releases, general assembly and various committee protocols (although excluding protocols from confidential committees, such as the Committee for Foreign Affairs and National Security Matters), draft and enacted laws, and even research papers that were handed to the various committees. The Knesset's committee and general assembly meetings are usually recorded and made available to watch online. The Knesset also operates the National Legislation Database, which aims to make all legislation and legislative processes digitally accessible to the public.

Citation:

Bender, Eric. "The Transparency Committee Headed by MK Shaffir Shall Be Cancelled in the Next Knesset." In Ma'ariv website.. April 18th, 2019. (Hebrew)

Government ICT Authority, "Open Government Action Plan for 2018-2019": <http://yoursay.gov.il/cio/File/Index/nap3english/>

Liel, Dafna. "MK Shaffir's Transparency Committee Will Be Cancelled?." In Mako website.. April 18th, 2019. (Hebrew)

Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 2018": <http://www.ti-israel.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/CPI-2018-Executive-summary-PRINT.pdf>

Tamar Hermann, "Democracy in Crisis? Israeli Survey Respondents Agree to Disagree": 13.12.2018, Podcast, <https://en.idi.org.il/podcasts/25310>

"Transparency International – Israel": <http://www.ti-israel.org/> (Hebrew)

Anna Ahronheim, "IDF comptroller to investigate army's readiness," JPost, 26.09.2018: <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/IDF-comptroller-to-investigate-armys-readiness-567994>

## Lithuania

Score 7

There are several main reporting mechanisms on the overall performance of the government and its institutions. First, every year the government presents to the parliament an annual performance report where overall performance and performance in the policy areas of individual ministries as well as thematic areas are reported. Second, the Lithuanian government publishes quarterly, semi-annual or annual reports on the implementation of annual performance priorities. Third, every year the institutions that manage appropriations from the state budget publish their annual performance reports on the implementation of strategic-performance plans (including budgetary programs) and the achievement of performance targets (i.e., outputs, outcomes and impacts). However, the National Audit Office found in its 2015 performance report that these government reports failed to include more than half of the outcome-level monitoring indicators whose targets were not achieved, and that information on unachieved outcomes was ambiguously reported. Also, reporting on the implementation of the 2015 priorities was incomplete, with less than half of all performance results presented by the government.

The scope of information presented in the annual performance reports of Lithuanian budgetary institutions is large, but they sometimes omit important information and lack a critical assessment of organizational performance. The Lithuanian government has committed to taking action to address the challenge of incomplete, selective and biased reporting.

An open-government data initiative is part of a national plan of information society development. The Ministry of Economy and Innovation launched the initiative during the 2008 to 2012 government term, when the potential of opening up government data was first recognized. Parts of the necessary infrastructure have been in place since implementation of the first EU directive on public sector information. For instance, the Information Society Development Committee created a preliminary open data portal (<http://opendata.gov.lt>) where information on available datasets is published. The Ministry of Transport and Communications intends to spend around €4 million on the development of an advanced open data portal. In order to exploit the opportunities presented by government data, government ministries and agencies are encouraged to open up data to the public. Despite a recent increase in the scope of government data published online, Lithuanian authorities should pursue a more experimental approach to discover how data can add value to the public sector, to society and to the economy. The program of the Šimonytė government (which took office in late 2020) contains provisions on open government and the provision of greater quantities of government data to the general public. Legal steps to make this possible were taken in 2021.

Lithuania joined the multilateral Open Government Partnership initiative in 2011. In subsequent years, the Office of the Government developed action plans for improving open-government practices throughout the country (the fifth action plan was approved in 2021). During the review period, Lithuania signed the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (2015) and the UN Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (2015). In 2016, the government approved three major initiatives to make public institutions more accountable to society, reduce corruption and increase transparency, while also increasing public engagement. However, implementation has been undermined by a lack of measurable targets and meaningful collaboration with civil society.

Citation:

Valstybės kontrolė (2016). Programinio biudžeto sistema: strateginių veiklos planų sudarymas ir įgyvendinimo stebėseną, Nr. VA-P-60-2-17.

## Spain

Score 7

Ministries and public agencies (e.g., the National Statistics Institute, INE, and the Sociological Research Center, CIS) often publish data and information that enables citizens to hold the government accountable. The centralized online platform

transparencia.gob.es lists all ongoing legislative initiatives and consultations, thus facilitating citizen participation.

During the COVID-19 state of alarm, the national government's service providing open access to data was suspended.

In October 2020, the government approved the Fourth Open Government Plan (2020 – 2024). The plan was jointly approved by the national, regional and local governments following a consultative process. The plan includes 110 initiatives and 529 activities; one of many aims is to create effective and transparent institutions that are accountable and guarantee public access to information. The Open Government Forum, composed of representatives of public administrations and civil society, has continued its operations, and in October 2021 delivered its recommendations for the reform of the transparency law.

Citation:  
Spanish Government (2020), Fourth Open Government Plan (2020-2024)  
[https://transparencia.gob.es/transparencia/ca/dam/jcr:eaa4dcf1-c1e6-48be-a43e-965d16a19983/4thPlan\\_OpenGov\\_Spain\\_EN.pdf](https://transparencia.gob.es/transparencia/ca/dam/jcr:eaa4dcf1-c1e6-48be-a43e-965d16a19983/4thPlan_OpenGov_Spain_EN.pdf)

Gobierno Abierto de Navarra, <http://www.gobiernoabierto.navarra.es/es>

## Austria

### Score 6

The Austrian government is not a “closed shop” – access to government data (e.g., provided by the government's websites) is possible and the opposition's right to information concerning significant developments is not disputed. However, this does not amount to the high level of open government that may be expected considering the promises given by consecutive governments. The proposed freedom of information act remains stuck in parliament and it appears likely that it will stay there for the foreseeable future.

Recent governments have made an effort to facilitate the provision of scientific micro-data. In 2020, the AUSSDA (Austrian Social Science Data Archive) was awarded the Core Trust Seal and thus certified as a “trustworthy data repository.” AUSSDA is a data infrastructure for the social science community in Austria, originally established in 2016, which offers a variety of research support services, primarily data archiving and help with data reuse.

The passing of a freedom of information act failed in 2021 (as it did in 2017), even though this reform had been a declared top priority by the ÖVP-Green government (or more precisely the junior coalition partner, the Greens). This latter episode showcased the institutional complexity of the Austrian system of government and the state's veto power more specifically. As the bill would have required a two-thirds majority in both the Nationalrat and the Bundesrat, the states – which opposed the reform mainly because of the expected tremendous administrative costs – were able to prevent the bill from becoming law.

Citation:

<https://aussda.at/en>

[https://aussda.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/p\\_aussda/Documents/AUSSDA\\_project\\_report.pdf](https://aussda.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_aussda/Documents/AUSSDA_project_report.pdf)

<https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000132182312/koalition-sagt-erstmal-der-das-informationsfreiheitsgesetz-verhindert>

## Bulgaria

Score 6

The Bulgarian government has adopted a policy of developing citizen access to government data through the establishment of an open data portal. As of late 2019, there were close to 10,000 datasets available, and constant updates take place. All datasets are downloadable in machine-ready format. The data portal provides citizens with a powerful tool for assessing government policies and holding the government accountable. Two major limitations remain, however. First, the supply of data, which would enable citizens to make a preliminary assessment of major government projects and plans, is relatively limited. Second, many datasets are difficult to interpret because of obscure and unclear methodologies.

The government response to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated an improved access to basic government information, especially with regard to its provision of timely statistics. In addition, the government improved its efforts to communicate necessary public health information.

In 2021, the National Revenue Agency, the National Insurance Institute, the State Pension Fund and the Financial Supervision Commission broadened the access to information. Simplifications and user-friendliness remain an issue. Some segments of the needed information lag behind best practices, especially in terms of timeliness (e.g., government spending) but also content (e.g., inflation and information regarding ethnic backgrounds in labor market statistics and social inclusion-relevant issues).

Citation:

<https://opendata.government.bg/>

## Czechia

Score 6

The 2016 amendment to the Access to Information Act defined the term “open data” and led to the creation of a National Open Data Catalogue (Národní katalog otevřených dat, NKOD) and a central open data portal (<https://opendata.gov.cz>). Open government became a significant issue in the 2017 parliamentary elections and the 2018 municipal elections, largely thanks to the newly established Pirate Party. As a result, the provision of data by the government has improved. However, it is not always provided in a user-friendly fashion and citizens seeking information are sometimes forced to jump through numerous administrative loops.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Babiš government refrained from publishing major pandemic-related data and information. The Ministry of Health

refused to provide data even to other ministries and experts engaged in the government response. Several economic advisers resigned in protest, as the lack of data hampered their ability to provide relevant expertise. It took the threat of litigation by the NGO Hlidac státu (National Watchdog) for the government to provide relevant health statistics. Ever since, the government has published most pandemic-related data in a comprehensive, timely and user-friendly way.

## Netherlands

### Score 6

The Dutch state shows a Janus face with regard to the issue of open government. On one hand, an avalanche of information about objective data and their official (often scientific) interpretation is made available to every citizen; on the other, the government maintains considerable secrecy about alternatives that may be on or off the table, arguments pro and con used in policy design, considerations relevant in shaping organizational matters, and which organizations and/or representatives participated in the deliberations.

The most important and high-prestige knowledge institutes regularly publish comprehensive, timely and accurate data and analyses. Such information is used in the annual information packages that accompany parliamentary deliberation and decision-making on the national budget and other issues. Throughout the year, government provides topical information about issues pertaining to ministerial policy agendas on the government website. For politically engaged citizens, it is thus quite possible to be well-informed on government policies. In the Edelman Trust Index 2019, like in the recent past, the Netherlands scored relatively high on trust in government information, with little difference between the well-informed and the broader public. But in 2021, much like in other countries, a deep divide showed up between the well-informed and the mass public: four in 10 of the latter believe the government intentionally misleads citizens through statements it knows to be incorrect or exaggerated and biased; moreover, also four in 10 believe that journalists do the same.

Not all of this can be explained as an expected response to fears triggered by the uncertainty and consequences of the pandemic. The Dutch government in fact proved to be less than an open government for two reasons.

First, the Department of Public Health refused to comply with the law which offers public access to most routine government information (Wet Openbaar Bestuur, WOB). Compliance with WOB demands was already an issue of political concern because the law also offers decision-makers plenty of opportunities to withhold or delay information if “necessary” for political convenience. In this case, refusal was based on the argument that in the midst of crisis management, there was not enough staff to process the demands for release of information. A deal with the written media bought time for the department to comply with running requests later; but this

promise was never kept. Second, and more serious for trust in government among citizens and members of parliament, in many other cases and for many years the government actively withheld information from parliament. This was possible due to the so-called Rutte doctrine, named after its alleged originator, the prime minister himself. The doctrine held that the government could not be obliged to disclose information to citizens or (against the grain of the constitution, Art. 68) to parliament about “personal policy beliefs intended for internal deliberation (only).”

This exemption ground, stretched in extremis, resulted in tens of thousands of redacted passages in documents disclosed (including those from the child benefits affair), much to the anger and frustration of members of parliament, journalists, NGOs and many citizen activists. At the same time, investigative journalism articles published in *De Correspondent* and *Follow the Money* disclosed hidden governance agendas and issues, and government facilitation of structural business lobbying arrangements.

Meanwhile, as of the time of writing, the Rutte doctrine has been rejected as unconstitutional for parliament and members of parliament. The new coalition government promised to change the rules of information disclosure fully in line with the constitution. And the old WOB is being replaced by a new Open Government Law (*Wet Open Overheid, Woo*), which will enter into force on 1 June 2022. The new law foresees active publication of government information on specified categories by means of a special Platform for Open Government Information. Every government body will have a contact person tasked with helping citizens find the information they are seeking; and an Advisory Body for Open Government and Information Management will advise the government and parliament on compliance with rules on active information publication, and will mediate in conflicts between governing bodies and professional information users, like journalists.

Citation:

*De Correspondent*, Enthoven, 12 January 2021. *De Black Box van het openbaar bestuur*.

*Adformatie*, Mulder, 18 February 2021. *Dramatische val van van vertrouwen in Nederland; Edelman Trust Barometer is ongekend pessimistisch*

*Follow the Money*, 27 July 2019. *ABDUP: al bijna 75 jaar de onzichtbare lobby van Nederlandse multinationals*. ([ftm.nl](http://ftm.nl), accessed 8 November 2019)

[Rijksoverheid.nl](http://Rijksoverheid.nl), 5 October 2021. *Eerste Kamer stemt in met Wet open overheid (Woo)*

## Cyprus

### Score 5

The Statistical Service and the Press and Information Office (PIO) systematically publish statistical data and reports, and information on the activities of the president and ministers. Ministries publish information on their work, albeit with significantly differing scope and type of information. The publication of annual activity reports by ministries and departments is often delayed by several years.

A website named EXANDAS, launched in 2019, provides access to government data, an inventory of projects and reforms, political decisions, and policies. The website provides an inventory of all actions undertaken by the government since 2013, but it is difficult to evaluate the progress made, in large part because no dates or timelines are specified with the data and information provided. The lack of comprehensive data and analysis on key policies and activities, in easy and legible forms, does not help citizens to evaluate the government's work.

Citation:

1. EXANDAS – Report for monitoring the progress of government work (in Greek), <https://exandas.presidency.gov.cy/>

## Italy

Score 5

According to the Freedom of Information principle established in 1990, and further extended in 2013 (Law decree no. 33) (FOIA-Governo), citizens have access to all administrative acts with limited exceptions. A government commission oversees the full application of this right. The frequency of access and the response rate are regularly monitored (Osservatorio FOIA).

The government does not have a systematic and comprehensive policy of making information easily accessible for citizens in such a way as would enable citizens to hold the government accountable. The Presidency of the Council of Ministers and the ministries themselves maintain web pages that publish information about government activities. However, the information published on these websites often provides a sequence of events (e.g., meetings of the ministers and press conferences) rather than data-rich documentation.

Citation:

<https://foia.gov.it/normativa/cose-il-foia> (accessed 20 December 2021)

<https://foia.gov.it/osservatorio/monitoraggio/articolo/monitoraggio-sullattuazione-del-foia-2020> (accessed 20 December 2021).

## Latvia

Score 5

Latvia joined the Open Government Partnership in 2011, with the State Chancellery as the assigned contact point. The government has made efforts to ensure Latvia complies with the partnership requirements. Four National Action Plans have been published since joining the partnership, monitoring the progress and proposing future improvements in the field of open government.

Following these recommendations, an online platform was set up in 2017 (<https://data.gov.lv>) to serve as a single point of public access to government data. At the time of writing, the portal contained 581 datasets from 90 data publishers (compared to 33 datasets from 13 data publishers in 2017). However, it is not mandatory for government data to be published on the platform. Instead, data is only



published on a voluntary basis. The Latvian Open Data Portal is linked with the European Data Portal, which means that all data published is also available on the European Data Portal.

In 2017, Latvia ranked 14 (up from 31 in 2015) in the Global Open Data Index. Open public sector data in Latvia is evaluated as meeting the basic criteria of the Open Data Index, but fails when it comes to more advanced criteria, especially when it comes to usability of the data (e.g., publishing documents in a machine-readable format, offering bulk-download options and using open license statements). Importantly, although the law (updated in 2018) regulates what information should be published online by governmental institutions, no unified approach is used when it comes to structuring the information, which often makes locating information difficult, although this could potentially be improved by the new unified state and local government website platform (see “Digitalization for Interministerial Coordination”).

Citation:

1. State Chancellery (2017), National Action Plan 2017-2019, Available at: [https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Latvia\\_National-Action-Plan\\_2017-2019\\_LAT.pdf](https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Latvia_National-Action-Plan_2017-2019_LAT.pdf), Last accessed: 10.01.2022.
2. Latvian Open Data Portal, Available at: <https://data.gov.lv/lv>
4. Cabinet of Ministers (2020) Open Government, Available at: <https://www.mk.gov.lv/en/open-government>, Last accessed: 10.01.2022.
5. Global Open Data Index (2017), Available at: <https://index.okfn.org/place/>, Last accessed: 10.01.2022.

## Malta

Score 5

Malta provides a mixed picture with regard to open-government issues. Since the country obtained EU membership, governments have found themselves increasingly pressured to provide information through more open and transparent channels. Malta has a Whistleblower Act. The National Statistics Office (NSO), which was last reformed in 2015, regularly makes freely accessible information available on various matters. The NSO also responds to researchers and the media seeking access to information relating to a great diversity of subjects. Every ministry, department, public corporation and public sector board must publish annual reports and information on their websites. Hence, a vast quantity of information can be accessed online through government websites or EU portals. Information can be obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. However, this remains contested territory. Governments tend to be reluctant to publish public contracts, citing commercial sensitivity. This can be valid in some cases, but not in others. The data commissioner, who had to adjudicate a case relating to documents pertaining to the Vitals hospital deal, was not allowed to view the documents in question. Such information may ultimately be obtained through a laborious process that involves submitting a request to NAO to investigate the matter. However, leaks are common,

which demonstrates that secrecy is no longer an option. Ombuds Office reports tend to show that politicians and public authorities generally have a negative attitude toward disclosing information. This remains a challenge today, undermining the overall openness and transparency of public administration. The 2020 ombudsman report stressed the need to amend the FOI act to increase transparency, and for the ombudsman to be given more clout in situations when the executive and the public authorities are not prepared to provide information requested to facilitate investigations.

Citation:

Ministers should not only invite selected journalists to public events standards commissioner says. Times of Malta 06/02/19

'Humanly impossible' to establish number of vacant state properties Times of Malta 05/02/19

2017 Parliamentary Ombudsman Report

Times of Malta 16/10/19 Court rejects Times request for hospital deal documents

Ministry of Justice Annual Report 2018

Ombudsman annual report 2020

## Mexico

Score 5

Mexico's access to information law from 2003 guarantees the public's right to request and receive information from the federal government. With the law, Mexico created the innovative Federal Institute for Access to Information (Instituto Federal de Acceso a la Información Pública – IFAI), which helps citizens to collect data and information. The government of President López Obrador is pursuing a more transparent policy toward citizens. The president's daily press conferences symbolize this new openness. But on the other hand, the press conference is also used to avoid critical questions and circumvent independent media, expressing the top-down character of López Obrador's information policy. Additionally, government communication policies at the national and subnational levels, especially regarding the war on drugs, cannot be considered very transparent. Another example can be seen in the data provided on the COVID-19 pandemic, which was rather (mis-)used by government to legitimize government policies rather than being a source of neutral and reliable information.

## Poland

Score 5

Poland is not a member of the Open Government Partnership. Still, the PiS government has expanded digital access to public administration and government data, and runs an open data portal (<https://dane.gov.pl>). In response to the European Commission's new 2020 European Data Strategy, the government adopted a new medium-term data opening strategy in March 2021. This strategy aims to increase the number of available data resources from 19,000 in 2021 to 55,000 in 2027. However, the provision of data does not primarily aim to foster citizens' participatory competence. This is clearly shown by the government's selective and

biased publication of information related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The government ignored calls by the Presidium of the Main Council of Doctors (Naczelna Rada Lekarska) to regularly publish data on COVID-19 infections among medical staff. Likewise, when Michał Rogalski, a 19-year-old high school student gathering data on the COVID-19 pandemic, found out that the infection numbers published by the subnational sanitary authorities did not add up to the totals presented by the government, the government responded by ceasing to publish the powiat-level data (Jaraczewski 2021). Given the gaps and inconsistencies in official data, many epidemiologists have preferred to work with the data gathered by Rogalski and his supporters.

Citation:

Jaraczewski, J. (2021): The New Normal? – Emergency Measures in Response to the Second COVID-19 Wave in Poland, in: Verfassungsblog, March 24 (<https://verfassungsblog.de/the-new-normal-emergency-measures-in-response-to-the-second-covid-19-wave-in-poland/>).

## Portugal

Score 5

Data and information is published by the government. However, it is not comprehensive nor necessarily regularly updated. It is also not easy to locate information, which is dispersed across agencies, ministries, QUANGOs, public administration bodies, and other state and quasi-state organizations.

In addition to the nature of the information, the government provides access to IT so that the citizens, in theory at least, can access data. Whether the available information is very useful is, however, questionable.

The government of Portugal has tried to improve access by setting up the e-Portugal portal ([eportugal.gov.pt](http://eportugal.gov.pt)), which provides public access to government information within the framework of the Strategy for Digital Transformation of Public Administration. This tool might enhance the public's ability to hold the government accountable.

Citation:

<https://www.dn.pt/.../governo-lanca-portal-eportugal-para-simplificar-o-acesso-dos-po..>

## Slovakia

Score 5

Slovakia joined the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2011 and opened an Open Data Portal in 2015. While open data has been a part of Slovak OGP action plans every two years, very few high-demand datasets have been published. The quality of published datasets has suffered from persistent problems with insufficient updates to some datasets and the non-standardization of formats. Shortly before the 2020 elections the National Agency for Network and Electronic Services (NASES)

has launched a new, improved version of the open data portal. The overhaul was part of the EU-funded project “eDemocracy and Open Government.” However, the provision of data has suffered from the fact that the adoption of the Act on Data, which has been on the agenda for some time, has been postponed several times (Žuffová 2020). The change of government after the 2020 elections and the accompanying staff changes on all levels within ministries have proved disruptive; and the COVID-19 pandemic has delayed the implementation of planned training programs.

Citation:

Žuffová, M. (2022): Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Slovak Republic Transitional Results Report 2019-2021. Washington, D.C.: Open Government Partnership (<https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/slovak-republic-transitional-results-report-2019-2021/>).

## Iceland

Score 4

The government does not systematically or regularly publish data or information that could strengthen the ability of citizens to evaluate or monitor the government. On the contrary, the government is widely seen as seeking to hide information that is readily available to citizens in neighboring countries. For example, the Pension Fund for State Employees has refused to publish the names of those pensioners who receive the largest payments from the fund and the amounts they receive.

The governing board of the central bank, appointed by parliament, does not publish the minutes of its meetings. This makes it impossible to ascertain whether the board has fulfilled its legal obligations to ensure that the central bank follows the law and makes it harder to investigate allegations of legal violations by central bank officials. In October 2008, the central bank lent the private bank Kaupthing €500 million just as Kaupthing was about to fail. The loan was not made in accordance with the bank's rules and may have violated the law. It is a matter of record that one-third of the loan amount was deposited immediately in an offshore tax haven. Even so, as no minutes of meetings were kept, there is no way to determine whether the governing board of the bank fulfilled its legal obligations, let alone took appropriate measures.

These examples notwithstanding, the government has for some time run an open consultation web portal (Samráðsgátt, [samradsgatt.island.is/um-samradsgatt/](http://samradsgatt.island.is/um-samradsgatt/)) to increase transparency, and opportunities for public and stakeholder participation in policymaking. One can find and access drafts of bills, rules, and policy documents via the portal. Everyone can send in comments and suggestions. The extent to which such contributions can affect the actions or intentions of the government is, however, unclear.

Citation:

Samráðsgátt stjórnvalda. <https://samradsgatt.island.is/oll-mal/?FilterDate=LatestChanged>. Accessed 4 February 2022.

## Romania

Score 4

Romania joined the international Open Government Partnership in 2011, emphasizing the overarching goals of increasing transparency, promoting new technologies and engaging citizens. Within the framework of the partnership, five action plans have been approved since 2011. In 2013, the government established an open data portal ([data.gov.ro](http://data.gov.ro)) which now provides over 1,000 datasets from almost 100 public bodies. From 2015 to 2017, the Ministry of Public Consultation and Civic Dialogue oversaw the implementation of the action plans. Since its disbandment in January 2018, the implementation oversight has rested with the Secretariat General of the Government. A quick look at the website of various ministries and agencies shows that the information provided is patchy, outdated or partial. Some of the websites are hard to access or are difficult to navigate. In Romania's 2021 Recovery and Resilience Plan, €1.5 billion is earmarked for the digitalization of government. This may improve the timeliness and quality of government publications.

Some restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 state of emergency constrained the capacity of citizens (through civil society) to effectively hold the government accountable. In particular, Article 56 of the Presidential Decree 195/2020 doubled the response time on FOIA and petitions, while some authorities became very reluctant to respond at all.

Citation:

Romanian Government (2018): Open Government Partnership: National Action Plan 2018-2020. Bucharest ([http://ogp.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Romania-2018-2020\\_NAP\\_EN.pdf](http://ogp.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Romania-2018-2020_NAP_EN.pdf)).

European Commission (2021). Fact Sheet on Romania's Recovery and Resilience Plan. Brussels. ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/factsheet-romania\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/factsheet-romania_en.pdf))

## Turkey

Score 4

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) Steering Committee designated the government of Turkey as inactive on 21 September 2016. Due to Turkey's failure to meet the requirements, Turkey's participation in the OGP ended in September 2017.

As part of its fight against corruption, Turkey prepared an Action Plan 2012 – 2013 that included launching four web portals (i.e., for transparency, expenditure, electronic procurement, and regulations), identifying areas at risk of corruption, developing relevant measures, minimizing bureaucratic obstacles, and promoting integrity, transparency and accountability.

The credibility and validity of data provided by public institutions have recently been substantially shaken. TURKSTAT, for instance, changed its calculation of GDP in 2016, which made the tracing of time-series data impossible. In calculating GDP, TURKSTAT changed the base year to 2008, when the Turkish economy experienced significant improvement. Similarly, political pressure has been put on authorized

institutions to manipulate figures, with the results becoming more evident in recent years. One public survey reveals that TURKSTAT is the least trusted institution in the country, with a trust rate of 22.8%.

Citation:

Open Government Partnership. "Turkey (Withdrawn)." July 06, 2020. <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/turkey-withdrawn/>.

Eğilmez, M. (2016). GSYH hesaplaması değişti, kişi başına gelirimiz arttı. <http://www.mahfiyegilmez.com/2016/12/gsyh-hesaplama-degisti-kisi-basna.html>

Gazeteduvar. "Anket: Diyanet'e, Merkez'e TÜİK'e güvensizlik yüzde 50'nin üzerinde," December 14, 2021. <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/anket-diyanete-merkeze-tuik-guvensizlik-yuzde-50nin-uzerinde-galeri-1545414>

## Hungary

### Score 3

The Hungarian government is certainly not an open government, since access to relevant information is very difficult even for members of parliament and much more for ordinary citizens. Hungary quit the Open Government Partnership in late 2016 because the Hungarian government had been heavily criticized for its lack of transparency and its treatment of NGOs in this forum. In December 2016, the Orbán government approved a White Paper on National Data policy that called for strengthening efforts to make public sector information available as open data. As it stands, the datasets available at the central open data portal [www.kozadat.hu](http://www.kozadat.hu) are limited and difficult to use. The lack of transparency was a major issue in the municipal elections in October 2019. The Hungarian government has provided information on the COVID-19 pandemic in a very selective manner. Vital data on case numbers by regions and municipalities have not been published in a consistent and reliable manner.

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