Democrat
EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

# Education inequalities and participation: National Reports


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# Executive Summary

This deliverable provides six national reports on education inequalities and political participation. Taking as a point of departure comparable data from international sources and national literature, these reports aim to contextualise and analyse how political participation is influenced by social inequalities and political values and attitudes. Based on this analysis and additional evidence on the education system, the reports provide recommendations with a view to strengthen the foundations for equal and democratic participation through education.

Equality of participation is at the heart of democracy, but there is evidence of widening participation gaps that are closely aligned to social stratification. Another major challenge for current liberal democratic regimes is the recent rise of illiberal and authoritarian social movements and parties, alongside related dynamics of pernicious polarisation. In a context where the resilience of democracy is under pressure, citizens' attachment to core democratic values and political engagement is becoming increasingly relevant - and education for democracy may play and important role to face these challenges.

The introduction and six national reports are presented as separated documents, each with its own authorship, document history and page numbers.

# Table of Contents

# Introduction

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# Executive Summary

This deliverable provides six national reports on education inequalities and political participation, and the implications for teaching and learning democracy at school. Education for democracy should focus on the ways children and young people learn and practice democracy within the social, economic, cultural and political contexts in which they live their lives. Taking as a point of departure comparable data from international sources and national literature, these reports provide an analysis of these contexts, with a focus on how political participation is influenced by social inequalities and political values and attitudes. Based on this analysis and additional evidence on the education system, the reports provide recommendations with a view to strengthen the foundations for equal and democratic participation through education.

Equality of participation is at the heart of democracy, but there is evidence of widening participation gaps that are closely aligned to social stratification. Another major challenge for current liberal democratic regimes is the recent rise of illiberal and authoritarian social movements and parties, alongside related dynamics of pernicious polarisation. In a context where the resilience of democracy is under pressure, citizens' attachment to core democratic values and political engagement is becoming increasingly relevant - and education for democracy may play and important role to face these challenges.

This introduction explains the conceptual and methodological approach of the whole deliverable. We start by providing a definition of the evolving forms of political participation, followed by an overview of trends concerning participation, social inequalities and political values and attitudes. The holistic concept of education for democracy adopted by DEMOCRAT is then presented, alongside an overview of existing evidence and current debates on teaching and learning methods. Finally, we explain the methodology used for drafting the national reports.

# Table of Contents

# 1. Introduction

This deliverable provides six national reports on education inequalities and political participation, and the implications for teaching and learning democracy in schools. Education for democracy should focus on the ways children and young people learn and practice democracy within the social, economic, cultural and political contexts in which they live their lives (Lawy and Biesta, 2006). Taking as a point of departure comparable data from international sources and national literature, these reports provide an analysis of these contexts, with a focus on how political participation is influenced by social inequalities and political values and attitudes. Based on this analysis and additional evidence on the education system, the reports provide recommendations with a view to strengthen the foundations for equal and democratic participation through education.

Equality of participation is at the heart of democracy, but there is evidence of widening participation gaps that are closely aligned to social stratification (Dalton, 2022). Another major challenge for current liberal democratic regimes is the recent rise of illiberal and authoritarian social movements and parties, alongside related dynamics of pernicious polarisation (Somer et al., 2021). In a context where the resilience of democracy is under pressure (Merkel, Lührmann, 2021), citizens' attachment to core democratic values and political engagement is becoming increasingly relevant - and education for democracy may play and important role to face these challenges.

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## 1.1. Main concepts and trends

### 1.1.1. Political participation

Political participation has undergone an expansive development driven by societal and political changes (van Deth, 2001). This is reflected in the evolution of scholar's understanding of political participation. In the 1940s and 1950s, the rise of representative democracies and the struggle for women's suffrage in many countries resulted in a rather strict understanding of political participation as election-related activities such as voting, campaigning, and party membership (Berelson et al., 1954). Social and political developments in the late 1960s and early 1970s made it clear that activities of protest and dissent developed outside the institutions should be included in the repertoire of democratic political participation (Barnes et al., 1979). In the last decades, not only the scope of government activities and responsibilities has been expanded, but the politicisation of more and more spheres of life has increasingly diversified the modes of political participation (van Deth, 2001). Finally, the rapid spread of internet-based activities also challenges narrow definitions of political participation and adds a new and significant layer of complexity (Theocharis, 2015).

The main tenet of van Deth (2014) is that these developments make it obsolete the search for a single and encompassing definition of political participation. Instead, he develops a conceptual map where the key question is more pragmatic: *How would you recognize a form of political participation when you saw one?* (van Deth, 2014: 353). Three first decisions rules are posited. Do we deal with behaviour? Is the activity voluntary?

Is the activity done by citizens? Considering the exception that in some democracies voting is compulsory (Hoohge, 2014), these rules define the common features of all types of political participation: activities carried out by citizens as a non-professional, non-paid activity (thus excluding politicians, civil servants or lobbyists amongst others) which are voluntary (that is, excluding compulsory activities such as attending a court or paying taxes - while instead civil disobedience could be a political activity).

The fourth rule (Is the activity located in the sphere of government/state/politics?) allows to achieve a minimalist or institutional definition of political participation: voluntary citizens' activities that take place within the institutional or formal architecture of the political system. Most empirical research coincides to distinguish two main modes of institutional political participation: voting, which is by far the most widespread, and other activities that are developed within the formal political system such as party membership or contacting a politician (Teocharis, van Deth, 2018).

Two targeted forms of political participation are considered for activities that are not developed within the institutional political system. The fifth rule (is the activity targeted at the sphere of government/state/politics?) allows to encompass protest activities that aim to influence decision-making, such as demonstrations or working for a political action group (van Depth, 2014). Empirical research has also showed that several social media activities - such as commenting on political/social issues, posting or sharing political links, and encouraging other people to take action - constitute a distinct mode of political participation that mainly belongs to this targeted form of political participation (Teocharis, van Deth, 2018; Teocharis et al., 2021). The second targeted type of political participation applies when the activity is instead aimed at solving collective or community problems (6th rule). This is certainly a disputed statement (van Deth, 2014). Many scholars do not consider civic participation as a form of political participation and there is a strong bulk of research aimed at analysing the relation between civic and political participation (van der Meer, van Ingen 2009; van Ingen, van der Meer 2016; Eckman, Amnå, 2012; 2022).

Besides, it remains open to empirical research whether engagement in social movements or volunteering in civic organisations fit into this type of targeted political participation or the former. Some social movements are clearly aimed at influencing decision-making (e.g., feminism, ecologism) whilst the same applies to some civic organisations (e.g., those fighting against poverty or homelessness) even if the core of its activities is providing direct support to people.

When none of these targeted rules apply, non-political activities may still be considered as forms of political participation if they are used for political purposes (Is the activity used to express political aims and intentions of participants?).[1] Especially newer, expressive and individualised modes of participation fit this category, which are also labelled as 'individual-collective' (van Deth, 2014). Empirical research has identified political consumerism (Teocharis, van Deth, 2018) and lifestyle politics (Teocharis et al., 2021) as two emerging modes.

Some scholars have criticised the "*very ambiguous category of nonpolitical activities that are politically motivated*" (Hooghe, 2014, p. 340) and in general refute any definition of political participation that is based on motivations. Instead, it is argued that political decision-making has become more and more diffuse and elusive and as a result, political participation, too, is now more complex. Nevertheless, it is claimed that non-institutional forms of political participation should be theoretically grounded on direct or indirect influence on

[1] Theocharis and van Deth (2017) have slightly modified this conceptual map, by including an additional question rule (Is the activity made in a political context? However, the overall rationale remains the same. This rule (alongside the motivation rule) is used for including non-political activities used for political purposes.

policy-making. In a similar vein, Eckman and Amnå (2022, 928) point out "*there are limits to what we would refer to as 'political participation'*." They argue for instance that recycling, even if done for environmental reasons, is not a political activity because it is not aimed at any specific actor (as it is the case of boycotting).

Feminist scholars (e.g., Phillips, 1992, 1995; Dietz, 1987; Lister, 1997) have theoretically developed the shift from institutionalised political participation towards its more diverse forms. While acknowledging the importance of democratic practices, they point out to their patriarchal roots and criticized its narrow understanding. They highlight that understanding of democracy as embedded in formal politics hinders participation and inclusion due to its formalistic approach. Through their critics of division into private and public spheres, they point to the disconnectedness of politics and society (Phillips, 1995; della Porta, 2019). They call for the recognition of involvement in local communities as political participation, arguing that it is not only easier for women (and other unprivileged groups) to become involved at the local level, but also because being engaged at the local level provides them with knowledge and skills that allows them to develop the confidence for their engagement in politics. Furthermore, feminist theorists reflect on the inclusion and participation as the values underpinning democratic order and argue for participatory democracy which promotes more equal access to all citizens and creates less hierarchical democratic spaces, therefore diminishing the distance and increase the trust between citizens and state. As Young (1990, p. 119) noted, participatory democracy puts emphasis on inclusion "*of a heterogeneous public, in which persons stand forth with their differences acknowledged and respected, though perhaps not completely understood*." Broadening the meaning of political participation expands also the political debate by including the issues which have not been considered as political. At the same time, the feminist approach brings also a challenge of inclusion of citizens who do not possess social and cultural capital allowing them for equal participation. Without proper resources, they lack agency pushing them to act as citizens. What they suggest is to enhance the liberal democracies and merge them in participation, deliberation and inclusion (Rahman, 2018).

While defining political participation might be a disputed terrain, it is clear that increasing attention to this topic is driven by some general trends: the expansion of informal or non-institutionalised modes of participation, the increasing salience of social media in the political arena, and the decline of some institutionalised modes of participation - namely voting and party membership (Theocharis, van Deth, 2017).

### 1.1.2. Participation and social inequalities

The current liberal democratic model has reached the normative consensus "*that democracies are based on the ideals of political equality, appropriate representation of societal preferences, and responsiveness of government. From this perspective, equality of participation is a major criterion for the quality of a democracy*" (Armingeon, Schädel, 2015, p. 3). While political equality is guaranteed in legal and formal terms, a wealth of studies shows that the effective use of the right to take part in politics is stratified in a way that corresponds to lines of social stratification. Two different participation trends are increasing social inequality in political participation: "*On the one hand, decreasing levels of voter turnout are leaving behind the less-educated, lower-income, and working-class public, who now vote less often. On the other hand, citizen involvement in other non-electoral forms of participation has been expanded, and this is increasingly the domain of the better-educated, affluent, and middle-class public*" (Dalton, 2022: 1950). Research has shown that the same pattern is found when other intersecting social inequalities are considered - minoritised racial, ethnic and migrant groups (Just, Anderson, 2014; Abrajano et al., 2022)

How does social position affect political participation? The influential civic voluntarism approach of Verba and colleagues reply that people participate in politics "*if they can, if they want to and if they are asked to*" (Brady

et al. 1995, p. 271). Resources for political participation (if they can) are money, time and civic skills (communication and organisational capacities) which are socially stratified. But this is only half of the history: ordinary patterns of mobilisation (if they are asked to) do not simply replicate the social bias of political participation, they actually amplify it (Verba et al., 1995). Privileged groups within society are more mobilised and more effective in influencing political decision-making processes (Schlozman, Verba, Brady, 2012). In between resources and mobilisation lies a third aspect (if they want to), which refers to issues like interest in political issues or political efficacy. As explicitly stated by these authors, it is the weakest part of the explanation: "*Causality can go from activism to engagement as well as from engagement to activism*" (Schlozmand, Brady, 2022, p. 98-99).

Different and often conflicting theoretical approaches - rationalism, culturalism, structuralism - have analysed the increase of social stratification in political participation from diverse angles and reaching sometimes contradictory results. However, there are two aspects that seem well grounded in empirical evidence. Widening social gaps in political participation are at least partially explained by increasing social inequalities and individualisation. In line with the classical study of Schattschneider (1960) in the US, research shows that increasing income inequality in Europe lies behind the participation social gap (Schäfer, Schwander 2019; Birch, Gottfried, Lodge 2014; Solt, 2010). The culture of individualisation, which emphasises the importance of individual choices and individual autonomy also affects disproportionally the political participation of low status groups (Armingeon, Schädel 2015). These groups are more strongly dependent on mobilising organizations in order to overcome their individual lack of political power and gain access to the process of political decision-making. However, unions and labour-oriented political parties have lost membership and influence in most European parties since the 1980s. Dalton (2017) adds that individualisation coupled with the search for obtaining merely individual benefits erodes the democratic potential of social movements and dissent activities.

The persistence of strong correlation between level of study and political participation, even when other social inequalities are considered (level of income and class) has led to a wealth of empirical research on the potential causal relation between level of education and political participation, including instrumental variables, matching, panel data, and natural and controlled experiments (Willeck, Mendelberg, 2022). A causal link might rely on the fact that education provides the knowledge and communication skills necessary for understanding the political system and being able to participate (e.g. Nie et al. 1996). Causality could expand to include other skills and civic values that might be nurtured by education (e.g., critical thinking, deliberation, empathy, fairness or engagement as posited by Gutmann 1999). However, research aimed at demonstrating a causal relationship between level of education and participation yields mixed and contradictory results (Schlozmand, Brady, 2022; Willeck, Mendelberg, 2022). More robust evidence is found when the type of education is analysed - that is, active learning based on pedagogies which include civics taught within an open classroom climate and meaningful and experiential learning (Willeck, Mendelberg, 2022).

The use of political efficacy as an explanatory factor of social bias in political participation is also a contested terrain. Political efficacy is defined as the citizen's feeling that individual political action "does have, or can have, an impact on the political process" (Campbell et al., 1955, p. 187). Internal political efficacy refers to citizens' perception that understand politics and can take political action. External political efficacy refers to the perception that the political system is capable of responding to society's demands and that citizens influence decisions. Correlation between political efficacy and political participation is often found in empirical research. However, there are reasons to believe that causality could go the other way around. Social bias in

political voice may be the cause that low status citizens lose the "sense that they can influence decisions and that the political system is responsive to them and well-functioning" (Stocker, 2010, p. 51).

Other social divides - gender and age - follow different patterns of political participation. Overall, the erosion of traditional gender roles is fuelling a decrease of gender inequalities in political participation, although there are enduring and significant gaps (Páez-Bernal, Kittilson, 2022). After women gained the right to vote, gender differences in voting have progressively disappeared or reversed - a pattern which is demonstrated in the few countries which provide sex-disaggregated official election data (Norris, 2022). Equal participation in other institutional fields seems to face more obstacles due to deeply gendered patterns in parties and institutions. In EU countries, women are only a third of ministries and elected members in parliaments or regional/local assemblies (EIGE, 2023). Concerning informal participation, gender gaps appear to widen around the level of intensity in the activity and could be explained by women's higher time constraints due to unequal distribution of care work, amongst other factors. Comparing seven European countries, Grasso and Giugni (2019) find that gender differences in protest activity are statistically significant for the intensity, but not frequency. However, the recent wave of feminism is leading mass mobilisation of women (and especially young women) and fuelling their participation in grassroots movements and in other informal ways (Bessant, 2022; Páez-Bernal, Kittilson, 2022). In addition to the bottom-up movements, de-gendering practices in institutional democratic processes have been also identified and applied, with mixed empirical results in terms of increasing women's participation (Páez-Bernal, Kittilson, 2022). They aim at enhancing gender-inclusiveness of political institutions by creating opportunities for underprivileged groups, in particular women. These practices vary from regulations on gender-balanced representation or gender mainstreaming provisions to softer measures focusing on sanctioning offensive and harmful speech.

Finally, life-cycle and cohort effects have to be distinguished when considering age (Grasso, 2014). A life-cycle approach holds that the relation between age and political participation is curvilinear at the individual level, which is a well-documented pattern. Political interest increases while the individual matures; in elderly life, social isolation and health problems leads this individual to retire gradually from public life (Serra, Smets, 2022). A cohort approach points the focus on the social and political circumstances of upbringing in each generation. This would explain that the generation born in the 1940s and 1950s had an unprecedent level of political participation in voting and protest activities. The post-baby-boom cohorts faced a more socioeconomic difficult context, while the extension of post-materialist and individualistic values makes them less inclined to consider voting as a civic duty, and are more attracted by other forms of political engagement (Dalton, 2021). Shifting away from formal political participation does not mean that young people are not politically active, but rather that they look for “new democratic arenas” for political engagement (Cornwall, Coelho, 2006).

### 1.1.3. Democratic values, attitudes and political participation

The prevailing normative approach of liberal democracy is far away from Schumpeter's minimalist concept, where citizens should keep out of politics in-between elections. Political participation in its different forms "*provides stability and legitimacy for a democratic political system, fosters a vibrant civil society, and makes for better governance by supporting accountability and responsiveness*" (Valgarðsson et al., 2022, p. 1737-1738).

Beyond normative debates around elitist and more participatory models of democracy, empirical research on the quality of democracy indicates that a dichotomous approach - participation vs passivity - is not adequate. Amnå and Ekman (2014) show it is crucial to acknowledge the existence of "stand-by" citizens, ready to engage

when they feel it is needed. Thus, passivity may be an indication that the political situation is perceived as "good" and there is no need to worry. This is in sharp contrast to passivity driven by citizens' feelings of powerlessness to influence decisions and lack of confidence in the political process, democratic institutions and politicians "*which cannot be interpreted as anything but a threat to democracy*" (Amnå, Ekman, 2014, p. 18).

In the 1990s and 2000s, evidence of declining trust in politicians and democratic institutions, turnout rates and parties' membership fuelled a hot debate on the erosion of democracy in established democracies (Stocker, 2010) and old and new democracies in Europe (Demetriou, 2012). Empirical research in Europe also indicated the existence of different meanings of democracy with different implications for participation (Oser, Hooghe, 2018). This study showed that citizens with strong attachment to liberal and/or social democratic values were more politically engaged than the rest, although the most participative group in any mode of participation was the group with a preference for only liberal values. Contrary to their expectations, an adherence to a social concept of democracy did not seem to be a strong mobilising tool.

In more recent years, the rise of the populist right parties has fostered a new wave of empirical research and debate on participation and democratic values. These parties do not overtly reject democracy but may end up subverting the liberal democratic regime from within: "*the main contemporary challenge to democracy is its gradual demise after illiberal or authoritarian-leaning political leaders come to power in elections and aggrandize their prerogatives at the cost of parliaments and independent judiciaries*" (Merkel, Lührmann, 2021, p. 869). Against this backdrop, the focus is placed on democratic resilience and the role played by citizens' values and behaviours.

Wuttke et al. (2022) analyse the *European Values Survey* and show that citizens' support of democracy in European consolidated democracies[2] has remained strong in 2008-2018. Preferences for democratic government remain stable as do levels of self-reported importance of living in democratically governed countries; confidence in democratic institutions has even increased. However, in some countries there is a growing number of `democrats in name only' (Wuttke et al., 2022, p. 426). These citizens show openness to trying other forms of government which are not seen as incompatible with their support for democracy - namely a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament. The study suggests that further research is needed on the different meanings of democracy and in particular the extent to which they are aligned with liberal democratic values.

A new approach to explore citizens' democratic values and implications for the resilience of democracy is adopted by Meléndez and Kaltwasser (2021). The study aims to analyse the potential limits of the new radical populist parties (PRP) in gaining electoral majoritarian support in ten Western European countries[3]. The main novelty of this study is that the analysis not only addresses positive partisanship but also negative partisanship - that is, those citizens who wholeheartedly reject PRP and cannot imagine ever voting for them. The study is based on original survey data and indicates that around 10% of citizens in these Western countries have a clear positive partisanship in relation to the PRP while approximately 50% have a marked negative partisanship. In terms of democratic values and attitudes, those citizens with negative identity towards the

[2] Consolidated democracies are defined according to the Polity IV index plus France. They include 14 EU countries (Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden) plus Iceland, Norway, UK and Switzerland.

[3] Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Spain and Sweden.

PRP reject anti-immigration discourses, show strong attachment for the liberal and social-democratic dimensions of democracy and support democracy as the most preferable regime even though they tend to be dissatisfied with it. This is interpreted as a significant indicator of democratic resilience, because the ceiling for the PRR is related to the rejection of various of its core principles (anti-immigration and illiberalism) by a large part of the Western European electorate despite its dissatisfaction with the ways in which the democratic regime is working. However, the study also finds that supporters of PRP are more mobilised in terms of prospects of voting than those who are not.

An experimental study by Svolik et al. (2023) sheds further light on the strength of citizens' commitment to democratic values and its implications for political preferences. The study includes representative samples of seven countries (Estonia, Germany, Poland, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, and Ukraine) which account for diverse democratic trajectories as well as different exposure to authoritarian and illiberal challenges. The aim of the experiment was to test citizens' ability to recognise and punish politicians who undermine democracy. For this purpose, participants were asked to made a series of choices between two hypothetical candidates for their country's legislature, each described by a party affiliation and a set of economic, social, and foreign policies. Crucially, a subset of these candidates— chosen at random—also endorsed a measure that violated a key democratic principle (civil liberties, constitutional checks and democracy's electoral principles). By comparing the vote shares received by undemocratic candidates with those of democratic but otherwise identical candidates, the study obtains a measure of a country's democratic resilience: its electorate's willingness to punish a preferred party or candidate for violating key tenets of democratic politics. The study finds that citizens who neglect democratic principles are not only illiberal, but also authoritarian. They are mainly concentrated in two groups. First, those citizens who support parties that have been referred to as the extreme, populist, radical, or nationalist right. Second, disengaged citizens (not voting in elections), which exhibit as much tolerance for authoritarianism as the former group.

Finally, it is well-documented that citizens with a broad culturally conservative worldview are especially open to authoritarian governance in both established and new democracies. Malka et al. (2022) provide strong evidence of this pattern for Western democracies. A set of consistent conservative values (traditional gender roles, traditional sexual morality, religiosity and resistance to multicultural diversity) is associated with low or flexible commitment to democracy and amenability to authoritarian alternatives. In some countries, ethnonationalism and anti-immigration attitudes are combined with strong 'welfare chauvinism', claiming the reserve of social welfare benefits and economic protection for the 'real' members of the nation.

### 1.1.4. Education for democracy

It is a basic tenet of DEMOCRAT that Education for Democracy (EfD) needs a holistic approach to educate citizens actively imbued with democratic values and attitudes while recognising children's and young people's agency in shaping their learning processes. EfD should not only include a transmission of democratic values but must also articulate and reinforce the agency and attitudes that maintain and justify such a system (Krüger et al., 2024). [4]

[4] DEMOCRAT conceptual framework and vision of democratic citizenship and education for democracy is presented in deliverable 2.1: *Conceptual Framework and Vision: Responsible Democratic Citizenship and Education for Democracy* (Krüger et al., 2024).

While state/teacher authority is an inherent characteristic of public education, the ways in which students experience authority and democracy in school are highly influential in their learning of democratic values and competences (Biesta, 2011; Gutmann, 1993). The shift towards active, student-driven models of learning focuses not only on the transfer of knowledge but also on the quality of interaction and real-life skills to act as a democratic citizen (Gallagher and Savage, 2020). Teachers and other educators can empower students to be responsible democratic citizens in their in-person and on-line interactions by exemplifying appropriate conduct and creating secure and open environments. These spaces allow students to cultivate active participation, respectful engagement with others, and the promotion of human rights. These elements are gaining importance as classrooms – whether physical, digital, or hybrid – increasingly bring together students and teachers from diverse sociocultural backgrounds, with varied experiences, values, beliefs, and aspirations.

According to the review of literature conducted by Krüger et al. (2024), research on civic education (which, in practical terms, overlaps with EfD in democratic societies) shows inconclusive results on the impacts of civic education on civic values, civic behaviour and political participation . Empirical studies indicate that teaching and learning environments and approaches are crucial elements for the effectiveness of civic education. The main elements are an open school climate, an open classroom climate, interactive and participatory approaches, and service learning or community-based learning. However, the extent to which these elements are found to be effective varies depending on the study (and the methodological approach to assess effectiveness), including some studies that find no clear evidence of impact. It is also worth noting that research indicates that interactive and participatory approaches are the most effective in transmitting not only democratic values to students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, but also in reinforcing their agency.

The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study is the most relevant comparative survey of civic education. It includes three waves (2009, 2016, and 2022) and a large corpus of empirical studies on civic education and its impact on civic knowledge, civic engagement, and prospects of future political participation (voting, other formal activities, and informal activities). The ICCS reports based on the 2022 wave[5] (ICCS 2022, 2023) provide a wide range of insights into civic education, although underscoring that it is not possible to establish a causal relationship between civic knowledge and expected political participation. Nevertheless, its findings are of great relevance to explore the relationship between civic knowledge, civic attitudes and expected political participation, and evidence the importance of connecting the process of learning and practicing democracy at school to its broader contexts, including family, local communities, and society at large.

An ICCS (2022) finding of special relevance for DEMOCRAT is the influence of social inequalities on the acquisition of civic knowledge in schools in the EU countries. Data show that knowledge acquisition is strongly influenced by students' family background (socio-economic level, immigrant status, and parents' interest in social and political issues). The influence of social inequalities is also clear when the social context of schools is considered at the aggregated level. Significantly, gender remains a relevant factor, and even when social

[5] ICCS 2022 analyses the whole set of countries participating in the 2022 survey. ICCS 2023 focuses on some aspects which are relevant for the European countries. The participation of European countries in the ICCS study is as follows. Eighteen countries and two benchmarking regions (the German states of North Rhine-Westphalia and Schleswig-Holstein) participated in the ICCS 2022. Eleven of the countries (Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, and Sweden) participated in all three waves of the study since 2009, while one country (Croatia) and one benchmarking region (North Rhine-Westphalia) participated only in the second (2025) and the third (2022) wave of the study. Cyprus, Poland, the Slovak Republic, and Spain took part in ICCS 2009 but not in ICCS 2016. France, Romania and the German benchmarking region Schleswig-Holstein participated for the first time in ICCS 2022.

inequalities and other differences are considered, girls demonstrate higher civic knowledge than boys. In terms of school learning methods and practices, evidence shows that an open classroom climate and opportunities for participation in civic activities in schools enhance civic knowledge acquisition.

ICCS (2022) findings are also of great relevance to explore the relationship between civic knowledge, civic attitudes and expected political participation in the EU countries. Civic knowledge is positively associated with civic attitudes, particularly with gender equality, environmental issues, and equal rights for all ethnics groups, as well as with a critical view of the political system which acknowledges current threats to democracy. The analysis also shows that when other factors are considered (either individual, social, school-related factors or country-level factors) civic knowledge is positively associated with individual interest in social and political issues.

As regards expected political participation, ICCS (2022) distinguishes 1) electoral participation (voting in local elections, voting in national elections and gathering information about candidates before voting) and 2) the so-called political participation (joining an organisation for a social or political cause, joining a trade union, joining a political party and standing as a candidate in local elections). Civic knowledge is strongly associated with participation, although this association is positive for electoral participation and negative for other forms of political participation.

ICCS (2022) also shows that expected political participation is associated to other aspects. Electoral participation appears to be influenced by parental socio-economic background (the higher the socio-economic status, the higher the expected electoral participation). However, it does not show a consistent association with other forms of political participation. Conversely, students' experience of participation outside schools (in-person civic activities and online engagement with social and political issues) has a positive association with all forms of political participation except voting. Gender has a significant but small and opposite association with participation - girls are more likely to foresee electoral participation than boys and the opposite happens with other forms of political participation. In terms of political values and attitudes, belief in democracy as the best governance system is positively associated with electoral participation, while satisfaction with the political system is positively associated with other forms of political participation. Significantly, trust in civic institutions has a positive association with both electoral participation and other forms of political participation.

When it comes to political participation, ICCS (2022) demonstrates the influence of social inequalities, including migrant background, in the acquisition of civic knowledge and expected political participation, while gender disparities are also acknowledged. The survey also shows the tension between endorsing democracy as the best political system and being dissatisfied with its practical implementation, with an emergence of critical democratic students. Like in adults, this manifests in children through different patterns of expected political participation, with a seemingly growing divide between voting and other political activities. A majority of students intend to participate in elections (on average, 77% expect to vote in local and national elections and 75% expect to get information about candidates before voting in an election), but relatively few students express intentions to engage in other forms of political participation (on average, 25% expect to join a political party, 27% expect to join a trade union, 24% expect to stand as a candidate in local elections and 31% expect to join an organization for a political or social cause).Such divide interplays with parents' socioeconomic status, students' civic knowledge and other students' factors (gender, interest in social and political issues, sense of citizenship self-efficacy, students' beliefs and perceptions of the political system, and practical experience of civic participation within and outside schools). Therefore, it is crucial to enhance the capacity of schools to

mitigate the influence of social inequalities, promote gender equality, cultivate critical democratic citizenship, and encourage diverse forms of participation.

## 1.2. Methodology

The analysis is based on the *European Social Survey* (ESS). This international survey was selected because it is the source which provides most comprehensive information on democratic values and different forms of political participation among adult citizens. Two ESS editions (2012 and 2020) include a specific module on democracy which provides a wealth of data to explore citizens' attachment to the liberal and social-democratic dimensions of democracy[6]. The data from the 2012 module were used by Oser and Hooghe (2018) to explore different understandings of democracy and their implications for political participation. Meléndez and Kaltwasser (2021) used the questions included in this module for exploring the different democratic profiles of positive and negative partisanship towards populist right parties. As explained below, in our study we build on these findings to explore more in-depth different meanings of democracy and patterns of political participation.

Three political participation variables have been used as independent variables[7]. They are based on existing typologies (van Deth, 2014; Theocharis, van Deth, 2017) and have been operationalised according to the available information in the survey. For conceptual reasons, we first distinguish between voting and any other form of political participation, considering that voting is the basic and most widespread form of participation in a democracy. In a second step, the distinction between formal political participation and informal participation has been confirmed by a PCA analysis and is aligned with the literature. Therefore, the three variables considered are: 1) Voting (in the last national elections); 2) Formal political participation (in the last 12 months) which includes contacting a politician, displaying a campaign badge and donating to or participating in a political party or lobby group; and 3) Informal political participation (in the last 12 months) which includes signing a petition, boycotting certain products, participating in demonstrations and posting or sharing something about politics online.

As voting, formal and informal political participation are constructed as dichotomous variables. This means that the value is 1 when the respondent has engaged in at least one sub-type of participation and 0 when it has not participated at all. This is in line with Oser and Hooghe (2018), although in this study voting was not included.

Explanatory socio-demographic variables are age, sex, level of education attained, household income, migration origin (of the respondent or any of his/her parents) and feeling to belonging to a discriminated group. These are standard variables in most literature on the field. As one of the objectives of the analysis is

[6] For these reasons, we selected the ESS instead of other international surveys such as the World Values Survey or the European Values Survey. The deliverable did not include further comparative analysis of ICCS micro-data because results of the 2022 wave were released late in 2023, when the analysis of comparative data was finalised. Instead, we include the main comparative findings in the introduction as a reference for the national analysis.

[7] In our study we do not include civic participation for both conceptual and operational reasons. First, whether civic participation is a political form of participation is a contested issue and the relation between civic and political participation constitutes a field of empirical research *per se* (e.g., Eckman and Amma, 2022). Second, the ESS provides poor information about civic participation.

to disentangle the potential impact of education inequalities from other socio-demographic and political variables, the analysis includes the population aged 25 or older.

Particular attention has been paid to the selection of political explanatory variables. In order to explore democratic ideals, the eight items used by the ESS to build the liberal and social democracy index were selected:

Liberal index

- National elections are free and fair
- Different political parties offer clear alternatives to one another
- The media are free to criticise the government
- The rights of minority groups are protected
- The courts treat everyone the same
- Governing parties are punished in elections when they have done a bad job

Social democracy index

- The government protects all citizens against poverty
- The government takes measures to reduce differences in income levels

The ESS asks respondents to rate how important for democracy is each of these items in a scale from 0 to 10. Building on Oser and Hooghe (2018) methodology, we conducted a Latent Class Analysis to cluster citizens in groups with similar values. The results are similar to those obtained by Oser and Hooghe. Strong attachment to liberal values is found in two groups: the difference is that one also expresses strong support to social democratic values (the so-called "high ideals" group) while support for these values is very low in the second group ("liberal rights"). Two groups show medium attachment to liberal values and are again different as regards their support to social democratic values: very high in the "social rights" group and medium in the "middle ideals" group. Finally, there is a clearly distinct group with very low support to both liberal or social democratic values ("low ideals" group).

The second explanatory political variable is the importance attached to living in a democratically governed country, which is widely used in the literature to grasp diffuse support to democracy (e.g. Wuttke et al., 2022).

Individual and country level controls are those used by Olsen and Hooghe (2018) which reflect mainstream political research in the field. As individual variables, we consider the ideological position in the right-left axis and satisfaction with the way democracy works. Country-level controls include democratic stability (number of years since the most recent regime change or the end of transition period defined by the lack of stable political institutions; Source: Polity 5 (2018); Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income (Source: EU-SILC, Eurostat 2020); Good governance index, which captures perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies. (Source: World Bank, 2020); Gross domestic product per capita (in PPS) (Source: Eurostat (2020); and Old/New democracy (the countries that qualify as 'New democracy' are Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia).

A multilevel logistic regression level was carried out at the EU level for 2020, including the 23 EU countries that participated in the survey[8]. Comparison between 2012 and 2020 was not possible due to substantial survey changes in the dependent variables of formal and informal political participation.

.To prepare the national reports, the results of the EU analysis for 2020 were provided to each team alongside national level data. This data should be taken with caution, due to the relatively small sample sizes for each country. They include both descriptive statistics and the results of the logistic regression model at the national level.

In order to explore somehow general trends in political participation in 2012-2020, descriptive statistics were also provided for those forms of participation that are available in both surveys. Finally, to enrich the analysis, additional descriptive data were calculated to explore political attitudes towards immigration (ESS, 2020) and gender equality (European Values Survey, 2017)[9].

Each national report is divided into four parts. It opens with a section exploring the national context for different forms of political participation. It focuses on factors such as political system, social inequalities, education as well as historical and current political and economic situation. The discussion presented demonstrates how political participation is context-sensitive, complex and multifaceted. Section 2 focuses on the description of ESS data. It starts with an overview on the changes in political participation between 2012-2020, which is followed by a detailed exploration of the relationship between socio-demographic characteristics and political participation as well as political values and ideals and political participation. This section concludes with the regression model illustrating the impact of all analysed variables on political participation. The next section provides a critical assessment of the ESS data. Based on qualitative and quantitative studies on political participation, the authors analyse the role of discussed variables in a process of empowering citizens and engaging them in political activities. The final chapter concludes with implications of political participation for education for democracy and recommendations. For this purpose, the authors build on international and national studies on civic education, including ICCS studies in the countries in which the survey has been implemented in 2022 (Estonia, Poland, Spain and two participating benchmarking regions of Germany).

DEMOCRAT will prepare a comparative report on education inequalities and political participation (deliverable 3.2) based on the national reports presented in this deliverable and additional research. This includes further comparative analysis of ESS 2020 data, comparative analysis of ICCS 2022 data, as well as research dealing with primary data on fake news and gender bias in on-line education.

[8] Missing countries are Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania

[9] The European Values Survey provides high-quality data on gender equality. The ESS does not have any question related to this topic.

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# Executive Summary

This report is part of Deliverable 3.1. of national reports regarding educational inequalities and political participation. It summarises the main results of the analysis of the key existing data sources on Estonia citizens' political participation and its relationship with their socio-demographic characteristics (including, among others, educational attainment) and their attitudes towards democracy. In this report, we discuss the Estonian social, political, educational and governance context as well as the statistical results. We conclude with policy recommendations, primarily for the education for democracy.

# Table of Contents

# 1. Political and civic engagement and education in Estonia

This report is part of Deliverable 3.1. of national reports regarding educational inequalities and political participation. It summarises the main results of the analysis of the key existing data sources on Estonia citizens' political participation and its relationship with their socio-demographic characteristics (including, among others, educational attainment) and their attitudes towards democracy. In this report, we discuss the Estonian social, political, educational and governance context as well as the statistical results. We will conclude with policy recommendations, primarily for the education for democracy.

## *1.1. Political system and governance*

Estonia is a relatively small country, located in North-East of Europe, with 1.3 million inhabitants in ca 45 000 square kilometres. While Fenno-Ugric Estonians can be seen as one of the oldest continuous inhabitants of their territory in Europe, they were subdued from 13th to 20th century by diverse foreign sovereigns and upper-classes. Estonian national awakening occurred in 19th century and an independent state was established in 1917-20 in the context of Russian revolutions and the Estonian war of independence. Under Nazi and Soviet occupations since 1940, Estonia restored its independence in 1991 and became a European Union and NATO member in 2004 (https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/estonia/historical-development).

Estonia has a unicameral national parliament named Riigikogu with 101 members elected in every 4 years. The country is led by the prime minister and the national government consists of 11 ministries, and a single-tier local government with 79 local government units (see e.g. eesti.ee/en). Thanks to the smallness of the country and relatively developed e-government solutions, it is relatively easy for citizens to communicate to national level politicians, policy makers and administrators.

Estonia has proportional elections and a multi-party system both at the national and local level. There are usually 4-6 political parties in national parliament. The country has been long dominated by the pro-market Reform Party that is also currently leading the government coalition; however, in the last decade there have also been alternative government coalitions led by the more socially conservative Centre Party. In addition, the current parliament of 2023-27 also has representatives from two conservative parties (Pro Patria Party and Estonian National Conservative Party), a Social Democratic Party and a pro-market liberal Estonia 200 party.

Beyond the elections citizen participation opportunities encompass also referenda (used only twice during the restored independence), relatively developed e-participation mechanisms (see e.g. https://rahvaalgatus.ee/ https://eelnoud.valitsus.ee/, https://www.riigikogu.ee/ for the national level), directly contacting public authorities, participating in political parties, civic organisations, community and political initiatives and events.

The recent key reforms of importance are the local government reform of 2017 that created more comparable local government units and the language of general education reform that was launched in 2022 and will likely last up to 2030. We will outline the administrative reform here and discuss the education reform later in more detail.

A large-scale administrative (local government) reform took place in Estonia in 2017, which resulted in fewer and more capable local government units. The aim was to increase the capacity of municipalities by merging smaller, less capable administrative units, into larger ones. As a result of the reform, Estonia has now 79 local government units (earlier there were 213), including 15 urban and 64 rural municipalities.

Most of the local government units nowadays have somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 inhabitants, making it relatively easy to develop broadly comparable public services and engagement solutions. However, there are some exceptions with the capital city of Tallinn having 461 371 inhabitants as of 1.01.2024 (more than a third of the population). The Harju county surrounding Tallinn has ca. 200 000 inhabitants and the three other larger cities together also ca. 200 000 inhabitants (together another third of the population). The rest of the country is inhabited by less than a third of population but has 60 municipalities, with the smallest island municipalities having below 200 to below 2000 inhabitants (www.stat.ee). One of the consequences of this reform is an ongoing restructuring (and reduction in the numbers) of schools.

## *1.2. Nationality, ethnicity and language*

In Estonia's recent history, a nearly 50-years of occupation by the Soviet Union in 1941/44-91 erased the earlier civic society and created a parallel society, which is mostly divided by ethnic groups – Estonians and Russophone population, who differ in terms of language they speak, the media the consume, socio-economic aspects and many more. This in turn is being reproduced by a bilingual general education system, which is currently in the process of being transformed into an all-Estonian language education system (addressed in the next chapter). Nevertheless, Estonia has managed to become a well-developed democracy with functioning market economy and some use of participatory and direct democratic arrangements complementing the representative system. In order to understand the current context, we will provide a brief explanation of different factors which have led to current situation.

The most important contextual factor having impact on political and civic participation in Estonia has to do with the division of the population into strongly segregated Estonian language majority and Russophone minority groups. Estonian Republic was occupied and annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940, during the Second World War. After regaining independence in 1991, the Estonian nation-building faced a completely different demographic situation as compared to the pre-occupation time: while in 1945, after the Second World War, the share of ethnic Estonians was 97%, then by 1989, it was down to 61% (Vetik, 1993). Thus, during the Soviet time, two comparable size language-based communities emerged with different patterns of political preferences as well as political and civic engagement, based on the following dimensions of the inter-ethnic division: citizenship, language, education and socio-economic well-being. Generally speaking, the integration of Russian-speaking minority has been relatively successful in Estonia. Latest reports show that 58% of the minority are well integrated, especially young people. Number of people who don't speak Estonian language has fallen from 20% 15 years ago, to just 4%. More than 80% of other nationalities have strong or relatively strong state identity and 88% of all people support the transition of education to Estonian language (Voog, 2024). We will now discuss these aspects in more detail.

An issue having a major impact on the opportunities and patterns of political and civic participation is the lack of Estonian citizenship by almost a half of the Russophones in Estonia. After regaining independence, the citizenship policy became a highly contested issue along the following political debate: whether the Soviet time immigrants had the right to get Estonian citizenship automatically, or should they abide by the naturalization process? Estonia decided to follow the restitution model in which only the former citizens of the pre-war Republic of Estonian, and their descendants, obtained citizenship automatically (Smith, 1996). Thus, while being Soviet-time immigrants, a majority of the Russian-speakers did not get citizenship automatically and had to obtain it through naturalization. As a result, many of them have become either the non-citizens with the so called 'grey passport' or have citizens of Russia. A number of studies show that the non-citizens and Russian citizens have been relatively alienated from the Estonian political and civic

participation as they do not trust the political institutions and are dissatisfied with Estonian democracy (Vetik, 2012). There are also some influences of post communism for the discourses and practices citizenship influencing all the population (Kalev, Jakobson, 2020).

In the first years after re-independence, the naturalization process was rather rapid. While in 1992, when the Law of Citizenship was adopted, around 1/3 of the population did not yet have Estonian citizenship. By the year 2000, only 1/4 of the population did not have Estonian citizenship, and by the year 2000, there were around 5% of people with non-citizenship status, and around 7% of the population had Russian citizenship. Currently, the naturalization pace has slowed down: less than 1000 people per year acquire Estonian citizenship via naturalization, including all children in Estonia whose parents do not have any citizenship. One can argue that without changes in the legal system, the number of non-citizens will decrease, but their share in the near future will not fall below 4-5% (Mägi et al., 2020).

The second key issue impacting the patterns of political and civic engagement in Estonia has to do with the poor knowledge of Estonian language by many Russophones. However, the Integration Monitoring Reports reveal that the situation is improving step-by-step. For example, the 2020 report shows that since 2008, the number of people who evaluate their Estonian language skills as good has risen from 31% to 42% (Mägi et al., 2020). Over the years, the number of people who do not speak the Estonian language at all has fallen considerably, now being at 4% of the Russophone community. However, it is important to put those numbers into context, as, according to the last Soviet-era census in 1989, only 14% of the Russophone community spoke the Estonian language when Estonian Republic regained independence (Vetik, 1993).

## 1.3. Attitudes towards immigration

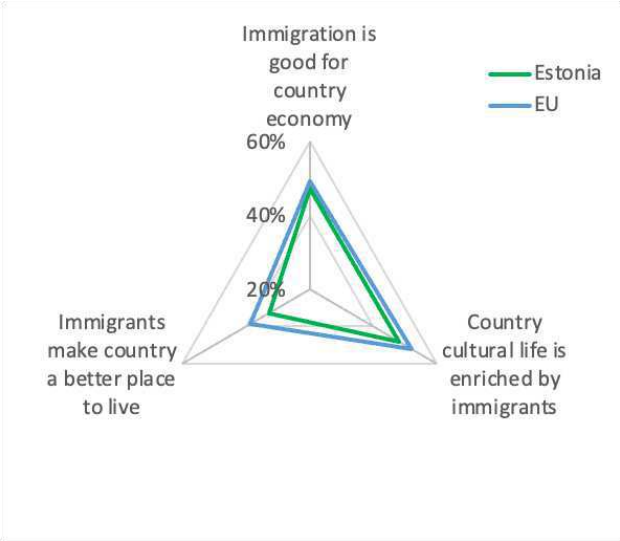


*Figure 1. Attitudes towards immigration, Estonia and EU, 2020*

Source: own elaboration based on ESS data

Figure 1 presents the results for Estonia and the EU for the three variables related to attitudes toward immigration as analysed in 2020. In Estonia, 47% of people consider that immigration is good for the country's economy, 48% that it enriches cultural life and 33% that it makes their country a better place to live. These results, as can be seen in the picture, are very similar to those in the EU.

The following illustration (Figure 2) shows, for the six countries analysed and for the EU, the results of the synthetic index of attitudes towards immigration constructed from the three previous variables. It is an index of normalised values (with EU mean equal to 0 and standard deviation equal to 1), where high values indicate more tolerant, benevolent or sympathetic attitudes towards immigration and vice versa.

The data show that Estonia is the country least tolerant or benevolent towards immigration of the six countries analysed. Its score is the only one below the EU average, although without significant differences. In contrast, the differences are significant with the other countries analysed, especially Ireland, and to a lesser extent also Spain, Finland and Poland.

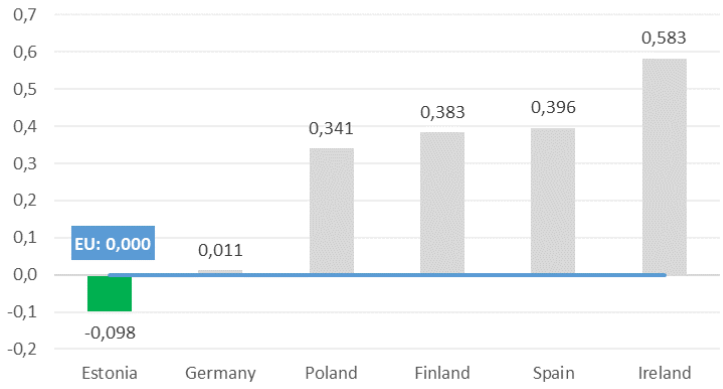


*Figure 2. Attitudes towards immigration by country. Synthetic index, 2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

## 1.4. Education system and civic education

Estonian education system is relatively simple with 7 years old children starting a mandatory basic education encompassing grades 1 to 9 in basic schools. This is followed by secondary education, where the majority of students attend general upper secondary schools and ca. 30% of the students go to vocational schools. Those willing, can continue with a 3 years BA, +2 years MA and +4 years PhD studies, mostly in universities but in some BA programmes also in applied higher education institutions. More than 37% of people have higher education in Estonia. Basic schools are expected to be near home, secondary schools in regional centres and universities in the two larger cities, Tallinn and Tartu. Most of the schools are owned by municipalities with a considerable segment of state-owned gymnasiums (high schools) and a small percentage of diverse set of other schools, including for profit, NGO, religious and other privately owned schools. The school directors and the teachers enjoy broad autonomy and wide discretion, not always backed up by training (Jakobson et al., 2019).

One major problem is the “parallel educational systems” segregated by language and established by the Soviet regime. Since regaining independence, there have been several attempts to transform the two parallel language branches into one Estonian language-based system. Already in 1993, the parliament decided that by the year 2000, the whole education system should use the Estonian language for instruction and operations, but the preparations required for implementing the reform were not undertaken. Instead, at the end of 1990s a new policy was adopted: starting in 2007 and implemented fully by 201 the upper high school (grades 10-12) were supposed to be taught according to a 40/60 model, meaning that 60 percent of the subjects should be taught in the Estonian language while 40% could be taught in Russian (Mägi et al., 2020).

The aim was, on the one hand, to better prepare students for integration into society by improving their language skills and therefore reducing the socio-economic inequalities in the future, and on the other hand, the minorities could still retain their cultural identity. However, this reform was not successful, as students in Russian-speaking schools failed to reach the required level of Estonian, and the model still reproduces the segregation of language communities (Sooväli-Sepping, 2019). In addition, a number of studies show that the current linguistically segregated educational system reproduces different patterns of political and civic engagement, which hinders the development of active democratic citizenship (Kunitsõn, Kalev, 2021; Kunitsõn et al., 2022). In 2022, the Parliament adopted a new bill aiming to bring the whole education system under

Estonian-language based instruction, starting from kindergarten level. This ambitious transition is purposed to take place by 2023. In addition, in recent years a new dimension has been added to the bilingual school system as more new immigrants opt for international schools where the main language of instruction is English (Põder, Lauri, Rahnu, 2017).

Civics is a compulsory subject with courses in 6th, 8th or 9th and 11th or 12th grade. It is accompanied by a now (since 2023-2024 school year) compulsory national defence course and a diverse set of electives in social studies. However, the general part of the national curriculum defines civic and social competences as general competences and expects all the subjects to contribute to these in an adequate manner. Currently, the civics curriculum is overloaded with rather abstract topics with too little attention to the individual development of a student as a responsible democratic citizen (Kunitsõn et al., 2023). This has started to slightly change as the new reforms in social studies curricula aim to offer teachers more examples of "hands-on" approaches and suggest that at least 1/3 of the civics courses should give students the chance to practice being active citizens (personal communication with an official).

The recent results of the ICCS 2022 study are presented in discussion.

## *1.5. Social inequalities*

Estonia has notable regional inequalities, for example in incomes, with the larger cities Tallinn and Tartu faring better with their surroundings while the rest of the country has clearly smaller income levels (see e.g. various data from stat.ee, eestipank.ee).

Similar to the regional inequalities, the socio-economic inequalities along the language lines are a major factor that has impact on political and civic participation in Estonia. The way market economy was established in the 1990s created large socio-economic inequalities, which tend to follow the language line. Comparative research shows that while at the end of the Soviet time the material well-being and socio-economic position in society were largely similar between Estonian and Russophone communities, after the free-market reforms in the 1990s, the socio-economic inequality rose substantially and has more or less stayed the same until today.

During the 1990s and 2000s, the differences in salaries between Estonian and Russian speakers reached up to 20% (Leping, Toomet, 2008) and are now around 15% (Mägi et al. 2020), favouring the ethnic Estonians. In addition, among the Russian minority, participation in the labour market is lower, the unemployment rate is higher, and they evaluate their labour market position and stability lower than Estonians (Mägi et al., 2020). Research also reveals that the two major economic crises of the independence period have influenced the Russophone community more: fewer people work in managerial positions or as specialists, while many Russians belong to the blue-collar working class (Mägi et al., 2020). This is a part of a wider trend related to independence period, which increased social inequalities.

Thus, one can argue that one of the key issues resulting in the lower level political and civic participation of the Russian-speakers in Estonia is as follows: while their national language skills and cultural capital have increased in the last three decades when Estonia has been independent, the socio-economic material well-being and labour market conditions have not improved at the same pace. In the Estonian Human Development Report of 2015, the issue has been described as the "integration trap," which increases political alienation of the Russian-speaking community (Vetik, 2015).

From another perspective, inequalities have historically had a relatively low level of impact on educational attainment in Estonia as compared to other countries (OECD 2016). However, according to the latest PISA

study, this has started to change – Estonia is now at OECD average when it comes to the impact of socio-economic background on students' educational results (Tire et al., 2022).

At the same time education has only some impact on income levels. The analysis of the Estonian labour market by the National Bank of Estonia in 2017 revealed that a person with a higher education earns 33% more than a person with basic education and 47% more than a person with basic education (Soosaar et al., 2017).

Of the more recent crises, Estonia managed relatively well the 2015 European migrant crisis and the 2020+ Covid-19 crisis, while the 2006-2009 parallel Russian trade limitation, global financial crisis and the War in Ukraine that started in 2022 have had strong impact on economy, society and politics.

## 1.6. Attitudes towards gender equality

Estonia differs markedly from the EU average regarding the attitudes towards gender equality. In the family sphere, 24% of people believe that children suffer when the mother works (significantly lower than 36% in the EU), up to 55% believe that what women really want is to take care of the home and children (well above the EU average of 42%) and in the same vein, 37% believe that men's job is to earn money while women's job is to devote themselves to the home and family (only 25% in the EU). Finally, the percentage who believe that family life is negatively affected when women have a full-time job is similar to the EU average (42%-44%) (see Figure 3).

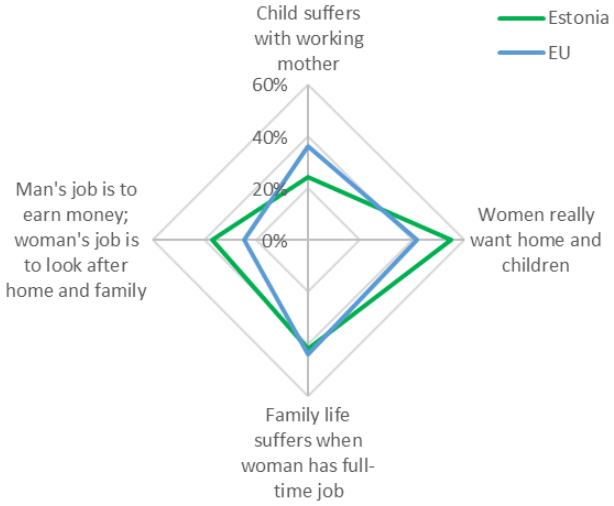


*Figure 3. Gender equality: family, Estonia and EU, 2020*

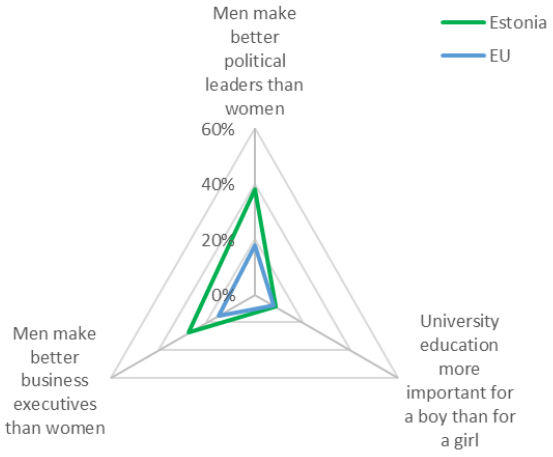


*Figure 4. Gender equality: education and work, Estonia and EU, 2020.*

*Source: own elaboration based on EVS data*

With regard to education and work, Estonia's results are similar to those of the EU in terms of the percentage who believe that university is more important for men than for women (8%-9%), but significantly lower in the other two aspects analysed. In Estonia, 38% believe that men are better political leaders than women and 28% that they are better executives, while in the EU these percentages drop to 18% and 15% respectively (Figure 4). These results echo the Estonian results for most recent International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (2023) where gaps surfaced between boys' and girls' attitudes towards gender equality: almost half (49%) of boys agreed that men are better suited to political leadership than women (only 10% of girls believed so) and

almost a quarter (24%) of boys agreed that women should stay out of politics, while only 4% of girls supported this view.

As in the analysis of attitudes towards immigration, a synthetic gender equality index has been constructed for each of these two domains to compare the results for the six countries considered (Figures 5 and 6). In the family domain, Estonia ranks as the EU average and with a similar result to Germany, significantly above Poland and below Finland and Spain. Regarding education and work, Estonia has the lowest score of all countries. This score is similar to that of Poland but well below the EU average and the other countries, especially Germany and Spain.

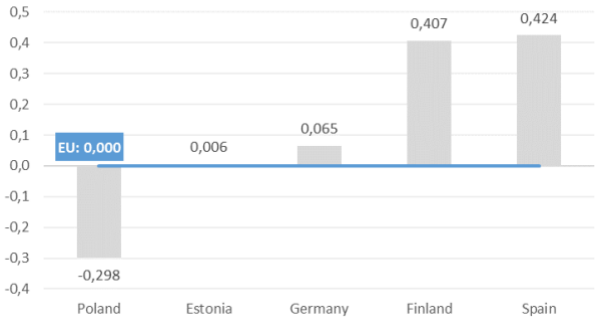


*Figure 5. Gender equality: family. Synthetic index, 2017*

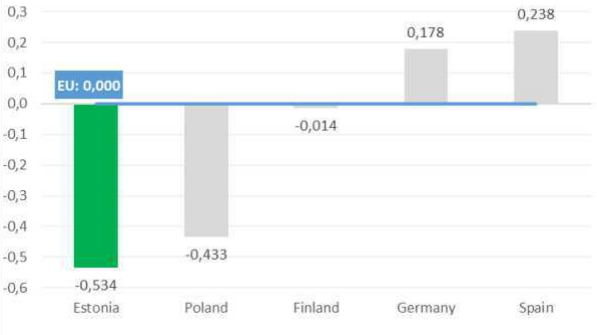


*Figure 6. Gender equality: education and work. Synthetic index, 2017*

*Source: own elaboration based on EVS data.*

# 2. Political participation

## 2.1. Evolution of political participation 2012-2020

While the autonomy and independence related movements attracted a significant part of population in 1987-92, it was followed by a decade of low civic and political engagement. In recent decades, things have improved with roughly a half of population having participated in civic and voluntary activities (Sidusa Eesti Arengukava, 2030). Voting participation in Estonia shows a positive pattern, rising from 69% in 2012 to 76% in 2020, growing faster than the EU average.

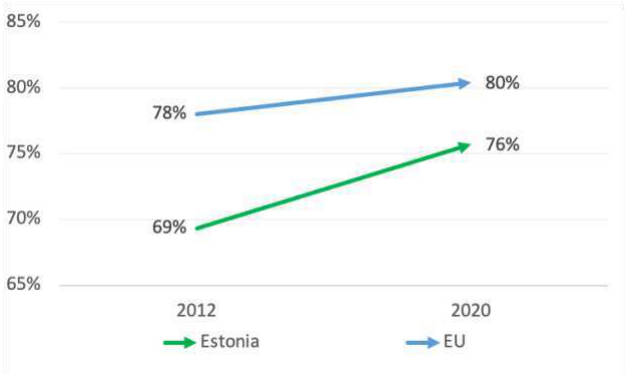


*Figure 7. Evolution of voting, Estonia and EU, 2012-2020*

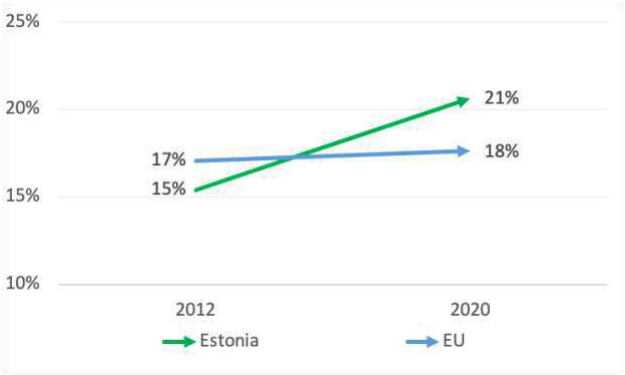


*Figure 8. Evolution of formal political participation, Estonia and EU, 2012-2020*

*Note: EU includes 19 EU27 countries (Missing countries: (Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)*

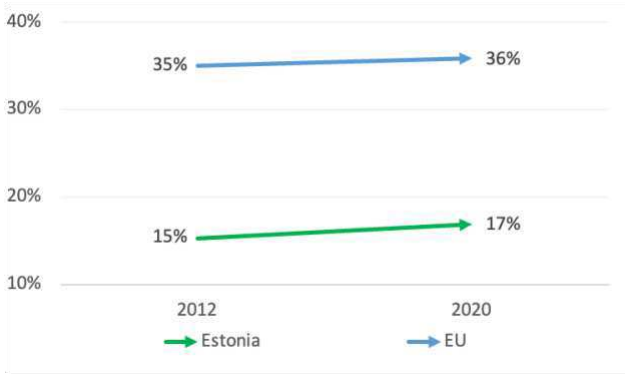


Figure 9. Evolution of informal political participation, Estonia and EU, 2012-2020

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data.*

Note: EU includes 19 EU27 countries (Missing countries: (Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)

With regard to formal political participation, Estonia shows a positive pattern over the period analysed (from 15% to 21%), above the EU average in 2020, which remains almost constant over time.

Finally, in relation to informal political participation, there is a practically stable trend over time (from 15% to 17%), very similar to the EU average.

Analysing formal participation in more detail, it can be seen (Figures 10 and 11) that formal participation is increasing in Estonia for both items considered. It increases for contacting a politician (from 13% in 2012 to 18% in 2020), which is significantly above the EU average in 2020. As for displaying a badge (from 4% to 5%), it shows a different trend to most countries, which are decreasing, but still remains below the EU average.

With regard to informal participation, Estonia is growing very moderately in the two items analysed (Figures 12 and 13). In the first case, signing a petition, this trend differs from the average, which decreases, while there are huge differences among the countries analysed. In the second case, boycotting certain products, the behaviour is very similar to that of the other countries, where it increases more sharply.

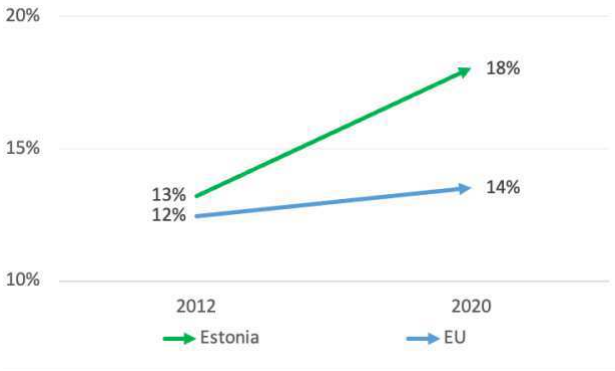


Figure 10. Evolution of the percentage of people who have contacted a politician or a government official,
Estonia and EU, 2012-2020

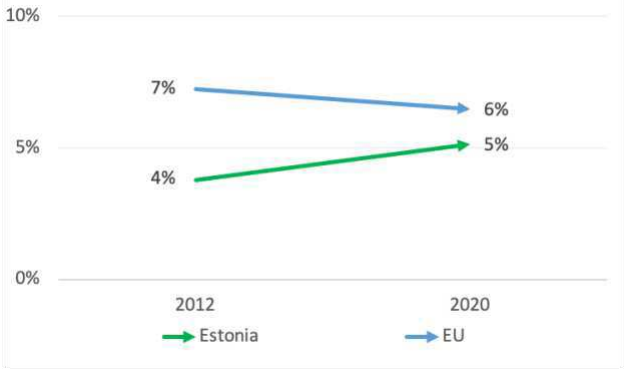


*Figure 11. Evolution of the percentage of people who have worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker,*
*Estonia and EU, 2012-2020*

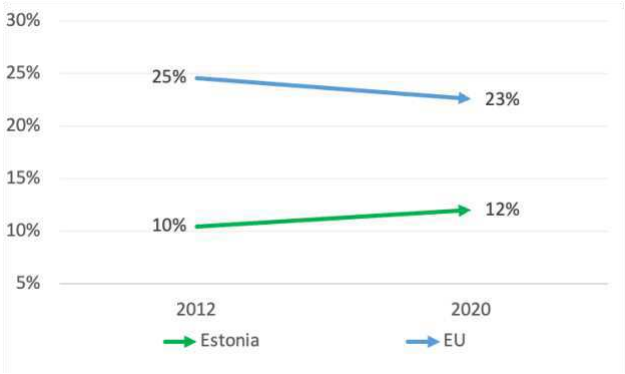


*Figure 12. Evolution of the percentage of people who have signed a petition,*
*Estonia and EU, 2012-2020*

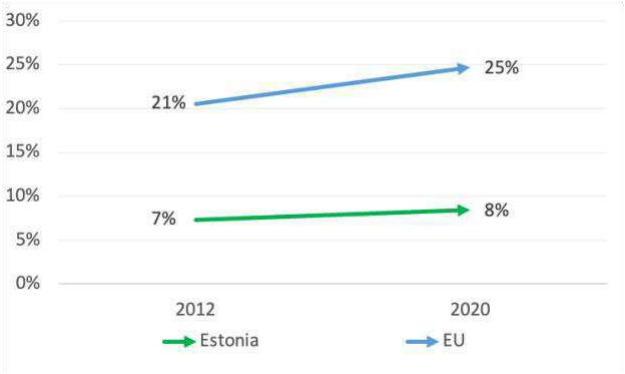


*Figure 13. Evolution of the percentage of people who have boycotted certain products,*
*Estonia and EU, 2012-2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data.*

*Note: EU includes 19 EU27 countries (Missing countries: (Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)*

## 2.2. Political participation in 2020

Estonia has the lower percentages of voting participation (77%) and informal participation (23%) than the EU average (82% and 42% respectively), but slightly higher in formal participation (22% compared to the EU average – 20%).

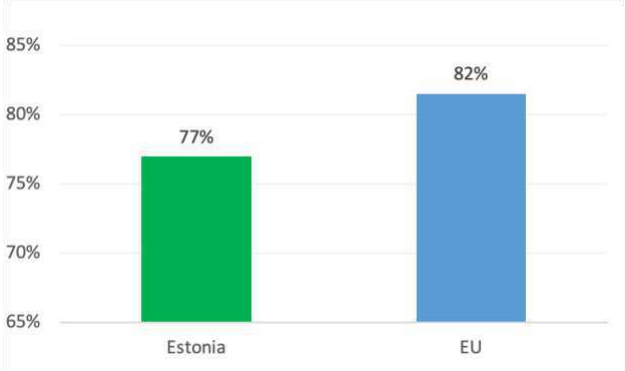


*Figure 14. Voting,*
*Estonia and EU, 2020*

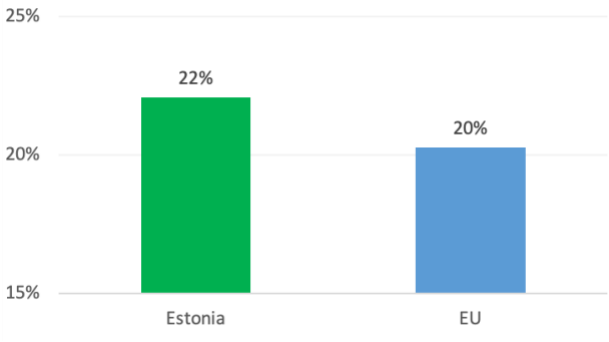


*Figure 15. Formal political participation,*
*Estonia and EU, 2020*

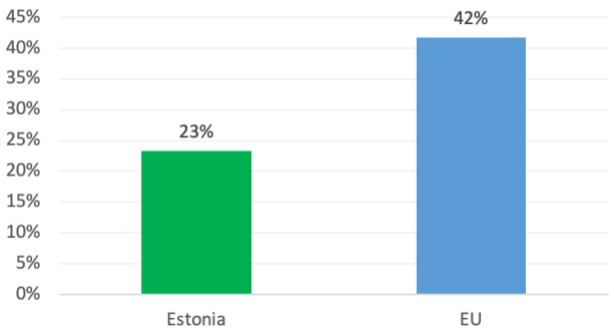


*Figure 16. Informal political participation, Estonia and EU, 2020*

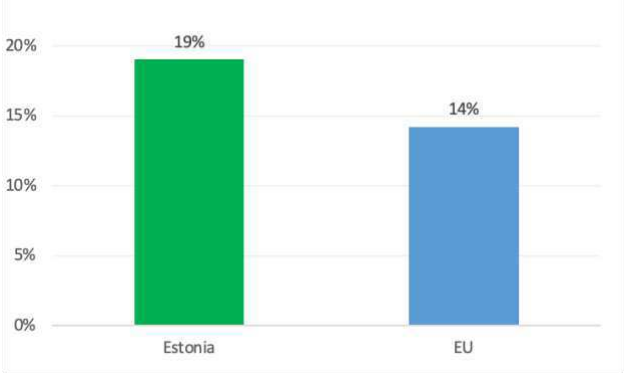


*Figure 17. Percentage of people who have contacted a politician or a government official, Estonia and EU, 2020*

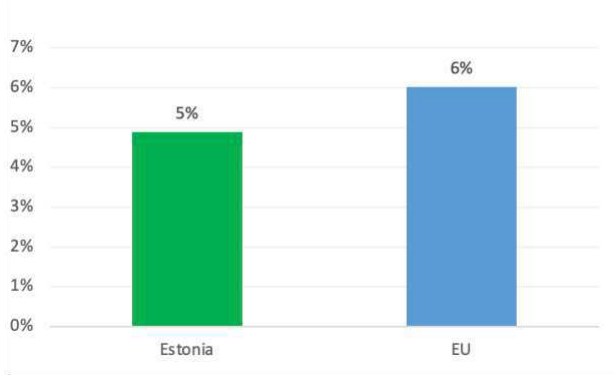


*Figure 18. Percentage of people who have worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker, Estonia and EU, 2020*

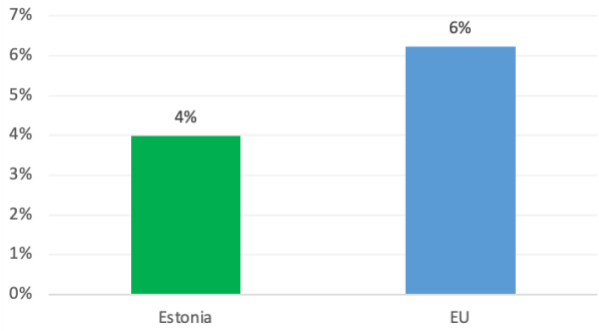


*Figure 19. Percentage of people who have donated to or participated in political party or pressure group, Estonia and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: For Figure 14 to 19: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Analysing formal participation in more detail (Figures 17, 18 and 19), we observe that the highest participation rate refers to contacting a politician (19%, above the EU average), but only small percantege of people declare that they have worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker (5%, below the EU average) or have donated to / participated in political parties (4%, below the EU average).

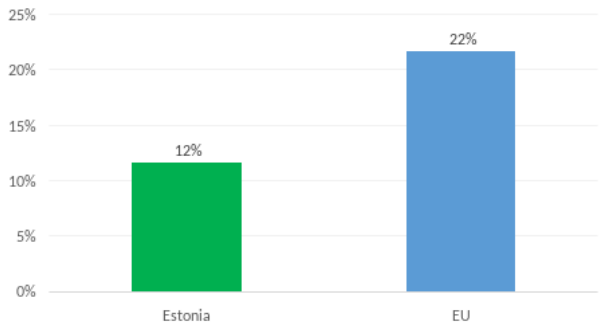


*Figure 20. Percentage of people who have signed a petition, Estonia and EU, 2020.*

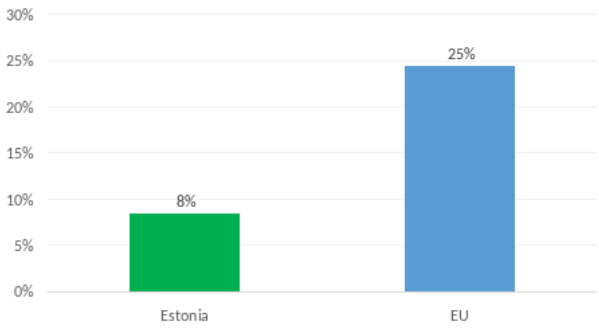


Figure 21. Percentage of people who have boycotted certain products, Estonia and EU, 2020.

Source: own elaboration based on ESS data

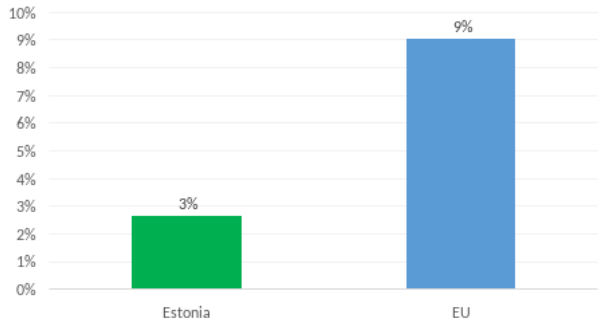


*Figure 22. Percentage of people who have taken part in public demonstration, Estonia and EU, 2020.*

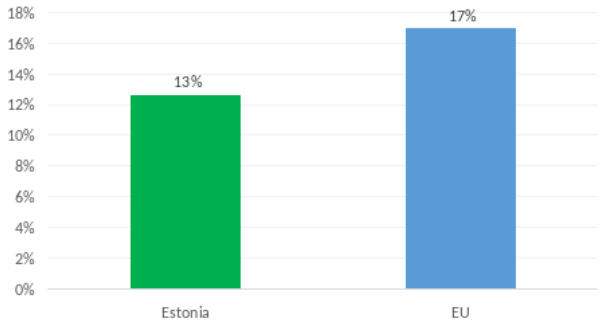


*Figure 23. Percentage of people who have posted or shared anything about politics online, Estonia and EU, 2020.*

Source: own elaboration based on ESS data

*Note for Fig.20-23: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Regarding informal participation (Figures 20, 21, 22 and 23), Estonia has lower than the EU average considered for signing a petition (12%) and boycotting certain products (8%), participating in demonstrations (3%) and posting or sharing something about politics online (13%).

## 2.3. Participation by socio-demographic characteristics

### 2.3.1. Voting

With regard to the socio-demographic variables (Figures 24 and 25), it can be seen that Estonian voter turnout follows a similar pattern to the EU average in most variables, with some aspects to highlight.

Participation increases with the level of education. In Estonia, people with lower levels of education have a very low participation (47%), much lower than those with secondary education (74%). In the EU the differences are less marked (75% vs. 81%).

Participation increases with age. In Estonia, the level of participation of the youngest (63%) is particularly low in relation to the other groups, while this difference is less pronounced in the EU.

Participation increases with income level. In Estonia there are similar levels of participation to those in the EU among those without financial difficulties, but a large difference among those with financial difficulties (65% vs. 76%).

Participation is lower among those born outside the country and those whose parents were born outside the country, but the differences are much less pronounced than in the EU. Participation among the native-born is lower than in the EU (78% vs. 83%) while

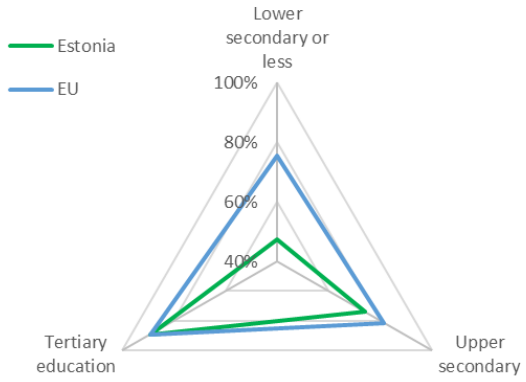


*Figure 24. Voting by level of education, Estonia and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

it is higher among the foreign-born (65% vs. 57%). Exactly the same pattern is repeated when analysing the parents' country of birth.

For the rest of the variables, a different pattern to the EU average is observed. Men's participation is lower (73%) than women's (81%), while in the EU the levels are very similar, although slightly higher for men. Slightly higher participation among those who report belonging to a discriminated group in Estonia (79%) than those who do not (77%), while in the EU the pattern is reversed and more pronounced (75% vs. 82%).

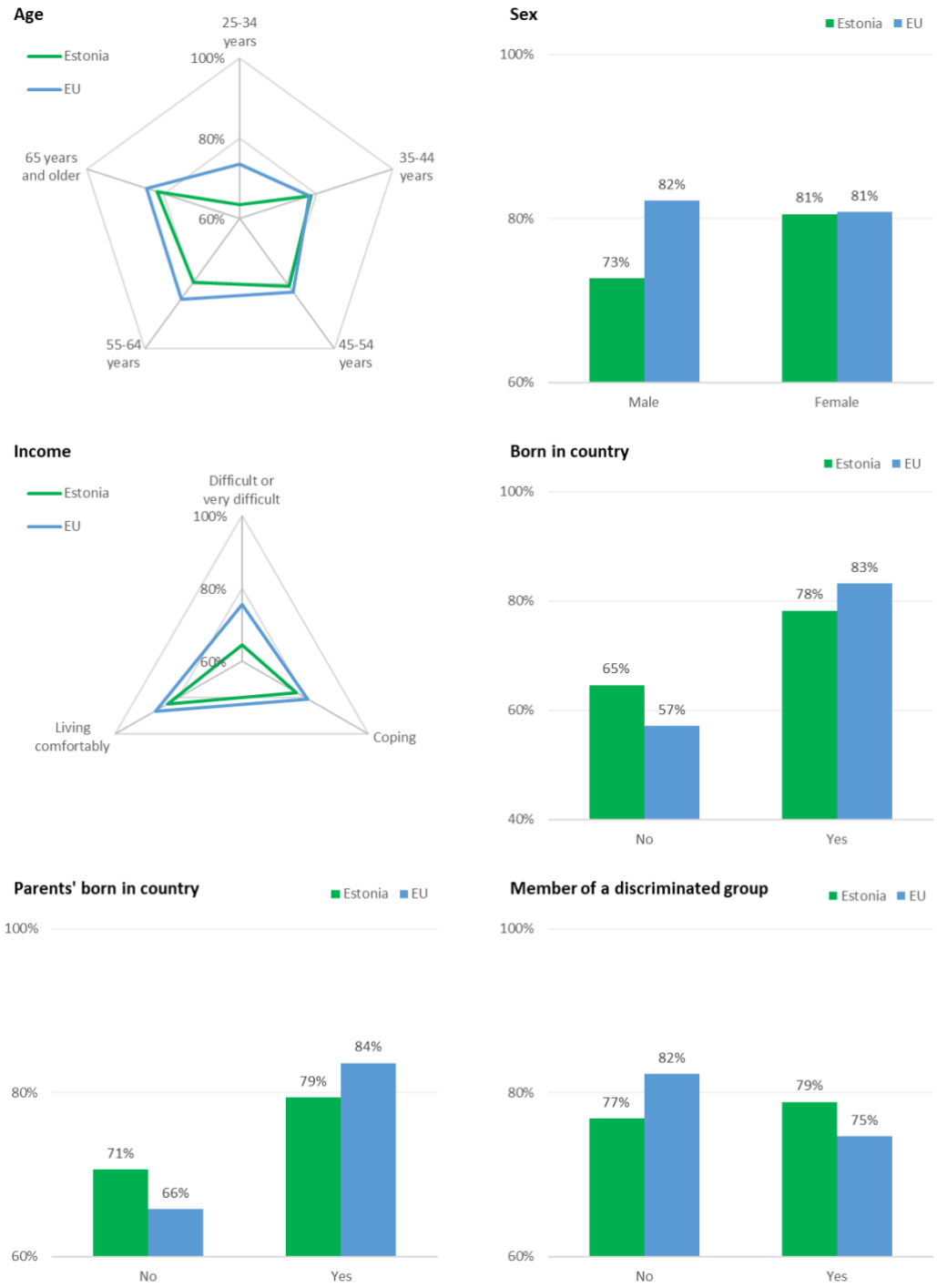


*Figure 25. Voting by sociodemographic characteristics, Estonia and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

### 2.3.2. Formal political participation

It can be seen that formal participation in Estonia follows a similar pattern to the EU average in most variables, with some aspects to highlight.

Participation increases with the level of education. In Estonia the differences are somewhat more marked than in the EU, with a very high participation of those with university education (34%) compared to the rest (16% with intermediate education and 12% with low education).

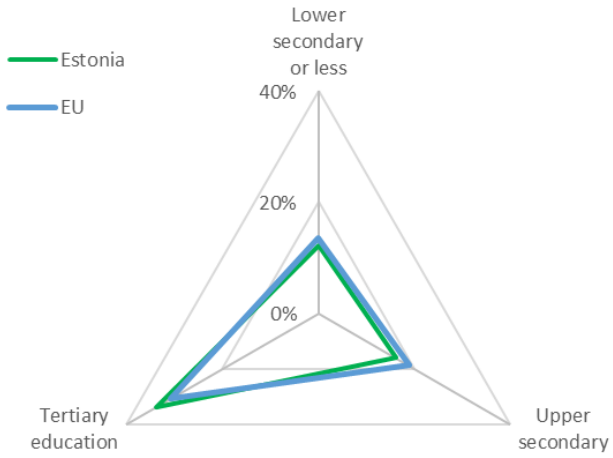


*Figure 26. Formal political participation by level of education attained, Estonia and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Participation is higher in the middle age groups (35-64 years) than among the youngest and oldest. This pattern is more pronounced in Estonia than in the EU, especially among 35-54 year olds (around 26%).

Participation increases with income level. In Estonia, the share of people living comfortably (29%) is comparatively high compared to all other groups.

Participation is lower among those born outside the country and those whose parents were born outside the country, following a similar pattern to the EU.

For the rest of the variables, a different pattern to the EU average is observed. Slightly lower participation of men (21%) than women (23%), while in the EU the pattern is the reverse. Similar participation among those who report belonging to a discriminated group in Estonia and those who do not (around 22%), while in the EU participation is much higher among those who feel discriminated against (31% vs. 19%).


*Figure 27. Formal political participation by sociodemographic characteristics, Estonia and EU,2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

### 2.3.3. *Informal political participation*

With regard to the socio-demographic variables (Figures 28 and 29), informal participation in Estonia follows a similar pattern than the EU average on most variables, with some aspects to highlight:

- Participation increases with the level of education. In Estonia, the main difference is between the most educated (32%) and the rest (16%-19%). In the EU, the main divide is between the less educated and the rest.
- Following a similar pattern as in the EU, participation in Estonia decreases with age (from 32% to 11%), increases with income level (from 19% to 31%), is lower among those born outside the country (17% vs. 24%), and is much higher among those who report belonging to a discriminated group (43% vs. 22%).

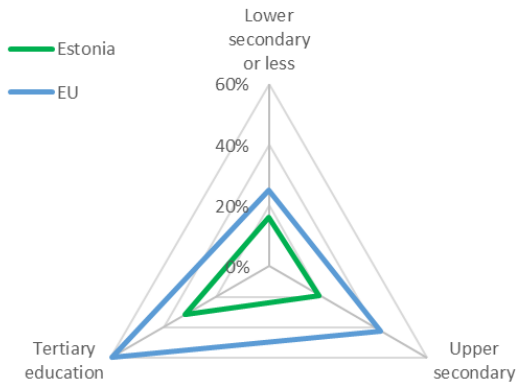


*Figure 28. Informal political participation by level of education attained, 2020, Estonia and EU.*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*
*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

For the rest of the variables, a different pattern to the EU average is observed:

- The participation of people with one parent born outside the country is significantly lower than the rest (19% vs. 25%), while in the EU there is no difference.
- Slightly lower participation of men than women, while in the EU the differences are somewhat more pronounced and in favour of men.

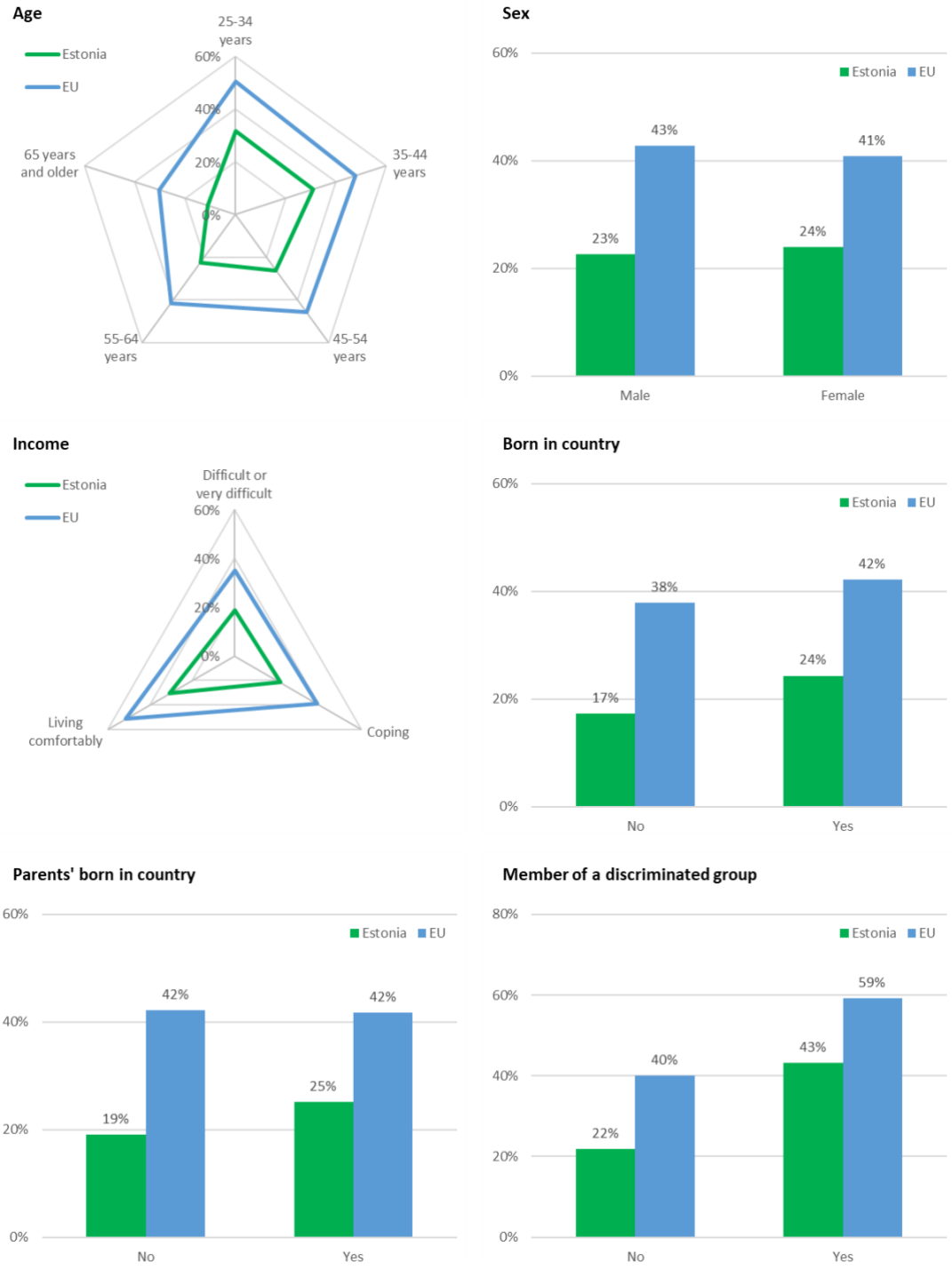


*Figure 29. Informal political participation by sociodemographic characteristics, Estonia and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

## 2.4. Participation by democratic ideals and political attitudes

### 2.4.1. Voting

Regarding the political variables (Figure 30), the Estonian and EU patterns for voting differ in terms of democratic ideals and the left-right axis.

As in the EU, in Estonia the "low ideals" group has the lowest turnout (67%) and the "political rights" group the highest (84%). However, in contrast to the EU, in Estonia the turnout among people in the "High ideals" group is very low (72%) and the "Medium ideals" group (82%) is very high.

People in the centre of the political spectrum have the lowest levels of voting participation in both Estonia and the EU. However, turnout in Estonia is higher among those on the right (87%) than on the left (80%), while in the EU the pattern is the opposite and less pronounced (85% vs. 87%).

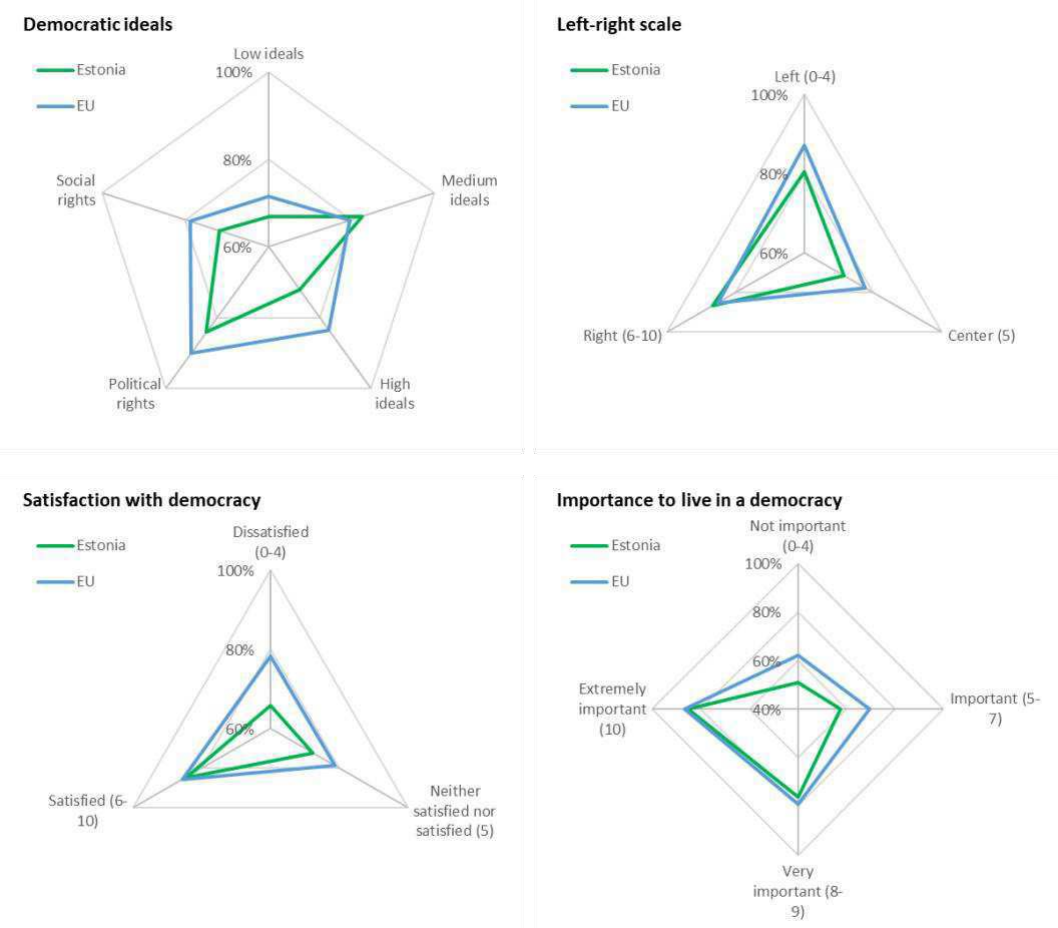


*Figure 30. Voting by political characteristics, Estonia and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

In all other policy variables, Estonia follows a similar pattern to the EU, with even more pronounced patterns. Voting increases as respondents' satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in their country increases.

Voting rates in Estonia are equivalent to those in the EU among those most satisfied with the functioning of democracy (around 85%), but lower among those neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (72% vs. 79%) and significantly lower among those dissatisfied (66% vs. 78%).

Participation increases according to the importance attributed to living in a democratically governed country. Participation in Estonia is similar to that in the EU for all those who consider it extremely or very important but significantly lower among the rest: 51% vs. 62% among those who do not consider it important and 57% vs. 69% among those who consider it only important.

### 2.4.2. Formal political participation

Regarding the political variables (Figure 31), the Estonian and EU patterns are similar in terms of the importance of living in a democratically governed country. The higher the importance, the higher the formal political participation. In Estonia there is a very low formal political participation when it is considered not important (9%) and a very high participation when it is considered extremely important (27%).

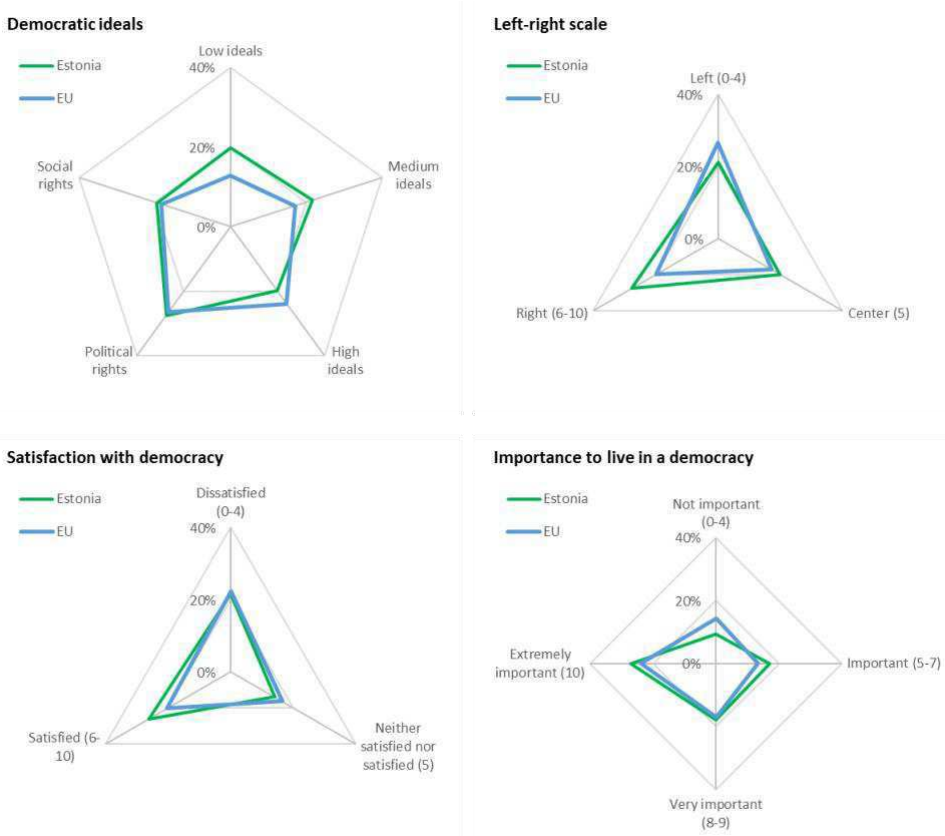


*Figure 31. Formal political participation by political characteristics, Estonia and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Concerning the other policy variables, the pattern differs. As in the EU, in Estonia the "political rights" group has the highest formal participation (27%). However, participation in the other groups is similar (19%-22%), with a low formal political participation in the "high ideals" group, which is high in the EU.

The turnout of those on the right of the political spectrum (28%) is significantly higher than the rest (around 20%). The opposite pattern is observed in the EU.

As in the EU, those who are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy in the country have the lowest turnout. However, in Estonia the highest turnout is observed among those who say they are satisfied (26%), while in the EU the opposite is true.

### 2.4.3. *Informal political participation*

Regarding the political variables (Figure 32), the Estonian and EU patterns are similar in terms of democratic ideals. In Estonia the "political rights" group has the highest participation (34%) and the "low ideals" group the lowest (11%). The rest of the groups follow a similar pattern to the EU, although the participation of the "high ideals" group is comparatively low (24%).

The pattern is also similar in relation to the importance of living in a democratic country, with a significantly higher participation of those who consider it extremely important (29%).

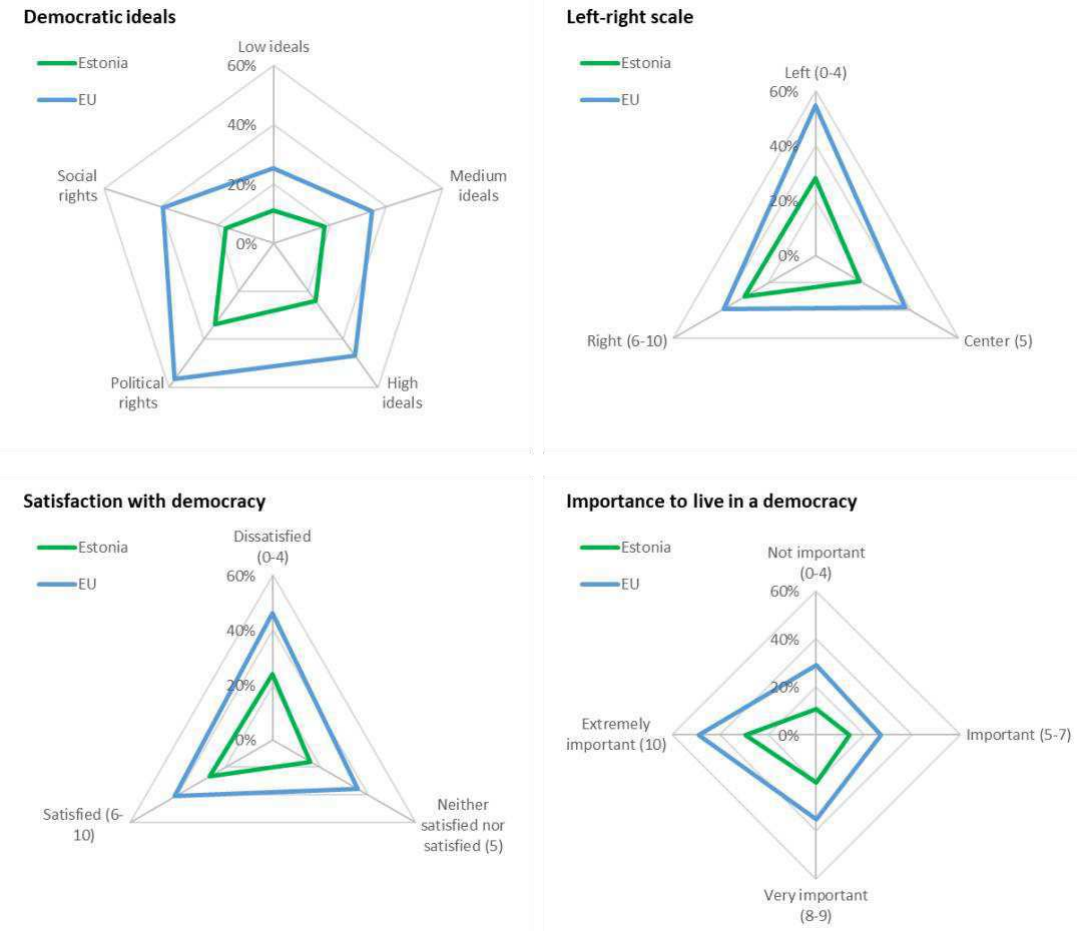


*Figure 32. Informal political participation by political characteristics, Estonia and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

For the other variables, the patterns are different. In Estonia, the highest participation is observed among those who are satisfied with the functioning of democracy in the country (27%), while in the EU the opposite is true (higher participation among those who are dissatisfied). On the left-right axis, participation is again higher among those on the right of the political spectrum (30%), although not very different from those on the left (28%). In contrast, in the EU, the differences are more marked and in favour of those on the left.

## 2.5. Conditions for political participation

In order to better characterise the political participation in Estonia, a logistic regression model has been carried out (Table 1). It estimates the probability of participation (for each type of participation) as a function of all explanatory variables (socio-demographic and political).

The analysis of the regression model shows that only one variable has the same significant effect on voting, formal and informal participation. The importance attached to living in a democratically governed country has a positive effect: the higher the importance, the higher the participation. In all other cases, the results can be summarised as follows:

- For voting
    - Age increases the likelihood of participation.
    - The level of education has a large positive effect on the likelihood of participation: the higher the level of education, the higher participation.
    - The participation of people born in the country is higher.
    - People who belong to a discriminated group also have a higher participation.
    - The further to the right of the political spectrum people are, the more likely they are to participate in national elections.
    - The more satisfied they are with the functioning of democracy in their country, the more they participate.
- For formal participation
    - People with a higher level of education are more likely to participate than people with a medium or low level of education.
- For informal participation
    - With respect to the democratic ideals variable, only people in the "Political rights" group are more likely to participate, while no differential effects are observed among the other groups.
    - Age has a negative effect in such a way that the younger you are, the more likely you are to participate.
    - People with native-born parents have a higher participation than those with a foreign-born parent.
    - People who belong to a discriminated group are much more participative than those who do not.

| Estonia | Voting | | | Formal participation | | | Informal participation | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *B* | *Sign.* | *S.E.* | *B* | *Sign.* | *S.E.* | *B* | *Sign.* | *S.E.* |
| **Constant** | -5,862 | *** | (0,724) | -2,429 | *** | (0,618) | -1,889 | ** | (0,639) |
| Democratic ideals (ref: medium ideals) | | | | | | | | | |
| Low ideals | -0,357 | | (0,298) | 0,219 | | (0,272) | -0,425 | | (0,335) |
| High ideals | -0,517 | | (0,270) | 0,019 | | (0,234) | 0,391 | | (0,243) |
| Political rights | 0,137 | | (0,258) | 0,188 | | (0,207) | 0,756 | *** | (0,215) |
| Social rights | -0,108 | | (0,322) | 0,109 | | (0,281) | 0,139 | | (0,303) |
| Age | 0,038 | *** | (0,006) | -0,006 | | (0,005) | -0,023 | *** | (0,005) |
| Sex (ref: male) | 0,164 | | (0,176) | -0,066 | | (0,146) | 0,157 | | (0,149) |
| Education (ref: lower secondary or less) | | | | | | | | | |
| Upper secondary | 1,149 | *** | (0,261) | 0,248 | | (0,304) | -0,151 | | (0,288) |
| Tertiary education | 1,975 | *** | (0,310) | 1,144 | *** | (0,314) | 0,289 | | (0,301) |
| Income feeling (ref: difficult or very difficult) | | | | | | | | | |
| Coping | 0,247 | | (0,254) | -0,289 | | (0,231) | -0,346 | | (0,239) |
| Living comfortably | 0,292 | | (0,304) | -0,193 | | (0,263) | -0,291 | | (0,271) |
| Born in country (ref: no) | 1,104 | *** | (0,313) | -0,004 | | (0,269) | -0,180 | | (0,279) |
| Parent's born in country (ref: no) | 0,253 | | (0,221) | 0,193 | | (0,195) | 0,425 | * | (0,202) |
| Member of a discriminated group (ref: no) | 0,888 | * | (0,409) | 0,083 | | (0,278) | 1,044 | *** | (0,260) |
| Left-right | 0,104 | * | (0,047) | 0,057 | | (0,038) | 0,060 | | (0,038) |
| Satisfaction with democracy | 0,126 | ** | (0,040) | -0,047 | | (0,034) | -0,033 | | (0,035) |
| Importance to live in a democracy | 0,168 | *** | (0,044) | 0,100 | * | (0,046) | 0,149 | ** | (0,050) |
| **Observations** | 1.107 | | | 1.221 | | | 1.221 | | |

*Table 1. Participation models, Estonia, 2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*
*Signification levels: *** 0,1%; ** 1%; * 5%*

# 3. Discussion

## 3.1. Contextualisation for civic education based on ICCS 2022 study

In a recent ICCS survey Estonian students ranked 4th in civic knowledge with aggregate median score of 545 (ICCS average was 508). The average scores of girls were higher than boys (gap is 23 points). Significantly, the civic knowledge scores of students from Russian-medium schools are 46 points lower than those of Estonian-medium schools (the gap has somewhat narrowed down) (Ümarik et al., 2024).

At the same time Estonian students' civic engagement indicators are below the ICCS average. Young people in Estonia and the other countries show a modest interest in political and social issues (33% of young people in Estonia and 31% ICCS average). However, recent ICCS (2022) study has shown that Estonian students have maintained high scores in civic knowledge, while in many other countries civic knowledge scores have dropped.

Expected future voter turnout has dropped: 65% of students plan to vote in future in national elections and in local elections (77% and 80% respectively in 2016). Internet and social media mediated participation of Estonian students has decreased compared to 2016 and remains below the ICCS average. Students with lower civic knowledge use social media report more to be politically active, as students of Russian-medium schools. Boys and students of Russian-medium schools expect to be more politically active in the future (join a political party or stand as a candidate in elections) (Ümarik et al., 2024).

This is paralleled by relatively modest school democracy and participation. A majority (80%) of Estonian students believe that student participation in school decision-making makes the school a better place, but 54% of students feel that students can influence school decisions. School-level engagement (e.g. participation in student council elections) of Estonian students is decreasing and below ICCS average. Indicators of an open classroom climate for Estonia are lower than the ICCS average and have declined since ICCS 2016 (Ümarik et al. 2024).

The gender dimension has traditionally been relevant in Estonian general education with the girls scoring better than the boys on a statistically relevant level but usually not more than 10% difference (Kirsipuu, 2022; Rozgonjuk, Täht, 2022.) Some effort has been made to address this inequality but it has persisted.

As for gender related attitudes, the recent ICCS report revealed some increase in the distance of the orientations of boys and girls. There is positive correlation between higher levels of civic knowledge and more supportive attitudes and vice versa. Estonian boys' gender equality related attitudes are below the ICCS average. Girls' attitudes have moved in a more supportive direction, while boys' attitudes have taken a leap in a negative direction. 24% of Estonian boys agree that women should stay out of politics and 49% of boys agree that men are better qualified to be political leaders than women (Ümarik et al., 2024).

## 3.2. General discussion

In the political and civic engagement and education chapter we saw several aspects that have relevance for responsible democratic citizen agency. The relative smallness of the country, simplicity of government structures, abundance of digital solutions, and the more comparably sized post-2017 reform local governments offer opportunities for more meaningful civic participation, if properly used. The ongoing educational reforms could also be utilised for a more meaningful political citizenship. Such observations offer the main basis for the recommendations.

The results of statistical analysis are more ambiguous. From 2012 to 2020 there has been a significant increase in political participation during the eight-year period. While this is generally positive, two things should be addressed. First, there should be more precision in the language used, since it has underlying assumption that higher participation equals positive outcome, which is not always the case. Political participation depends on various factors and can express various phenomena, for example, in literature, this is referred to as the general concept of 'situational temperature', meaning that in a 'hot situation', i.e., in the case of Estonia, in a heightened perception of danger, the reactions of actors are usually more intense. Therefore, while we can note an increased formal political participation, while it might indicate that actors have become more internally active, it might also mean that the external environment has changed during this time, with crises escalating (migration crisis, annexation and occupation of Crimea, etc.), which means that the perception of these threats may increase the desire for formal political participation to make one's voice heard. In the explanation related to the perception of the external threat, the issue of Estonia as a small country located on the border with Russia and being a former Soviet republic, can be a significant factor, potentially explaining the rise of political participation (see e.g. Vetik, 2012). To sum up, environmental or external changes making the situation more problematic is one of the possible factors that may influence people's attitudes and practices towards political participation.

Based on the analyzed data, Estonia ranks low in political participation in 2020. Here, another explanation for what was mentioned in point 1 should be added – since Estonia's initial level is very low compared to others, it is logical to assume that the improvement dynamics are relatively greater compared to others. In the context of the EU as a certain common space, one can expect a levelling of attitudes as a general tendency.

In the tables regarding specific forms of formal participation Estonia in some cases ranks average, but for example, participation in parties or interest groups is relatively low. During the Soviet period, many people developed a reluctance towards parties as a phenomenon, while in the 1990s, there was an opposite process as participation was very high amidst the wave of national resurgence and restoration of independence. However, by the beginning of the 2000s, there was considerable disillusionment with party politics, which could be one factor causing participation to decline and remaining relatively low (see e.g. Vetik, 2002, 2012).

In the tables regarding signing petitions and boycotting certain goods, Estonia ranks relatively low. This seems to simply reflect the development of Estonian political culture, meaning that the traditions of political activity are significantly shorter in Estonia compared to all other participating countries, as Estonia is the only former Soviet republic among them, where such things simply did not exist (the Soviet structures were based on its particular logic).

In the trends in participation in voting and their correlation with socio-demographic characteristics two central explanatory strategies can be identified. Firstly, it is noted that in Estonia, there are significantly greater differences in participation based on educational level and economic security. One possible explanation is that compared not only to the other participating countries but also in the broader context of the EU, Estonia has been the most neoliberal in terms of economic policy since the early 1990s, which has created deep social divides in terms of wealth, education, ethnicity, urban/rural areas, etc., which are also reflected in people's attitudes. Secondly, unlike the EU average, Estonia has a different pattern in comparing local and migrant voting behavior, meaning that the difference is significantly greater in the EU than in Estonia. One possible explanation is related to the ethnic composition of the population and the influence of the Soviet period, meaning that our migrants are mainly Russians, while EU migrants come from third world countries. In this context, we hypothesize that the difference in political participation patterns between Estonians and Russians is significantly smaller than, for example, between Germans and Turks.

In several places, reference is made to the lower participation of men compared to women in Estonia, unlike the EU average. It seems that further analysis and controlling for this should be done based on education – in Estonia, women have a higher level of education than men, which also affects political participation.

Regarding the attitudes towards migrants and gender equality Estonia's indicators are the lowest in several sections. Regarding attitudes towards migrants, the result confirms many other research findings over the past 20-30 years. It can be generally said that Estonians perceive the issue of migration from the perspective of a 'hot situation' due to their historical memory (rapid demographic changes during the Soviet period, fear of the 'foreign', etc.). Regarding gender equality, it may also indicate the influence of the Soviet period – before the occupation in 1940, Estonian society was relatively patriarchal, stemming from the later formation of nationhood compared to others. The Soviet period encouraged attitudes of gender equality due to communist ideology, but it was rather an ideology of artificial equality. After the restoration of independence, Estonia's restoration took place not only legally but also in terms of many attitudes. Therefore, in a macro-historical context, it reflects the result of so-called late modernization (see Vetik, 1999).

# 4. Recommendations

Based on the report we have the following recommendations.

1. The smallness of Estonia as a country could be treated as an advantage when it comes to addressing the issues of democratic/political participation and being an active responsible citizen. One recommendation we have is that there could be more quasi-experimental and design-based research strategies, pilots and measures supporting integration, civic and political engagement, participation, and also civic education. A quasi-experimental approach would allow for more scientific validity than a case study, yet not be limited by the design or randomized experiments which may not work for small-scale locally embedded interventions (Heath, 2005). Design-based approaches on the other hand have strong practical applicability and engage the participants (rather than treating them as research subjects) in creating and evaluating the interventions, making these locally relevant, more likely adopted and more sustainable in the long term (Tinoca et al, 2022). One example of such an intervention was done as part of international project called COSIE, where Võru municipality designed a co-creation process and a 'social hackathon' method together with Tallinn University researchers – the co-creation processes, proved to have had a positive impact on local community participation as per the data collected (see Toros et al, 2022; Kangro & Lepik, 2022). This method was adopted and is used in the municipality to this day. Our recommendation is to continue to use more of such 'experimental' approaches at local levels in Estonia while paying even more attention to education for democracy (the learning aspect) and creating opportunities for democratic participation (the political aspect).
2. The report noted that there are significantly greater differences in participation based on educational level and economic security in Estonia than the average in the EU. Therefore, when developing solutions, it is important to pay attention to differences in opportunities for political participation in specific contexts of different sized municipalities, rural and town environments, as well as in relation to people's economic and educational background. While it's out of our scope to give recommendations for each topic, we do have some suggestions in relation to the rural-urban divide. In the sparsely settled and distant localities physical access to services and opportunities for participation should be improved – one of the key issues in rural areas is lack of transport connections, and that hinders many youth from participating in local democracy as well as youth leisure time and youth work related activities. Various online participation methods and tools could be a solution (there is no significant rural-urban digital divide in Estonia, according to Freedom House, 2021), but these need to be better designed and introduced to local populations, preferably as early as in basic education. There are ongoing or recently finished projects which look at online skills and participation of the elderly, e.g. "Tark maaelu", as well as the youth, e.g. "Noorte osaluse suurendamine". In a similar way, there are initiatives by Estonian Cooperation Assembly, such as rahvaalgatus.ee and dialogues in local libraries across Estonia, which have risen in popularity and offer a platform for democratic participation, also in schools. Hence, our key recommendation would be to nationally encourage and assist local municipalities in thinking through democratic participation for the different age-groups, offering a combination of online tools and offline opportunities while taking into consideration the local needs, including that for transportation, online-skills and general awareness of participation opportunities. In larger cities the main challenge is less about access and more about awareness. This means designing better communication and educational activities that raise awareness about different opportunities for democratic participation – better equipping for example

the schools' recreational leaders (huvijuhid) to promote school democracy and communicate such opportunities on school, local and national level to youth. This recommendation has also emerged in a recent co-creation process conducted by the Estonian National Education and Youth Board. In addition, making use of digital tools like "Idender" (see here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VduEZAblpg) developed by youth from Tallin French School to capture young people's ideas for their school and local community improvement could be a specific way to increase youth political participation, but testing this prototype and developing it to the next level needs local and national support.

3. Another significant recommendation in regards to socio-economic disparities and participation is that introducing opportunities for participation at school-level (basic school) when school education is compulsory, would give young people an experience of participation and likely increase the development of a responsible democratic citizen agency and influence their future civic behaviour (as per ICCS studies as well as numerous other research findings). Broadly, civic and social competences are well outlines and described in the national framework curriculum and there is a civics class/course. However, according to the most recent ICCS study our youth have good theoretical knowledge but lack in experience of participation and have low future intentions to participate. This is why attention needs to be paid to giving students real opportunities for participation, e.g. via community projects, volunteering opportunities, debates and dialogues, and school democracy like participatory budgeting. When it comes to the real opportunities for participation, good examples of the latter can be found on Estonian Cooperation Assembly's website: https://demokraatia.rahvaalgatus.ee/eelarve as well as the already existing practices gathered by the Estonian DEMOCRAT team on Padlet: https://padlet.com/democrat_eesti/demokraatiat-ja-demokraatliku-kodaniku-kujunemist-toetavate--60wrq49u33ndefd2. While not covered specifically in this report, the use of such pedagogical approaches means improvements to teacher training, so teachers are able to properly support the development of students as responsible democratic citizens - teachers are in key steering and facilitating role in actually achieving these changes in practice.
4. In regards to the disparities between Estonian and Russian-speaking populations in the school system, our recommendation is that it is reasonable to proceed with establishing the unitary Estonian school where the main language of instruction Estonian – there are ongoing political actions being taken to achieve this. While both Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking schools should adopt more interactive pedagogies and give more opportunities for students' democratic participation (see previous recommendation), the broader inequalities that are being reproduced in Tallinn and small regional schools as well as in the schools with the (up to now) Russian language instruction might have serious consequences, not only in terms of socio-economic inequalities but also in terms of democratic citizenship. Maintaining the relative equality in the system should be observed. In addition to the unitary school reform this also implies paying sufficient attention to the opportunities of sparsely populated areas, and maintaining a universal good quality among the relatively diverse Tallinn schools. The civic engagement and community embeddedness of the former Russian-speaking schools possibly needs more attention and activities as compared to the other already Estonian-language based schools.
5. We also noted in the report that in Estonia 38% population believe that men are better political leaders than women and 28% that they are better executives, while in the EU these percentages drop to 18% and 15% respectively. These results echo the Estonian results for most recent International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) where significant gaps were noted between boys' and girls'

attitudes towards gender equality: almost half (49%) of boys agreed that men are better suited to political leadership than women (only 10% of girls believed so) and almost a quarter (24%) of boys agreed that women should stay out of politics, while only 4% of girls supported this view. Our key recommendation at this point is to conduct further research specifically about this aspect. There is currently not enough information as to why the attitudes of boys have changed so significantly, and hence there are no interventions we could recommend apart from perhaps recognising nationally and in educational institutions that this is a problem, and raising awareness about it among teachers and youth workers, so they could start exploring the topic with youth where and when appropriate.

6. While the focus democratic citizenship education is understandably often on young people, also adult education solutions for democracy should be considered and implemented as studies like ICCS show that there is a strong link between the family background and young people's civic attitudes. There is some evidence of the positive impact of adult civic education programmes on awareness, democratic efficacy, tolerance and other aspects (e.g. Finkel, 2014). The new tensions in contemporary politics need also adult awareness and ability to adjust. Also the civic engagement is generally relatively low in Estonia and middle-aged and older generations who have had no Western style citizenship education as they studied in Soviet or early post-Soviet age. Regarding attitudes towards migrants, the result confirms many other research findings over the past 20-30 years. It can be generally said that Estonians perceive the issue of migration from the perspective of a 'hot situation' due to their historical memory (rapid demographic changes during the Soviet period, fear of the 'foreign', etc.), however, general tolerance and respect for others is important in democracies and adult education interventions could possibly address this. Responsible democratic citizenship education for adults could be enhanced by producing content, publishing it on a purposefully developed web portal or TV shows, and by adding self-learning, discussion and possibly some interactive elements, ideally supported by some practical engagement opportunities, such as the ones organised by Estonian Cooperation Assembly in local libraries, or events such as participatory budgeting or national / local civic assemblies (mini-publics).

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# Finland

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# Abbreviations

EfD: Education for Democracy

ESS: European Social Survey

FNES: Finnish National Election Study

RKP: Swedish People's Party

SDP: Social Democratic Party

EVS: European Values Study

# Executive Summary

This is the Finnish national report on education inequalities and political participation, part of Deliverable 3.1 within a collaborative framework. Following a common conceptual and methodological approach (outlined in the Introduction), the report utilizes comparable data from international and national sources and literature to contextualize and analyse the influence of social inequalities and political values and attitudes on political participation. Through this analysis, the report offers recommendations to strengthen the foundations for equal and democratic participation through education in Finland.

Structured in accordance with agreed-upon guidelines, the report's first chapter sets the stage by presenting the context of political and social system and engagement in Finland, emphasizing aspects crucial for understanding patterns of political participation and their evolution. The second chapter unveils the main findings of statistical analyses based on European Social Survey data from 2012 and 2020, with political participation patterns concerning social inequality and political values and attitudes in 2020. The third chapter discusses the results from ESS and national surveys and studies. Finally, the report concludes with policy recommendations aimed at fortifying education for democracy in Finland.

Finnish respondents reported the same level of voting (85%) in 2012 and 2020. Finland has also demonstrated a significant upward trend in formal participation. For informal participation, between 2012 and 2020, the percentage of Finns who signed a petition increased from 25% to 38%. Finland's participation rates closely resemble the EU's among those considering voting extremely or very important. As for attitudes towards gender equality, Finland's results are better than those of the EU average, although with less marked differences. Only 2% of people believe that university is more important for men than for women.

# Table of Contents

# 1. Political and civic engagement: national perspective

## *1.1. The system*

The constitutional system of Finland, which gained independence in 1917, has continuously evolved, and the Constitution that came into effect in 1999 was a significant milestone in the country's legislative development. This comprehensive law replaced four previous constitutional-level statutes, consolidating them into a unified whole, which enabled a more consistent and cohesive legal framework. Finland is a parliamentary Republic under the 1999 Constitution. The President of the Republic serves as the Head of State, and the Prime Minister is in charge of the Government. Finland is now a complete parliamentary democracy as a result of the 1999 and 2012 constitutional modifications, whereas it was previously thought of as having a semi-presidential parliamentary system. The unicameral Parliament, known as the Swedish Riksdagen or the Finnish Eduskunta, is made up of 200 elected legislators who serve four-year terms. 'Mainland' Finland has a slightly different legislative and administrative structure from the autonomous province of Åland, which elects a single Member of Parliament (https://portal.cor.europa.eu/divisionpowers/Pages/Finland.aspx; https://finland.fi/life-society/parliamentarism-in-finland/).

The country is a decentralised unitary bilingual state (Finnish and Swedish) with official language systems. The three tiers of government in Finland are local, regional, and central. However, in mainland Finland, the regional level's autonomy is restricted. Legislation from the 1860s, which still serves as the framework for the current system, is where local self-government originated. Following the 1917 declaration of independence from Russia, new laws were enacted that provided unlimited direct suffrage at the municipal level. Since then, local government has evolved progressively. A Local Government Act was passed in 1995. In 2015, this was updated. Furthermore, since 1921, the Åland Islands have enjoyed a unique status as a self-governing province that speaks only Swedish, protecting the language, culture, and regional traditions of the Islands.

The norms of European party-based parliamentarism regulate the relationship between the President of the Republic, the Government, and the Parliament. The Prime Minister is chosen by the majority of Parliament, which supports the Government. In terms of foreign policy, the President has historically possessed significant authority, albeit not as much or as unchallenged authority as their American or French counterparts. The 2000 constitutional amendment places restrictions on the President's authority in other political domains, but it does allow for the possibility of politically significant actions when it comes to the appointment of senior federal officers. The President and Parliament require cooperation from the Government, but when these relationships work, the Government's standing in realpolitik is enhanced.

Usually four times a week, the Parliament meets in plenary sessions to discuss issues, or rather to hear comments on them, and then cast votes to make decisions. MPs question government officials frequently. Voting against the party line is not something that happens often for MPs. Though, as in many other nations, in practice they have a party mandate, Members of Parliament have a free mandate in theory (https://finland.fi/life-society/parliamentarism-in-finland/).

The three primary roles of the Parliament allow it to represent the interests of the people and make fundamental choices about Finnish policy. It enacts legislation, reviews and approves the national budget, and oversees the administration of the nation. The processing of a bill takes two to four months, sometimes much longer.

The Government also prepares the national budget, which is presented to Parliament each year. A significant portion of the autumn season is spent discussing it. Parliament usually only makes small adjustments to the budget.

The difficult process of passing laws normally starts with the government introducing a bill in Parliament, which it does between 200 and 300 times a year. Legislation can and frequently is proposed by individual MPs, but government measures are better prepared and have the upper hand. There is no formal apparatus in Parliament for formulating or preparing recommendations. A measure needs to be signed by the President of the Republic and receive the backing of a majority of lawmakers in order to be approved.

The majority of the content that Parliament reviews and considers while making decisions is produced by the Government. After conferring with the Speaker of Parliament and negotiating with the parties in Parliament, the President formally appoints, dissolves, and nominates a candidate for prime minister. In actuality, the political parties involved play a major influence in the establishment, operation, and dissolution of the government.

Finland is made up of 310 municipalities (kunta/kommun), 18 provinces (maakunta/landskap) and the autonomous Åland Islands. The mainland province's local governments indirectly make up the eighteen Regional Councils (maakunnan liitto/landskapsförbund), which are required joint municipal authority. As per the provisions of Finnish legislation, each Regional Council is endowed with financial resources from its constituent municipalities in addition to money allocated by the government and the European Union for regional development ((https://portal.cor.europa.eu/divisionpowers/Pages/Finland.aspx).

The civil service is managed by the State and is also decentralised at the municipal and regional levels through Centres for Economic Development, Transportation, and Environment Agencies and Regional State Administrative Agencies.

Except for the Åland Islands, the State has legislative authority over all matters. Nonetheless, it possesses sole authority over the Åland Islands in international relations; the majority of criminal and civil laws; the legal system; and state taxes.

Regionally, the Regional Council's obligations include for instance: being in charge of the region's overall development, collaborating with the organisations driving the growth of major cities and other municipalities, academic institutions, and governmental bodies both within and outside of the region, as well as the province of Lapland and the Sami Parliament where cooperation may be expressed through cooperation agreements; developing the economy and operational circumstances by considering the advantages and demands of municipalities with varying origins; participating in the outcome negotiations of the Centres for Economic Development, Transport, and the Environment and contributes to the necessary drafting of the strategic guidance documents of the Centre for Economic Development, Transport, and the Environment as well as those of the Regional State Administrative Agencies.

The political system of Finland in general is one that prides itself on inclusivity and active participation. The Finnish democratic framework is notable for its robust mechanisms that ensure transparency, the rule of law, and citizens' active participation in the political process. Under the Constitution, the Finnish people exercise state power through the Parliament, and the Ministry of Justice plays a pivotal role in safeguarding these democratic principles.

Finland holds parliamentary elections every four years, municipal and county elections every four years, presidential elections every six years, and European Parliament elections every five years. The autonomous

region of Åland also holds its parliamentary and municipal elections every four years. These elections are by universal and equal suffrage, a practice that was established with the 1907 parliamentary elections.

## *1.2. The state of Finnish Democracy*

Finland stands as a testament to robust democracy, consistently showing high levels of political trust amongst its citizens in Europe. However, Finns' confidence in their ability to influence politics, also known as internal efficacy or civic competence, ranks surprisingly low compared to their European counterparts, indicating a discrepancy between trust in the system and a sense of personal political empowerment (OECD, 2021). This phenomenon points to education as a pivotal factor, especially among adults, for cultivating a climate conducive to political participation. The impact of schools in fostering students' internal political efficacy is significant, suggesting that while Finnish democracy heavily invests in democratic education within the curriculum, there's a substantial margin for further enhancing education for democracy (Kestilä-Kekkonen, Tiihonen, 2022).

In Finland, the independence of the judiciary, constitutional oversight, media freedom, and inter-party collaboration are highlighted as bulwarks against the erosion of democratic values. The Finnish commitment to sustaining democracy domestically and supporting it through international cooperation is crucial in an era where democracy seems imperilled even within established democracies like those in the European Union. Amidst potential internal threats of polarization and a decline in public discourse due to fear of harassment, Finland's political institutions and their steadfast commitment to democracy provide a foundation for the country to serve as a strong advocate for democracy on the global stage.

Turning to the specific measures of democracy within Finland, various indicators are employed to monitor its health and development. These indicators encompass a range of themes, including the state of democracy overall, representative democracy, participatory democracy and open government, as well as education and youth participation in democratic processes. The Finnish Ministry of Justice supports the gathering of these indicators, particularly during parliamentary elections, reflecting the government's dedication to a transparent and informed democratic process (Ministry of Justice).

There has been a noticeable variation in voter turnout. This could be related to the expansion of voting rights given the time frame. The fact that women's turnout was initially higher and data on women's voting existed before many other countries even allowed women to vote may be explained by the fact that Finland was among the first countries to grant women the right to vote in 1906.

The following graph (Figure 1) differentiates turnout by gender—women and men—as well as the overall turnout in Finland 1920-2020. There has been a discernible a convergence in the rates of male and female voter turnout throughout the middle of the 20th century. A rise in gender equality and a standardisation of social roles, along with the expansion of political rights and participation in democratic processes, are likely all contributing factors to this phenomenon.

Following the first wave of fluctuations, there comes a protracted era of stability marked by high voter turnout. This can be linked to a stage of political development during which public participation becomes the norm and democratic institutions and procedures become deeply ingrained.

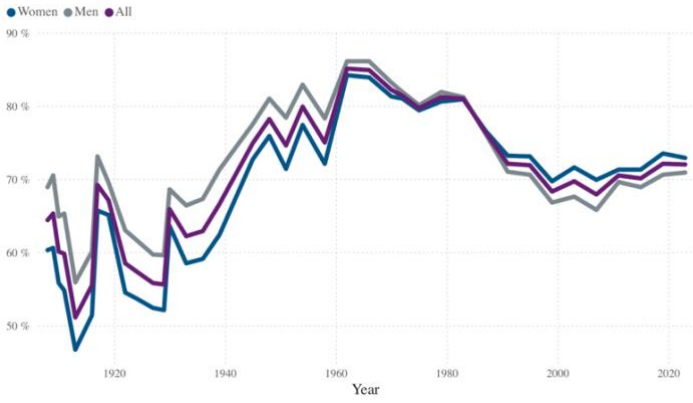


*Figure 1. Voting turnout in the long term*
*Source: Official Statistics of Finland (OSF): Parliamentary elections*

There has been a lot of scholarly research on voter indifference worldwide, and it's possible that this decline in turnout, which started in the late 20th century and continued into the 21st, is a reflection of these trends. A few examples of contributing factors are political disenchantment, the belief that voting is futile, the depletion of social capital, and the individualization of society.

The most recent data points point to a levelling down of voter turnout, which may indicate the formation of a new, lower norm for voting or the success of recent efforts to boost turnout.

Scholars have explored a wide range of potential factors that may affect voter participation, such as socioeconomic status, education, political efficacy, electoral competitiveness, and voter laws and regulations. Voter turnout is a useful metric for assessing a democracy's health, with higher turnout suggesting a more involved and representative citizenry.

According to cross-national comparative research, like that provided by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, institutional factors like election frequency, voting laws that require voter registration, and electoral systems (such as Finland's proportional representation) can have a big impact on turnout rates. Thus, Finland's proportional representation system and long history of political engagement should be taken into consideration while analysing the country's turnout trends.

Despite fluctuations in voter turnout over the years, which are influenced by various factors including socio-economic status, educational attainment, and political engagement, Finland’s long-term commitment to equal suffrage since granting women the right to vote has fostered a deeply rooted democratic tradition. This tradition is also mirrored in the nation's education system, where democratic values are integral to the curriculum, aiming to cultivate a generation well-versed in the principles of participation and active citizenship.

In conclusion, while Finnish democracy is not without its challenges, the continued dialogue on democratic values, combined with the country’s sustained efforts in education and policy-making, positions Finland as a resilient democracy with active and informed citizenry. Its democratic institutions stand firm, reflecting the nation’s overall health and maturity as a democracy.

## 1.3. Development of the political scene and party politics with sociodemographic and political characteristics

In recent years, Finland's political scene has undergone notable transformations. Firstly, advancements in technology, notably the Internet and social media, have completely altered how electoral messages are

conveyed. However, these various communication platforms often cater to different segments of the voting populace.

Secondly, there has been a discernible change in how party popularity is measured, with polls increasingly focusing on the appeal of prime ministerial candidates, particularly in the run-up to elections. This change underscores the pivotal role of the Prime Minister within the current constitutional framework.

Thirdly, Finland's previously rigid party structure has experienced a significant evolution, likened metaphorically to a melting process. This transformation has resulted in a fractured party system characterized by new societal divisions and differences. Consequently, new combinations of values among voters have emerged, reshaping the political conversation and priorities.

One significant division that has emerged is the sociocultural gap, which extends beyond traditional economic and public service concerns. This shift has prompted parties to take stances on issues such as environmental conservation, immigration, and minority rights. In the 2019 parliamentary elections, discussions surrounding climate change took precedence over traditional economic debates, with parties advocating progressive climate policies experiencing increased electoral success.

The primary report of an academic research project, titled "Climate Change in Politics," is funded by the Ministry of Justice and focuses on data collected after the 2019 parliamentary elections. This study, primarily based on survey data from 1598 eligible citizens conducted by Taloustutkimus Oy, constitutes the fifth volume of the Finnish National Election Study (FNES).

Analyzing voting patterns in Finland, including factors such as values, gender, and socio-economic background, reveals distinct differences among supporters of various political parties (Borg, Kestilä-Kekkonen, Wass, 2020). Notably, the voting bases of the Finns Party (Perussuomalaiset) and the Greens (Vihreät) stand out from those of other parties. Broadly speaking, the Finns Party is perceived as appealing more to male voters, while the Greens are seen as attracting more female supporters. This characterization has only become more pronounced over time. In the 2019 elections, the Finns Party received votes from 27% of men, whereas only one in ten women voted for them. Conversely, the Greens received approximately one in five votes from female voters, but only about five percent from male voters. Interestingly, there are not significant gender-based differences in voting for other parties.

Age is another significant factor shaping party choice in Finland. Elderly voters, aged 64 and over, still consistently support the three traditional major parties. In the 2019 elections, the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the National Coalition Party (Kokoomus), and the Centre Party (Keskusta) each garnered around one-fourth of the votes among voters aged 64 and over. Young adults, aged 25–34, predominantly voted for either the Finns Party (28%) or the Greens (19%). The Finns Party attracted votes from all age groups except the elderly. While the Greens' support declined in previous elections among young voters, they managed to increase their share of the vote in the 2019 elections, particularly among voters aged 45–64.

Educational level also influences voters' party choices. The Social Democratic Party (SDP) is the clear favorite among the least educated group, comprising many elderly voters. In the 2019 elections, one-third of this group voted for the Social Democrats. Among voters with vocational education, both the SDP and the Finns Party received over one-fifth of the votes, with the Centre Party slightly less. Among those with secondary and tertiary education, the Finns Party and the National Coalition Party (Kokoomus) were the most popular parties, while university-educated voters favored the National Coalition Party and the Greens.

Party support varies significantly by region. The Finns Party garners votes most consistently across different parts of the country. The distribution of support is most uneven for the Swedish People's Party (RKP), the Greens, and the National Coalition Party. The RKP's votes come from four constituencies where Swedish-speaking Finns predominantly reside. The Greens' support comes from Helsinki, Uusimaa, and Pirkanmaa, which accounted for 56% of the Greens' votes in the 2019 elections. The National Coalition Party's support remains concentrated in urban areas of Southern Finland, particularly Uusimaa and Helsinki, which accounted for 38% of the party's votes. The Centre Party's support is almost the opposite of the National Coalition Party's, geographically. Only in the Southeast Finland constituency did the two parties receive roughly equal numbers of votes. The Centre Party performs poorly in large southern cities and, consequently, in large southern constituencies. The support for the Social Democratic Party and the Finns Party is similar across different regions of Finland, with the two parties being almost equally strong in almost all constituencies in the 2019 elections. The largest difference was in the Oulu constituency, where the Finns Party received twice as many votes as the SDP.

The opinions of party voters and identified were examined and six contradictory dimensions based on the 2019 election survey data. One such dimension revolves around attitudes towards immigration, either positive or negative, liberal values versus conservative values, and people who prioritize environmental protection versus economic growth. In terms of these dimensions, Finns Party voters deviate the most from the average voter towards conservative values. They are the most negative towards immigration, hold traditional moral values, and prioritize economic growth over environmental protection. Greens and Left Alliance voters represent the opposite pole to Finns Party voters. They are pro-immigration, hold liberal values, and prioritize environmental protection over economic growth. RKP voters are pro-immigration and liberal but are less keen on environmental protection at the expense of economic growth. Centre Party voters, especially Christian Democrats, are conservative in their values. It is important for them to strengthen the position of the nuclear family. These findings indicate the significance of values in party choice among Finnish voters.

The rise of the Finns Party in Finland can be attributed to several factors. Unlike many other Western European countries, Finland had not seen significant success for right-wing populist parties in the early 2000s. However, analyses suggested that the Finnish political environment was ripe for the growth of such movements, with sentiments of anti-elitism and suspicion towards immigrants prevalent, albeit with slightly higher levels of political trust compared to other Western European nations.

The turning point came with the emergence of the Finns Party under the leadership of Timo Soini. They gained traction with over ten percent support in the 2009 European Parliament elections. This success was followed by a seismic shift in the 2011 parliamentary elections, where they secured 19.1% of the vote, signaling a significant breakthrough. Subsequent strong showings in the 2012 municipal elections (12.3%) and the 2015 parliamentary elections (17.7%) solidified their position. In both the 2011 and 2015 elections, the Finns Party attracted votes from a diverse range of voters, a characteristic typical of populist parties, with varying motivations driving their support. (Borg, Kestilä-Kekkonen & Wass (2020))

## *1.4. Young people's interest in politics*

Young people's interest in politics (Figure 2) has been trending upward over time. The percentage of people who say they are "Very interested" in politics has increased noticeably, from 4% in 2001 to 12% in 2018. Comparably, the percentage of people who say they are "Somewhat interested" increased considerably, reaching 51% in 2018.

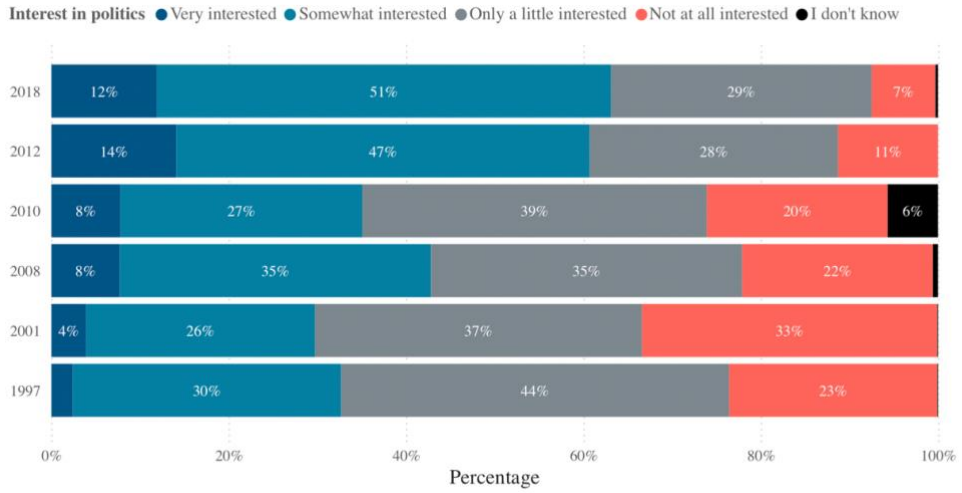


*Figure 2. Young people's interest in politics (Youth Barometer)*

*Source: nuorisobarometri.tietoanuorista.fi. Kuinka kiinnostunut olet politiikasta?*

There is some variation throughout the survey years, even if the general trend indicates rising interest. For example, interest was stronger in 2010 than in 2008, which may indicate that certain political events or societal shifts had an impact on youth participation. One factor might be the global economic crisis whose repercussions were felt several years after the events. A number of factors, including heightened access to information via social media and the internet, shifts in the political landscape that appeal more to younger populations, or educational reforms emphasising civic engagement, could also have an impact on this trend.

## 1.5. Education for Democracy

As for the educational system, democratic values are the bedrock of the national core curriculum (Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet, 2014). Basic education is built on respecting life and human rights and promotes well-being, democracy, and active agency in civil society. The newest national core curriculum that is implemented to basic education in 2016 has seven transversal competences that should be applied to all subject areas and school subjects. Their common goal is to support personal growth and promote the skills required for membership in a democratic society and for a sustainable way of life.

One of the seven competences is called "Participation, Influence, and Building a Sustainable Future". It is designed to prepare students for active and responsible citizenship in a democratic society. This aspect of the curriculum focuses on practical involvement and experiential learning. Students actively participate in shaping their own learning and group activities, gaining insights into democratic principles such as fairness, equality, and reciprocity. They become members of the student council, participate in decision-making processes, and learn to express their views constructively even on early years of primary education.

The Core curriculum includes descriptions of these broad-based transversal competences separately for grades 1-2, 3-6, and 7-9. In addition, the broad-based transversal competences have been linked to the learning objectives of each subject, making it easier for teachers to understand which skills are associated with each competency area in each subject. Alongside this, civic education/social studies as a school subject becomes mandatory starting from the 4th grade. Democratic education and democratic values are strongly embedded in the Finnish curriculum. The core curriculum is thoughtfully crafted and research-based, and within its framework the education providers, such as municipalities as the local education authorities, and schools themselves draw up their own curriculum with its specific emphases.

While democratic education is broadly integrated into the curriculum, one challenge for EfD in practice is that teachers have a high degree of freedom in organizing their teaching, and there is minimal oversight. Thus, the emphasis on various aspects of education can vary from one school and teacher to another.

Nonetheless, increasing differentiation in democratic participation in Finland can be seen as moderately alarming. There is also a growing tension between more conservative and liberal perspectives or along the left-right political spectrum. This tension poses challenges not only to politics but also to the belief and trust in democratic processes and institutions. The average level of political trust among Finns is one of the highest in Europe. However, their self-assessment of their ability to influence politics, i.e., internal efficacy (civic competence), is among the lowest in Europe (OECD 2021). This internal efficacy is significantly linked to education, particularly among the adult population, and it has a strong connection to political participation. The school appears to be a significant factor in the development of students' internal political efficacy (Kestilä-Kekkonen & Tiihonen 2022). Despite the prominence of democratic education in the curriculum, there's much work to be done in the field of education for democracy.

## *1.6. Immigration*

In Finland, one in ten children is of immigrant background. Approximately 115,000 children living in Finland were of immigrant background in 2021, with around 63% of them being born in Finland. Among immigrant children, those whose families arrived in Finland due to international protection needs or who arrived unaccompanied, as well as children belonging to visible minorities, are particularly vulnerable.

Immigrant children and adolescents in Finland experience poorer well-being compared to those in other Nordic countries. Several factors contribute to their well-being disparities, with low income being significantly more prevalent in their families. According to the 2021 School Health Survey, immigrant-background children are more frequently bullied and discriminated against at school and experience higher levels of loneliness compared to their peers. Immigrant boys born abroad also report experiencing violence more commonly and exhibit significantly poorer well-being compared to other youth.

A study by Wass and Heide (2015) indicates that age and education have a weaker correlation with voting among immigrants compared to native-born voters. However, factors such as marriage with a native citizen and parenthood in large families significantly increase the likelihood of electoral participation among immigrants. Additionally, the duration of being an eligible voter and the degree of democratization in the country of birth are also influential factors. While some factors explaining electoral participation overlap between all Finns and ethnic minorities, there are specific characteristics associated with immigrant voter participation that require further investigation. Notably, socioeconomic background plays a role, with higher participation observed among immigrants with improved socioeconomic status.

As the proportion of immigrants among all eligible voters increases, it becomes crucial to include new ethnic minorities in surveys on political engagement to gain comprehensive insights. Integration policies should consider the political socialization context of newcomers' youth and adapt educational contents accordingly. Political parties should actively engage with recently arrived immigrants as a potential new voter base. Clarifying electoral legislation, such as granting all foreign citizens the right to participate in municipal elections under uniform criteria, would support clearer understanding and promote active citizenship.

Improving parental integration also enhances children's well-being. Policy recommendations (Wass, 2022) outline various measures to enhance the well-being of immigrant children and adolescents. Improving the

financial, psychological, and informational resources of parents is crucial, as this significantly supports the well-being of their children and adolescents.

Table 1 presents the results from ESS for Finland and the EU for the three variables related to attitudes towards immigration analysed in 2020. When it comes to the perception of immigration's impact on the economy, 60.4% of Finns believe that immigration is good for the country's economy, which is notably higher than the EU average of 48.4%. This suggests a more optimistic view among Finns regarding the economic contributions of immigrants. Cultural perceptions are even more positive in Finland, with a significant 80.7% of the population feeling that immigrants enrich the country's cultural life. This figure vastly exceeds the EU average, where only 51.2% share this sentiment, indicating a strong appreciation in Finland for the cultural diversity brought by immigrants. Regarding the overall influence of immigrants on the country as a place to live, over half of the Finnish population, at 52.2%, believe that immigrants make Finland a better place to live. This contrasts with a lesser EU average of 38.0%, showcasing a more welcoming stance within Finnish society.

These statistics reflect a general trend in Finland towards more favorable views on immigration compared to the EU average, acknowledging the positive impacts of immigration on economic, cultural, and general societal well-being.

| Attitudes towards immigration | Finland | EU(1) | Difference (p.p.) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Immigration bad or good for country economy (% Good; 6-10) | 60.4% | 48.4% | 12.0 |
| Country cultural life undermined or enriched by immigrants (% Enriched; 6-10) | 80.7% | 51.2% | 29.5 |
| Immigrants make country worse or better place to live (% Better; 6-10) | 52.2% | 38.0% | 14.2 |

*Table1 . Attitudes towards immigration. Detailed results, 2020, Finland and EU*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: 1) EU includes 23 EU27 countries. (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)*

## 1.7. Gender equality

Finland is renowned for its commitment to gender equality, consistently ranking among the top countries in global gender equality indices (such as World Economic Forum - Global Gender Gap Report, European Institute for Gender Equality reports, OECD reports etc.). The country has made significant strides in promoting equal opportunities for men and women in various sectors, including education, employment, and politics. Finnish women benefit from robust parental leave policies, extensive childcare support, and strong legal protections against discrimination and violence. The political landscape in Finland is also notable for its gender balance, with women holding key positions in government, including the former Prime Minister's office. This progressive approach to gender equality has contributed to Finland's reputation as a leading advocate for women's rights and social justice.

Table 2. presents the Finnish and EU results of EVS for the four variables related to gender equality in the household domain and the three for education and work respectively, in 2017.

In the family sphere, Finland’s scores are significatively better than EU average; 14% of people believe that children suffer when the mother works (36% in the EU), 32% believe that what women really want is to take

care of the home and children (42% in the EU), 16% believe that family life is negatively affected when women have a full-time job (44% in the EU) and 12% believe that men's job is to earn money while women's job is to devote themselves to the home and family (25% in the EU).

In the domestic sphere, Finland demonstrates progressive views that much exceed the average for the European Union when it comes to gender equality and the harmony of work and family life. Remarkably, compared to the 36% average across the EU, only 14% of Finns believe that children may be at a disadvantage when their mother works. This implies a recognition by society of the relationship between a mother's employment and the development of a healthy child, which may reflect extensive childcare regulations and social support for working mothers. European policies, such as those in Finland, have placed a greater emphasis on equal opportunities and assistance for men and women in striking a balance between their personal and professional lives when it comes to work-life balance. The EU has implemented many measures to promote a more equitable work environment, including regulations and policies that support maternity leave and flexible work arrangements that benefit all workers.

Furthermore, just 32% of Finns hold the traditional belief that a woman's primary goal should be to take care of her home and children, while this belief is held by 42% of people in the EU. This suggests that women's many goals, including those that extend beyond the home, are increasingly being acknowledged in society. Based on this statistic, it appears that women in Finland are valued and their different responsibilities and aspirations outside of the home are acknowledged more than in other societies. This tendency in Finland is indicative of a broader realisation in society that women have different aspirations, including contributions to personal growth, career success, and societal advancement (e.g. Van der Lippe, Lippényi, 2020). This change reflects the shifting views on gender equality and the growing recognition that gender-based role-assignment can be confining and undervalue the aspirations and skills of the individual.

| Gender equality (%agree) | | Finland | EU[(1)] | Difference (p.p.) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Family | Child suffers with working mother | 14.2% | 36.2% | 22.1 |
| | Women really want home and children | 32.2% | 41.9% | 9.7 |
| | Family life suffers when woman has full-time job | 16.3% | 44.1% | 27.9 |
| | Man's job is to earn money; woman's job is to look after home and family | 12.0% | 24.7% | 12.6 |
| | Synthetic index (z-score) | 0.407 | 0.000 | - |
| Education and work | Men make better political leaders than women | 10.4% | 17.9% | 7.5 |
| | University education more important for a boy than for a girl | 2.3% | 7.7% | 5.4 |
| | Men make better business executives than women | 11.1% | 15.0% | 3.9 |
| | Synthetic index (z-score) | -0.014 | 0.000 | - |

*Table 2. Gender equality Source: EVS 2017*

*Notes:EU includes 21 EU27 countries. (Missing countries: Belgium, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg and Malta)*

Out of all Finns, only sixteen percent believe that women's full-time jobs have a detrimental effect on family life. Finland's strong family policies, which seek to more fairly divide family responsibilities among genders and promote work-life balance through initiatives like parental leave, flexible work schedules, and publicly funded childcare services, may be the reason for this notable divergence from the 44% EU average.

Lastly, the idea that men are primarily breadwinners while women should dedicate themselves to home and family is endorsed by just 12% of Finns, a view less than half as prevalent as in the EU at large, where 25% still hold this belief. This reflects a broader societal commitment to gender equality in Finland, where both men and women are increasingly seen as equally capable and responsible for financial provision and domestic life.

With regard to education and work, Finland's results again surpass those of the EU average, although with less marked differences. Only 2% of people believe that university is more important for men than for women (8% in the EU), 10% believe that men are better political leaders than women (18% in the EU) and 11% that they are better executives (15% in the EU).

Women have been voting more actively than men in all types of elections. In particular, the 2023 parliamentary elections saw women's voting percentage at 72.9% versus men's at 71%. This demonstrates a consistent pattern of women's higher electoral engagement in Finland, going against the grain of what might be expected from the EU average. The heightened activity in younger female voters also points towards a generational shift, potentially driven by stronger political mobilization among young Finnish women (Statistics Finland, 2023 Parliamentary elections).

These disparities in perspective between Finland and the broader EU might also point to the effectiveness of such policies in shaping public opinion and attitudes towards family roles. It highlights the importance of institutional support in fostering gender equality and suggests that policy interventions can lead to significant cultural shifts. As such, Finland serves as a case study for the potential of progressive social policies to influence societal attitudes and reduce the stigma often associated with working mothers and the division of domestic labour. Gender equality is a priority for EU research and programmes, albeit to varying degrees and with varying degrees of success among member states. For instance, the EU promotes gender mainstreaming across all policy domains and has passed laws such as the Work-Life Balance Directive (https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=9438&furtherNews=yes). The goals of these initiatives are to close the gender pay gap and advance men's and women's equal financial independence.

Such policy actions can have a significant impact on societal attitudes, according to research. The European Institute for Gender Equality, for example, observes that gender equality measures have played a significant influence in improving women's responsibilities both within and outside the house throughout the EU and in changing public opinions. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that incorporating gender-sensitive regulations encourages a more equitable distribution of family duties, which helps to create more balanced perspectives on gender roles in households.

# 2. Description of political participation

This chapter summarises the results of the statistical analysis of the European Social Survey (ESS). Three different forms of political participation are analysed: voting, formal political participation (which refers to other institutionalised forms of participation, such as participating in a political party) and informal participation (which refers to non-institutionalised participation, such as signing a petition or participating in demonstrations). The first section analyses the evolution of political participation between 2012 and 2020, offering the general results of Finland in comparison with the EU average. The next sections focus only on 2020, showing in detail differences in political participation related to social inequalities and to political values and attitudes, comparing the results with the EU average. Given that the objective is to analyse the aspects

that influence participation in addition to the level of education attained, the analysis of the 2020 data is carried out for the population aged 25 and over.

## 2.1. Evolution of political participation 2012-2020

The ESS data indicate that Finland experienced varied changes in political participation from 2012 to 2020. Finnish respondents reported the same level of voting (85%) in 2012 and 2020, which contrasts with a slight increase for the EU from 79% to 81%. For formal participation, Finland saw a minor decrease from 30% to 29%, whereas the EU remained at the same level (18%). Informal political participation in Finland displayed a significant rise from 45% to 54%, while in EU the informal political participation remained at 35%.

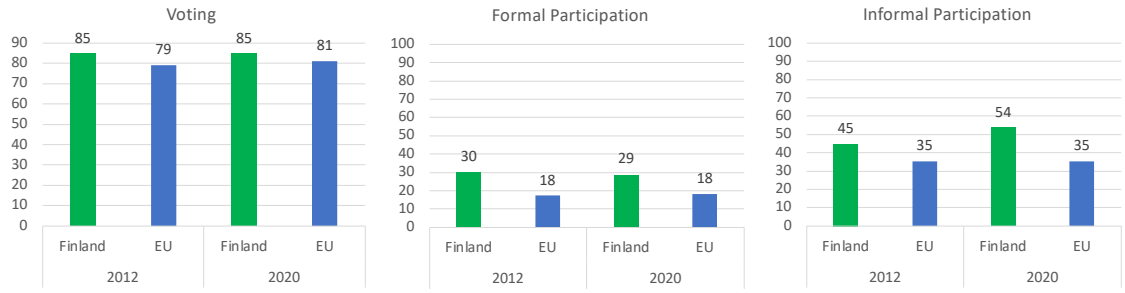


*Figure 3. Evolution of political participation by type in Finland and EU, 2012-2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*
*Note: EU includes 19 EU27 countries (Missing countries: (Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)*

In 2020, the ESS data demonstrate that political participation in Finland was varied when compared to the EU average. With both formal and informal political participation between Finland and the EU, Finland had higher participation than the EU average. Formal participation in Finland was at 29% and the EU at 18%. However, it was in the realm of informal participation that Finland particularly stood out with a substantial increase to 54%, considerably above the EU's 35%. This rise reflects a notable engagement in activities such as signing petitions or joining boycotts, suggesting a heightened civic activism among Finns.

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### 2.1.1. Formal participation

The data from 2012 to 2020 shows interesting trends in formal political participation in Finland compared to the European Union.

For contacting politicians or government officials (Figure 4), Finland demonstrates a significant upward trend, with the percentage of people engaging in this activity rising from 18% in 2012 to 22% in 2020. In contrast, the EU saw a more modest increase, from 12% in 2012 to 14% by 2020.

Regarding the wearing or displaying of campaign badges or stickers (Figure 5), both Finland and the EU experienced declines over the same period. In Finland, the decrease was more pronounced, with participation dropping from 17% to 10%. Meanwhile, in the EU, the decrease was relatively minor, moving from 7% to 6%. Despite the overall decline, the data suggests that Finnish citizens still engage in this form of political expression more than their EU counterparts.

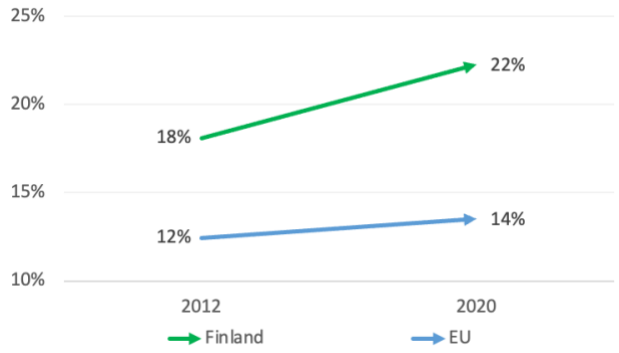


*Figure 4. Evolution of the percentage of people who have contacted a politician or a government official, Finland and EU, 2012-2020*

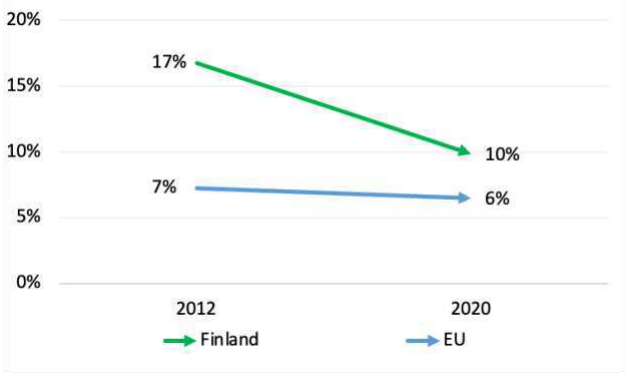


*Figure 5. Evolution of the percentage of people who have worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker, Finland and EU, 2012-2020*

Source: own elaboration based on ESS data

Note: EU includes 19 EU27 countries (Missing countries: (Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)

### 2.1.2. Evolution of informal participation, 2012-2020

In Finland, there has been a noticeable growth in informal political participation (Figures 6 and 7) over the years 2012 to 2020, particularly in activities such as signing petitions and boycotting products. During this period, the percentage of Finns who signed a petition increased from 25% to 38%. This is in contrast to the European Union as a whole, where there has been a slight decline from 24% to 23% in the same period.

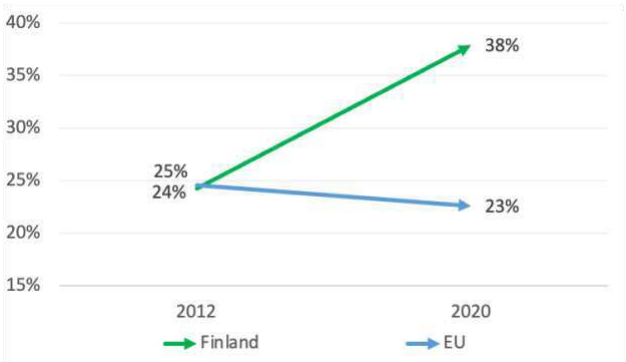


*Figure 6. Evolution of the percentage of people who have signed a petition, Finland and EU, 2012-2020*

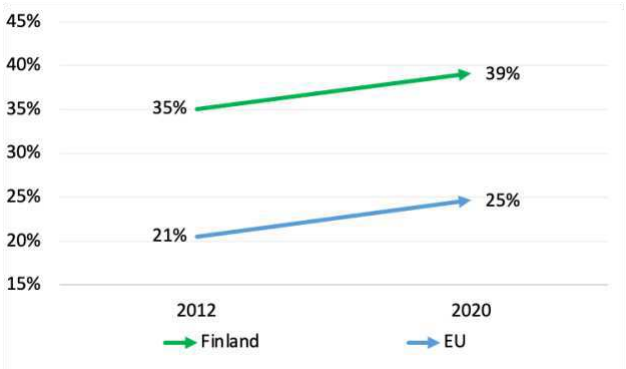


*Figure 7. Evolution of the percentage of people who have boycotted certain products, Finland and EU, 2012-2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data.*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

The trend in boycotting products reflects a parallel rise within both Finland and the broader EU, albeit at different rates. In 2012, 35% of Finns reported participating in boycotts, compared to 21% in the EU. By 2020,

these figures had increased in Finland to 39%, while the EU average had increased to 25%. This highlights a consistent and growing engagement in these forms of protest and activism in Finland.

## 2.2. Political participation in 2020 - main aspects

The Figures 8, 9, and 10 present a comparison between Finland and the European Union (EU) average across three different forms of political participation in 2020. In Finland, voter participation (Figure 6) is quite high at 85%, slightly above the EU average of 82%.

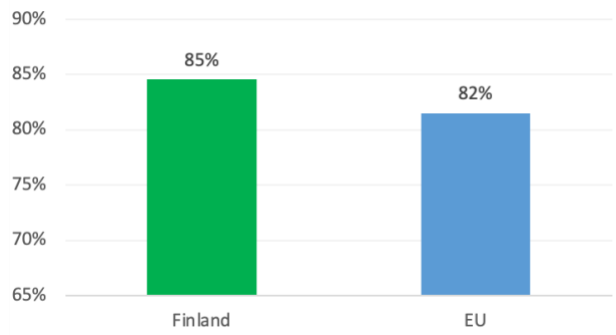


*Figure 8. Voting in Finland and EU, 2020*

This indicates a strong democratic engagement among the Finnish population, with voter turnout slightly higher than the broader EU context. Formal political participation (Figure 7), which can include activities like contacting a politician or a government official, is significantly higher in Finland at 31% compared to only 20% in the EU. This suggests that Finns are more actively involved in structured political processes than their EU counterparts. When it comes to informal political participation (Figure 8), which includes actions such as protests, petitions, or grassroots campaigns, Finland shows a substantial lead with 57% participation, versus the EU average of 42%. This highlights a pronounced tendency among Finns to engage in civic activities that are less structured but still crucial for influencing public policies and societal norms.

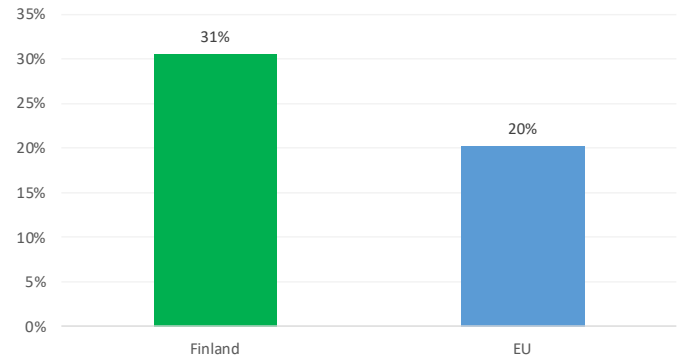


*Figure 9. Formal participation in Finland and EU, 2020*

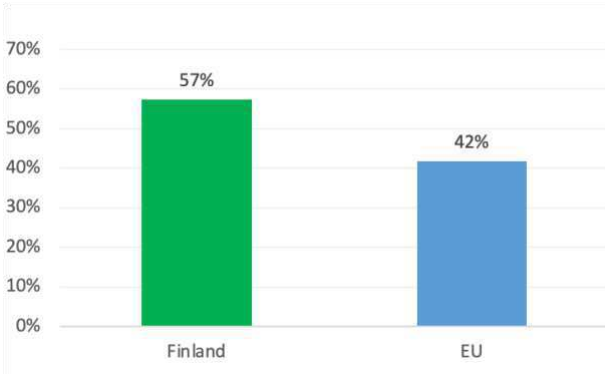


*Figure 10. Informal participation Finland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data.*

*Notes: Figure 8- 10: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Figures 11, 12 and 13 illustrate the informal participation in Finland and EU. In Finland, 24% of the population reported having contacted a politician or government official (Figure 9a), compared to 14% in the EU, suggesting a more proactive approach in political communication by the Finnish population compared to the broader EU. Wearing or displaying a campaign badge or sticker (Figure 9b) is also higher in Finland, where 10% of the population reported participating, compared to 6% across the EU.

This indicates a slightly stronger tendency among Finns to publicly display their political affiliations or support for political causes. Both Finland and the EU reported a participation rate of 6% for donating to or participating in a political party or pressure group (Figure 13). For signing petitions (Figure 14), Finland reports a significant engagement level with 36% of the population participating, compared to 22% in the EU. This higher rate suggests that Finns are more inclined to express their political opinions through petitions than their EU counterparts.

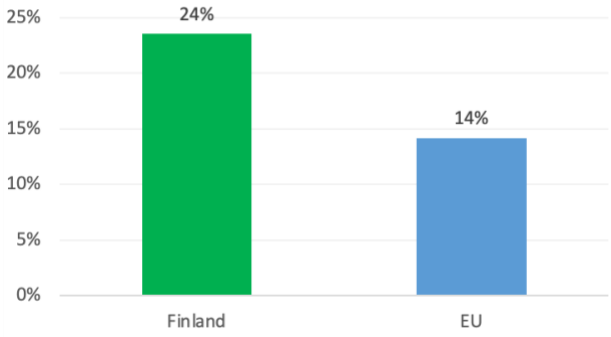


*Figure 11. Percentage of people who have contacted a politician or a government official, Finland and EU, 2020*

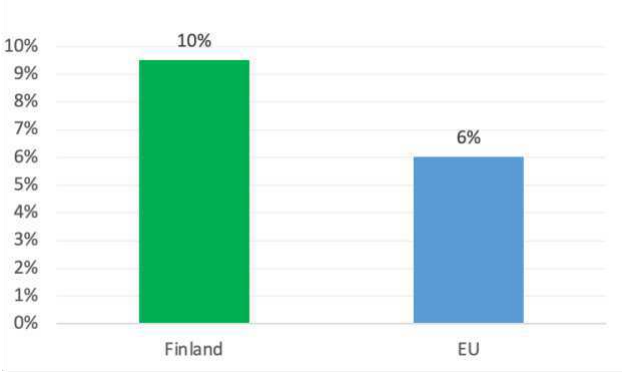


*Figure 12. Percentage of people who have worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker, Finland and EU, 2020*

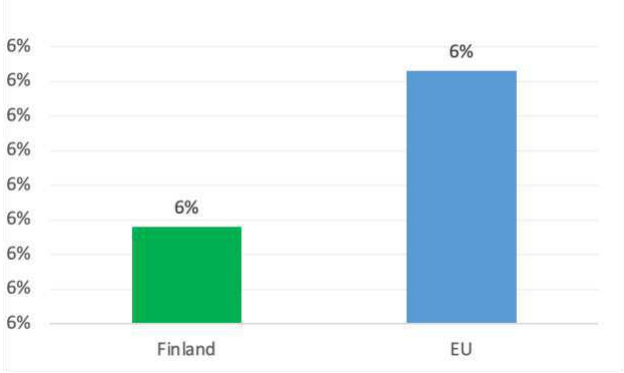


*Figure 13. Percentage of people who have donated to or participated in political party or pressure group, Finland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Regarding boycotting products as a form of protest (Figure 15), 38% of Finns engage in this activity, which is notably higher than the 25% observed across the EU. This indicates a stronger propensity among Finns to use consumer choices as a means of political expression.

Participation in public demonstrations (Figure 16) is considerably lower in Finland, with only 3% of the population taking part, compared to 9% in the EU. This stark difference highlights a lesser tendency for Finns to engage in public protests.

Lastly, the extent of sharing or posting about politics online (Figure 17) is relatively similar between Finland and the EU, with 18% of Finns participating, slightly higher than the EU's 17%. This indicates a modest but comparable level of engagement with digital platforms for political discussion and activism.

Overall, these figures illustrate a varied landscape of informal political participation in Finland, with notably higher activities in signing petitions and boycotting products, but less involvement in public demonstrations, while online political engagement remains close to EU levels.

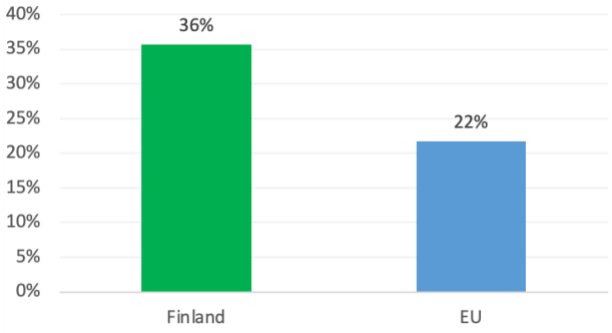


*Figure14. Percentage of people who have signed a petition, Finland and EU, 2020*

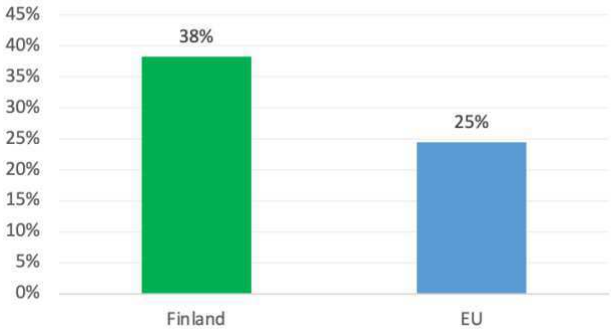


*Figure 15. Percentage of people who have boycotted certain products, Finland and EU, 2020*

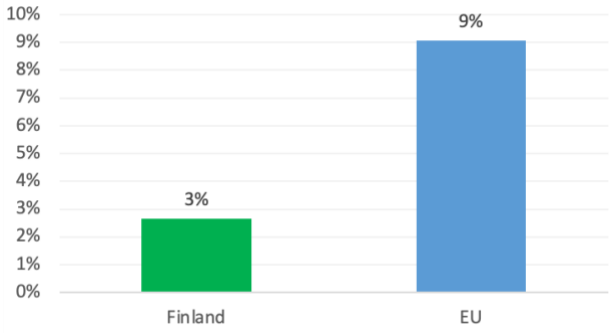


*Figure 16. Percentage of people who have taken part in public demonstration, Finland and EU, 2020*

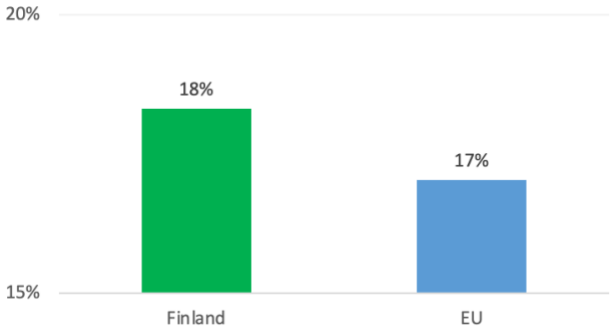


*Figure 17. Percentage of people who have posted or shared anything about politics online, Finland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

## 2.3. Participation in 2020 by socio-demographic characteristics

### 2.3.1. Voting

In examining voting participation, it is evident from socio-demographic variables (Figures 17 and 18) that Finnish voter turnout generally mirrors the EU average across most factors, with noteworthy distinctions. Participation tends to rise with educational attainment. In Finland, individuals with lower levels of education exhibit high participation (82%), surpassing the EU average (75%). Interestingly, the lower level of voting is reported by Finns with upper secondary level (80%).

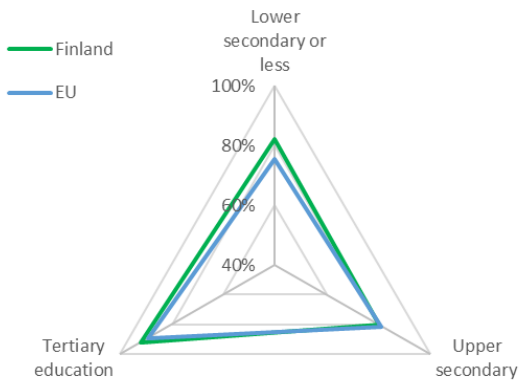


*Figure 17. Voting by level of education attained, Finland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Similarly, participation increases with age, except for a dip among those aged 55-64. In Finland, the highest participation occurs among individuals aged 45-54 (91%), while those aged 55-64 show lower participation (79%), akin to the youngest age group. These percentages deviate significantly from the EU average.

Income level correlates positively with participation in Finland, aligning closely with EU rates.

While participation is lower among foreign-born individuals and those with foreign-born parents, the differences are less pronounced compared to the EU. Native-born participation in Finland mirrors that of the EU (85% vs. 83%), while participation among foreign-born individuals is higher (62% vs. 57%). A similar pattern emerges when analysing parents' country of birth.

Participation among individuals reporting belonging to a discriminated group in Finland (80%) is lower than those who do not (85%), consistent with the EU average but with narrower differences between the two groups.

In contrast to the EU average, men's participation in Finland (82%) is lower than that of women (87%), where levels are more comparable, albeit slightly favouring men.

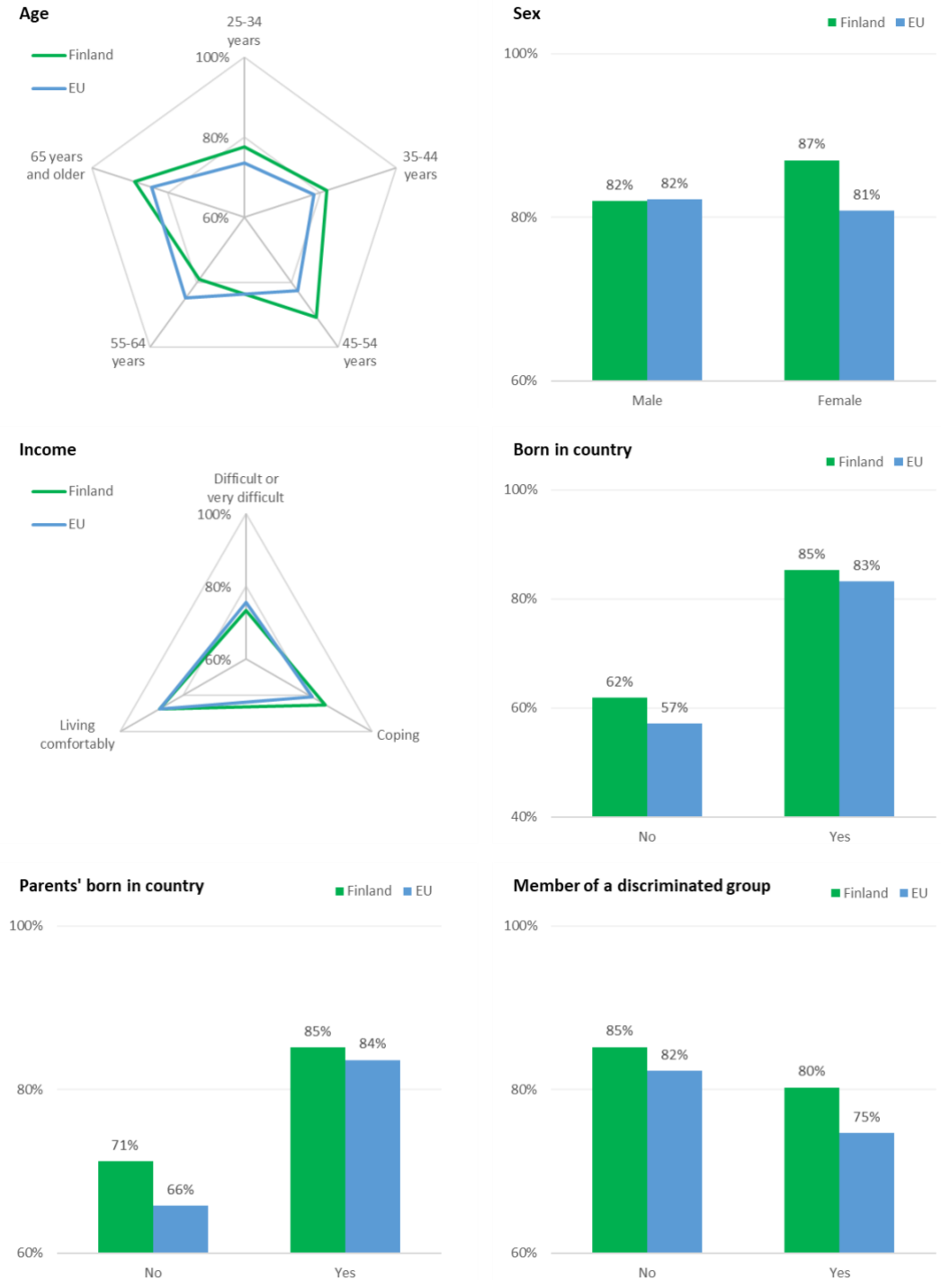


*Figure 18. Voting by sociodemographic characteristics, Finland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

### 2.3.2. Formal political participation

Formal political participation in Finland aligns closely with the EU average across most socio-demographic variables, yet several distinctions stand out. Participation escalates with educational attainment. Notably, in Finland, the participation gap is most pronounced between the less educated (20%) and others (31%-36%), while in the EU, the divide is between the most educated (31%) and others (14-19%) (Figure 19).

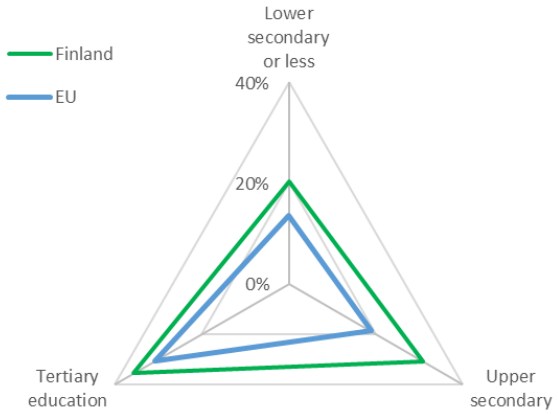


*Figure 19. Formal political participation by level of education attained, 2020, Finland and EU*

Source: own elaboration based on ESS data

Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over

As seen in Figure 18, middle-aged groups (35-64 years) exhibit higher participation rates in Finland compared to the youngest and oldest age groups, a trend more accentuated than in the EU. Participation across all age groups in Finland significantly surpasses that of the EU.

Participation is lower among individuals born outside the country or with foreign-born parents, mirroring EU trends.

Those identifying with a discriminated group display higher participation rates in Finland compared to those who do not, with a more pronounced difference between these groups in Finland (47% vs. 29%) than in the EU (31% vs. 19%).

However, a deviation from the EU average is observed regarding gender: men exhibit slightly lower participation (30%) than women (31%) in Finland, contrary to the EU where the reverse is true.

In terms of income, participation rates remain consistent across all income levels in Finland (around 30%), whereas in the EU, participation among those living comfortably (26%) is notably higher than among others (17-18%).

These observations underscore nuanced differences in formal political participation between Finland and the EU, highlighting the impact of socio-demographic factors on civic engagement.

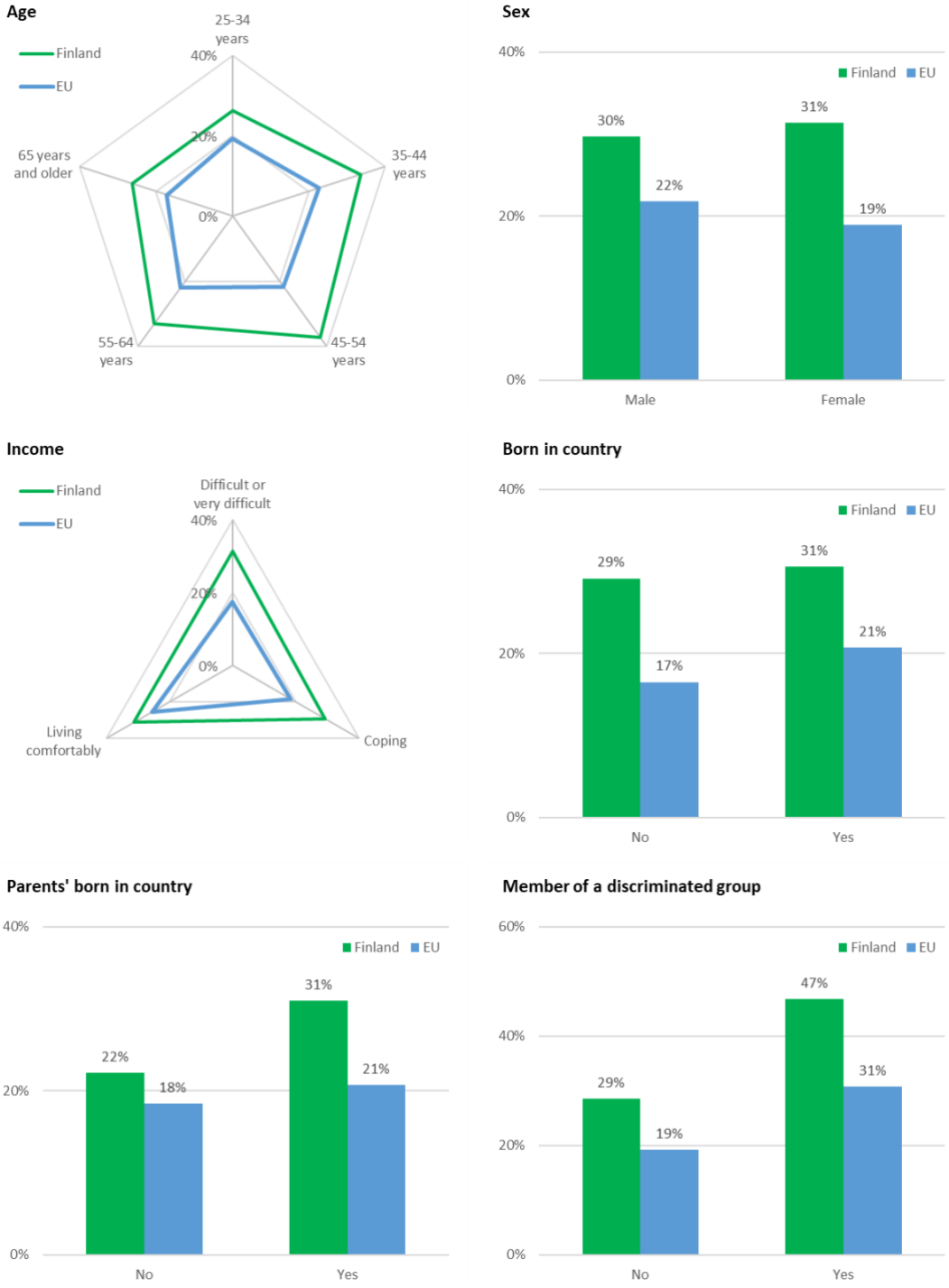


*Figure 20. Formal political participation by sociodemographic characteristics, Finland and EU, 2020*

Source: own elaboration based on ESS data

Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over

### 2.3.3. *Informal political participation*

In analysing informal political participation in Finland compared to the EU average, we observe that educational attainment plays a significant role in both contexts. Participation escalates with the advancement of one's education, highlighting the impact of educational experiences on civic engagement (Figure 21).

The Finnish landscape presents an interesting scenario where participation wanes with age, mirroring the EU trend, diminishing from 77% among the younger demographic to 36% in older age brackets.

Income level similarly influences participation rates; individuals with higher incomes participate more, with participation growing from 53% to 66% as income rises.

The effect of being born to parents from outside the country does not present a significant divergence from the EU average, maintaining a stable participation rate of around 58%.

Notably, those who identify as part of a discriminated group report a strikingly higher participation rate of 77%, compared to 55% among those who do not report such experiences.

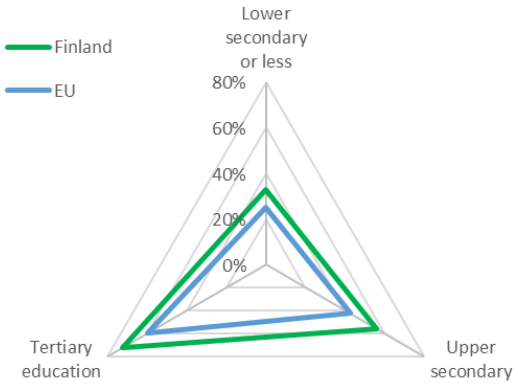


*Figure 21. Informal political participation by level of education attained, 2020, Finland and EU*

Source: own elaboration based on ESS data

Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over

Diverging from the EU pattern, informal political participation in Finland is greater among those born outside the country, with a rate of 67% as opposed to 57% among native-born individuals. In contrast, within the EU, native-born citizens are typically more engaged. Moreover, the gender dynamic in Finland shows a subtle variance, with men participating marginally less than women, a reversal of the more pronounced gender gap seen in the EU where men tend to participate more. These nuances paint a complex picture of the socio-demographic influences on political engagement, underscoring the distinct characteristics of Finnish society in the broader European context.


*Figure 22. Informal political participation by sociodemographic characteristics,, Finland and EU, 2020*

Source: own elaboration based on ESS data

Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over

## 2.4. Participation in 2020 by democratic ideals and political attitudes

### 2.4.1. Voting

Regarding the political variables (Figure 23), differences between Finland and the EU emerge concerning democratic ideals and the left-right axis.

In Finland, akin to the EU, the group with "low ideals" exhibits the lowest turnout (77%), while the highest participation is seen among the “high ideals” group (91%), contrasting with the EU where the highest turnout is observed among the "political rights" group.

Individuals positioned in the center of the political spectrum show the lowest participation rates in both Finland and the EU. However, in Finland, turnout among those on the right (90%) surpasses that of those on the left (88%), whereas in the EU, the trend is reversed (85% vs. 87%).

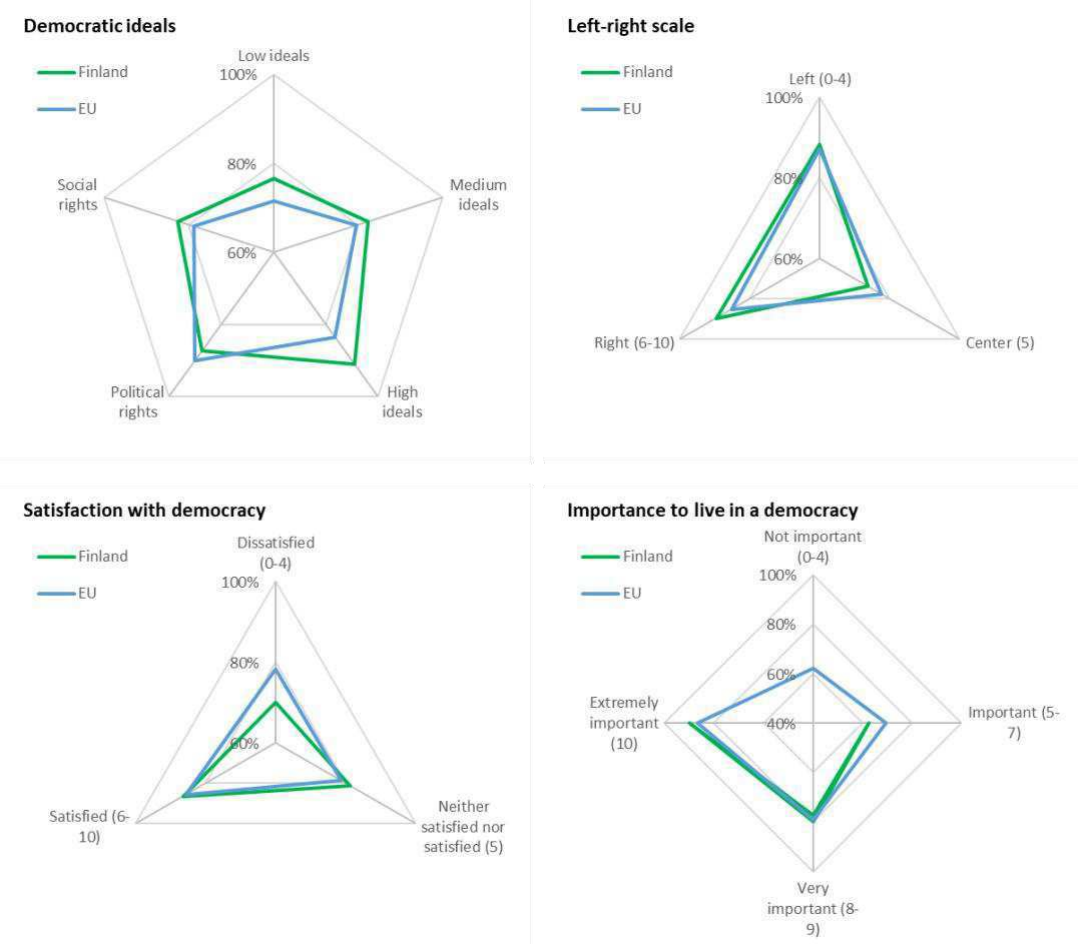


*Figure 23. Voting by political characteristics, Finland and EU,2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

In other policy variables, Finland generally mirrors the EU pattern, often with more pronounced trends. Participation increases as respondents' satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in their country rises. Finnish participation rates align with those of the EU among those most satisfied with democracy's functioning

(around 86%) and among those neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (around 80%) but drop notably among those dissatisfied (70% vs. 78%).

Likewise, participation rises with the perceived importance of living in a democratically governed country. Finland's participation rates closely resemble the EUs among those considering it extremely or very important, but notably lag behind among those who find it somewhat important (63% vs. 69%).

These findings suggest that Finnish citizens are more likely to engage in elections when they hold positive views about democracy's functioning and the significance of living in a democratic nation. Conversely, a decline in participation among those dissatisfied or who value democratic governance less underscores the motivational influence of these factors on electoral engagement. While broadly consistent with the EU context, there are variations in the extent of participation.

### 2.4.2. *Formal political participation*

As seen in figure 24, for democratic ideals, low ideals are reported at (24%) for Finland and (13%) for the EU. Medium ideals are at (30%) for Finland and (17%) for the EU. High ideals stand at (30%) for Finland and (24%) for the EU. Political rights are valued at (36%) in Finland and (26%) in the EU, while social rights are at (24%) in Finland and (18%) in the EU.

Regarding the left-right scale, the left (0-4) is at (32%) in Finland and (26%) in the EU. The center (5) is at (26%) in Finland and (17%) in the EU. The right (6-10) is at (32%) in Finland and (20%) in the EU.

In terms of satisfaction with democracy, (26%) of respondents in Finland are dissatisfied (0-4) compared to (22%) in the EU. Those who are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (5) are at (32%) in Finland and (16%) in the EU. Satisfied respondents (6-10) are at (31%) in Finland and (20%) in the EU.

When considering the importance of living in a democracy, the percentage of respondents finding it not important (0-4) is not available for Finland but stands at (14%) for the EU. Those who find it important (5-7) are at (25%) in Finland and (13%) in the EU. Very important (8-9) is noted by (23%) in Finland and (17%) in the EU. Extremely important (10) is indicated by (34%) in Finland and (24%) in the EU.

These figures highlight that Finland generally shows higher adherence to democratic ideals across all categories compared to the EU average. Both political and social rights are valued more highly in Finland. Finland has an about evenly distributed population across the left, center, and right of the political spectrum, whereas the EU shows a lower percentage of individuals identifying with the center and right. Finnish respondents exhibit a higher level of satisfaction with democracy, with a higher percentage of satisfied individuals and fewer dissatisfied compared to the EU average. In Finland, a higher percentage of respondents consider living in a democracy as "extremely important," while the EU has a noticeable portion that finds it "not important." These figures highlight that Finland tends to have a more robust democratic engagement and satisfaction with democratic governance compared to the broader EU context.

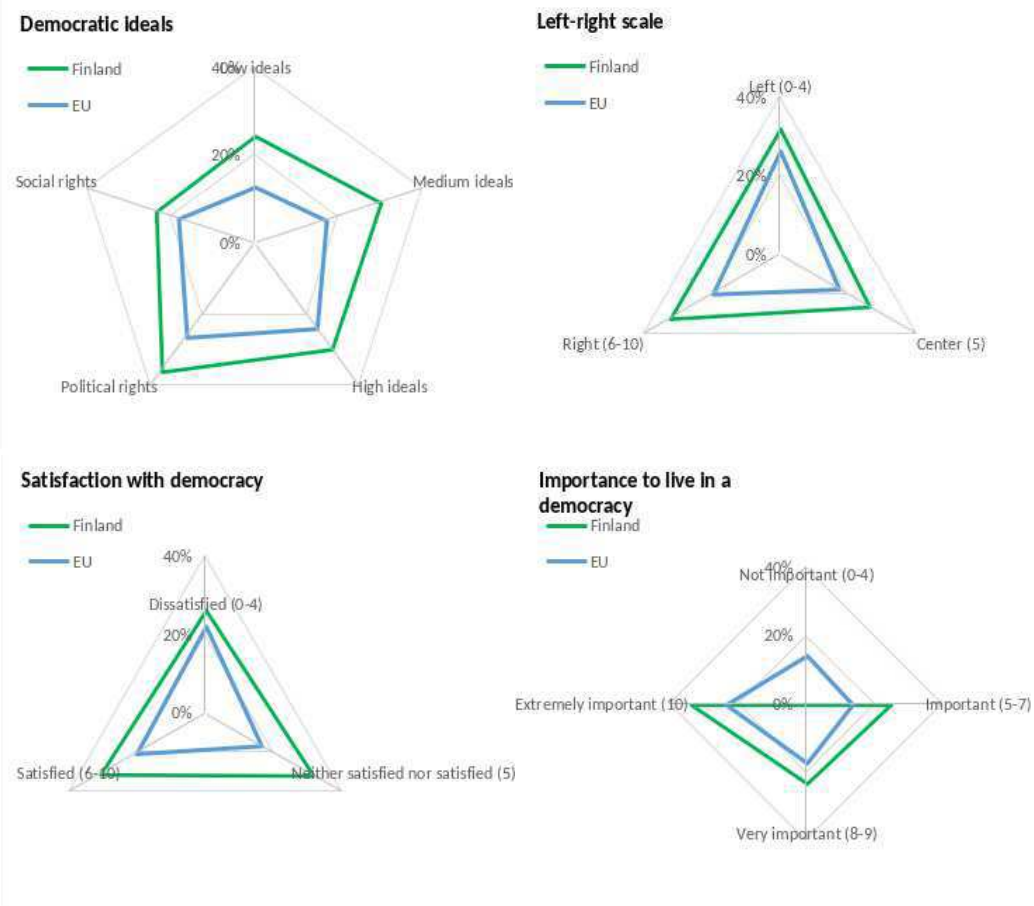


*Figure 24. Formal participation by political characteristics, Finland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

### 2.4.3. Informal political participation

Delving into the political characteristics (Figure 25) that influence informal political participation in 2020, we see a distinct divergence between Finnish and EU patterns, particularly when examining democratic ideals. In Finland, the "high ideals" group stands out with the highest level of participation at 71%, indicating a strong correlation between high democratic aspirations and political engagement. This contrasts with the EU, where the "political rights" group takes the lead in participation rates.

Finnish citizens with high democratic ideals are the most actively engaged in informal political participation, highlighting a strong link between democratic values and civic involvement. Finland's even distribution across the left, center, and right political spectrum suggests a balanced and diverse political landscape, fostering varied political discourse. The significant portion of Finnish citizens who are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with democracy indicates a more moderate and perhaps critical perspective on democratic governance. Additionally, Finnish citizens place a higher importance on living in a democracy compared to the broader EU population, reflecting a deep-rooted appreciation for democratic principles.

The remaining democratic ideals groups in Finland align more closely with the EU trends, following a pattern that suggests a general European inclination towards certain democratic values influencing political participation. While there are distinct differences, the alignment of certain democratic ideals groups in Finland

with EU trends suggests a shared European inclination towards democratic values influencing political participation. These findings reveal the nuanced differences in political culture between Finland and the broader EU community, reflecting how varied interpretations of democracy can shape civic involvement. These findings highlight Finland's unique political culture, characterized by high democratic aspirations, balanced political attitudes, and a strong valuation of democracy, setting it apart from the broader EU context while also reflecting shared European democratic values.

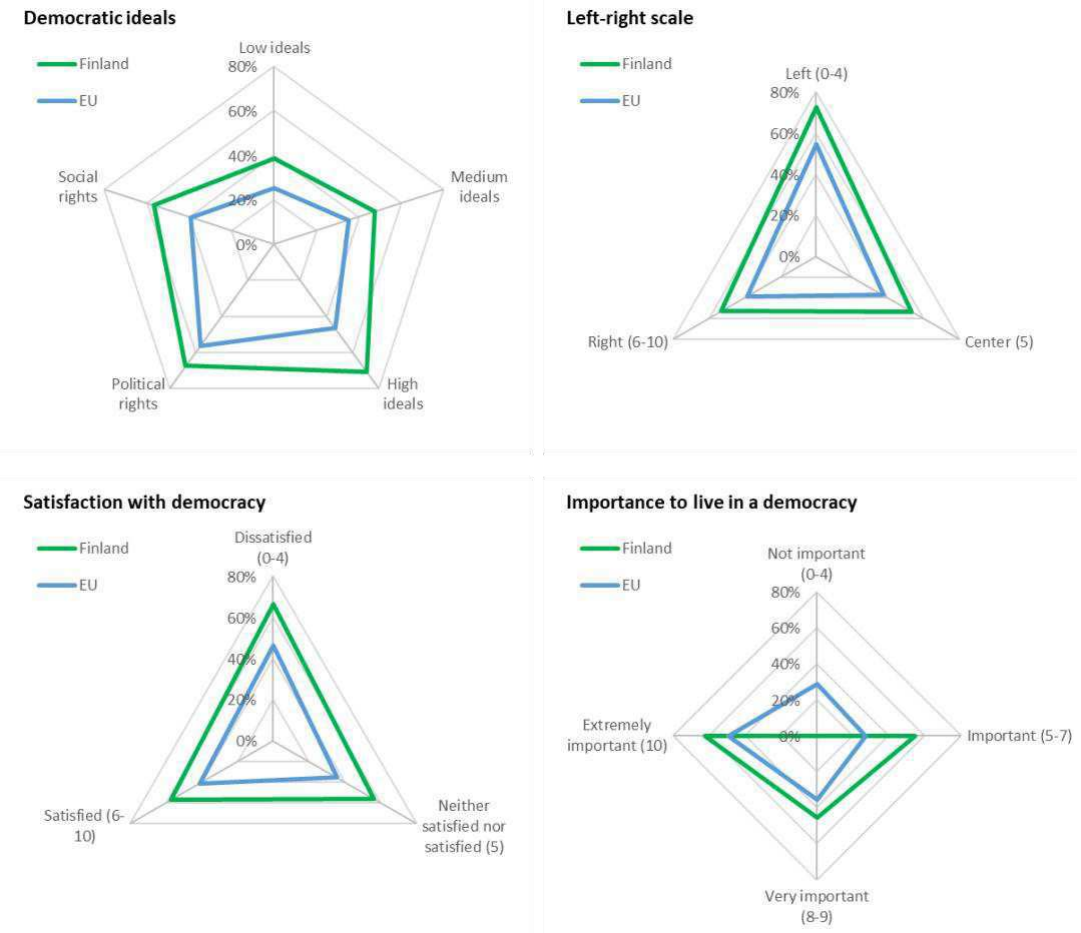


*Figure 25. Informal political participation by political characteristics, Finland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: no data for people who do not consider important live in a democratic country due to low reliability of sample.*

## 2.5. Participation in 2020 - Results from regression models

To enhance the analysis of political participation, a logistic regression was conducted (Table 3). This regression model predicts the likelihood of participation (for each type of participation) based on various explanatory variables, including socio-demographic and political factors.

Educational level emerges as an important factor, positively influencing participation in all three types of participation. Individuals with higher levels of education tend to participate in voting, formal and informal activities. The effect of upper secondary education is less evident in terms only of voting participation as it does not reach statistical significance in this case.

| Finland | Voting | | | Formal participation | | | Informal participation | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *B* | *Sign.* | *S.E.* | *B* | *Sign.* | *S.E.* | *B* | *Sign.* | *S.E.* |
| **Constant** | -5,297 | *** | (0,893) | -3,579 | *** | (0,833) | 2,601 | *** | (0,774) |
| Democratic ideals (ref: medium ideals) | | | | | | | | | |
| Low ideals | 0,407 | | (0,338) | 0,010 | | (0,277) | -0,400 | | (0,266) |
| High ideals | 0,475 | | (0,310) | -0,315 | | (0,210) | 0,755 | *** | (0,214) |
| Political rights | 0,094 | | (0,223) | -0,004 | | (0,163) | 0,482 | ** | (0,164) |
| Social rights | 0,086 | | (0,287) | -0,599 | * | (0,236) | 0,256 | | (0,216) |
| Age | 0,022 | *** | (0,006) | 0,004 | | (0,004) | -0,029 | *** | (0,004) |
| Sex (ref: male) | 0,229 | | (0,178) | -0,018 | | (0,128) | 0,015 | | (0,130) |
| Education (ref: lower secondary or less) | | | | | | | | | |
| Upper secondary | 0,197 | | (0,252) | 0,569 | ** | (0,209) | 0,444 | * | (0,193) |
| Tertiary education | 1,176 | *** | (0,316) | 0,750 | ** | (0,231) | 0,959 | *** | (0,220) |
| Income feeling (ref: difficult or very difficult) | | | | | | | | | |
| Coping | 0,268 | | (0,280) | -0,305 | | (0,231) | 0,097 | | (0,236) |
| Living comfortably | 0,209 | | (0,308) | -0,351 | | (0,247) | 0,508 | * | (0,253) |
| Born in country (ref: no) | 1,087 | * | (0,527) | -0,640 | | (0,478) | -0,215 | | (0,487) |
| Parent's born in country (ref: no) | 0,494 | | (0,486) | 0,889 | | (0,475) | -0,258 | | (0,434) |
| Member of a discriminated group (ref: no) | 0,157 | | (0,279) | 0,838 | *** | (0,195) | 0,921 | *** | (0,235) |
| Left-right | 0,081 | * | (0,041) | 0,009 | | (0,029) | -0,128 | *** | (0,030) |
| Satisfaction with democracy | 0,107 | * | (0,049) | 0,003 | | (0,039) | -0,144 | *** | (0,041) |
| Importance to live in a democracy | 0,251 | *** | (0,066) | 0,213 | ** | (0,075) | 0,045 | | (0,062) |
| **Observations** | 1.307 | | | 1.315 | | | 1.315 | | |

*Table 3. Participation models, Finland, 2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*
*Signification levels: *** 0,1%; ** 1%; * 5%*

In the realm of voting, the analysis reveals several factors that influence the likelihood of participation. Age emerges as a significant determinant; the propensity to vote increases with age. Furthermore, individuals born in Finland exhibit a higher tendency to vote compared to those born outside the country. A rightward orientation in political ideology also correlates with increased participation in national elections. An interesting socio-political factor is the level of satisfaction with democracy; those more satisfied with how democracy functions in Finland are more likely to cast their vote. Additionally, the intrinsic value placed on living in a democratic country positively impacts voting participation.

Turning to formal political participation, the dynamics shift slightly. Those who identify with the "Social rights" group show a lesser inclination to participate formally, while no notable differences are detected among other demographic groups. However, belonging to a discriminated group markedly increases participation, indicating that those who may feel marginalized are more actively seeking to engage formally in political processes. Similar to voting, the importance placed on living in a democratic society is a significant motivator for formal participation, highlighting the role of democratic values in political engagement.

When it comes to informal political participation, different patterns emerge. Adherence to democratic ideals, specifically among those in the "Political rights" and "High ideals" groups, enhances the likelihood of engaging in informal political acts, such as protests or signing petitions. In contrast to formal participation, age has a reverse effect; younger individuals are more engaged in informal political activities. Economic comfort also plays a role, with those living more comfortably more likely to participate informally. Discrimination, once again, proves to be a powerful driver, with those experiencing discrimination participating more than those who do not. Political ideology influences informal participation as well; individuals leaning towards the left of the political spectrum show a higher rate of involvement. Lastly, dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy propels individuals towards informal participation, perhaps as a means of expressing and prompting change.

# 3. Discussion

Firstly, so summarise some of the key findings, we can state the following:

- **Increasing Importance of the Internet**: The internet has become more critical in election campaigns, reducing the need for traditional methods of showing political affiliations such as wearing campaign badges.
- **Digital Platforms**: Expanded use of digital platforms like social media for political communication and engagement.
- **Citizen's Initiative**: Use of the citizen's initiative in Finland as a tool for democratic participation, allowing direct influence on legislation.

The increasing importance of the internet in election campaigns can be considered an explanatory factor. On the one hand, there might no longer a significant need to display one's political commitments physically, through clothing such as wearing an actual badge, for example, as this can now be done virtually on the internet. On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic may have influenced the results of the year 2020 due to societal lockdowns, with political campaigning and participation largely being carried out from home. The parliamentary elections were held in 2019, after which in 2020, these factors are likely to have been less pronounced because electoral campaigns were not in full swing.

The decrease in displaying a campaign badge (from 17% to 10%) showcases a shift towards more direct forms of political engagement. This might partially be explained by the expanding channels of communication that include social media platforms such as X (Twitter). The use of traditional campaign badges has been noted to be declining, while direct political engagement through social media has increased. This trend in political participation is consistent with broader trends, particularly among younger generations. Research has demonstrated that social media sites like Twitter, which enable more instantaneous and direct forms of communication and participation, have a major impact on political engagement (Matthes, 2022). The ease with which thoughts and endorsements can be conveyed online, most probably, is the reason behind this shift in political support from physical to digital forms.

Through a citizens' initiative, citizens can propose a new law, suggest amendments to an existing law, or advocate for the repeal of an existing law. This procedure provides a tangible way to bring citizens' voices into the political decision-making process.

To proceed to parliamentary consideration, a citizens' initiative must gather at least 50,000 signatures within six months. This collection process has been digitalized and is managed by the Ministry of Justice through the online service at kansalaisaloite.fi. Launched in December 2012, this platform allows citizens to create new initiatives and support existing ones. The service is free to use, making it accessible to all citizens who wish to participate in societal influence and the legislative process. This system emphasizes transparency and the active role of civil society in Finland. Less than 1% of Finland's population, or 50,000 signatures, are needed for the citizens' initiative to be taken up by Parliament. This comparatively low threshold, along with a well-functioning digital mechanism for collecting signatures, has made it possible for the Finnish Parliament to discuss and vote on several successful ideas. Legislative action and public support have been observed for initiatives related to same-sex marriage and environmental issues.

Conversely, the ECI (European Citizens‘ Initiative) requires at least one million signatures from across the EU, which makes it a more challenging and extensive process ((https://citizens-initiative.europa.eu/how-it-works/faq_en). While the ECI aims to increase direct democracy at the European level, its impact has been

limited by bureaucratic hurdles and the lack of direct legislative outcomes following successful initiatives. There is a general perception that the ECI has not fully lived up to its potential to bring the EU closer to its citizens, with many seeing it as cumbersome and lacking in significant political impact.

Overall, the politicians are much more available for a citizen in 2020 than in 2012, due to the increasing use of internet and social media in elections, increasing citizens' online political participation (Arshad, Khurram, 2020).

This trend can be seen also in the next table 4, showing how many percent of the candidates are using social media and internet in their campaigns in Finland.

| Table 4. Candidate use of the Internet and Social Media in Elections, Finland, 2003-2029 in % | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year | **2003 (N=2013)** | **2007 (N=1997)** | **2011 (N=2315)** | **2015 (N=2114)** | **2019 (N=2489)** |
| Candidates' Use | | | | | |
| Website | **44** | **67** | **69** | **61** | **80** |
| Blog | **.** | **34** | **55** | **57** | **42** |
| YouTube Video | **.** | **6** | **29** | **10** | **15** |
| Facebook Page | **.** | **.** | **88** | **73** | **87** |
| Twitter Account | **.** | **.** | **19** | **51** | **53** |
| Instagram Account | **.** | **.** | **.** | **13** | **41** |
| Other Social Media, e.g., LinkedIn, Snapchat | **.** | **.** | **.** | **13** | **15** |

*Table 4. Candidate use of the Internet and Social Media in Elections, Finland, 2003-2029*

*Footnote: The percentages of candidates who utilized these means in their campaigning. The data is based on the analysis of candidates' websites. A dot indicates that the data was not collected in those particular elections.*

*Source: Borg, Kestilä-Kekkonen & Wass (2020)*

When looking at age groups, it's evident that the internet is predominantly the domain of young citizens in Finland (Strandberg & Carlson, 2021). The generally higher activity of young people online and on social media supports the previously discussed perspective of the internet's mobilizing effect, as young citizens are not traditionally considered politically active. However, it is noteworthy that middle-aged individuals also use the internet and social media quite extensively. The two oldest age groups stand out for using social media less during elections than other age groups.

Similar to the findings from Finland, a trend relating education level and online political activity has been noticed throughout Europe. According to a study, greater levels of education are associated with more political engagement and interest, including online activity. Education increases one's self-perceived political knowledge and encourages attitudes supportive of political liberties, which increases engagement through informed participation (OECD.

Differences based on residential area are not generally large. Urban residents use the internet and social media more during elections than those in rural areas (cf. Nordberg, Virkkala Mariussen, 2024). This observation is primarily due to the fact that the population in rural areas of Finland is, on average, much older than in urban areas. Observations consistent with the level of political interest can be interpreted to consistently support the reinforcement theory, which suggests that the internet more likely amplifies than evens out participation disparities. The participation differences between those most and least interested in politics are consistently very large and statistically very significant (Borg, Kestilä-Kekkonen, Wass, 2020).

## *3.1. Political and sociodemographic characteristics*

Socioeconomic disparities in voter turnout have markedly increased in Finland in recent years (Lahtinen, 2019). Alongside the widening of these disparities, prior research has generally underestimated their extent. Consequently, the issue of inequality in voter turnout appears to be a more pressing societal concern than previously recognized, even within the academic community. This discovery is consistent with larger study findings indicating that socioeconomic status has a significant impact on voting behaviour worldwide (see Tiihonen et al., 2022 for Finland). Research demonstrates the strong correlation between socioeconomic characteristics and political participation, since lower income and education levels are frequently linked to lower voter turnout.

Individuals with higher socioeconomic status, including those with advanced educational attainment, prestigious occupations, and substantial incomes, exhibit a greater likelihood of participating in elections than their counterparts. While statistical evidence has supported this trend for nearly a century, recent discourse has questioned the diminishing relevance of social class in political behaviour and even heralded its demise. There has been a prevailing belief that social class no longer influences voting behaviour. However, the research underscore that social class continues to exert a significant influence on voting behaviour, emphasizing not only voting choices but also the decision to engage in the electoral process (Lahtinen, 2019).

Particularly concerning are the widening disparities in voter turnout among various educational groups, particularly evident in younger age cohorts. For instance, data from the 2015 parliamentary elections in Finland reveals that 86% of 30-year-olds with advanced university degrees participated in voting, while only 31% of their peers with basic education qualifications exercised their voting rights. The information supports the hypothesis that greater political engagement is correlated with higher levels of education. There are several reasons for this occurrence. A higher level of education frequently endows people with improved cognitive abilities, such as the capacity for critical thought and problem-solving, which improves their capacity to interact with complicated political issues. Furthermore, increased political efficacy—the conviction that one's involvement can have an impact—is associated with higher levels of education and is a powerful predictor of voting behaviour (Verba, Schlozman, Brady, 1995). Although overall voter turnout rates have remained relatively stable in Finland in recent years, socioeconomic disparities in turnout, especially among younger age groups, have significantly exacerbated (Tuorto, 2022).

In Finland, voting disparities stem from factors like family background, financial resources, and health status. Intergenerational transmission plays a key role, as an individual's childhood socioeconomic status heavily influences their voting behavior as adults. Finnish research (Lahtinen, 2019) reveals stark differences in voter turnout, with only 28% of young adults from non-college-educated families voting compared to 69% from families with at least one parent holding a university degree. These disparities highlight how socioeconomic backgrounds impact political participation despite Finland's universal suffrage principles.

The 2023 Finnish parliamentary elections data highlights several sociodemographic factors influencing voting behavior:

- Women were generally more active voters than men, especially in the younger age groups. The largest differences were observed in the 19-year-olds, where women's voting percentage exceeded that of men by over 10 percentage points, and in the 20-24 age group, by nearly 10 percentage points.
- Voting participation was more common among higher income brackets. The highest income quintile had an 85.1% voter turnout, whereas the lowest quintile showed significantly lower participation at 58.4%. This nearly 27 percentage point difference underlines the influence of economic status on electoral engagement.
- Higher education levels were strongly correlated with increased likelihood of voting. Individuals with at least lower tertiary education degrees were more likely to vote than those with lower educational qualifications. (Statistics Finland)

## *3.2. Political values*

The Finnish National Election Study (Statistics Finland) provides comprehensive insights into the political characteristics of Finnish voters from the 2023 parliamentary elections. The data reveals a complex picture of political alignment and preferences, shaped by various ideological scales and attitudes towards democracy.

- Party Support by Political Spectrum: The ideological positions of voters align predictably with their party choices. The National Coalition Party (Kokoomus) was predominantly supported by right-wing voters, with 94% of its voters placing themselves on the right. Similarly, the Finns Party had 16% of its voters identifying with the center or left, while the Swedish People's Party had a third of its electorate in the center or left. On the liberal-conservative scale, the mean position of voters was just below the midpoint, suggesting a balanced spread across the spectrum. However, this balance is more nuanced when looking at individual parties. The Christian Democrats and Finns Party attracted the most conservative voters, while the Swedish People's Party and the National Coalition Party had a more evenly distributed support from liberals to conservatives.
- Democratic Values and Ideological Alignment: The study's findings suggest that democratic values and the importance of living in a democracy are pivotal factors influencing voters. Parties on the left typically score higher on scales prioritizing environmental concerns and advocating for progressive social policies, indicating a connection between liberal values and democratic ideals.
- Satisfaction with Democracy: Finnish voters exhibit varying levels of satisfaction with democracy, which correlates with their ideological leanings and party support. Parties like the Green League and the Left Alliance, which advocate for environmentalism even at the cost of economic growth, tend to attract voters who prioritize democratic ideals and are more satisfied with the state of democracy.
- Policy Issues: When it comes to specific policy issues, there are significant divergences among the supporters of different parties. For example, attitudes towards immigration and minority rights show clear differences among the parties' voters, influencing the overall satisfaction with democracy and perceptions of living in a democratic society.
- Voter Mobility and Engagement: There is also an analysis of voter mobility, indicating how voters might change their preferences from one election to the next. This mobility can be affected by the voters' perception of the importance of democracy and their satisfaction with it, as well as their placement on the ideological spectrum.

- Cross-cutting Political Cleavages: The study highlights cross-cutting political cleavages, such as attitudes towards economic policies, social issues, and the environment. These cleavages often reflect broader values related to democracy and governance and are influential in party choice.

The sociodemographic characteristics were also studied from the Parliamentary election study 2019 (Borg et al., 2020). The results indicate diverse participation rates across different sociodemographic groups:

- Overall, 34% of individuals were active and participating, while 51% were participating, and 15% were inactive and not involved.
- Men and women participated at similar rates, with women being slightly more active (34% for women vs. 33% for men).
- Age showed a distinct pattern: younger individuals under 30 were less active (46%) compared to those aged 30-40 (49%). Participation decreased for individuals over 60, with only 20% being active.
- Education levels significantly influenced participation. Those with comprehensive school grades 1-6 were the least active (11%), whereas those with a university degree or further qualification in science were the most active (41% and 74% respectively).
- Looking at occupation, farmers were the least active (12%), while senior employees and those in leading positions were more engaged (40% and 37% respectively).
- Those unemployed or at home (parents) showed lower levels of participation compared to employed individuals.

Comparing these results with the European Social Survey (ESS) findings for Finland and the EU average, we can observe some patterns:

- Education's effect on participation is prominent in Finland, much like the EU. However, the divide between the least educated and others is more distinct in Finland than in the EU, where the gap is wider between the most and least educated.
- Middle-aged groups in Finland show higher participation rates than in the EU, and the Finnish trend is stronger across all age groups compared to the EU average.
- Similar to the EU, participation is lower among individuals born outside of Finland and for those with parents born outside of the country.
- In Finland, individuals belonging to a discriminated group participate at a significantly higher rate than those who do not. This difference is more pronounced in Finland than in the EU.
- Unemployed individuals have a notably high non-participation rate at 41% and a lower active participation at 43%, potentially reflecting disengagement or disenfranchisement from the political process.
- Pensioners have a relatively high non-participation rate at 27% and a modest active participation at 17%, which might reflect a disconnection or even apathy towards current political events.

## *3.3. Participation and perception of democracy*

Younger people under 30 and older people over 60 are less actively involved than middle-aged individuals. Employment status also plays a role, with the unemployed and certain job roles like farmers being less actively involved. In summary, Finland exhibits higher political engagement across most sociodemographic groups compared to the EU average, however with notable disparities based on education, age, and minority status.

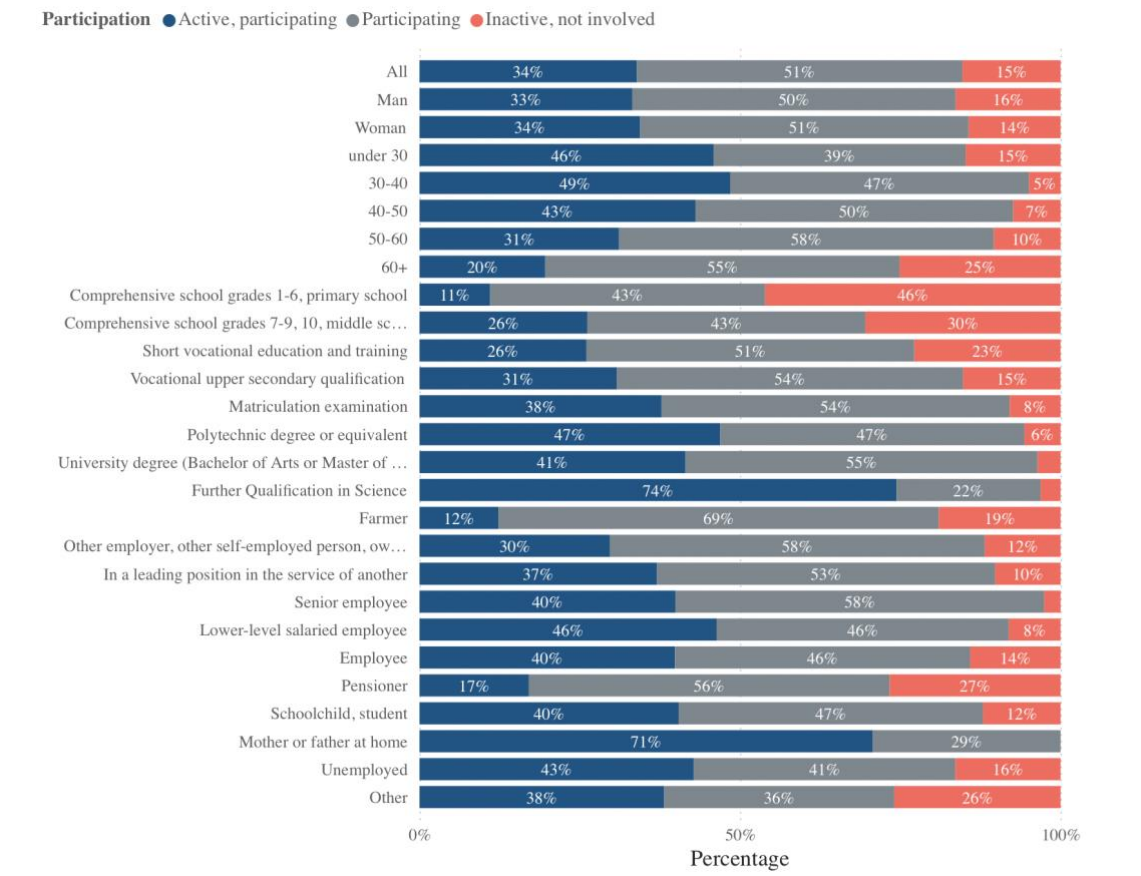


*Figure 26. Participation by background variable*

*Source: Parliamentary election study 2019*

Key Highlights from the 2024 Presidential Election:

- There was a noticeable decrease in voter turnout among men during the second round of the election, this trend being particularly pronounced within younger demographics.
- Individuals in higher income brackets showed a higher voter turnout.
- The likelihood of voting increased alongside the level of education achieved, with those holding higher education degrees being more likely to vote.
- Voter turnout for individuals with foreign backgrounds stayed low.

The data indicate that around 54% of those eligible participated in voting during the 2024 presidential election.

Voters possessing at least a lower tertiary education were more inclined to vote compared to those with only a basic education. The turnout for individuals with a higher university or doctoral degree was 17.9 percentage points above the overall average and 33.7 percentage points higher than for those with just basic education.

Across the board, male voter turnout was consistently lower than that of females, with the discrepancy being most significant amongst those with secondary education. The gender gap in voter turnout expanded across all educational levels in the subsequent election.

According to Statistics Finland, the initial round of the 2024 election saw the highest voter turnout in the 57-74 age bracket, exceeding 80%. Within this group, 68-year-olds had the highest turnout at 82.3%. In contrast, the second round didn't see turnout surpass 80% for any age group. Younger voters, particularly 19-year-olds in the first round (60.5%) and 21-year-olds in the second round (54.3%), had the lowest voter turnout.

Despite targeted efforts to mobilize the youth through various campaigns and initiatives, their turnout remained significantly lower when compared to older voters. (Statistics Finland, Presidential election 2024, 2024 https://stat.fi/julkaisu/cln47x0wh2keq0avtslszg9x0)

The Finnish political context provides further layers to these findings. The complexity and fluidity of political alliances in Finland, as well as a culture that might emphasize consensus over clear political opposition, can make the political landscape challenging for citizens to navigate and understand. The Finnish case suggests that even when citizens find politics perplexing, they still exhibit strong system-level support (diffuse support) for democracy. This is evidenced by their satisfaction with democracy and belief in their influence within the system, despite their self-perceived lack of understanding.

However, these dynamics of political engagement cannot be fully explained by the electoral or party systems alone. While clear bloc politics and stable party systems, as seen in the Nordic countries, facilitate understanding and engagement, the complexity of party systems in other countries indicates that other factors must also play a role. It's possible that Finns are more willing to admit difficulties in understanding politics, or they might underestimate their competence. International comparisons suggest that Finnish political knowledge is above average, indicating a contrast between perceived and actual understanding. (Borg et al., 2020).

## 3.4. The digital and the collective

The proliferation of digital platforms has further democratized political participation, especially for those on the fringes of society. These digital realms offer expansive opportunities for engagement in political dialogue and advocacy efforts (Gibson, Lusoli, Ward, 2005). Digital engagement serves to elevate the voices of individuals often overlooked by mainstream media and political narratives, carving out new paths for advocacy and exerting influence. It enables a broader spectrum of the population to partake in political campaigns and discussions, thereby enhancing the inclusivity and reach of political engagement. This digital transformation in political participation not only amplifies marginalized voices but also enriches the democratic process by integrating a wider array of perspectives and fostering a more engaged citizenry.

The marked ascent in Finland's informal political participation, from 45% to 55%, signals a pivotal transition towards a multifaceted spectrum of civic involvement that transcends the confines of conventional voting and structured political actions. This shift is notably evident in activities like petition signing and product boycotts, signaling an expansion in the avenues of political engagement within the nation. This development mirrors a worldwide trend that leans towards enabling more accessible and diversified methods of involvement in democratic processes. Several elements contribute to this rise in informal political participation in Finland, including the widespread adoption of digital technologies, evolving social norms favouring activism, and an increased focus on leveraging both individual and communal power to tackle issues spanning social, environmental, and political domains.

The rise of collective movements and internet activism, which are changing the face of political involvement and civic engagement in Finland and abroad, is indicative of the greater focus on using communal power to address large societal concerns (Gray-Hawkins, 2018).

Digital technology's pervasiveness has changed how people interact with social, environmental, and political issues by facilitating both individual and group action. The Finnish situation is especially intriguing because it shows how integral digital technology is to supporting issue-based and grassroots campaigns that go beyond traditional forms of political engagement.

The integration of social media and digital platforms has significantly reduced obstacles to political engagement, facilitating effortless participation in informal actions such as petitions and boycotts. Bennett and Segerberg's concept of "The Logic of Connective Action" (2012) elucidates how digital media aids in the distribution of personalized content across networks, thus enabling collective actions even in the absence of structured organizational settings. This phenomenon is particularly pertinent in Finland, where the nation's high levels of internet accessibility and digital fluency have presumably played a critical role in bolstering informal political participation.

Political expression through clothing or other outward means can often be confrontational or limited to certain social contexts. In contrast, the internet provides a space where individuals can express their political affiliations and engage in discourse with relative ease and potentially less risk of social friction. It democratizes participation by providing individuals with access to political content and the ability to express their political views through social media platforms, blogs, and other online forums.

However, this shift to the digital realm also raises questions about the digital divide and whether certain demographics may be excluded from political discourse due to a lack of internet access or digital literacy. Moreover, the impact of online 'echo chambers' and the spread of misinformation are growing concerns that may affect the quality and diversity of political engagement.

In terms of COVID-19's effect on political engagement, the epidemic forced a change from conventional, in-person political activity and campaigning to virtual ones. This has probably had a mixed effect, since it has probably been easier to shift some activities online than others. Additionally, it made way for the emergence of new, less physically reliant modes of activism and political engagement, like online petitions, virtual rallies, and digital canvassing.

Norris's exploration in "Democratic Phoenix" (2002) delves into the evolving landscape of civic engagement, positing that although traditional modes of political participation might be witnessing a downturn, they are concurrently being supplanted by a variety of engagement approaches, encompassing informal activities. This viewpoint offers a framework for understanding the Finnish scenario within the larger context of a shift towards an increasingly active and participatory democratic model.

When examining global patterns, instruments such as the World Values Survey and European Social Survey offer comparative insights into political participation, displaying diverse levels of informal political engagement across different nations. These surveys have uncovered that countries characterized by high degrees of social trust and political efficacy generally exhibit elevated levels of informal political engagement (Dalton, 2008; Welzel & Deutsch, 2012). Consequently, Finland's significant social trust and the efficacy of its governance systems are likely crucial drivers behind its pronounced informal engagement rate.

## *3.5. Reflection*

Finland's surge in informal political engagement, particularly through mechanisms like digital activism, petitioning, and boycotting, reflects a broader evolution in citizen interaction with societal and political matters. This movement towards varied and readily accessible forms of participation denotes a vibrant democracy, one that embraces different modes of civic involvement, fostering a more inclusive and dynamic political conversation. Through the lens of comparative research and theories on political engagement, Finland's example illuminates the changing dynamics of democratic participation in the modern era, highlighting the value of acknowledging and promoting informal channels of participation alongside conventional frameworks (see e.g. Luonila, Ruokolainen, 2024).

Through the use of the citizens' initiative, people can mobilise support for their proposals by getting a predetermined number of signatures from other citizens within a given time frame. When this criterion is reached, the proposal is brought before the Finnish Parliament for approval, operationalizing direct democracy—which involves the public participation in the legislative process, which is customarily the exclusive domain of elected officials.

This tool for participation is representative of a larger tendency in modern governance that aims to close the divide between the governed and the controlling. It emphasises the understanding that people may actively shape the laws that affect their lives if they are given the appropriate resources and venues.

In addition, the citizens' initiative shows a dedication to improving democratic participation by giving the public a formal, structured way to voice its desires as a group and shape the legal system.

The citizens' initiative acts as a spark for public discourse and civic education in addition to providing a channel for legislative impact. Through interacting with the complexities of legislative requirements and policy creation, citizens have a better understanding of the legislative process, which may result in a more politically aware and active electorate.

In more critical terms, even though the citizens' initiative, or initiatives alike, is a direct democracy instrument, its effectiveness depends on how receptive the parliamentary system is. The degree to which the legislature discusses and passes these initiatives is a good indicator of how well the system integrates direct democracy with representative democracy. Therefore, other democracies hoping to improve citizen participation and promote a more inclusive political discourse can learn from the Finnish model.

In Finland, the gender dynamics in political participation reveal a deviation from the EU's pattern of near-equal male and female participation rates; Finnish women participate in elections at a higher rate of 87% compared to men's 82%, highlighting the gendered aspects of political engagement. Additionally, individuals from discriminated groups in Finland are significantly more involved in non-formal political activities, indicating these platforms as vital for the expression of marginalized perspectives.

Reinforcing this idea, research has illustrated that equal gender representation in the political arena can markedly affect women's involvement in voting. The inclusion of women in positions of political power is closely linked to a rise in political activity among female members of the voting public, as it fosters a sense of better representation and a stronger motivation to engage in the electoral process (Schwindt-Bayer, 2005; Paxton, Hughes, Green, 2006).

Furthermore, studies suggest that the cultural beliefs and attitudes regarding gender roles play a role in shaping political participation. Nations that exhibit greater gender equality, within both public and private sectors, are often characterized by narrower gaps in political engagement between genders, or even higher rates of participation among women (Inglehart, Norris, 2003; Coffé, Bolzendahl, 2013).

These findings illustrate Finland's distinctive position in terms of political and civic engagement within the European context. The high and increasing rates of informal political participation, along with the stable yet high voter turnout, underscore a vibrant and evolving democratic culture. Additionally, the specific patterns of engagement among different socio-demographic groups highlight the inclusive nature of Finland's political landscape, setting it apart from comparative nations in the study.

The outcomes, which underscore the heightened activity of individuals from discriminated groups in Finland within the sphere of informal political participation, underscore the significance of non-traditional avenues for the articulation of marginalized perspectives. Informal political endeavours, such as the act of signing

petitions, involvement in public demonstrations, and participation in online political dialogues, serve as more approachable and less formalized channels for expressing political views. These avenues are particularly vital for those who may perceive themselves as being excluded or sidelined by the established political framework.

This observation is in harmony with scholarly work indicating that marginalized communities frequently resort to informal modalities of engagement as a strategy to bypass obstacles encountered within the formal political arena. Such obstacles can span from experiences of discrimination and socio-economic disparities to a palpable absence of representation in conventional political entities (Schlozman, Verba, Brady, 1995; Marien, Hooghe, Quintelier, 2010). Through informal political activities, these communities find a medium to highlight pressing issues and galvanize support beyond the boundaries of electoral politics. This becomes a source of empowerment for those discriminated groups striving for societal transformation (Dalton, 2008; Norris, 2002). Pluralist approaches are likely to support the positive trend (Mikander, Satokangas, 2024).

Recognizing the value and legitimacy of informal political participation can lead to more inclusive and equitable governance structures. By addressing the root causes of exclusion and enhancing the mechanisms for participation, political systems can become more responsive to the needs and aspirations of all societal segments.

# 4. Recommendations for education for democracy

Based on the Finnish national context, the documents and statistics analysed and other pertinent country-relevant material, a list of some key recommendations follows. The recommendations outline a multifaceted approach to enhancing democracy education in schools, and emphasise the integration of civic values across the curriculum to cultivate an understanding of democratic principles and responsibilities through diverse subjects, including history and digital literacy. They underscore the necessity of developing digital literacy to safely engage in online political discourse and advocates for active participation in school governance as a practical experience in decision-making. Fostering inclusivity and respect for diversity to ensure all voices are heard is highlighted, supporting student-led initiatives for real-world impact, and continuing professional development for educators to facilitate sensitive discussions and encourage active participation. The recommendations also emphasise the importance of continuous evaluation and adaptation of these initiatives to respond to evolving societal needs, ensuring their effectiveness through regular feedback and improvements.

1. Integrate Civic Education Across the Curriculum

Given the importance of education in fostering civic and political participation, integrating civic education across various subjects can cultivate a deeper understanding of democratic values, rights, and responsibilities.

Civic education is not limited to certain social studies classes but is stressed as a fundamental element in many fields. The recommendation calls for the creation of instructional materials that blend traditional disciplines like language arts, history, and computer literacy with democratic values, critical thinking, and media literacy.

**Implementation:** Develop modules that incorporate democratic ideals, critical thinking, and media literacy into subjects like history, social studies, language arts, and digital literacy. For educational policy makers, this implies high-level decisions and outlines for local and localised curricula and teaching programs.

**For policy makers**: make legislative guidelines that leave sufficient space for peer driven civic engagement; install new frameworks that blend democratic literacy with classic academic disciplines like history through digital literacy to ensure youth develop the kind of broad based understanding they increasingly need.

**For school leaders**: support the implementation of these new curriculum changes by developing training for teachers, as well as resources; help ensure civic education effort responds to local needs and context by reconciling national educational directives with more local community values.

**For local education authorities**: coordinate executive bodies on how a mandate from national curricula aligns with local educational aims; offer professional development for teachers to ensure that civic education appears on assessments of what the students have learned.

**For teachers**: search for new teaching approaches with content related to critical thinking and media literacy for their classroom curriculum daily (evading the risk of students finishing a course in democratic theory and conclude that they have learned all there is to know of democracy; engage students with (as best one can) practice, discourse and other concrete activities reflecting those values enacted.

2. Promote Digital Literacy and Safe Digital Spaces

With the significant rise in unofficial political engagement via internet channels, it is imperative that students develop their digital literacy in order to be able to appropriately navigate online environments and participate in critical political discourse. This dimension responds to the increasing impact of digital media on political participation by giving students the tools they need to securely and intelligently browse and interact in online contexts. In order to participate effectively in today's digital environment, education should encompass critical evaluation of online content, comprehension of digital footprints, and engaging in fruitful online debate.

**Installation:** Provide thorough digital literacy training covering assessing online content, comprehending digital footprints, and participating in civil and productive online political discourse.

3. Encourage Active Participation in School Governance

Engaging in active participation in school governance can emulate real-life political engagement and offer practical experience in decision-making processes. This entails e.g. planning seminars and educational initiatives that advance social learning, empathy, and cross-cultural understanding with the goal of lowering prejudice and fostering societal harmony.

**Implementation:** Increase the number of ways that children can participate in school governance by establishing student councils, suggestion boxes, and initiatives including participatory student budgeting for school supplies.

4. Foster a Culture of Inclusivity and Respect for Diversity

Schools need to be places where diversity is celebrated and all perspectives are heard in order to address the lower participation rates among marginalised groups.

**Implementation:** Arrange workshops on empathy, social and emotional learning, inclusivity, and fighting discrimination for students, teachers and parents/care-takers; incorporate intercultural education programmes that showcase the contributions of many cultures to Finnish society.

5. Support Student-Led Initiatives and Social Activism

Student-led initiatives and engagement in social activism can empower students to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world contexts, enhancing their sense of agency and civic responsibility.

**Implementation:** Give student-led projects addressing social, environmental, and political challenges resources and mentorship. As part of extracurricular activities, promote community involvement and activism.

6. Continuing Professional Development for Educators

Educators play a crucial role in fostering civic and political engagement among students; thus, their continuous professional development in these areas is essential. Effective civic education pedagogies, handling delicate conversations, and encouraging critical thinking and active involvement from students are the main topics of training and workshops for educators.

**Implementation:** Offer workshops and training sessions for educators on civic education pedagogies, facilitating discussions on sensitive issues, and encouraging critical thinking and active participation among students.

7. Evaluate and Adapt

Continuous evaluation of the impact of these initiatives is necessary to ensure their effectiveness and adapt them to changing societal and technological landscapes.

**Implementation:** Establish mechanisms for regular feedback from students, educators, and community partners on the effectiveness of civic engagement initiatives. Use this feedback to make informed adjustments and improvements, ensuring they remain relevant and impactful in changing societal and technological landscapes.

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https://portal.cor.europa.eu/divisionpowers/Pages/Finland.aspx

This is Finland

https://finland.fi/life-society/parliamentarism-in-finland/

# Germany

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# Abbreviations

AfD: Alternative für Deutschland

ESS: European Social Survey

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

HICP: Harmonized Index of Consumer Prices

ICCS: International Comparative Citizenship Study

# Executive Summary

This is the German national report on education inequalities and political participation, one of the six reports included in Deliverable 3.1. Based on a common conceptual and methodological approach (see Introduction), the report takes as a point of departure comparable data from international sources and national literature, with the aim to contextualise and analyse how political participation is influenced by social inequalities and political values and attitudes. Based on this analysis and additional evidence on the education system, the report provides recommendations with a view to strengthen the foundations for equal and democratic participation through education in Germany.

The first chapter provides the context of political and social engagement in Spain, focusing on those aspects which are more relevant for the understanding of political participation patterns and their evolution over time. The second chapter presents the main results of the statistical analysis of the European Social Survey data in 2012 and 2020, paying special attention to patterns of political participation in terms of social inequality and political values and attitudes in 2020. The third chapter discusses the results on the basis of national surveys and studies. The final chapter provides policy recommendations to strengthen education for democracy in Germany.

# Table of Contents

# 1. Political and civic engagement: The German perspective

This section offers an overview of the German political and societal context which shapes the analysis of political and civic participation. First part is on the political system in Germany, including a focus on the constitution, the federal character, parliamentary structures, voting arrangements and current zones of conflict. The section also considers informal political participation within the German context, including boycotts, street protests, and petitions. Finally, the section concludes with an overview of general and educational inequalities (including socio-economic, ethnic and gender) in Germany, relying on latest research.

## *1.1. The political system in Germany*

The Federal Republic of Germany is a democratic and federal parliamentary republic, where federal legislative power is vested in the Bundestag (the national parliament of Germany) and the Bundesrat (the representative body of the Länder, Germany's regional states). Germany comprises sixteen states that are collectively referred to as Länder. The federal states have extensive legislative powers in the areas of the police (except the federal police) and education (schools, universities) and culture. Due to differences in size and population, the subdivision of these states varies especially between city-states (Stadtstaaten) and states with larger territories (Flächenländer).

The political system is laid out in the 1949 constitution, the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law or literally, the Constitution), which remained in effect with minor amendments after the unification of the two German states in 1990. The constitution emphasizes the protection of individual liberty in an extensive catalogue of human and civil rights and divides powers both between the federal and state levels and between the legislative, executive and judicial branches. As Germany is a representative democracy citizens participate in political processes mainly through elections. Direct forms of democracy, such as referendums, are provided for at state level, but not at federal level. Electoral law is currently the subject of much debate: in particular, a change is being sought to reduce the number of elected representatives and thus prevent the constant expansion of the Bundestag. Discussions are also around other proposed changes, such as lowering the voting age from 18 to 16 or introducing a parity rule to increase the proportion of women in the Bundestag. It shall be considered that voter turnout in Bundestag elections is generally much higher than in state (Bundesländer) and local elections.

Another important opportunity for citizens to participate in political processes is the constitutionally protected right to petition, according to which everyone has the right to address requests and complaints to the Bundestag or other public bodies. The Bundestag has set up an online platform for this purpose, where petitions can be submitted, supported and discussed. Over four million users are now registered here (Deutscher Bundestag). Another constitutionally protected means of participation is the freedom of assembly. In this area, so-called civil disobedience has become more relevant again in recently, for example, through actions by climate activists who stick to busy roads. Such protests may fall within the scope of protection of freedom of assembly but regularly violate criminal laws (e.g. as coercion), which restrict the fundamental right in a constitutional manner in this respect.

## *1.2. More recent developments*

In an intriguing report on the (bad) state of German politics Oliver Noyan (2024) (Euroactiv) points to the recent jolt of ex-centricity, i.e. the jarring loss of confidence on the political centre and ordoliberal economies, as the cause of the political crisis that traverses the country. This is a tidal wave whose ripples leave no rest

until the next crisis hits: For decades, he says, Germany has been considered a beacon of political stability, where centrist parties dominated the scene. "Elections are won in the centre" was the mantra that guided former Chancellor Angela Merkel's electoral success. The New York Times even concluded that Germans like their politics to be boring (Noyan 2024). The state of democracy and the pulse of participative interest on the part of the population has been greatly affected by the attrition of the policies of the so-called centre and by the reliance of this political geometry on the economies as the engines capable of generating equality, welfare and social mobility. If the social elevator in Germany is stuck, the cause of this jamming seems more caused by a lack rather than by an excess of politics, which has left an empty field for the economy to roll over and progressively rule over the negotiation of social contracts. With its leading role in a European project hit by the debt crisis compromised, the economic situation in Germany has had a significant impact in several areas discussed below.

### 1.1.1. *Immigration and integration*

For a country heavily dependent on the export and production of goods, the problems arising from the influx of immigration have been a turning point in the re-orientation of political choices, their respective agendas, and the perception in each of these of the role of the immigrant (beneficial or destabilizing, as the case may be) within German society. While immigration seems to benefit from lower production costs and the demographic crisis, it has a negative influence on the labour relations of the various segments of the population, especially in terms of the wage gap (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. Migration and Integration Research Department, 2005). The statistics indicate a significant increasing gap with higher wages for both foreigners (13.6 to 17.6%) and naturalized immigrants (10.0 to 16.4%). The results also show a weak explanation of the wage gap in the lower wage deciles which is even more pronounced within the immigrant subgroups. New immigrant workers are found to earn on average 20% less than native workers with otherwise identical characteristics (Ingwersen & Thomsen, 2021). The difference is smaller for immigrants from advanced countries, with good German language skills and a German degree, and larger for others. The gap gradually decreases over time.

The influx of refugees and migrants, especially since the Syrian civil war, has posed integration challenges for Germany. Issues such as language acquisition, employment opportunities and cultural integration have been important. Much has changed since the optimism of 2015 with which Germany announced to mitigate the immigration debate by sponsoring the attractiveness of the migrant population for productive segments; always thirsty for cheap labour and in the face of endemic shortages in manual trades. How this affects the spread of a culture of tolerance and integration is evidenced by the way in which public awareness marketing campaigns for respect and tolerance seem to coincide suspiciously with periods in the German economy in which the turnover of capital and labour over national wages is made to appear unsustainable. The number of people migrating to Germany is an important stressor in demographic

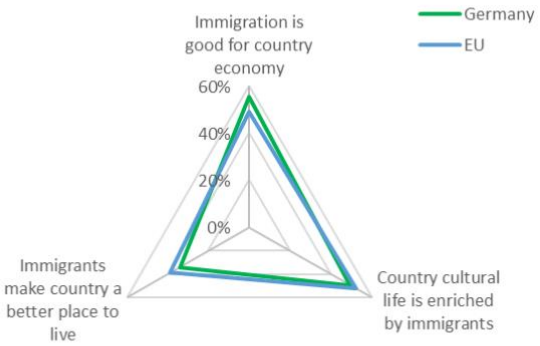


*Figure 1. Attitudes towards immigration, Germany and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS 2020 data*

*Note: EU includes 23 EU27 countries. (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)*

change. Depending on the framework conditions, we can expect annual net migration of between 100,000 and 200,000 persons in the coming years (Federal Statistical Office of Germany, 2015). While the number of ethnic German resettlers and their families coming to Germany has been declining for years, some areas of labour migration have seen strong growth. Germany will need greater immigration by skilled and highly qualified workers in order to mitigate the negative impact of shortages of skilled labour on productivity and growth. In order to make Germany more attractive to highly qualified and skilled workers, the Federal Government will reduce bureaucratic obstacles for eligible workers, improve the framework conditions for their temporary and permanent resident permits, and examine how foreign skilled and highly qualified workers can be recruited in a more targeted way to meet the needs of the German labour market, as well as how such recruitment can be organized in line with coherent and transparent criteria such as need, qualification and ability to integrate.

Figure 1 presents the results for Germany and the EU for the three variables related to attitudes towards immigration analysed in 2020. In Germany, 55% of people consider that immigration is good for the country's economy, 49% that it enriches cultural life and 34% that it makes their country a better place to live. These results, as can be seen in the picture, are very close to those in the EU.

### *1.1.2. Economic shifts*

According to the autumn forecast, economic activity in Germany will contract by 0.3% in 2023. Private consumption suffered from the loss of purchasing power (Martínez, 2023). High construction and borrowing costs, combined with labour shortages and high energy prices, depressed investment in the construction and energy-intensive sectors.

Investment growth is expected to remain low relative to pre-pandemic levels (2020-2023). Germany has experienced economic changes, such as globalization, automation and digitalization, which have led to job shifts and changes in traditional industries. This has created challenges related to unemployment, retraining and securing a skilled workforce for emerging sectors. Labor shortages remain a drag on activity. A trade-led recovery is also unlikely, as exports and imports will grow at roughly the same pace over the two-year forecast. A tightening of fiscal policy conditions will have only a modest effect on near-term growth prospects. Moreover, market financing conditions have eased. In addition, real incomes are expected to benefit from a strong labour market and rising real wages, which will support private consumption over the forecast period. Overall, real GDP is projected to increase by 0.3% in 2024 and by 1.2% in 2025 (Gentiloni, 2024). For 2024, this is a downward revision from the 0.8% projected in the autumn forecast, while the forecast for 2025 remains unchanged. HICP inflation decelerated from its peak of 11.6% in October 2022 to 6.0% in 2023 as a whole and 3.1% in January 2024. This reduction is mainly due to lower wholesale energy prices and the introduction of energy support measures, which were discontinued in November 2023. HICP inflation is projected to reach 2.8% in 2024 and 2.4% in 2025. This is broadly in line with the autumn forecast. Inflation in both years is expected to be driven mainly by the services sector and groceries, while energy price growth is expected to contribute only slightly to inflation in the future.

### *1.1.3. Demographic changes*

Germany, like many other European countries, is experiencing demographic changes such as an aging population and declining birth rates. This has implications for pensions, healthcare systems, and the overall economy. Demographic change in Germany is marked by low birth rates and a declining population size. Increased life expectancy, the resulting ageing of the population and the growing proportion of the population

with an immigrant background affect Germany more than other industrial countries. Demographic change impacts almost every area of life and will significantly influence our society and economy in the coming decades. The population of Germany has been shrinking since 2003 and is now 81.7 million residents (Demography Report…, 2012). The reason is that the number of people dying is higher and rising faster than the number of those being born. Since 2003, positive net migration (more people moving to Germany than moving away) has not made up the difference between the death rate and the birth rate. This trend will continue in the coming years. According to models of the Federal Statistical Office, Germany's population will decline to 65-70 million by 2060. That would be as much as 17 million fewer residents, or a decline of 15% to 21% within 50 years. This trend is also accompanied by a decline in the working-age population. While the population is declining, the age structure is also shifting. Over the next two decades, the proportion of older persons in the total population will significantly expand. Today, the population group of children and young people under age 20 is roughly the same size as the group of persons aged 65 and older, and each group makes up about 20% of the total population. In 2030, the group of persons aged 65 and older will account for 29% of the total population; in 2060, every third person (34%) will be at least 65 years old. There are two reasons for population ageing. After reaching a peak in the mid-1960s, known as the "baby boom", average birth rates have steadily declined. Since the mid-1970s, the birth rate in Germany has remained low at an average of 1.4 children per woman. This is well below the rate of 2.1 children needed to replace the parental generation. The low birth rate is due in part to a large proportion of women remaining childless, especially highly educated women; to childbearing at later ages; and to changing notions of the family.

In addition to these demographic aspects, there is a number of intersections with issues related to population aging that arguably affect trend behavior. For instance, average life expectancy in Germany, as in other industrial countries, has steadily risen over the past 150 years by about three months per year. This increased life expectancy initially arose from a decline in child mortality. For more than six decades, however, it has reflected an increase in life expectancy at the oldest ages. This trend will continue. According to the estimates of the Federal Statistical Office model, life expectancy for persons born in 2060 will rise by eight years for males, to 85, and by seven years for females, to 89.2 (Demography Report…, 2012). Rising birth rates or more migration can moderate the impact of changes in the age structure, though they cannot stop them, because ageing is already inherent in the current age structure of the population and is speeding up as the large age cohorts of the baby-boomer generation grow older. As well as population ageing and decline, two more trends are significant for demographics: First, lifestyles and families in Germany have become more diverse. Second, the population has become more ethnically diverse due to a growing number of immigrants and refugees. The proportion of residents with an immigrant background has grown to nearly one-fifth of the total population. This trend will continue.

### *1.1.4. Environmental concerns*

The nuclear catastrophe in Japan together with the recent dramatic flooding of waterways has polluted German politics, forcing it to rethink and restructure the energy production sector, but at the same time propelling the Greens to a remarkable electoral triumph. Awareness and concern for environmental issues, such as climate change, air pollution and sustainable development, has increased in Germany across the board. In the streets, weekly actions by groups such as *Fridays for Future* or *Last generation* took place. Balancing economic growth with environmental protection has been a major challenge. On the one hand, energy companies have warned that the closure of nuclear power plants will mean a complete reversal of policy and will stretch the levers of financing and supply in energy infrastructures. On the other hand, energy

restructuring has been a major criterion in the reinterpretation of Germany's geo-strategic map in its relations with energy-producing countries such as Russia.

### *1.1.5. Political polarisation*

Like many other Western democracies, Germany has experienced increasing political polarisation, with the rise of populist movements and challenges to mainstream political parties (Ellger, Fabio, et al., 2021). This has implications for governance, public discourse and social cohesion. The lack of cohesion between the two national blocs after reunification remains another challenge facing German society (Mau et al., 2023). Never before has this problem been as acute as with the rise of the German far right and pan-imperialist movements (Quent, Virchow, 2024). Apart from the ideological and even colourful content of these movements and taking into account the economic gap between the two blocs, the proliferation of populist moods could be an indicator to be taken into account when linking the variables of deteriorating quality of life, the decline of social benefits and the rise of populism in a climate of social discontent. The Berlin Wall is arguably still present in shaping the economic, political and even socio-cultural landscape of the country and the relationship between its two halves. In 2024, the East-German *Bundesländer* remain the centre of anti-establishment movements: In the run-up to the upcoming elections in September, the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party continues to lead in the polls, as well as being the second strongest party at the national level. Due to internal scandals there was a certain decline (YouGov, 2024). In line with other tactics of camaraderie and apparent partisanship that characterize the populisms of Trump, Milei and others, the far-right party invests heavily in its grassroots presence, capitalizing on the discontent of people who feel forgotten by the mainstream, and address young people via social media, Tiktok in particular (Bösch, 2023). In this sense, the various Civic Education Agencies (such as in this case that of Baden-Württemberg) have already mobilized with pedagogical initiatives that define populism in terms of its opposition to the political class, the so-called elite: In this sense it is argued that at the same time populism idealizes the people and creates enmity towards the elite. Populism tells the story of the people betrayed by the elite. (Frick et al., 2022, P. 1).

With this strong component of populism's discrediting of politicians, the erosion of democratic mechanisms is twofold: On the one hand, the complexity of political processes, which require the presence and effort of political representatives, is clouded; on the other, simplistic solutions are proposed, the realization of which depends for the most part on the establishment of an authoritarian decision-making regime (Turnbull et al., 2024). Secondly, as the representative and political foundations of a democracy have been eliminated, debates turn into direct confrontations, leading to the urgency of controlling the channels of information that allow the formation of diverse opinions and political consciences. Not only the representativeness of democracies is compromised, but also the means of transmission and exchange of information and knowledge: science, media, etc.

In the context of these political conjunctures and in line with the objectives of education for democracy it becomes imperative to interface the evidence of political drifts with an assessment of the educational achievements of these societies. The PISA report points to inequality as one of the most salient factors in educational disparity in Germany, and consequently in the quality of civic and social participation skills acquisition. According to the 2018 report these are the key findings, regarding the areas in which this gap is most prominent (Germany, Country Note - Equity in Education: Breaking Down Barriers to Social Mobility, 2018, p. 2):

> “In Germany, social background is more closely linked to success at school than it is in many other countries. About 16% of the variation in students’ science performance in PISA 2015 was accounted

for by differences in students' socio-economic status (OECD average: 13% among OECD countries with above-average performance the relationship is weakest in Estonia and Norway [8%]). However, between 2006 and 2015, equity in science performance improved in Germany (on average across OECD countries, equity in science performance improved at a lower rate than in Germany during this period). Improvements in equity were also observed in the other two main subjects PISA assesses (in reading between 2000 and 2015, and in mathematics between 2003 and 2015).

The mean science score in PISA 2015 among socio-economically disadvantaged students in Germany was 466 points, while among socio-economically advantaged students it was 569 points. This gap of 103 points is larger than that observed in many other countries (OECD average gap: 88 points; the gap is only 69 points in Estonia) and represents the equivalent of almost three-and-a-half years of schooling.

Some 46% of disadvantaged students in Germany attend disadvantaged schools, i.e. schools where other students tend to be disadvantaged as well (OECD: 48%; in Finland, only 40% of disadvantaged students attend such schools). However, where disadvantaged students attend advantaged schools, they score 122 points higher, or the equivalent of four years of school, than those attending disadvantaged schools (OECD average: 78 points higher; among OECD countries with above-average performance, no performance difference is observed between the two groups of students in Finland, Norway and Poland).

In Germany, 10% of disadvantaged students are "nationally resilient", meaning that they score in the top quarter of science performance in Germany (OECD average: 11%; 14% in Estonia and Finland). Some 32% of disadvantaged students in Germany are "core-skills resilient", meaning that they score at PISA proficiency Level 3 or above in science, reading and mathematics (OECD average: 25%; 42% in Estonia, 41% in Japan, and 40% in Canada and Finland).

Some 36% of disadvantaged students in Germany are "socially and emotionally resilient, meaning that they are satisfied with their life, feel socially integrated at school and do not suffer from test anxiety (OECD average: 26%; 50% in the Netherlands, 43% in Switzerland and 39% in Finland). Disadvantaged students in Germany who are academically resilient are also more likely to be socially and emotionally resilient.

In Germany, 24% of adults (age 26 to 65) attained a higher level of education than their parents (PIAAC average: 41%; 57% in Korea and 55% in Finland). However, only 15% of adults with parents who did not complete upper secondary education completed tertiary education (PIAAC average: 21%), as opposed to 58% of adults with tertiary-educated parents (PIAAC average: 67%).

In Germany, adults with tertiary-educated parents were 8 times more likely to complete tertiary education than adults with low-educated parents (OECD average: 11 times more likely; only 3 times more likely in New Zealand and 4 times more likely in Canada, Estonia, Finland and Sweden)."

Regarding results in Germany, the 2022 PISA study has shown that the proportion of 15-year-olds whose parents were both born abroad are at 26% in Germany in 2022 (compared to 13% in 2012). Pupils with a migrant background generally have a less favorable socio-economic profile than those without a migrant background. Overall, 25 percent of all pupils in Germany are considered to be socio-economically disadvantaged; among pupils with a migrant background, this figure is 42 percent. In mathematics, 15-year-olds without a migrant background have an average performance advantage of 59 points over their peers with a migrant background. If the socio-economic disadvantage is deducted, there is still a performance gap of 32

points. In reading, pupils with a migrant background are 67 points behind. After taking the socio-economic profile into account, they score 40 points lower than pupils without a migration background.

### 1.1.6. Attitudes towards gender equality

Figures 2 and 3 present the German and EU results for the four variables related to gender equality in the family domain and the three for education and work respectively, in 2017.

In the family sphere, German scores are either similar or better than the EU average. In Germany, 32% of people believe that children suffer when the mother works (36% in the EU) and 45% believe that family life is negatively affected when women have a full-time job (44% in the EU); in contrast, 28% believe that what women really want is to take care of the home and children (significatively below the EU average of 42%), and 14% believe that men's job is to earn money while women's job is to devote themselves to the home and family (25% in the EU). With regard to education and work, German results are significatively better to those of the EU: 9% believe that men are better political leaders than women (18% in the EU), 4% believe that university is more important for men than for women (8% in the EU), and 10% that men are better executives (15% in the EU).

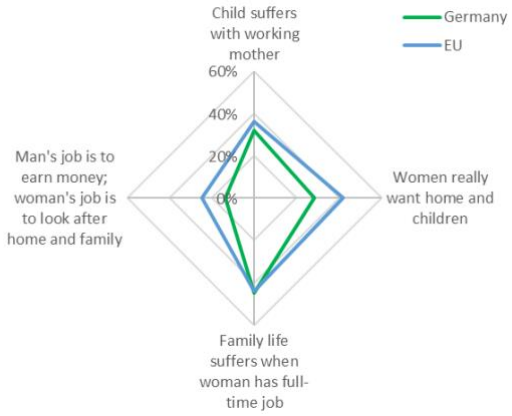


*Figure 2. Attitudes towards gender equality and family, Germany and EU, 2017*

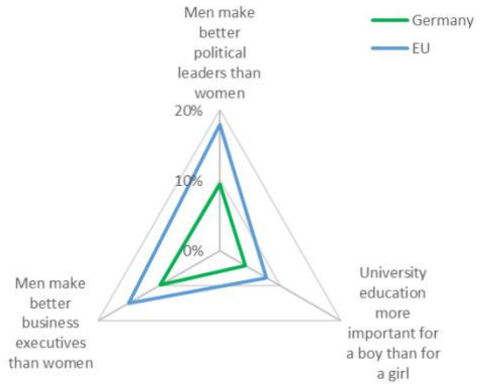


*Figure 3. Attitudes towards gender equality, education and work, Germany and EU, 2017*

*Source: own elaboration based on EVS data.*

*Note: EU includes 21 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Belgium, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg and Malta)*

# 2. Political participation

This section summarises the main results of the analysis of the European Social Survey on citizens' political participation and its relationship with their socio-demographic characteristics (including, among others, educational attainment) and their attitudes towards democracy.

## 2.1. Evolution of political participation 2012-2020

As can be seen, voting (Figure 4) in Germany increases significatively between 2012 and 2020, from 81% to 91%. Regarding formal political participation (Figure 5), Germany shows a slightly decreasing pattern over the period analysed (from 18% to 16%). In relation to informal political participation (Figure 6), there is decreasing trend for Germany (from 52% to 47%). These trends differ from the EU average, as the three modes of political participation remain rather stable in the period analysed.

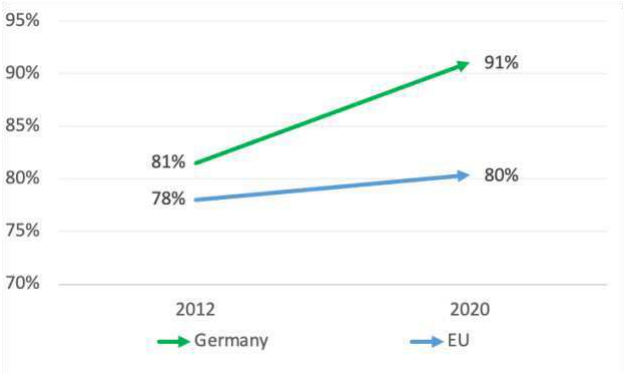


*Figure 4. Evolution of voting, Germany and EU, 2012-2020*

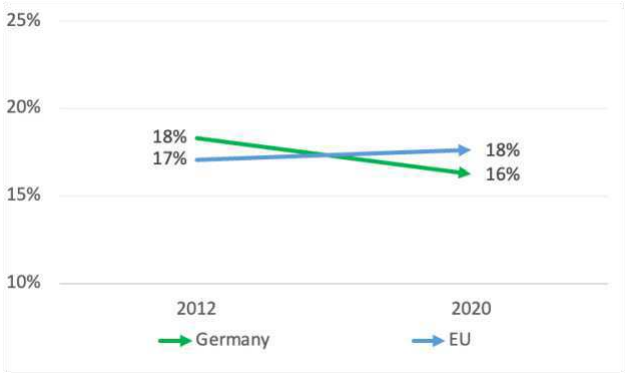


*Figure 5. Evolution of formal political participation, Germany and EU, 2012-2020*

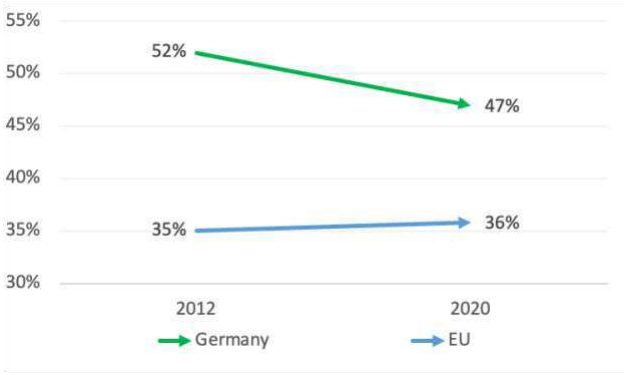


*Figure 6. Evolution of informal political participation, Germany and EU, 2012-2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: Figure 4-6 EU includes 19 EU27 countries (Missing countries: (Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)*

Analysing formal participation in more detail, it can be seen (Figures 7 and 8) that participation moderately decreases in Germany for both items considered: contacting a politician (from 15% in 2012 to 13% in 2020) and displaying a badge (from 6% to 4%).

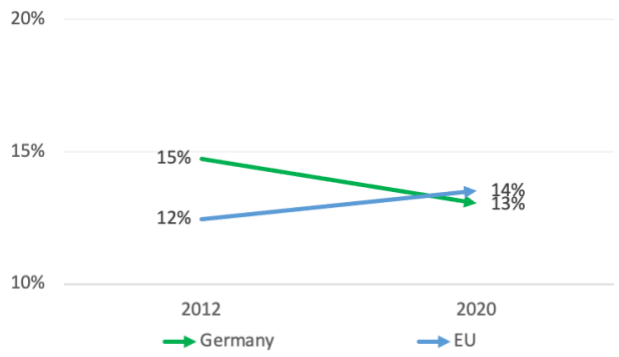


*Figure 7. Evolution of the percentage of people who have contacted a politician or a government official, Germany and EU, 2012-2020*

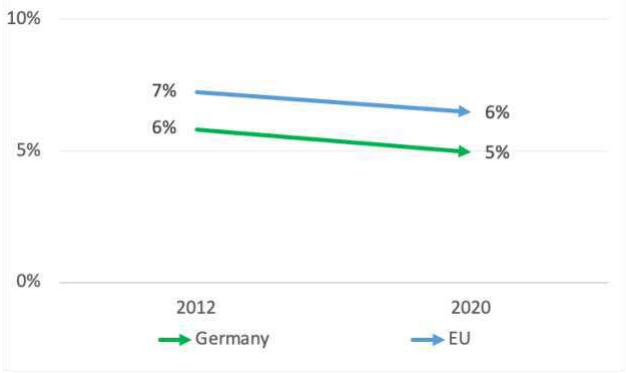


*Figure 8. Evolution of the percentage of people who have worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker, Germany and EU, 2012-2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data.*

*Note: EU includes 19 EU27 countries (Missing countries: (Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)*

With regard to informal participation, Germany has a different trend in the two items considered (Figures 9 and 10). In the first case, signing a petition, Germany decreases 11 percentage points (from 33% to 22%) and is located very close to the EU average in 2020. In the second case, boycotting certain products, it increases 5 percentage points (from 36% to 41%) following a similar pattern than the EU.

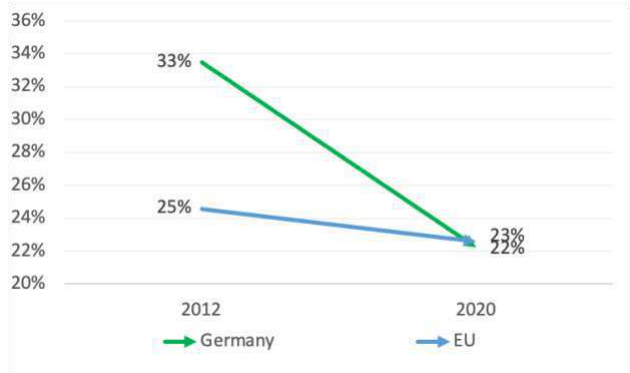


*Figure 9. Evolution of the percentage of people who have signed a petition, Germany and EU, 2012-2020*

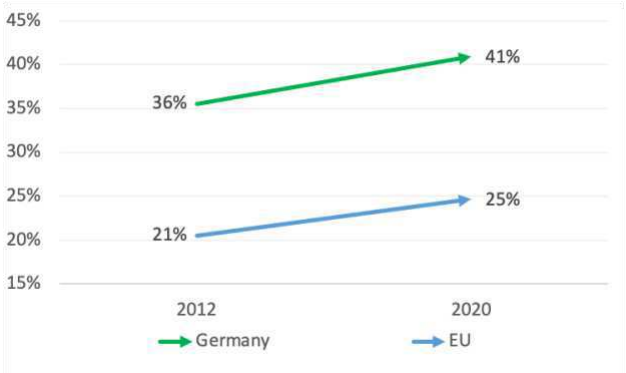


*Figure 10. Evolution of the percentage of people who have boycotted certain products, Germany and EU, 2012-2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data.*

*Note: EU includes 19 EU27 countries (Missing countries: (Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)*

## 2.2. Political participation in 2020

Figures 11, 12 and 13 present respectively voting formal and informal participation in 2020, considering the population aged 25 and over. Germany shows a participation rate significantly higher than the EU average in terms of voting (91%) and informal participation (51%), while results are similar for formal participation (19%), although slightly lower.

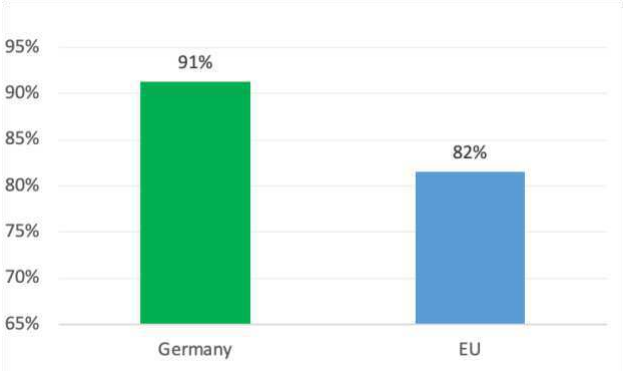


*Figure 11. Voting, Germany and EU, 2020*

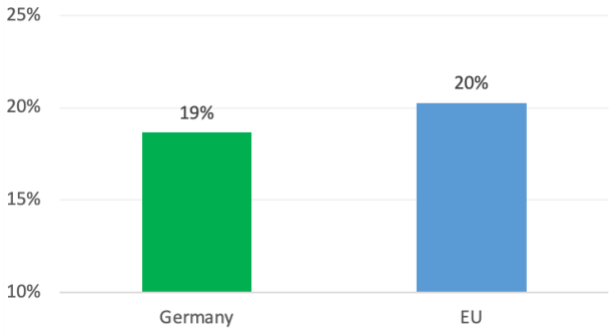


*Figure 12. Formal political participation, Germany and EU, 2020*

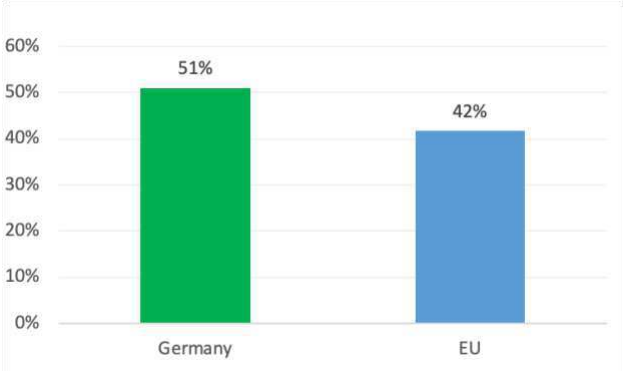


Figure 13. Informal political participation, Germany and EU, 2020

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: Figure 11-13 - EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Analysing formal participation in more detail (Figures 14, 15 and 16), we observe that in Germany participation is slightly below or similar to the EU average in the three aspects considered: contacting a politician (13%), showing a badge (4%) and donating to or participating in a political party (6%).

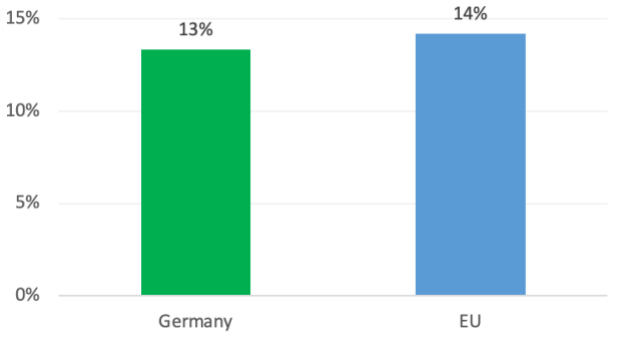


*Figure 14. Percentage of people who have contacted a politician or a government official, Germany and EU, 2020*

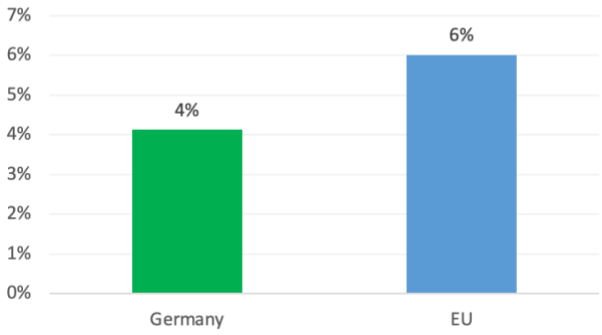


*Figure 15. Percentage of people who have worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker, Germany and EU, 2020*

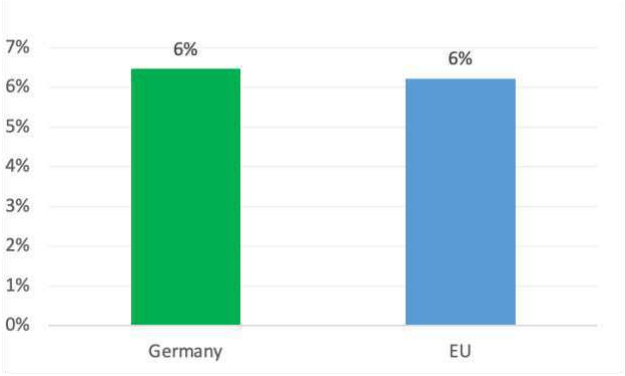


*Figure 16. Percentage of people who have donated to or participated in political party or pressure group, Germany and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: Figure 14-16 EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Regarding informal participation (Figures 17, 18, 19 and 20), Germany has a significantly higher participation than the EU average for boycotting certain products (41%). In the other three items, Germany is similar to the EU average: 22% for signing a petition, 7% for participating in demonstrations and 17% for posting or sharing something about politics online.

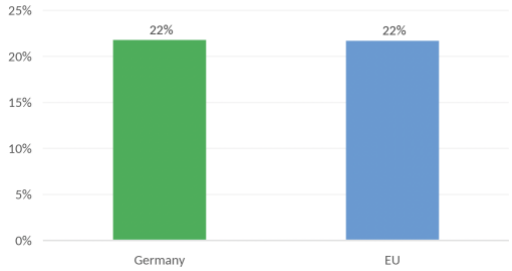


*Figure 17. Percentage of people who have signed a petition Germany and EU, 2020*

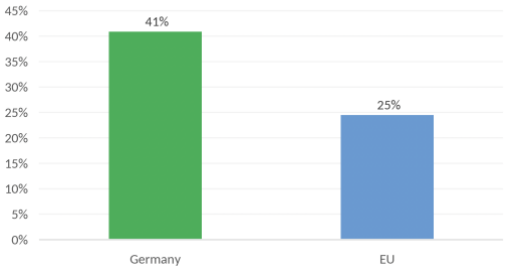


*Figure 18. Percentage of people who have boycotted certain products*

*Germany and EU, 2020*

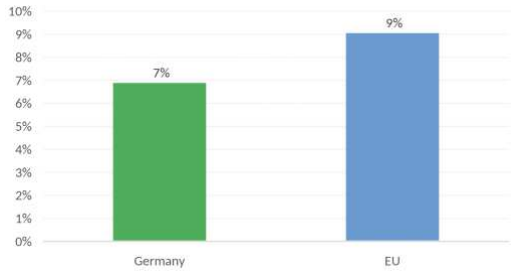


*Figure 19. Percentage of people who have taken part in public demonstration, Germany and EU, 2020*

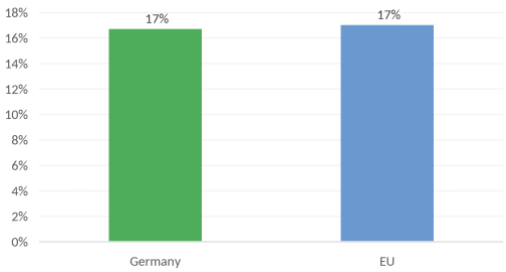


*Figure 20. Percentage of people who have posted or shared anything on politics online, Germany and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: Figure 17-20 - EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

## 2.3. Political participation in 2020 by socio-demographic characteristics

### 2.3.1. Voting participation

As for the socio-demographic variables (Figures 21 and 22), it can be observed that declared voting in Germany follows the same pattern as the EU average, with some aspects to highlight with regard to educational attainment and age.

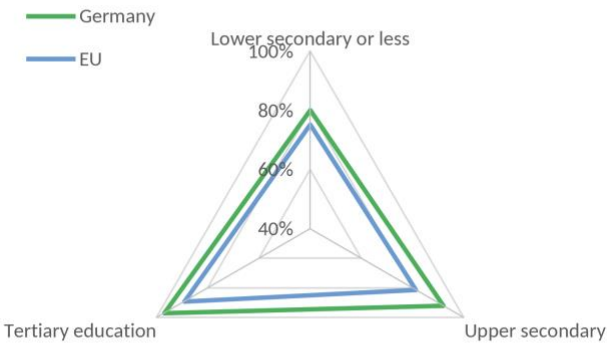


*Figure 21. Voting by level of education attained, Germany and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Voting increases with educational attainment, although in Germany, people with lower levels of education have a comparably high participation (80% for those with secondary education or less and 92% for those with upper secondary education. In the EU the differences are less marked (75% vs. 81%).

Participation in elections increases with age, but only very slightly. In Germany, the level of voting participation of the youngest (88%) is only 5 percentage points lower than that of those aged 65 and over (93%), while this difference is less pronounced in the EU.

Concerning the rest of variables, the pattern is very similar to the EU average: while participation is slightly lower in the case of women, differences are more pronounced for other characteristics: people with migrant background, people feeling to belong to a discriminated group and people with lower income level report lower rates of voting.

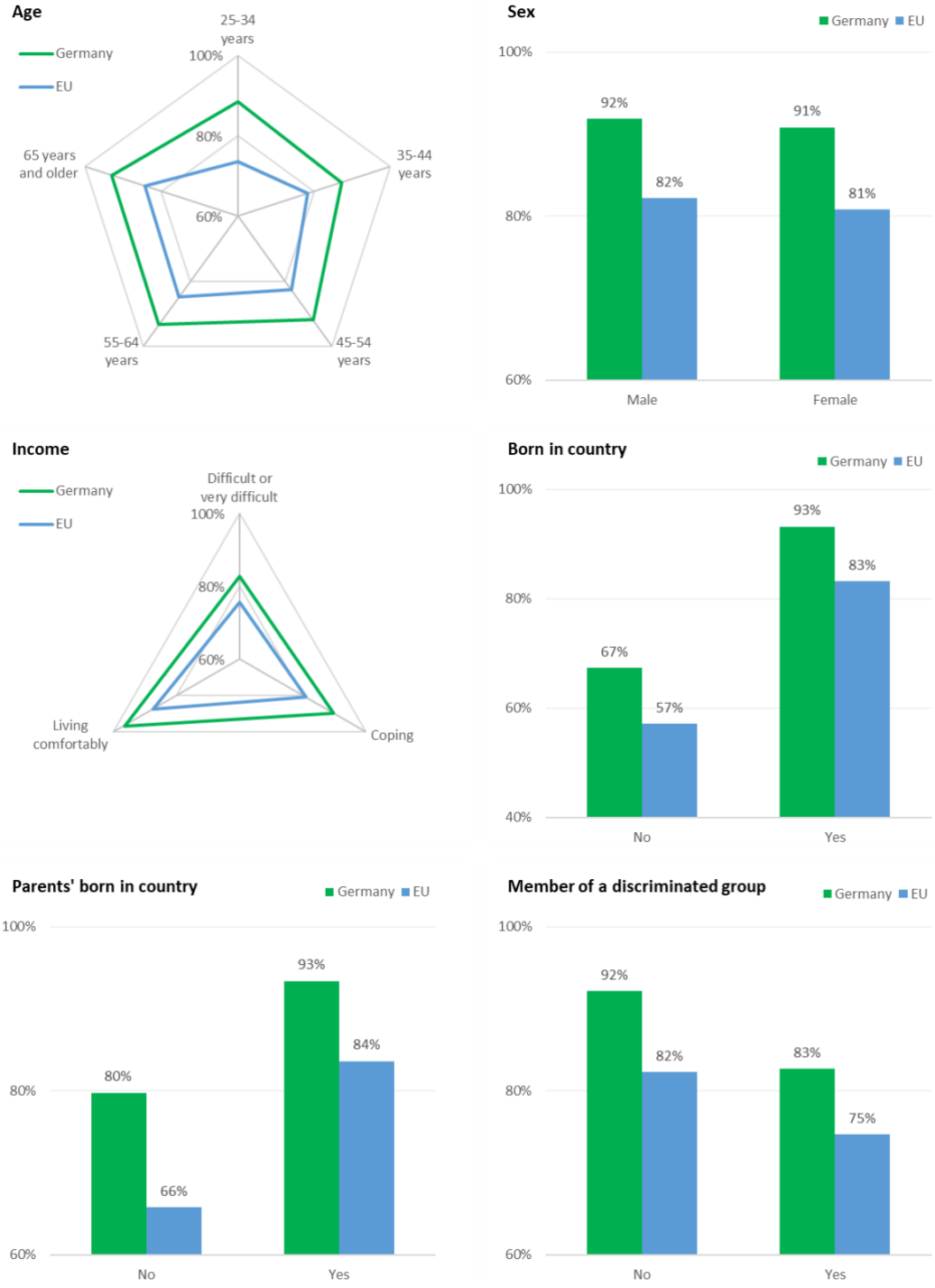


*Figure 22. Voting by sociodemographic characteristics, Germany and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

### 2.3.2. Formal political participation

With regard to the socio-demographic variables (Figures 23 and 24), it can be seen that formal political participation in Germany follows a similar pattern to the EU average for most variables, with some aspects to be highlighted.

In Germany formal participation increases with educational attainment, and these differences are somewhat more pronounced than in the EU, with very low formal participation of those with lower secondary education or less (9%) compared to the rest (17% with medium education and 30% with higher education).

As regards sex, men's participation is higher (22%) than women's (16%) in Germany, while in the EU this difference is less marked (22% vs. 19%). In terms of age, in Germany participation among 45-64 year olds (18%-20%) is similar to that of younger people (20%), while in the EU it is higher.

Other variables follow a similar pattern in Germany and in the EU. Formal participation is higher for those living comfortably and people who feel to belong to a discriminated group, while it is lower for people with migrant background.

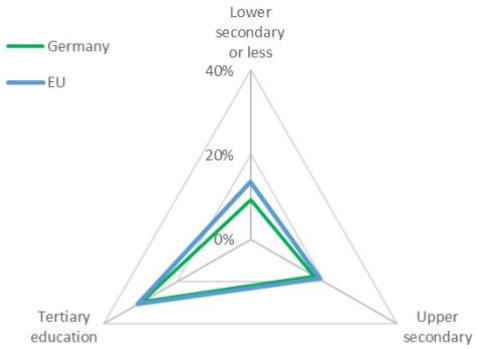


*Figure 23. Formal participation by level of education attained, Germany and EU, 2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*
*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

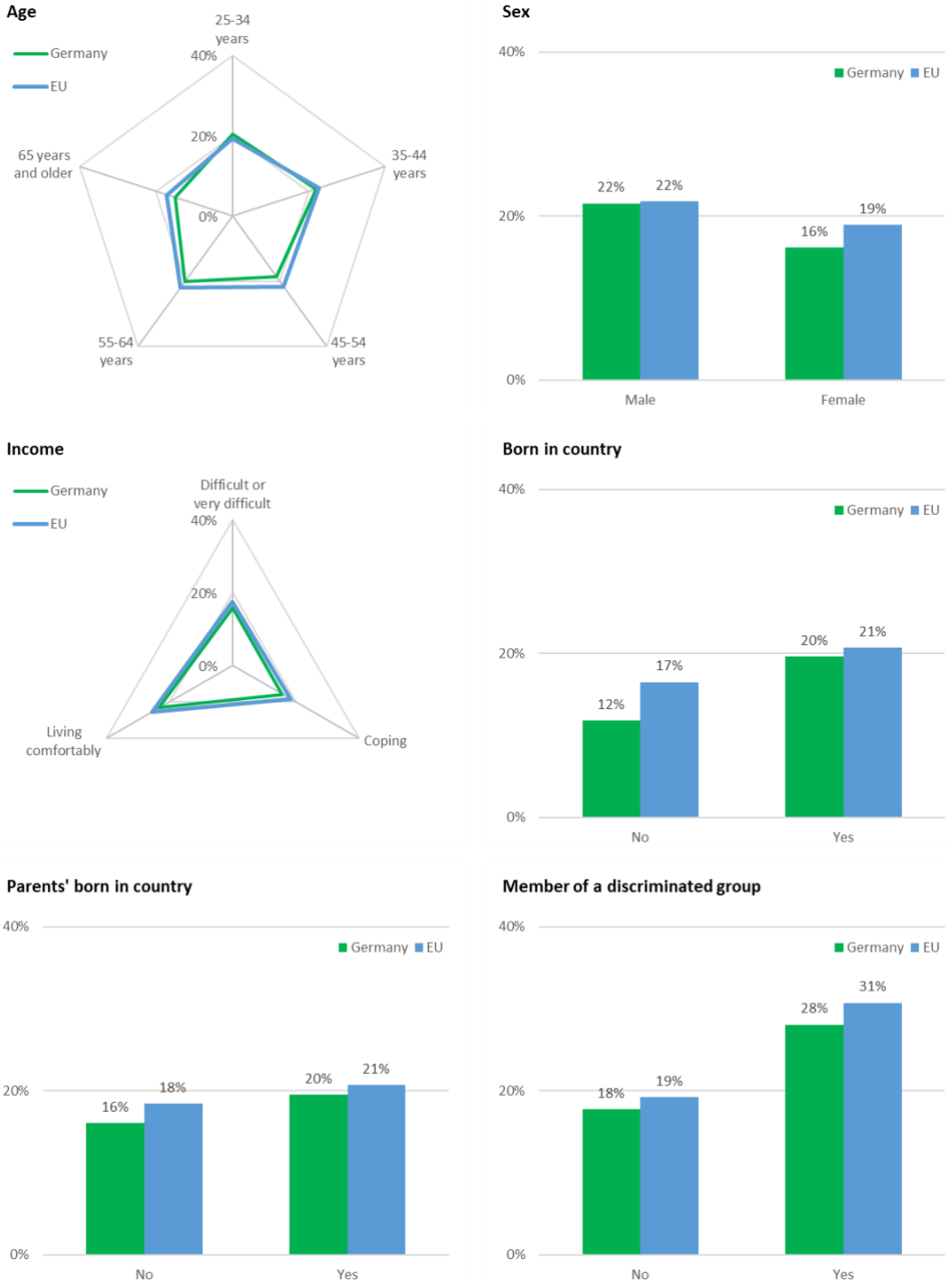


*Figure 24. Formal participation by sociodemographic characteristics, Germany and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

### 2.3.3. *Informal political participation*

Informal political participation covers activities such as rallies, petitions, consumer boycotts, or flash mobs. Again, this kind of political participation increases in line with the level of formal education. While informal political participation of people with lower secondary (or even less) education in Germany is similar to that of the EU average (24%), it is significantly higher for people with upper secondary and tertiary education (see Figure 25).

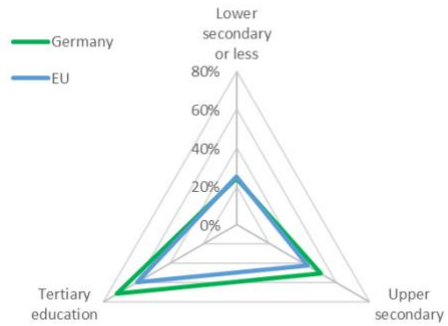


*Figure 25. Informal participation by level of education attained, Germany and EU, 2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*
*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Regarding sociographic dimensions (Figure 26), informal political participation in Germany follows the same pattern than the EU in most variables: Participation in Germany is similar for men and women (around 51-52%) and decreases with age (from 60% to 37%). Concerning income level, participation is much higher among those who live comfortably (60%) than the rest (46-46%). Finally, participation is lower among those born outside the country (39% vs. 53%), and is much higher among those who report belonging to a discriminated group (64% vs. 50%). The pattern differs only with regard the participation of people with at least one parent born outside the country: In Germany, it is significantly lower than the rest (46% vs. 53%), while in the EU there is no difference.

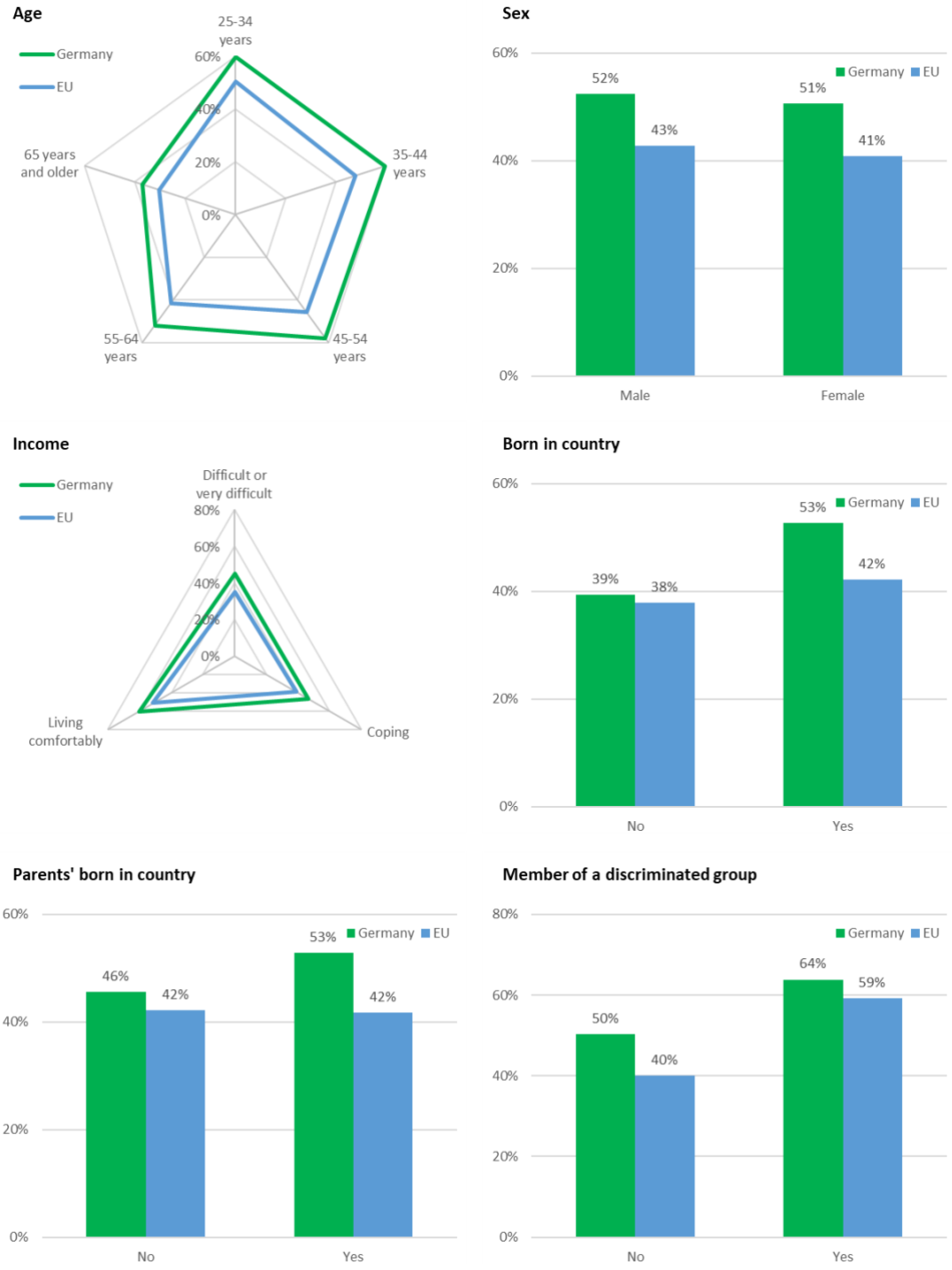


*Figure 26. Informal participation by sociodemographic characteristics, Germany and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

## 2.4. Political participation in 2020 by democratic ideals and political attitudes

### 2.4.1. Voting

As for the political variables (Figure 27), the German and EU patterns are very similar for all variables. The "low ideals" group has the lowest declared turnout (82%) and the "political rights" group the highest (96%). People in the centre of the political spectrum have the lowest levels of participation (89%) and people in the left and in the right have very similar levels of participation (92%-94%). Participation increases as respondents' satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in their country increases, with a sharp difference between those satisfied (95%) and the rest (86%-88%). Finally, participation increases according to the importance attributed to living in a democratically governed country, with two differentiated groups: 91%-94% for those who consider it extremely or very important, and 73%-75% for the rest.

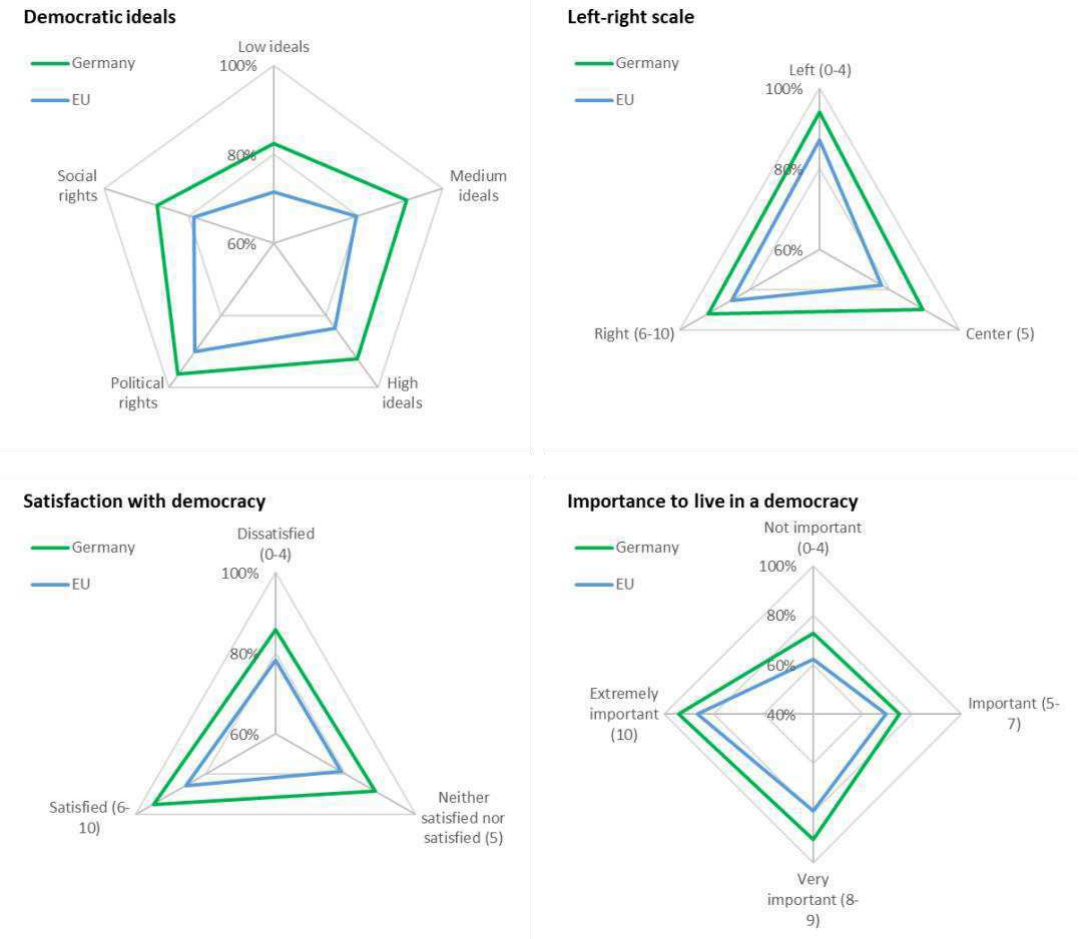


*Figure 27. Voting by democratic ideals and political attitudes, Germany and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

### 2.4.2. Formal political participation

As for the political variables (Figure 28), the German and EU patterns are similar for the left-right political position (participation of those on the left is significantly higher than the rest), for satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in the country (higher and similar participation for those who consider themselves either satisfied or dissatisfieed) and for the importance of living in a democratically governed country (the higher the importance, the higher the participation). As for the democratic ideals variable, German patterns are also similar to those in the EU, with the “political rights” group having the highest participation (25%) and the “low ideals” group the lowest (9%). However, this 9% is comparatively very low (13% in the EU) and the same applies to the “social rights” group with (13% in Germany compared to 18% in the EU).

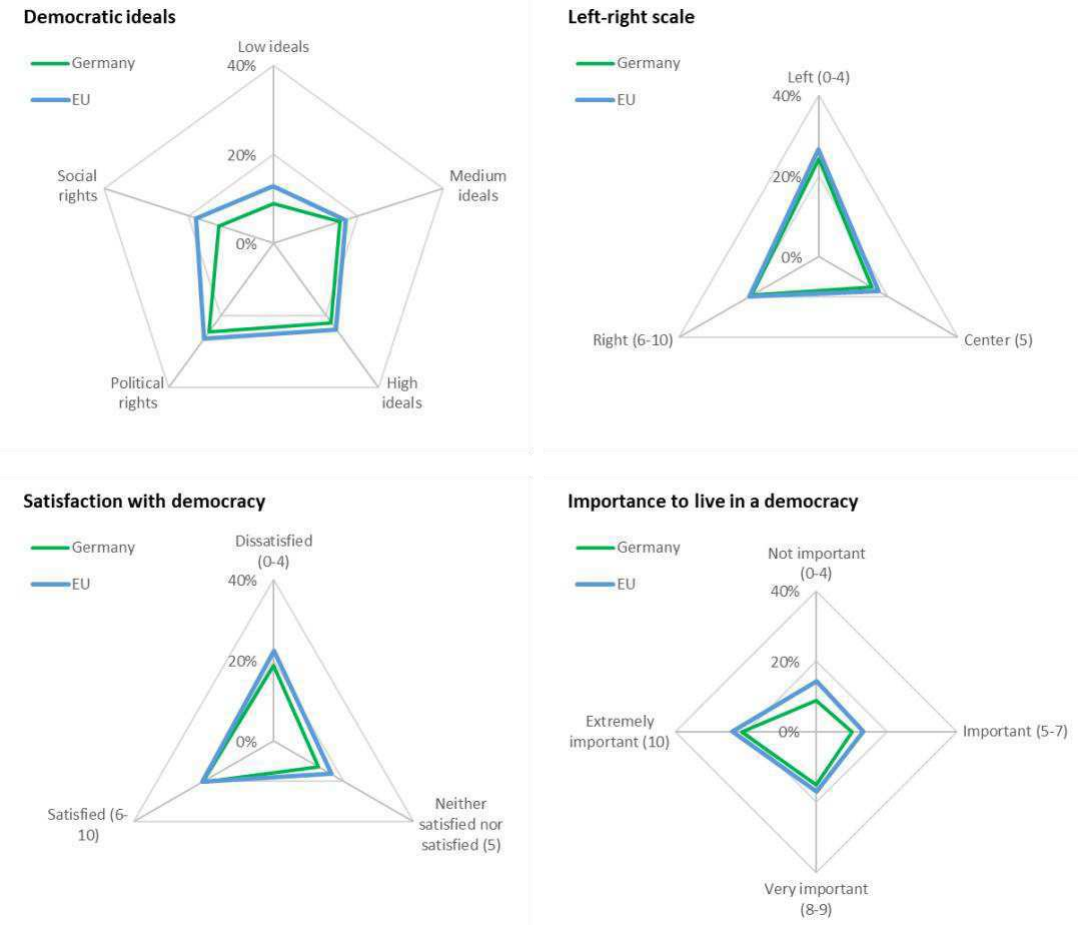


*Figure 28. Formal political participation by democratic ideals and political attitudes, Germany and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

### 2.4.3. Informal political participation

As for the political variables (Figure 29), the patterns in Germany and the EU are very similar. In Germany the "political rights" group has the highest participation rate (64%) and the "low ideals" group the lowest (31%). Informal participation increases in line with the importance attributed to living in a democratic country, with a significantly higher participation of those who consider it very important (47%) and extremely important (55%). As regards satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in the country, the highest participation is

observed among those who are dissatisfied (55%), followed (without significant difference) by those who are satisfied (53%). On the left-right axis, participation is higher among those on the left of the political spectrum (64%).

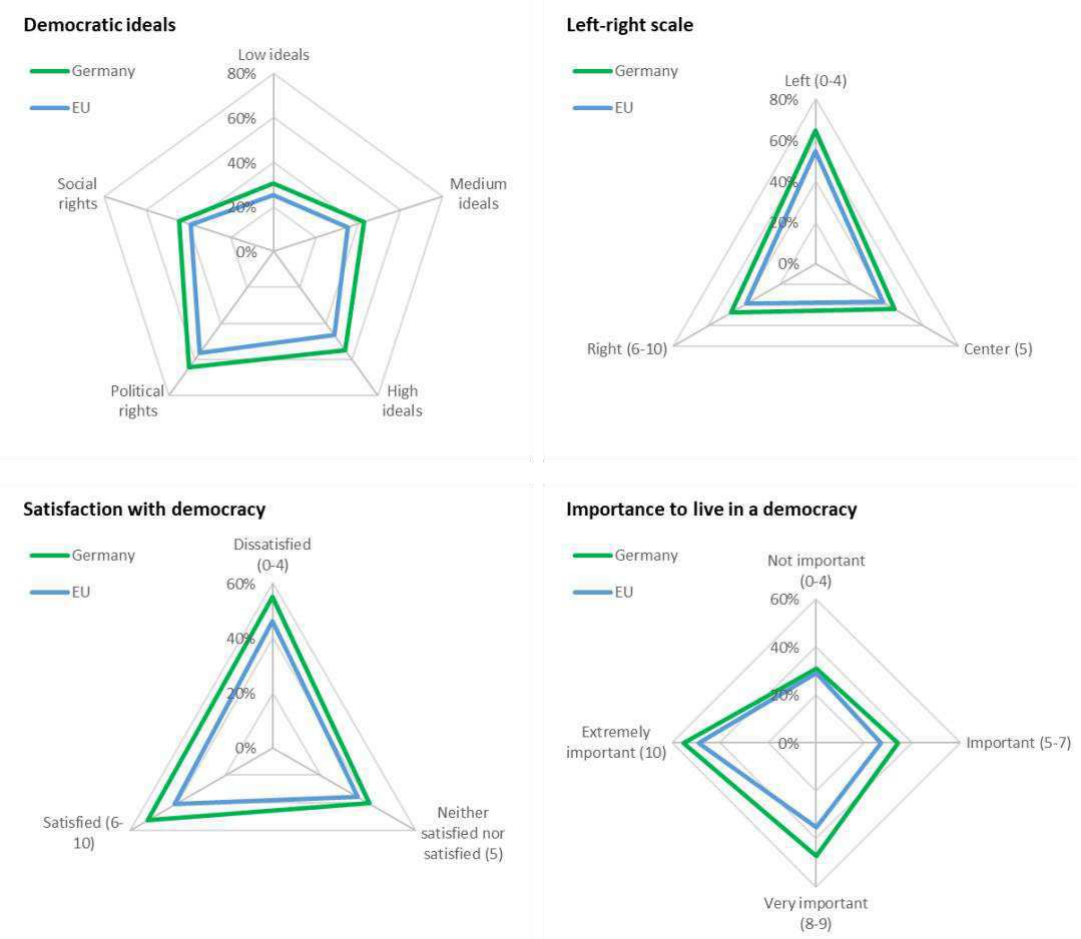


*Figure 29. Informal political participation by democratic ideals and political attitudes, Germany and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

## 2.5. Political participation in 2020: results from regression models

In order to better analyse political participation, a logistic regression has been carried out (Table 1). The regression model estimates the probability of participation (for each type of participation) as a function of all explanatory variables (socio-demographic and political variables).

We observe that the results of the three models differ greatly. Only two variables have the same significant effect on voting, formal and informal participation. In this sense, we find that the level of education has a large positive effect on the probability of participation: the higher the level of education, the higher the participation. The same applies to the importance attached to living in a democratically governed country: the higher the importance, the higher the participation.

When it comes to voting, we observe that several other variables have a significant effect. With regard socio-demographic characteristics, age increases the probability of participation, and participation is higher for people born in the country, people who live comfortably and people who belong to a discriminated group. In

terms of political variables, people in the "Political rights" group is more likely to participate and participation increases with satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in the country.

As far as formal participation is concerned, some sociodemographic characteristics have a significant effect. Women are less likely to participate than men. Participation decreases with age: the younger people are, the more likely they are to participate. Participation is higher for people born in the country, and people who belong to a discriminated group are much more likely to participate than those who do not. Concerning political variables, people in the "Low ideals" group are less likely to participate and people in the "Political rights" group are more likely to participate. Finally, the further to the left of the political spectrum people are, the more likely they are to participate.

If we look at informal participation, some socio-demographic variables follow a similar pattern to that of formal participation: it decreases with age and people who belong to a discriminated group are much more likely to participate than those who do not. In addition, people living comfortable and people with no migrant background are more likely to participate. Concerning political variables, people in the "Low ideals" group are less likely to participate and people in the "Political rights" and "High ideals" groups are more likely to participate. Conversely to voting, informal participation increases with dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy in their country: the more dissatisfied people are, the more they are likely to participate.

| Germany | Voting | | | Formal participation | | | Informal participation | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *B* | *Sign.* | *S.E.* | *B* | *Sign.* | *S.E.* | *B* | *Sign.* | *S.E.* |
| **Constant** | -2,554 | *** | (0,421) | -2,940 | *** | (0,377) | -0,428 | | (0,272) |
| Democratic ideals (ref: medium ideals) | | | | | | | | | |
| Low ideals | -0,137 | | (0,197) | -0,415 | * | (0,171) | -0,482 | *** | (0,121) |
| High ideals | 0,003 | | (0,192) | 0,236 | | (0,125) | 0,367 | *** | (0,101) |
| Political rights | 0,609 | ** | (0,197) | 0,266 | * | (0,116) | 0,632 | *** | (0,094) |
| Social rights | -0,099 | | (0,194) | -0,264 | | (0,150) | 0,078 | | (0,111) |
| Age | 0,011 | ** | (0,004) | -0,005 | * | (0,002) | -0,019 | *** | (0,002) |
| Sex (ref: male) | -0,066 | | (0,115) | -0,278 | *** | (0,070) | 0,103 | | (0,059) |
| Education (ref: lower secondary or less) | | | | | | | | | |
| Upper secondary | 0,717 | *** | (0,143) | 0,426 | ** | (0,146) | 0,709 | *** | (0,101) |
| Tertiary education | 1,573 | *** | (0,238) | 0,866 | *** | (0,158) | 1,281 | *** | (0,119) |
| Income feeling (ref: difficult or very difficult) | | | | | | | | | |
| Coping | 0,189 | | (0,159) | -0,057 | | (0,135) | 0,045 | | (0,106) |
| Living comfortably | 0,832 | *** | (0,199) | 0,168 | | (0,140) | 0,362 | ** | (0,114) |
| Born in country (ref: no) | 1,532 | *** | (0,210) | 0,632 | *** | (0,167) | 0,389 | ** | (0,132) |
| Parent's born in country (ref: no) | 0,338 | | (0,186) | 0,053 | | (0,121) | 0,251 | * | (0,105) |
| Member of a discriminated group (ref: no) | -0,216 | | (0,172) | 0,687 | *** | (0,116) | 0,713 | *** | (0,115) |
| Left-right | -0,014 | | (0,028) | -0,074 | *** | (0,017) | -0,126 | *** | (0,015) |
| Satisfaction with democracy | 0,100 | *** | (0,024) | -0,029 | | (0,015) | -0,101 | *** | (0,013) |
| Importance to live in a democracy | 0,143 | *** | (0,028) | 0,117 | *** | (0,031) | 0,104 | *** | (0,021) |
| **Observations** | 5.672 | | | 5.966 | | | 5.964 | | |

*Table 1. Participation models, Germany, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: Signification levels: *** 0,1%; ** 1%; * 5%; population 25 years old and over*

# 3. Discussion

The following section adds further information to the data and analysis based on the ESS and presented above. We start with some statistical information on political participation, its scope, its dynamics and its participants. Following subsections focus on attitudes on democracy in German context with particular interest in a comparison between East Germany and West Germany – a perspective not covered by ESS. Finally, we will narrow down the issue of participation to youth and school and discuss some conclusions relevant for the issue of education for democracy.

Political participation in Germany has changed over time. Voting is a bit more popular in West Germany than in East Germany. Conventional political participation has increased slowly since the late 1990s coinciding with the German reunification. Also, non-conventional political participation has significantly got more importance. This is true for collecting signatures, political consumerism, and taking part in a rally. Taking part in a rally not allowed by state officies remains on a low level.

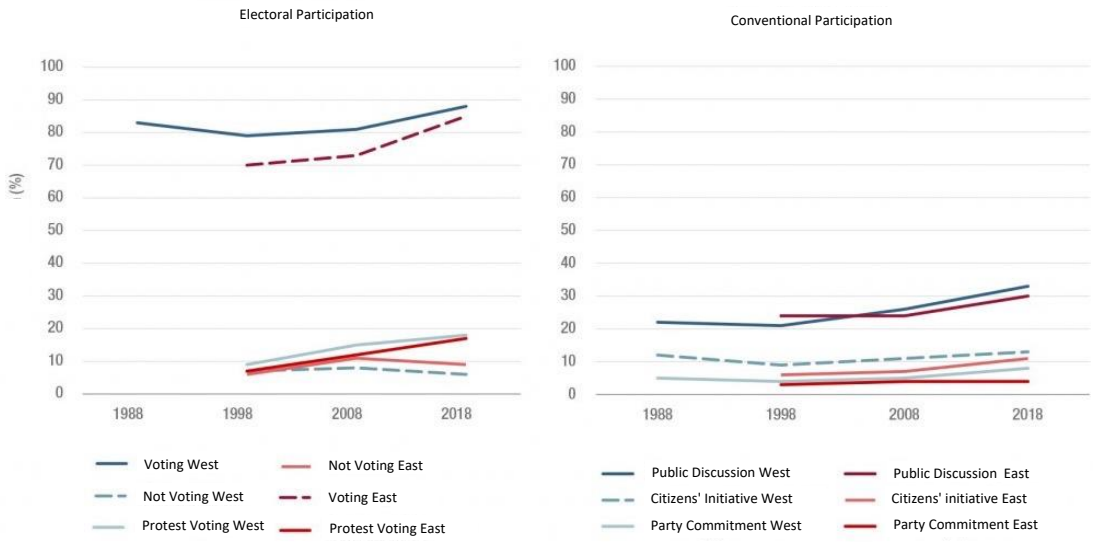


*Figure 30. Electoral and conventional participation in East and West Germany 1988 – 2018 based on ALLBUS 1988 – 2018, Source. Gabriel, O. (2020)*

In the late 2010s, around half of the population in Germany participated in significant forms of influencing political decision-making processes. A total of 49.2% of the population state at least one of the following five forms of political participation: participation in a political organization, participation in a demonstration, contact with politicians, participation in signature campaigns and boycotting products. There are clear differences in participation between the forms of political participation. For example, 6.8% of respondents stated that they had been involved in a political organization in the twelve months prior to the survey; 10.1% had taken part in demonstrations; 15.0% had made contact with people in politics; 23.5% had boycotted certain products; and 33.0% had taken part in petition campaigns. Women and men differ in the forms of participation, although there is no clear pattern of gender differences. Women and men do not differ in terms of participation in political participation overall (women: 49.8%, men: 48.4%). However, women's participation in political organizations and contact with politicians is lower than that of men. Women are proportionately more represented than men in signature campaigns and product boycotts. There are clear differences in education for all types of political participation. People with a high level of education participate in at least

one form of political participation with 64.9%, people with a medium level of education with 45.8 % and people with a low level of education with 32.0%. This pattern of educational differences can be seen in all forms of political participation. Volunteering and political participation are closely linked young people (aged 14-29 years) are significantly more often participating in demonstrations, slightly more petitioning, but significantly lower in boycotting and contacting politicians (Arriagada, Tesch-Römer, 2022).

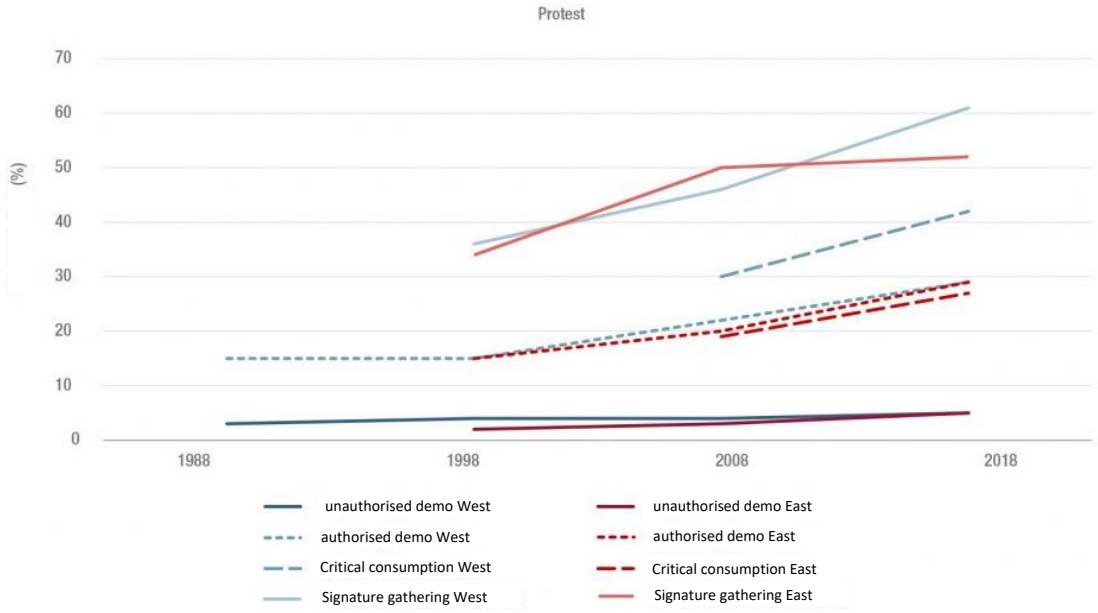


*Figure 31. Political participation in West and East Germany, 1988-2018 (ALLBUS Data)*
*Source: Gabriel, O. (2020)*

Trust in democracy is decreasing in Germany. A recent study (Best et al., 2023), conducted in light of the Covid19-crises, the war in the Ukraine, and challenges posed by the climate crisis, shows that more than 80% of the interviewees expect a decline of the situation of future generations in Germany (p. 16); just under fifty percent are overall satisfied with how democracy works in Germany (p. 18) – yet, the number of those who see a worsening of the situation has increased over the last years. Satisfaction with democracy is clearly income/class-based: while only some thirty percent of lower classes/workers are satisfied, it is nearly two thirds of upper classes (p. 18). This result corresponds with the level of formal education.

It is relevant to see that a large majority of three quarters agrees that politics is so complex today that it is difficult to understand (p. 20). The number of people who see decreasing options of political participation next to voting has risen over the last years. This is partly explained by the increasing complexity of political issues as well as the growing distance between the reality of voters and the political management of the institutions that are supposed to represent them (Schulte-Cloos, 2022). Trust in core political institutions varies significantly according to type and party affiliation. The Federal Constitutional Court is most trusted (between 72% and 93%), except by voters with an AfD preference (25%) (p. 29). Media are trusted between 12% (AfD) and 66% (Greens).

The idea of education for democracy is closely linked to encourage pupils/students to actively participate in issues relevant to their lives. This makes sense not least in the environments in which pupils spend a longer period of time, i.e. school (Eike, 2006). A relevant condition, however, is to experience real impact of own's participation. With a strong focus on the contribution of political education to school education, Weißeno

(2023) claims the former relevance for developing active citizenship. The contribution is seen particularly in preparing students for a civic role that demands participation from everyone in a democracy. Gloe (2020, p. 138f.) emphasizes the educational importance of developing political attitudes and values and processing information before taking political action or consciously not taking action. Overall, there is an expectation that political education helps to reduce support for illiberal, autocratic and authoritarian behaviour in all areas and to increase resilience against respective invocations (Kiess, 2021).

A relevant issue in this context is the question if participation (having experienced some of participation, willingness to participate, and beliefs) has any impact on the level of knowledge absorption and the capacity for judgement. The model of policy competence (Detjen et al., 2012) which covers four dimensions of competence (expert knowledge; political judgment; political ability to act; attitudes and motivation) might be a reference here. It should also be kept in mind that there is a particular dynamic in teaching political issues as school (up to a certain age) is compulsory. Also, there is a certain percentage of pupils who are disillusioned with politics. Empirically, several studies with some 3,500 students of different age have shown that the increase in knowledge does not lead to a greater willingness to participate. It seems that having participated politically already is more relevant for participation in the future. The cultural capital of the parental home has little positive effect on the participation variables. Pupils with a migration background tend to express less willingness to participate. (for details see Weißeno, 2023).

One of the main challenges for education for democracy seems to be supporting pupils/students to participate actively. The willingness of adolescents to take action is not only based on the subjective importance of a particular topic, but also on the conviction that their own actions can also influence the world: their own self-efficacy beliefs. Political self-efficacy describes the conviction that one can interact with one's own actions in the political world and bring about change.[1] Only if people believe they can make a difference will they try to get involved in political processes. Compared to adolescents in other countries, German pupils are more likely to be confident enough to take part in discussions than to participate in political decision-making processes in offices or groups. Probably, this relates positively to the community pupils/students feel connected to. Ziemes and Deimel (2024, p. 81) show that 14-year-olds mostly identify with their group of friends, followed by the school class, the German nation-state, the neighbourhood, and to a lesser extent the school. The authors conclude: “The strengthening of action-related political self-efficacy can nevertheless be approached at various levels: At the student level, teachers can strengthen life-world references and discuss with students how they can transfer their values into political action. At school level, institutional opportunities for participation can be further strengthened. Both approaches, the individual and the structural approach, can also be used to enable young people who have experienced marginalization to develop ways to pay attention to their own legitimate political concerns and then find strategies to articulate and incorporate these concerns against the background of disadvantageous structures. In addition to experiencing the effectiveness of their own actions, this engagement with and pursuit of interests also creates points of contact for a sense of belonging to school communities.” (2024, p.88). It is important, however, to have in mind that political participation in society in the sense of a direct transfer is not necessarily a consequence of school participation. Rather, it is discussed as necessary to reflect on the experiences that pupils gain in the participatory environment of school in a pedagogically guided manner (Sander, 2021). Reflecting on participation experiences at school in comparison to political socialization outside of school seems particularly relevant, as political socialization processes in the school context can be shaped more consciously and directly than, for

[1] For the operationalization see Ziemes & Deimel 2024: 86.

example, experiences in the wider, socio-spatial environment (Deimel, Abs, 2022). Hurrelmann and Albrecht (2020, p. 145ff) suggest that student companies are activating concepts for school. Supported by their teachers, pupils set up a real company, run as an interdisciplinary project. The not only learn the basics of economic activity, but also aspects of sustainability, globalization and linguistics/language (web-design).

# 4. Recommendations

The landscape of political intent in Germany has undergone significant alterations in the course of the last few years. For a country accustomed to winning elections by the centre, Germany is witnessing a turbulent time of strong polarisation and indeterminacy with regard to choices and modes of participation. For example, circumstances that were once unthinkable, such as the return of the extreme right, are now a fact of life for some of its federal states. At the same time, a coalition in government with a strong Green presence seems to have replaced the options traditionally considered to be recurrent in elections. All this might point to a voter profile that is immediately and viscerally concerned with urgent day-to-day issues, concerned with not losing more social mobility (claims more in line with the promises of extreme platforms) than with gaining it, and thus far removed from a more complex understanding of social dynamics and democracy. In the analytical data presented above, there is an intertwining of origin and educational level with political preference, which, against the background of the progressive loss of intellectual skills in the population (according to the PISA report), could explain the increasing vulnerability and exposure of citizens to extremist views.

Working to raise the profile of democratic knowledge and participation is an important attempt to redress these imbalances. It is important to create a classroom culture that encourages participation, debate and decision-making that empowers students to play an active role in their communities and in the wider political landscape. But not least, and if the statistics are anything to go by, the curriculum of this education must be re-signified and adapted to the complexities of a society with increasingly salient and disparate cultural, religious and economic background discrepancies.

The German education system is broad and complex; improving it requires a comprehensive approach that addresses various aspects, from curriculum and pedagogy to equity and resources. Recommendations take into account the empirical findings that social/economic inequality has a negative impact on educational success; therefore, in order to reduce achievement gaps, disparities between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds must be addressed, ensuring that all students have equal opportunities to succeed. likewise, an environment that supports students with special needs and disabilities must be fostered by providing adequate resources and specialized professionals. It might therefore be helpful, to implement a national/regional funding model that allocates additional resources to schools in lower-income or underserved areas. This could include targeted grants, better teacher pay to attract quality educators, and funding for specialized support programs. Ensuring a base level of resources across schools helps provide equal opportunities for all students.

In view of the analysis presented here as well as the demographic trends and political intentions we suggest the following recommendations for implementing and optimizing the German education system in accordance with the goals of the democrat project. Adapting Germany's education system to support democracy is crucial, especially in light of recent societal and global shifts that test democratic values and civic engagement. Here is how Germany's education system could be strengthened to foster democratic principles and prepare students to actively participating in democratic society:

School infrastructures suffer from chronic underfunding in Germany. This is particularly the case in many areas with low-income level where this problem is not balanced by additional investment by well-off parents. It is recommended to increase investment in school infrastructures, ensuring that schools are equipped with modern facilities and technology to support a dynamic learning environment; also by providing schools with adequate learning materials, equipment and digital tools. Another area whose implementation can have a decisive impact on citizenship is that of cooperation between different educational and professional platforms.

This requires fostering collaboration between schools, businesses and higher education institutions to provide students with real-world experiences and mentoring opportunities. By addressing these key areas, the German education system can work towards greater equity, relevance and innovation, which will ultimately lead to better outcomes for students and society as a whole.

An important issue would be to create an infrastructure that fosters participation, inclusivity, and real-world democratic engagement. Examples for such infrastructures could be the following: a) student council rooms that can provide a central place for students to organize, discuss, and plan activities related to civic engagement, democratic participation, and school governance, but also to address conflicts, reflect on incidents, and collaboratively find solutions; b) multi-purpose spaces where students, teachers, parents, and community members can meet for town-hall-style meetings, debates, and public discussions. These rooms should be equipped with seating, projectors, and sound systems to facilitate open dialogues; c) labs equipped with computers, internet access, video production tools, and software for analyzing media content and creating digital media. These spaces enable students to learn about media bias, create content (like student newspapers or videos), and practice responsible digital citizenship; d) school voting and decision-making systems such as suggestion boxes and digital feedback platforms and digital voting systems based on secure, user-friendly voting systems (apps or tablets) that allow students to vote on school issues, elections, or initiatives; plus on-campus and outdoor learning spaces, such as community gardens and environmental projects, but also graffiti walls.

Implementing these infrastructures in schools can provide a practical foundation for democratic learning by offering spaces for discussion, collaboration, and real-world engagement. By building the physical and digital spaces that foster democratic principles, schools can help students develop competencies in critical thinking, empathy, civic responsibility, and participation. These investments in infrastructure ultimately support a more engaged, informed, and responsible future citizenry.

While the German educational system includes civic education/education for democracy, the intensity and focus can vary across regions, sometimes limiting students' engagement with democratic ideas and practices. This is all the more important as empirical research states that the low levels of education go along with a lower participation in democracy. It would therefore be helpful, to make education for democracy as an important part of civic education a core, mandatory part of the curriculum from an early age and integrate it through all school levels. Continuous education about democracy whereby this is to be combined with practical experience in democratic processes ensures students develop an understanding of its importance and their role within it.

The curriculum must be updated in accordance with the changing times and in line with the tensions that the country is going through. It should reflect the contemporary knowledge, technology and skills required by the 21st century labour market. Projects should insist on strengthening Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics education, focusing on digital literacy and coding skills. Also, in the understanding and management of advances in digital communication, network economies and artificial intelligence.

In order to being able to implement and creatively work with the curriculum, teachers should have more flexibility and resources (time, money) to educate themselves in teaching education for democracy. This needs workshops in which the most pressing challenges and dangers to democracy are identified, and projects and formats presented to develop and implement projects but also foster debates about structural changes in the school system to increase the amount of options for education for democracy. The teaching staff also lacks continuous accompaniment and professionalization. Teachers should be supported with ongoing training to

keep them updated on best practices and new teaching methods. Such workshops and trainings should cover issues such as how to handle highly-conflictual issues in class and break down very complex issues into workable portions without trivializing the particular issue. On the school level, it might be helpful to create mentorship programs where experienced teachers in education for democracy mentor others in integrating these practices into teaching. This supportive accompaniment should also promote a collaborative teaching environment between senior professionals and new teachers.

In the age of information, students are exposed to a vast array of digital media, which can sometimes be misleading or polarizing. Developing the ability to critically evaluate information is essential to informed participation in democracy. Therefore, introducing media literacy as a core component in schools, teaching students to critically assess sources, differentiate facts from opinions, and identify bias or manipulation in media would be key. By fostering analytical skills, students become more discerning and responsible consumers of information, better equipped to make informed decisions in a democratic society. This should also include promoting a civilian digital society. For instance, students might compare coverage of a single event across different news outlets and then discuss how and why perspectives differ. Schools could also organize workshops with media professionals to discuss journalism ethics and fact-checking techniques.

Many school systems still operate in top-down models that provide students with limited opportunities to influence their educational experience. This can lead to disengagement and a lack of understanding of participatory democratic processes. It is needed to strengthen and upscale school environments that model democratic principles by establishing student councils, engaging students in decision-making processes, and encouraging them to take ownership of school projects. This kind of participatory education allows students to practice democracy in action and understand their role in shaping their communities.

Germany is a post-migrant society; in a diverse society, understanding different cultures, religions, and backgrounds is essential for democratic cohesion. Discrimination and lack of exposure to diversity can lead to division, weakening democratic principles. Therefore, it is urgent, to increase the number of programs that promote intercultural understanding and inclusivity within schools, emphasizing Germany's multicultural makeup and the values of tolerance and respect. Project-based learning that includes dialogues, intercultural workshops, and collaborative projects with diverse groups can foster empathy and a deeper understanding of others' perspectives. Literature classes could include books from diverse authors to help students understand different cultural perspectives.

Germany's complex historical relationship with authoritarian regimes and its journey to modern democracy provide invaluable lessons, yet younger generations and those young people who have migrated to Germany may feel disconnected from these events. This makes it necessary to expand history education to highlight lessons about the rise and fall of authoritarian regimes and the importance of democratic resistance, with particular focus on German history, such as the Nazi era, the Cold War, and reunification. Field trips to historical sites, guest lectures from survivors, and interactive workshops can make history tangible, showing students the real-world impact of democracy and authoritarianism. It would also be useful to run such projects as part of international cooperation to allow students to learn how violence imposed by German soldiers in WW II have affected local communities and whole populations.

Radical ideologies and misinformation, including conspiracy theories, are on the rise and can erode trust in democratic systems. Students have to understand how they identify and challenge anti-democratic narratives through robust civics and ethics education. Schools can create safe spaces for students to discuss complex societal issues, learn about the consequences of misinformation, and explore ways to engage constructively

in political debates. Encouraging debate and discussion on sensitive topics can build resilience against anti-democratic influences. Teaching formats of this kind often need additional personnel and financial resources.

With growing concerns about climate change and social justice, students increasingly see these issues as central to their future. However, these topics are not always linked to democratic action within education. Education for democracy should include environmental and social responsibility, linking them explicitly to democratic engagement. . Classes could engage in projects where students draft policies for the school's environmental footprint, present them to school administrators, and potentially see their ideas implemented. By understanding that democracy empowers them to influence social and environmental issues, students can feel more connected to democratic practices. This teaches them how democratic processes can drive real social and environmental change.

Respect for democratic institutions is waning in some regions, partly due to disillusionment or lack of understanding of their roles. Students are to be educated about the functions of democratic institutions, such as the Bundestag, judicial system, and federal structure, and discuss the roles of various government bodies. Involving students in simulated debates, mock elections, or model government structures can give them first-hand experience with democratic processes and foster respect for the rule of law. Schools could also establish partnerships with local government officials for guest lectures or visits to the local parliament. Schools could also arrange field trips to local courthouses to observe real legal proceedings.

Education for democracy is most effective when reinforced by families and communities. However, not all parents may have the same level of engagement or understanding of democratic education or have the resources (time, language knowledge, …) to actively support their kids. Schools can work to engage families by holding open discussions, community forums, and events centered on democracy and civic engagement. Providing multilingual materials and inviting community members to share experiences of democratic involvement can strengthen the school-community connection and model democratic engagement for students.

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# Ireland

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# Abbreviations

CSO: Central Statistics Office

CSPE Civic, Social, and Political Education

DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

ESS: European Social Survey

EU: European Union

STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

TASC: Think tank for Action on Social Chang

USI: The Union of Students in Ireland

YSI: The Young Social Innovators

# Executive Summary

The report offers a thorough examination of political engagement in Ireland, focusing on various factors such as education inequalities, socioeconomic background, immigration, age, gender, and political attitudes. Drawing on data from the European Social Survey (ESS) and existing research, the report examines the factors influencing participation across voting, formal, and informal political activities.

Key findings highlight a complex relationship between educational attainment and political engagement, with disparities observed across different forms of participation. While higher levels of education correlate with increased formal political involvement, voting participation remains high among individuals with lower levels of education, challenging traditional assumptions. Socioeconomic factors also play a significant role, with individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds demonstrating higher levels of participation, particularly in formal political activities. Gender disparities persist, with women still underrepresented in certain political arenas despite narrowing gaps in voting participation. The integration of immigrants poses unique challenges, as lower participation rates are observed among foreign-born individuals, highlighting the importance of inclusive policies and targeted initiatives. Age and political beliefs also impact participation patterns, with older individuals and those holding specific political ideals demonstrating higher engagement levels. Conversely, younger demographics tend to prefer informal methods of political activism, reflecting changing trends in political engagement. Recommendations focus on enhancing civic education, promoting immigrant integration, addressing gender inequalities, and empowering educators to foster inclusive learning environments.

In conclusion, the report emphasises the importance of targeted interventions to address participation disparities and foster inclusive democratic processes in Ireland. By prioritizing civic education, promoting immigrant integration, and addressing gender disparities, Ireland can build a more engaged and representative democracy that serves all its citizens.

# Table of Contents

# 1. The Irish context for political and civic participation

## *1.1. The political system in Ireland*

The Republic of Ireland is a parliamentary representative democracy with powers of legislation held by the Oireachtas, more specifically the President of Ireland and the two houses, Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann (House of the Oireachtas, NDa). The Taoiseach and Tánaiste (Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister respectively) lead the Government which holds executive power (House of the Oireachtas, NDa). There are 39 voting constituencies in Ireland, with Daíl, Seanad and European elections decided by secret ballot through proportional representation and single transferable vote (House of the Oireachtas, NDa).

Ireland has a National Youth Parliament, Dáil na nÓg, which, on an annual basis, draws together young people from Comhairle na nÓg, the child and youth councils across the 31 local authorities. Themes of equality, mental health and climate change have framed previous iterations (Comhairlí na nÓg, ND). A Seanad na nÓg with 100 invited young people took place in 2022 (House of the Oireachtas, NDc). More recent referenda have included amendments to the constitutions regarding divorce, blasphemy, abortion, and marriage. Two constitutional referendums on family and care, open to all Irish Citizens, were held on 8 March 2024. In addition to this direct democracy of referenda, there has been an increasing focus on deliberative democracy within the Irish context. In recent years, Ireland has convened several Citizens Assemblies, with a Citizen Assembly on Gender Equality in 2020-21, and Citizen's Assemblies on Biodiversity Loss and on the directly elected mayor for Dublin occurring a year later. Farrell et al. (2018) argue that Ireland has become "something of a trail-blazer in the use of deliberative methods in the process of constitutional review" (p. 113). They recognise that some recommendations from assemblies have been acted on to varying degrees, however in some cases, recommendations have been ignored. However, such assemblies can contribute towards "inclusive, citizen-driven policymaking" (Devaney et al., 2020). Participation in deliberative democracy within Ireland has been expanded to children and young people in more recent years, as 2022 saw the first Children and Young People's Assembly in Ireland, this time concerning Biodiversity Loss (Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss, 2023) with the calls to action recognised by the Irish government, through inclusion in Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan. Children and Young People's Assemblies are increasingly recognised as an important part of deliberative democratic processes and as spaces where the gap between children's participation and wider democracy can be bridged (Reid, 2023).

Ireland joined the European Economic Community in 1973, signing the Treaty on European Union at Maastricht in 1991. In 2002, the Euro replaced the Punt as the Irish currency. Beyond the European level, Ireland was admitted to the United Nations in 1955. In the time since, Ireland has signed and ratified a plethora of European and global human rights frameworks supporting the social, political and cultural rights of individuals and groups. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child came into force in September 1990. Ireland ratified the Convention on 28 September 1992, with optional protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflict signed in 2002, and concomitant periodic reviews recognising ongoing shortfalls in young people's participation rights which have been further limited by the Covid pandemic (Mallon and Martinez Sainz, 2021).

Alongside a long history of political neutrality, Ireland has been involved in several international processes, for example, leading the adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in 2020. However, it is important to recognise the significant conflicts which underpin the political system in Ireland. In 1998, the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement was approved by voters in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. This

peace agreement is seen as a pivotal component of a wider peace architecture seeking to bring to an end an episode of violent conflict, known as the Troubles, which had flared since the 1960s, albeit with its roots in the colonisation of Ireland since the 1200s. The Agreement itself included provision for cross-border developments, bringing together communities from Northern Ireland the Republic of Ireland, with certain approaches utilising a framework of European citizenship as a shared aspect of identity, (and a step away from problematic national forms of identity) for those identifying as British or Irish, or both. However, this point of connection was damaged with the Brexit vote of 2016, alongside tensions in relation to the status of the Irish border. The question of whether the majority of voters on the island of Ireland wish for Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom, or to become part of the Republic of Ireland still remains, with clear implications for education. As McCully and Clarke (2016) note:

> "Whether in the longer-term NI remains British or secedes to the Irish Republic, that decision by referendum, should be rationally reached by well-taught and informed citizens who show critical awareness to both the positive and negative implications of cherishing their own sense of national identity" (p. 365).

## *1.2. Informal political participation*

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a deep analysis of informal political participation in the Irish context, there are a number of events which speak to the focus, if not necessarily the scope of participation in Ireland. These protests can all be seen against a backdrop of the global financial crisis which struck Ireland in 2008, and the continuing social crises concerning poverty, homelessness, and emigration (O'Connor, 2017).Key protests since the turn of the century have focused on public services (bin charges, particularly in traditionally working class areas of Dublin, and involving local community groups and political parties, see Davies, 2007; water charge protests in 2014, were approximately half the population refused to pay, see Hearne, 2015), anti-austerity demands (the Occupy Dame Street of 2011 and 2012, see Szolucha, 2017), climate change inaction (the Fridays for Futures protests of 2019 and 2020). Regarding the latter protests, Waldron et al. (2020) note that despite the popularity of the protests amongst young people (with over 10,000 in attendance), there remained ongoing criticisms of young people involved in climate action, often centred on the capability of young people to take informed action. Indeed, newspapers reported school leadership naming the strikes as 'infuriating' (Gleeson, 2019) and Bryan (2019) argued that ageism and sexism have underpinned several critiques of climate action from young people.

## 1.3. Understanding socio-economic and gender inequalities in Ireland

The Census of Population 2022 is crucial for understanding the demographics of Ireland. It provides insights into not just the population composition, but also how socio-economic factors like income, education, and employment are distributed. One important finding from the 2022 Census of Population is about immigration in Ireland. The country has seen a significant rise in immigrants, adding to its diverse and multicultural population. The Central Statistics Office's (CSO, ND) press release highlights key immigration statistics, emphasizing how international migration has influenced Ireland's demographics. According to the CSO data, at least 12% of the population identified themselves as 'non-Irish' in the 2022 census.

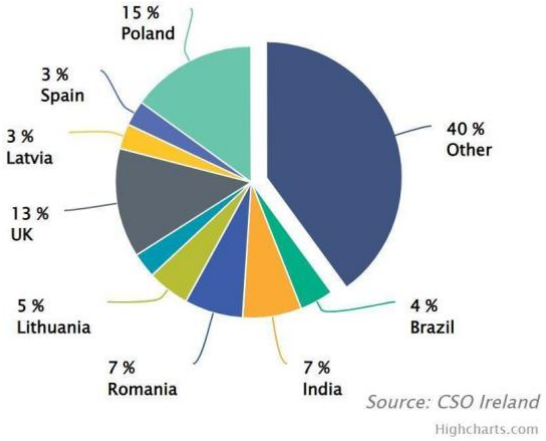


*Figure 1. Non-Irish population usually resident and present in the State by citizenship (%), 2022 (derived from Census 2022 Profile 5 - Diversity, Migration, Ethnicity, Irish Travellers & Religion, Central Statistics Office of Ireland)*

The Immigration CSO statistics further emphasize the need to recognise the impact of migration on political and civic participation. A diverse population brings unique perspectives and experiences, influencing engagement in the democratic process. For instance, exploring the civic and political engagement of young people including immigrant communities, as highlighted in the study by Laurence and Smyth (2023), offers valuable insights into inclusive participation.

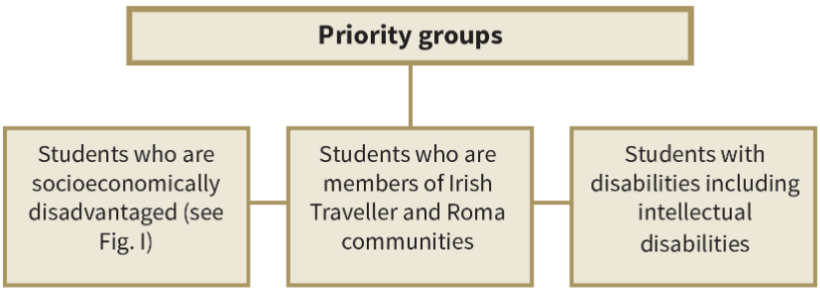


*Figure 2. The three overarching priority groups*

This research is instrumental in understanding the dynamics of civic and political engagement in a changing Irish demographic landscape. One key finding is that education plays a significant role in shaping young people's engagement in civic activities. Factors such as a mother's education level, performance in exams like the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate, pursuing higher education, participating in programs like Transition Year, and enjoying school or being involved in extracurricular activities during childhood are all linked to higher levels of civic engagement. Additionally, factors like socio-economic background, education, and social connections also impact how engaged young adults are, which could also affect immigrant communities.


*Figure 3. Life experiences that can cause socioeconomic disadvantage*

Another key insight from the Census highlights significant disparities in educational achievement among various socio-economic groups. As outlined in the 2022-2028 National Access Plan of Ireland, three primary groups have been identified, with the 'socioeconomically disadvantaged' category encompassing various life situations that may result in disadvantage. Figure 2 outlines the three overarching priority groups, as specified in the National Access Plan 2022-2028, while Figure 3 depicts specific life situations that can lead to social disadvantage according to the plan.

The National Access Plan outlines nine performance indicators for the higher education system in order to support socioeconomically disadvantaged students. These indicators are categorised by context and cover aspects such as **flexibility** within higher education, **diversity** across programmes and levels, **access** and **participation** for priority groups, and **student success** and **engagement.** Examples include tracking participation by part-time/flexible learners, progression from further education to higher education, postgraduate study among selected priority groups, and the progression and completion rates of students from disadvantaged areas. The plan aims to assess and enhance access, diversity, and success within higher education for all students, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds.

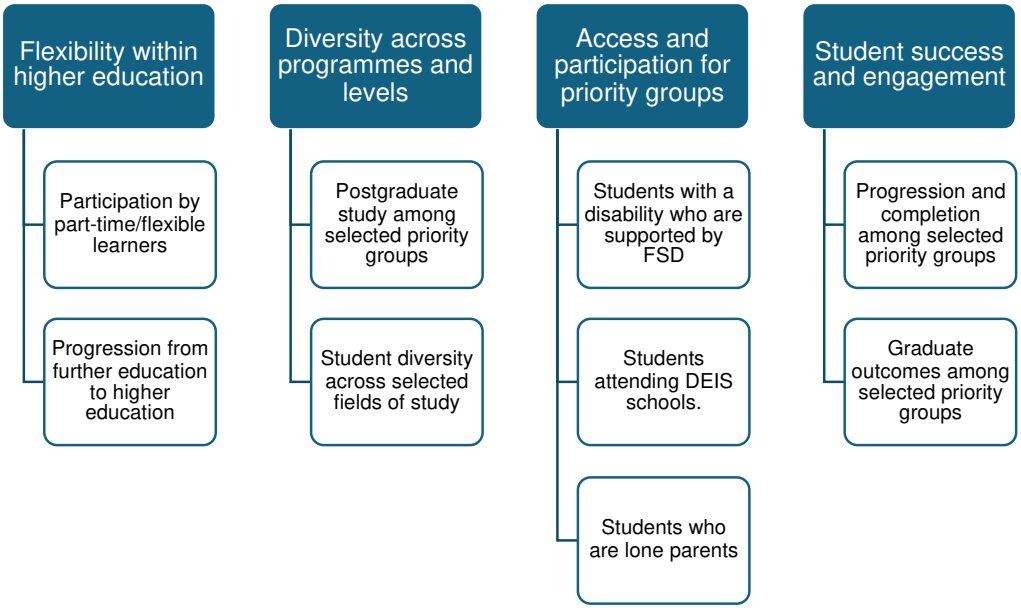


*Figure 4. Figure 4 Key performance indicators, National Access Plan 2022-2028*

Educational inequalities serve as a significant barrier to political and civic participation, reflecting broader socio-economic disparities. Studies by Jeffers and Lillis (2024) underline the role of socio-economic factors in shaping educational outcomes and perpetuating inequality. In response to this issue, Ireland introduced the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative to address educational disadvantage However, despite such efforts, educational inequalities persist (Jeffers and Lillis, 2024). It suggests that incorporating teachers' perspectives and fostering collaborative efforts can inform more effective policies and interventions aimed at reducing educational inequality. Additionally, Duggan et al. (2023) shed light on trends in educational inequalities within primary schools, emphasising the importance of addressing systemic factors to ensure equitable access to education. The research highlights the significant influence of socio-economic factors on educational inequalities. Students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds consistently experience lower academic achievement compared to their peers from more affluent backgrounds. Research by Cosgrove and Gilleece (2012) highlights the unequal distribution of civic opportunities within Irish post-primary schools, with students from disadvantaged backgrounds encountering greater barriers to participation. Similarly, McNamara et al. (2020) studied 17/18-year-olds in Ireland, revealing how socio-economic backgrounds impact their experiences and opportunities. Economic disparities can limit access to education, exposure to civic activities, and involvement in political processes, worsening participation inequalities.

Social class, closely linked with socio-economic disparities, significantly affects education, political agency, and civic participation. Research by Roantree and Doorley (2023) emphasizes how poverty and income inequality worsen living standards, perpetuating socio-economic disparities, and hindering inclusive civic engagement. These inequalities not only limit meaningful participation of people in democratic processes but also weaken the legitimacy of the political system overall.

According to the Inequality report by TASC (Think tank for Action on Social Change), income inequality in Ireland has decreased over the past 25 years, largely due to increased employment opportunities as the economy recovered. Welfare reforms aimed at boosting employment among low-income individuals may have also contributed to this trend. However, market inequality remains high, especially considering the challenges posed by the Covid pandemic and subsequent lockdowns in Ireland. Research by Roantree and Doorley (2023) highlights that while measures of income poverty have remained stable, there has been a notable increase in the rate of material deprivation in 2022. This increase has been particularly prominent among specific groups, such as lone parents, renters, and households with no employed individuals. Children, in particular, have faced elevated levels of material deprivation and income poverty, underscoring the urgency of targeted interventions to address child poverty.

Gender disparities in political and civic participation are significant forms of inequality. Ireland has implemented strong equality laws, like the Equal Status Acts, to prevent discrimination based on various factors such as age, gender, marital status, and sexuality. These laws are essential for ensuring that all citizens have equal opportunities and access to participate in political and civic activities, regardless of their background or identity.

The Gender Equality Index for Ireland 2022, by the European Institute for Gender Equality, highlights both progress and challenges in achieving gender equality. Despite improvements in gender equality policies, women continue to be underrepresented in political leadership roles due to persistent structural barriers and cultural norms. Additionally, issues such as the gender pay gap and inadequate childcare support further limit women's involvement in public life, highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies to address these systemic inequalities. Research conducted by Laurence and Smyth (2023) sheds light on the gender gap in civic and political engagement among young adults in Ireland, emphasising the necessity for targeted interventions

to tackle systemic barriers effectively. Regarding the composition of the Irish parliament, Connolly (2016) argues that whilst by international standards, gender stereotyping with governments has reduced since 1970, the Irish parliament does not correspond to this pattern, with high degrees of gender stereotyping which has indeed deepened since the turn of the century. Here, gender stereotyping includes not only cultural stereotypes and their impacts on perceptions and roles but also extends to the representation of women in decision-making positions. Her analysis focuses on how these stereotypes manifest within the parliamentary setting, affecting not just the number of women in politics but also their roles, the expectations placed upon them, and the legislative focus on gender issues. Connolly observed that women were often confined to roles aligning with traditional caring and nurturing stereotypes. Despite global trends towards reducing such stereotyping in parliaments, Ireland has not followed this pattern, showing high levels of gender stereotyping that have deepened over the past decade.

In summary, socio-economic and gender inequalities greatly impact political and civic participation in Ireland. Despite legislative efforts and policy interventions aimed at fostering inclusivity and equality, persistent structural barriers continue to shape opportunities and experiences of people in engaging with the democratic process. Effectively addressing these inequalities demands a comprehensive approach involving education reform, socio-economic empowerment, and gender mainstreaming strategies.

# 2. Political participation in Ireland

This section summarises the main results of the analysis of the main existing data sources on citizens' political participation and its relationship with their socio-demographic characteristics (including, among others, educational attainment) and their attitudes towards democracy. The primary data source used was the European Social Survey (ESS). The report is divided into two sections: the first part explores formal political participation, while the second part focuses on informal political participation.

## *2.1. Evolution of political participation 2012-2020*

Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the progression of voting and formal political participation, respectively. Notably, participants reporting voting participation in Ireland rose from 74% in 2012 to 80% in 2020.This rate is equal to EU Average in 2020.

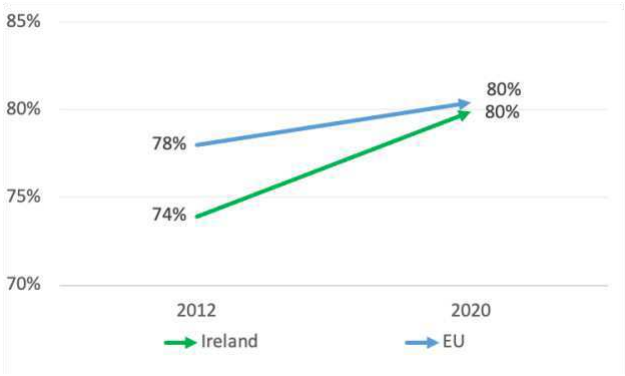


*Figure 5. Evolution of voting, Ireland and EU, 2012-2020*

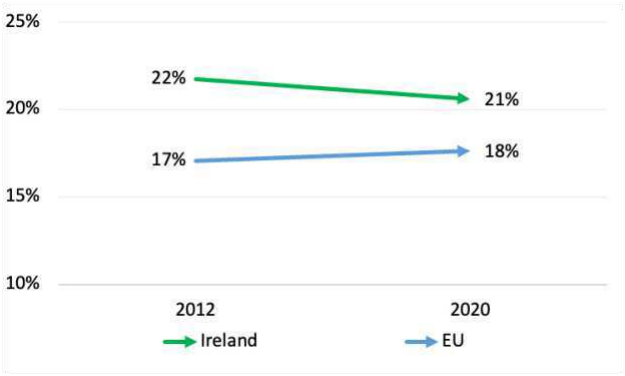


*Figure 6. Evolution of formal political participation, Ireland and EU, 2012-2020*

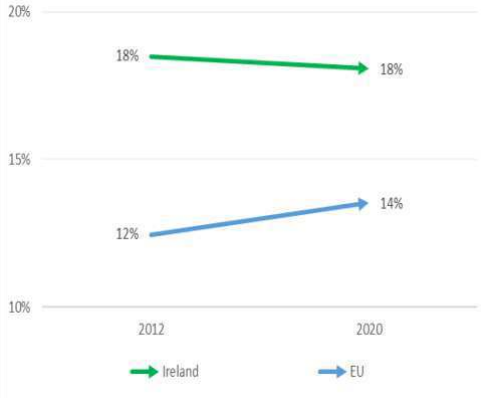


*Figure 7. Evolution of the percentage of people who have contacted a politician or a government official by country, Ireland and EU, 2012-2020*

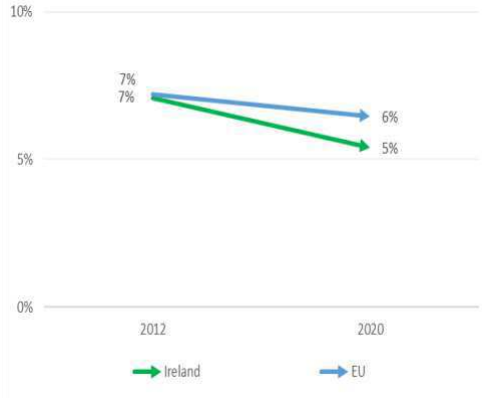


*Figure 8. Evolution of the percentage of people who have worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker, Ireland and EU, 2012-2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data.*
*Note: Figures 4 – 7 - EU includes 19 EU27 countries (Missing countries: (Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)*

Regarding formal participation (not including voting participation), Ireland slightly decreased from 22% in 2012 to 21% in 2020. However, there is a slight increase from 17% to 18% according to the EU data.

Analysing formal participation in more detail, it can be seen (Figures 7 and 8) that formal participation in Ireland remains constant for contacting a politician (around 18%) which is significantly above the EU average.

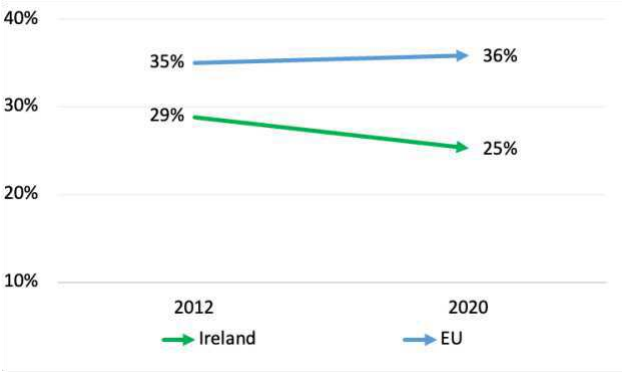


*Figure 9. Evolution of political informal participation, Ireland and EU, 2012-2020*

For displaying a badge, Ireland is slightly decreasing (from 7% to 5%). Comparatively, across the EU, the decrease was also minor, moving from 7% to 6%.

Regarding informal political participation, Ireland demonstrates a moderate decreasing trend, declining from 29% to 25%. However, in the EU informal participation rates increased from 35% to 36% from 2012 to 2020.

When we analyse informal participation in greater detail, as depicted in graphs 10 and 11, Ireland shows a decline in signing petitions, dropping from 25% in 2012 to 20% in 2020), similar trend to EU average. Conversely, there is a moderate increase in the tendency to boycott certain products within Ireland. However, in the EU, the increase is minor, rising from 12% to 14%.

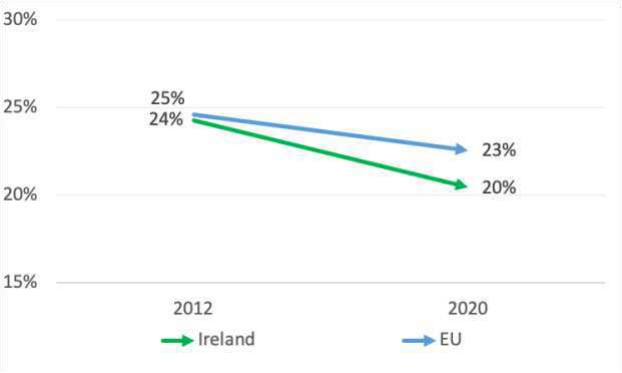


*Figure 9. Evolution of the percentage of people who have signed a petition,*

Ireland and EU, 2012-2020

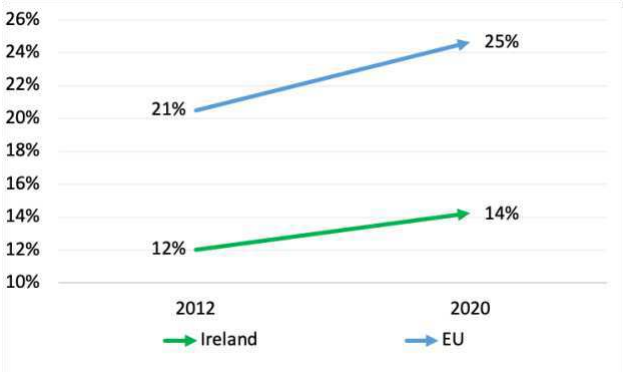


*Figure 10. Evolution of the percentage of people who have boycotted certain products*

*Ireland and EU, 2012-2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: Figure 9 – 11 - EU includes 19 EU27 countries (Missing countries: (Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)*

## 2.2. Political participation 2020

In Figures 12 and 13, voting and formal participation in 2020 are depicted, focusing on individuals aged 25 and above.

Ireland demonstrates an 83% voting participation rate, similar to the EU average. However, its formal participation stands at 23% which is slightly higher than EU rate of 20%.

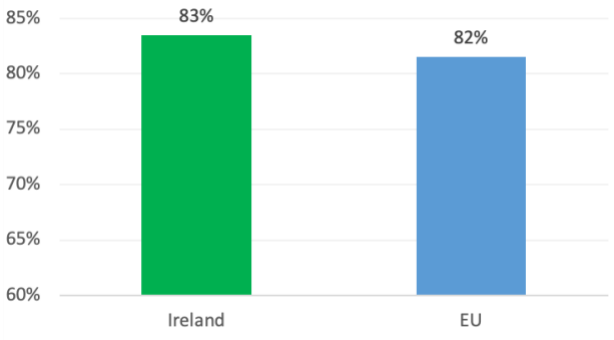


*Figure 11. Voting, Ireland and EU, 2020*

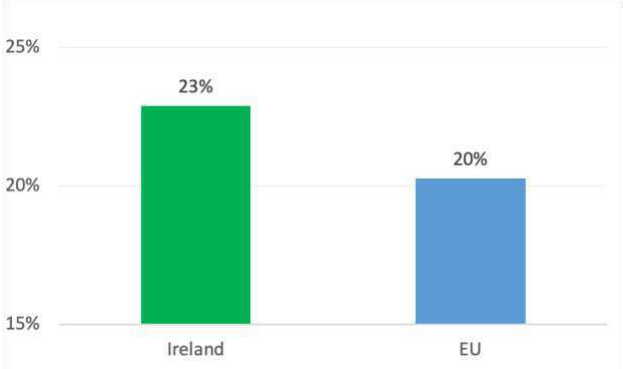


*Figure 12. Formal political participation, Ireland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

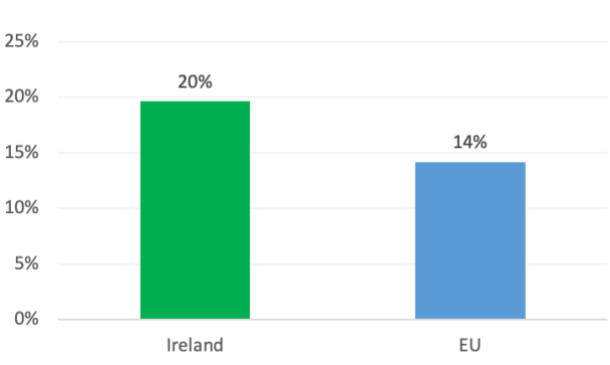


*Figure 13. Percentage of people who have contacted a politician or a government official, Ireland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Examining formal participation in greater detail through graphs 14, 15, and 16 reveals specific insights. In Ireland, 20% of survey respondents engage in the ESS survey by reporting that they communicate with a politician or government official. However, in the EU, this rate is 14%. In Ireland, only 5% report wearing or displaying a campaign badge/sticker, and a similar 5% indicate contributing to or participating in a political party or pressure group. Both rates are similar to EU rates of 6%.

(5%)

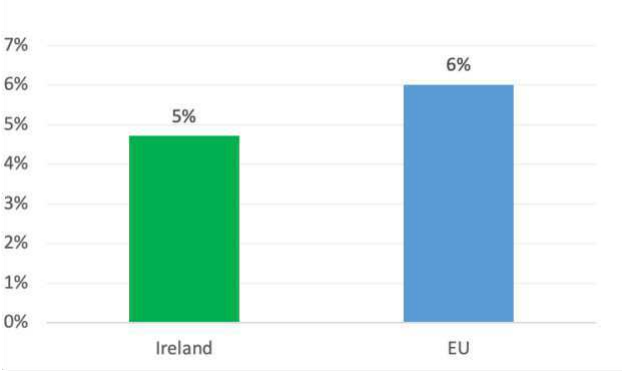


Figure 14. Percentage of people who have worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker,

*Ireland and EU, 2020*

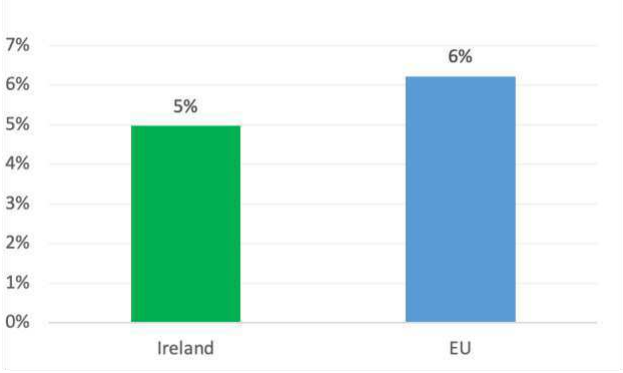


*Figure 15. Percentage of people who have donated to or participated in political party or pressure group,*

Ireland and EU, 2020

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Figure 17 display informal participation in 2020 among individuals aged 25 and over. In Ireland, informal participation stands at a low percentage of 28% which is significatively below EU average. Regarding informal participation, as illustrated in graphs 18, 19, 20, and 21, Ireland demonstrates relatively low percentages across various aspects. Specifically, signing a petition reflects a participation rate of 19%, while boycotting certain products stands at 14%. In the EU these rates are 22% and 25% respectively which is both higher than the rates in Ireland.

In terms of engaging in demonstrations, the percentage is notably lower at 6%, which is slightly comparable to the EU rates of 9%.

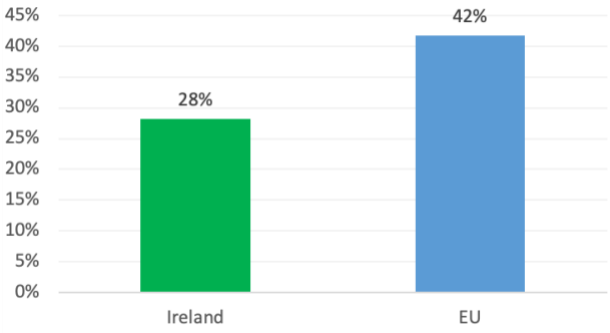


*Figure 16. Informal political participation, Ireland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Lastly, posting or sharing political content online records a participation rate of 11%, while in the EU, this rate is 17%.

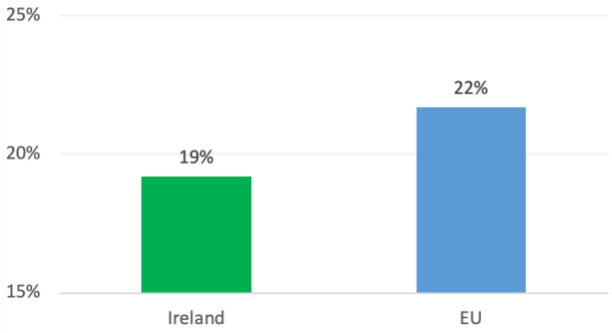


*Figure 17. Percentage of people who have signed a petition, Ireland and EU, 2020*

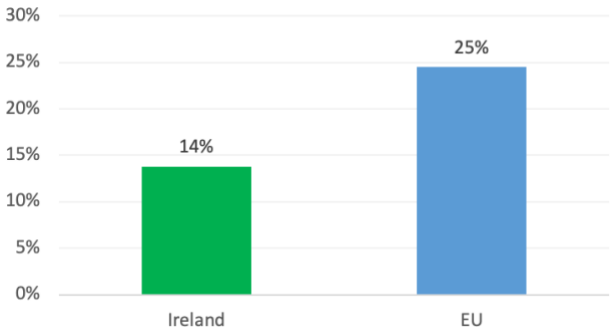


*Figure 18. Percentage of people who have boycotted certain product,*

*Ireland and EU, 2020*

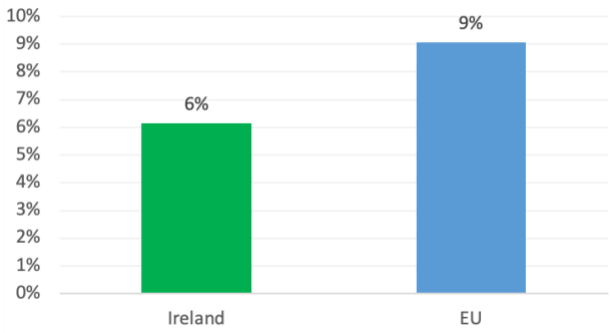


*Figure 19. Percentage of people who have taken part in public demonstration,*

*Ireland and EU, 2020*

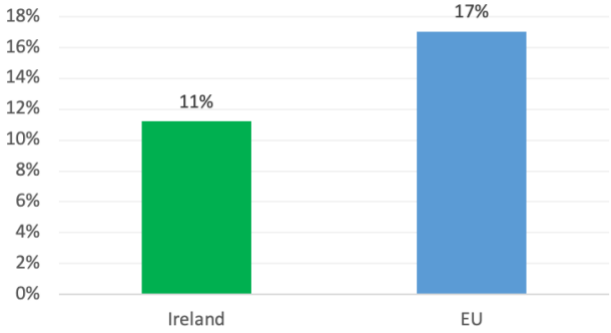


*Figure 20. Percentage of people who have posted or shared anything about politics online,*

*Ireland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

## 2.3. Participation by socio-demographic characteristics

### 2.3.1. Voting participation

Participation by socio-demographic characteristics, values, and attitudes towards democracy, particularly in terms of voting participation, reveals several trends. Analysis of socio-demographic variables depicted in graphs 22 and 23 uncovers several notable patterns. Participation tends to increase with age, albeit individuals aged 35-44 in Ireland exhibit the lowest level of participation at 71%. Men demonstrate higher participation rates at 85% compared to women at 82%. Additionally, participation escalates with income level, with rates in Ireland remaining comparable between those living comfortably (86%) and those coping on present income (84%).

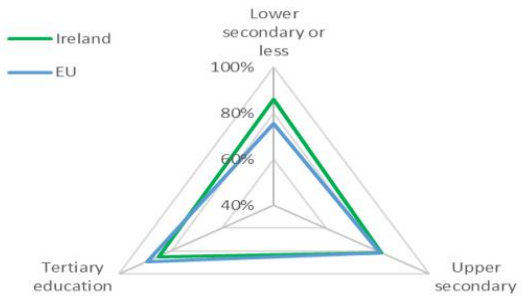


*Figure 21. Voting by level of education attained, Ireland and EU, 2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*
*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

However, participation rates are lower among individuals born outside the country or whose parents were born abroad, with native-born individuals exhibiting a high participation rate of 88%, contrasting sharply with the 55% rate among foreign-born individuals. Moreover, participation among those identifying with a discriminated group in Ireland stands at 72%. Contrary to what happens in the EU, in Ireland, participation levels in Ireland do not correspondingly increase with educational attainment; individuals with lower levels of education exhibit high participation rates (86%), similar to those with secondary (81%) or higher education (85%).

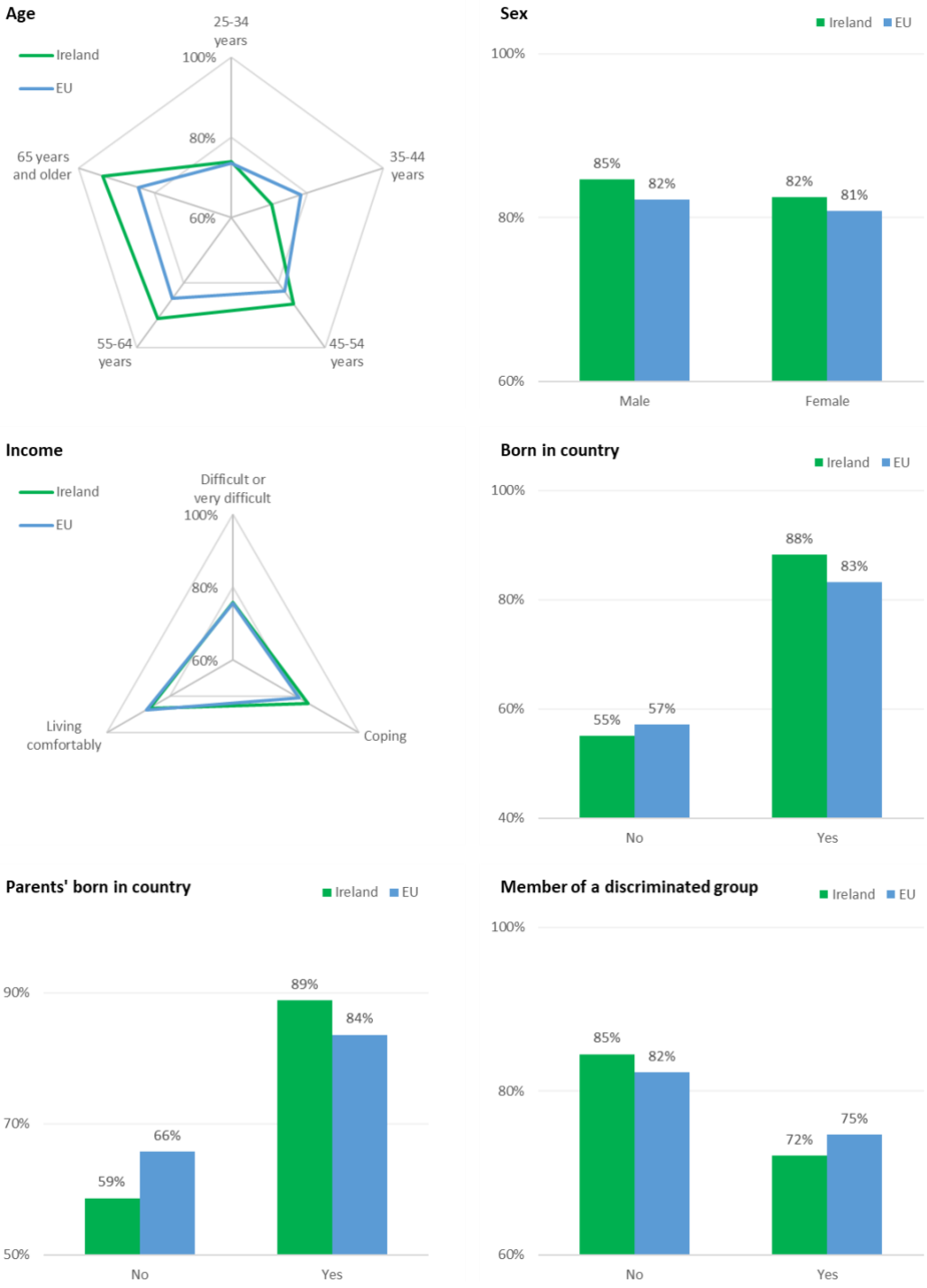


*Figure 22. Voting by sociodemographic characteristics, Ireland, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

When examining political variables (Figures 24-25-26 and 27), notable distinctions emerge between Ireland and the EU across all variables. In Ireland, the group associated with "Social rights" displays the lowest turnout at 81%, contrasting with the "High ideals" group recording the highest at 87%. This contrasts with the EU, where these groups are identified as "Low ideals" and "Political rights," respectively. Additionally, the disparity

in participation levels between groups with democratic ideals is less pronounced in Ireland compared to the EU.

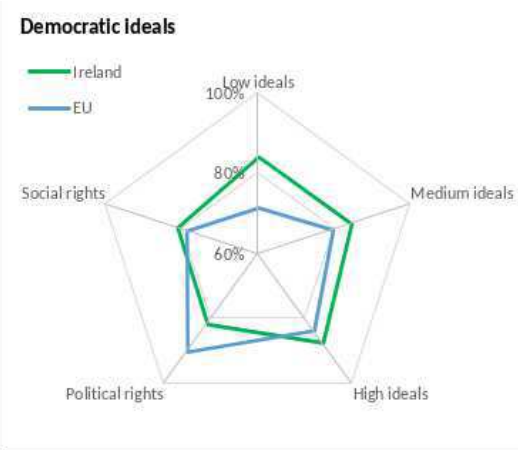


*Figure 23. Voting by political ideals, Ireland and the EU, 2020*

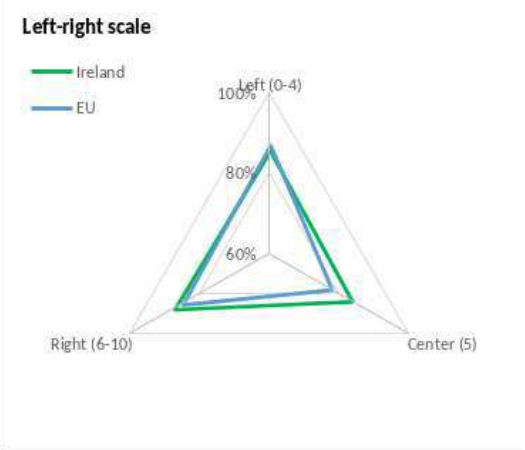


*Figure 24. Voting by left-right scale, Ireland and the EU, 2020*

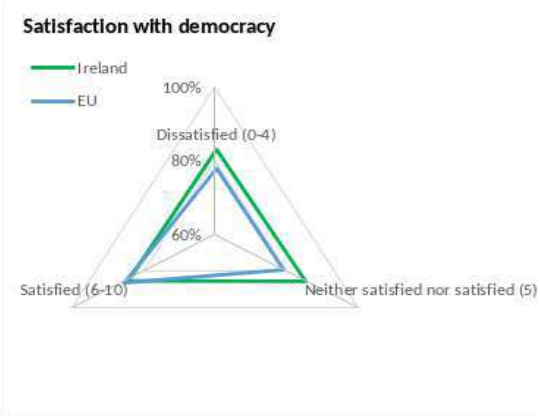


*Figure 25. Voting by satisfaction with democracy, Ireland and EU, 2020*

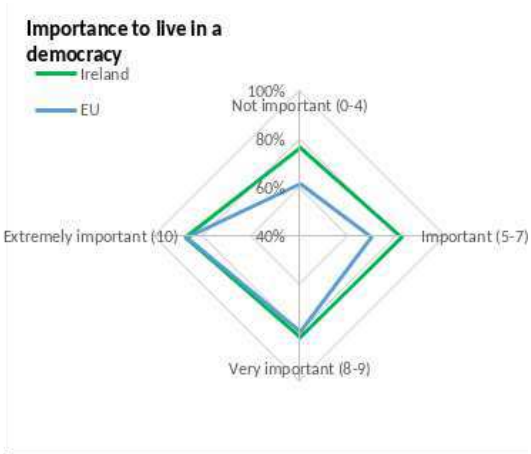


*Figure 26. Voting by importance to live in a democracy, Ireland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Interestingly, individuals positioned in the political centre exhibit the lowest levels of participation in both Ireland and the EU, yet the turnout is comparatively high in Ireland at 84%. Moreover, in Ireland, turnout is higher among those leaning to the right (88%) than those leaning to the left (86%), while the opposite pattern is observed in the EU.

In the EU, participation tends to increase as respondents' satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in their country rises, while in Ireland, no significant differences are observed based on satisfaction levels.

Furthermore, participation rises in Ireland according to the importance attributed to living in a democratically governed country, with levels resembling those in the EU for individuals who consider it extremely or very important. However, participation is notably higher among those who do not consider it important and among those who consider it only somewhat important.

### 2.3.2. Formal political participation

In the analysis of socio-demographic variables presented in graphs below, formal participation in Ireland follows a similar pattern to the EU average in most variables, with some aspects to highlight:

In Ireland, participation increases with the level of education, with those holding upper secondary education displaying comparatively high participation rates (23%) compared to the EU average.

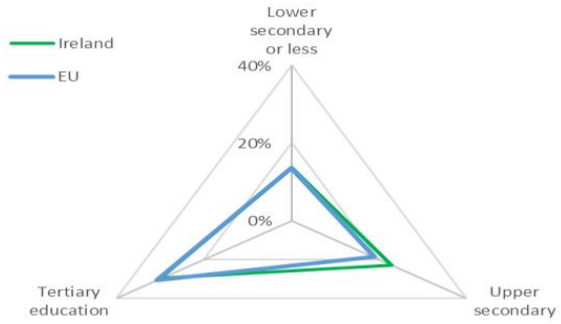


*Figure 27. Formal political participation by level of education attained, Ireland and EU, 2020*

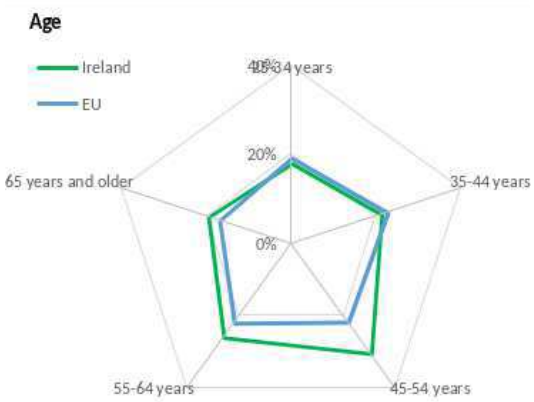


*Figure 28. Formal political participation by age, Ireland and EU, 2020*

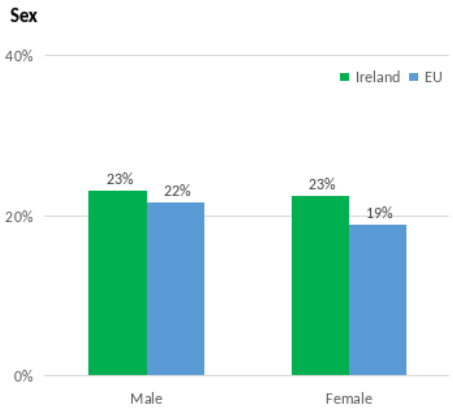


*Figure 29. Formal political participation by sex, Ireland and EU Ireland*

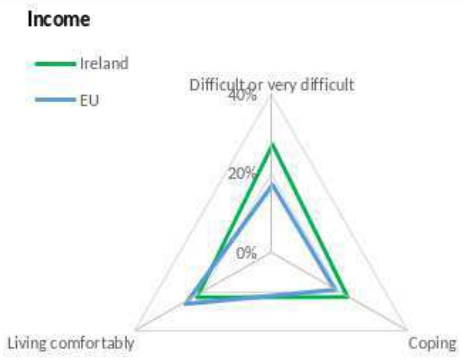


*Figure 30. Formal political participation by income, Ireland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Moreover, participation tends to be higher among middle-aged groups (35-64 years) than among the youngest and oldest, particularly pronounced among 45-54 year olds (31%) in Ireland compared to the EU.

Ireland diverges from the EU average in term of formal political participation. Participation rates between men and women are equal (23%), contrasting with the EU where men typically participate more than women.

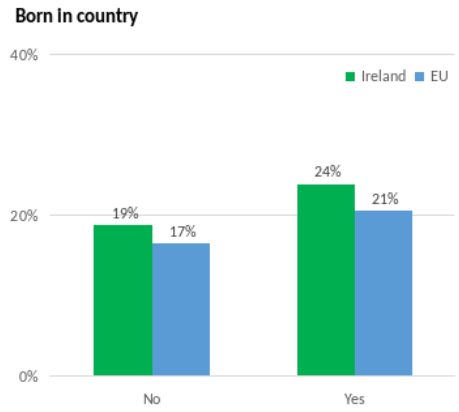


*Figure 31. Formal political participation by born in country, Ireland and EU, 2020*

Participation decreases with income level in Ireland, where individuals facing difficult financial circumstances exhibit higher participation rates (28%) compared to the EU, where the reverse pattern is observed.

Additionally, participation is lower among individuals born outside the country and those with parents born abroad, aligning with a similar EU pattern but with more marked differences.

Notably, higher participation is observed among those who report belonging to a discriminated group compared to those who do not, with the difference being more pronounced in Ireland (38% vs 22%).

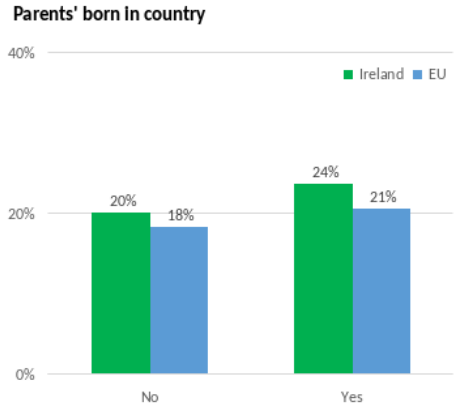


*Figure 32. Formal political participation by parents born in country,*
*Ireland and EU, 2020*

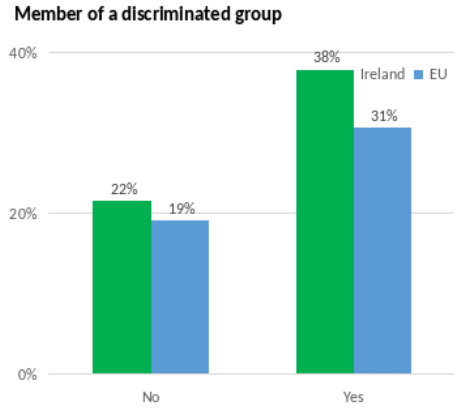


*Figure 33 Formal political participation by member of a discriminated group,*
*Ireland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Regarding the political variables (Figure 35-36-37 and 38), similarities and differences between Ireland and the EU emerge. Both regions exhibit similar patterns along the left-right political spectrum, with higher participation among those on the left (31%) in Ireland, while participation among those in the center or on the right is similar (21%). However, for other policy variables, the patterns diverge. In both Ireland and the EU, the "political rights" group records the highest participation (29%), while participation rates among the "Low ideals" and "Medium ideals" groups hover around 20% and are comparatively high for those in the "High ideals" group (29%).

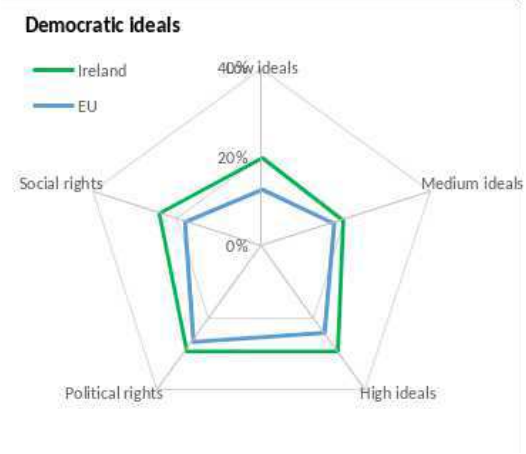


*Figure 34. Formal political participation by democratic ideals, Ireland and EU*

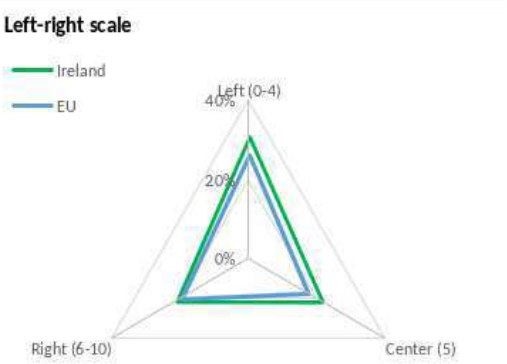


*Figure 35. Formal political participation by left-right scale*

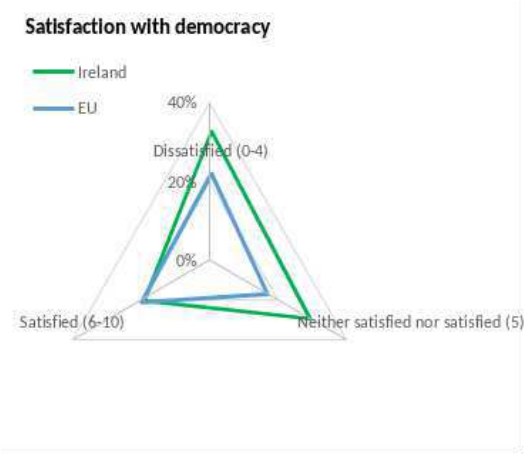


*Figure 36. Formal political participation by satisfaction with democracy, Ireland and EU, 2020*

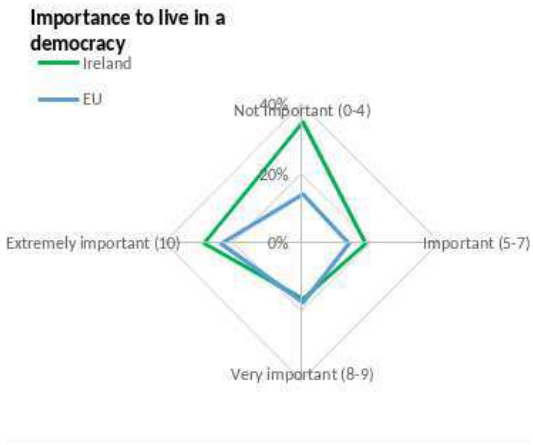


*Figure 37 Formal political participation by importance to live in a democracy, Ireland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Concerning satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in the country, the highest participation is observed among those who are dissatisfied (33%), followed by those who are neither dissatisfied nor satisfied (29%), and finally by those who are satisfied (20%) in Ireland. Conversely, in the EU, the differences are less pronounced, with the lowest participation observed among those who are neither dissatisfied nor satisfied.

Regarding the importance attributed to living in a democratic country, the highest participation is among those who do not consider it important (35%), followed by those who consider it extremely important (29%), and is notably lower for those who consider it very important or only important (16%-18%) in Ireland. Conversely, in the EU, higher importance corresponds to higher participation.

### 2.3.3. *Informal political participation*

With regard to the socio-demographic variables (Figures 39 and 40), informal participation in Ireland follows a similar pattern than the EU average on level of education (the higher level of education, the higher participation) and on belonging to a discriminated group (higher participation among those who report belonging to a discriminated group then those who do not).

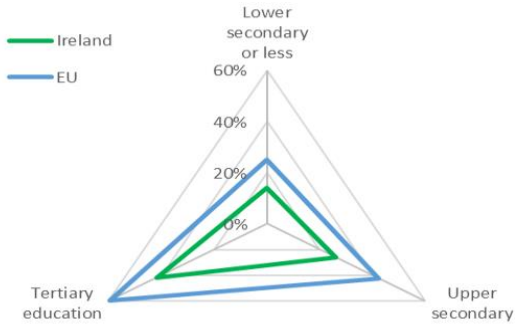


*Figure 38 Informal political participation by level of education attained, Ireland and EU, 2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*
*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Participation rates vary across different demographic factors. In terms of age, participation is highest among those aged 44-54 (37%), followed by individuals aged 55-64 (30%), with similar levels observed among the youngest age groups (28%-29%), and declining among the oldest individuals (19%). This contrasts with the EU, where participation typically decreases with age. Additionally, women in Ireland exhibit slightly higher participation rates (29%) than men (28%), whereas in the EU, the opposite trend prevails. Interestingly, there are no significant differences in participation based on feelings about income in Ireland, while in the EU, participation tends to increase with higher income levels. Similarly, there are no notable disparities in participation based on country of birth in Ireland, whereas in the EU, participation is higher among native-born individuals compared to foreign-born. However, in Ireland, individuals with foreign-born parents demonstrate higher participation rates (34%) than those with native-born parents (27%), a contrast to the EU where there are no significant differences based on parents' country of birth.


*Figure 39 Informal political participation by sociodemographic characteristics, Ireland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

The Irish and EU patterns are similar in terms of democratic ideals, left-right political position and the importance of living in a democratic country. In Ireland the "political rights" group has the highest participation (48%) and the "low ideals" group the lowest (18%). The rest of the groups follow a similar pattern to the EU,

although the participation of the "medium ideals" group is comparatively low (19%). Higher participation among those on the left of the political spectrum (42%).

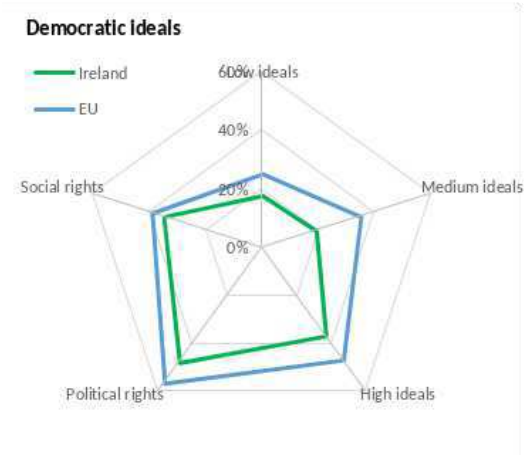


*Figure 40. Informal political participation by democratic ideals, Ireland and EU, 2020*

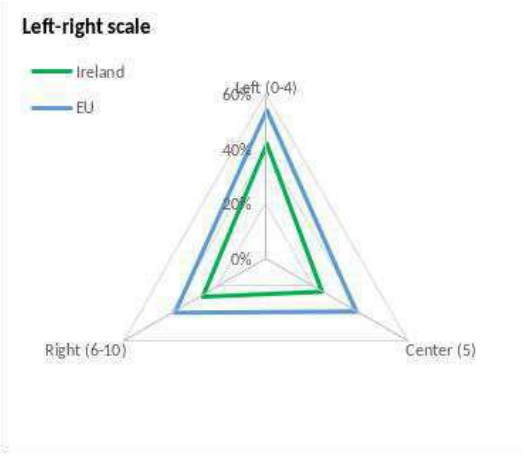


*Figure 41. Informal political participation by left-right scale, Ireland and EU, 2020*

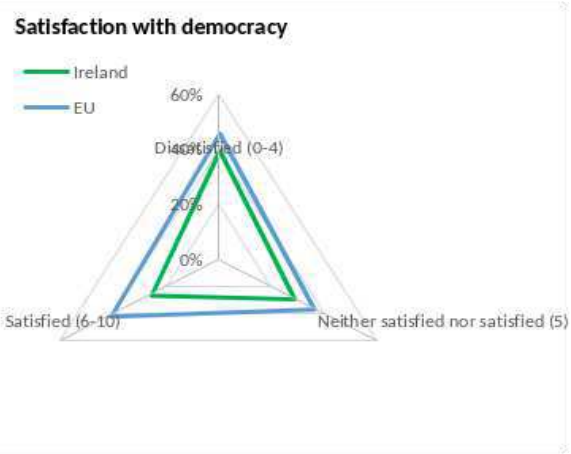


*Figure 42. Informal political participation by satisfaction with democracy, Ireland and EU, 2020*

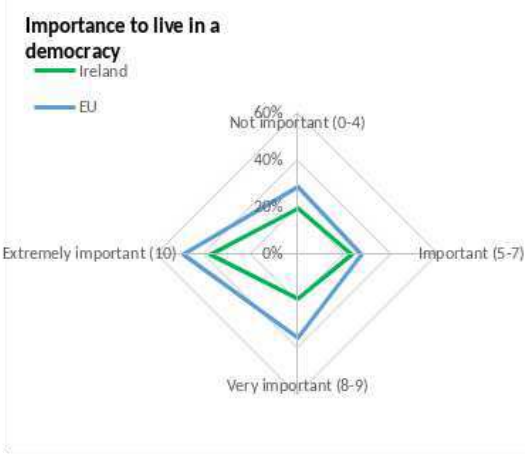


*Figure 43. Informal political participation by importance to live in a democracy, Ireland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

For the satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in the country, the patterns are different to the EU. In Ireland, the higher the satisfaction, the lower the participation, while in the EU the highest participation is among those who are dissatisfied followed by those who are satisfied.

There's a notable increase in participation among individuals who view living in a democratic country as extremely important (37%). However, in Ireland, participation is significantly lower among those who consider it very important (19%), comparable to those who don't consider it important (20%) or only consider it important (23%).

## 2.4. Results from regression models

To provide a comprehensive understanding of Ireland's situation, a logistic regression model was conducted. This model aims to estimate the probability of participation for each type of participation based on various

explanatory variables. Table 1 presents the results specific to Ireland. The model considers all individual-level explanatory variables outlined earlier, in addition to five variables defined at the country level. Moreover, it incorporates a random effect to account for the variability associated with different countries.

In this case, we observe that the results of the three models differ greatly.

Only one variable has the same significant effect on voting, formal and informal participation. The importance attached to living in a democratically governed country has a positive effect: the higher the importance, the higher the participation.

Here are the summarized results for each type of participation:

For voting:

- Participation tends to increase with age.
- Individuals born in the country or with parents born in the country are more likely to participate.
- Higher importance attached to living in a democratically governed country correlates with increased likelihood of participation.

For formal participation:

- Individuals in the "High ideals" group demonstrate higher participation.
- Age positively influences participation.
- Higher levels of education are associated with increased participation.
- Improved economic conditions within the household decrease the probability of participation.
- Members of discriminated groups show significantly higher levels of participation.
- Increased dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy in the country is associated with higher participation.

For informal participation:

- The "Political rights" group exhibits the highest likelihood of participation, followed by the "Social rights" and "High ideals" groups.
- Among the groups, only individuals in the "Political rights" group are more likely to participate due to democratic ideals.
- Higher levels of education correspond to increased participation.
- Individuals living comfortably tend to participate less.
- Native-born individuals are more likely to participate, whereas those with native-born parents have lower participation compared to those with foreign-born parents.
- Members of discriminated groups display significantly higher levels of participation.
- Increasing alignment with the left on the political spectrum correlates with higher participation.

| Ireland | Voting | | | Formal participation | | | Informal participation | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *B* | *Sign.* | *S.E.* | *B* | *Sign.* | *S.E.* | *B* | *Sign.* | *S.E.* |
| **Constant** | -3,125 | *** | (0,801) | -2,074 | *** | (0,601) | -1,494 | * | (0,606) |
| Democratic ideals (ref: medium ideals) | | | | | | | | | |
| Low ideals | 0,318 | | (0,305) | 0,185 | | (0,222) | 0,016 | | (0,230) |
| High ideals | 0,063 | | (0,306) | 0,430 | * | (0,209) | 0,778 | *** | (0,204) |
| Political rights | -0,583 | | (0,327) | 0,434 | | (0,243) | 1,145 | *** | (0,232) |
| Social rights | -0,492 | | (0,381) | 0,279 | | (0,278) | 1,097 | *** | (0,264) |
| Age | 0,047 | *** | (0,008) | 0,016 | ** | (0,005) | -0,002 | | (0,005) |
| Sex (ref: male) | -0,230 | | (0,211) | -0,178 | | (0,146) | 0,092 | | (0,144) |
| Education (ref: lower secondary or less) | | | | | | | | | |
| Upper secondary | 0,037 | | (0,335) | 0,947 | *** | (0,236) | 0,832 | *** | (0,241) |
| Tertiary education | 0,005 | | (0,362) | 1,247 | *** | (0,258) | 1,499 | *** | (0,259) |
| Income feeling (ref: difficult or very difficult) | | | | | | | | | |
| Coping | 0,067 | | (0,309) | -0,440 | * | (0,218) | -0,294 | | (0,220) |
| Living comfortably | 0,019 | | (0,319) | -0,596 | ** | (0,228) | -0,586 | * | (0,230) |
| Born in country (ref: no) | 1,033 | ** | (0,328) | 0,329 | | (0,292) | 0,656 | * | (0,281) |
| Parent's born in country (ref: no) | 1,163 | *** | (0,308) | 0,037 | | (0,274) | -0,883 | *** | (0,263) |
| Member of a discriminated group (ref: no) | -0,430 | | (0,367) | 0,727 | ** | (0,260) | 0,629 | * | (0,264) |
| Left-right | -0,081 | | (0,053) | -0,049 | | (0,035) | -0,078 | * | (0,035) |
| Satisfaction with democracy | -0,036 | | (0,049) | -0,079 | * | (0,033) | -0,052 | | (0,032) |
| Importance to live in a democracy | 0,216 | *** | (0,058) | -0,006 | | (0,048) | 0,059 | | (0,050) |
| **Observations** | 1.151 | | | 1.205 | | | 1.205 | | |

*Table 1. Participation models, Ireland, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: Signification levels: *** 0,1%; ** 1%; * 5%; population 25 years old and over*

# 3. Discussion

In this section, we interpret the findings on political participation in Ireland detailed in Section 2, focusing on education inequalities, socioeconomic background, immigration, age, gender, political attitudes and ideals in relation to political participation at the national level, as presented in Section 2.

## *3.1. Education inequalities and socioeconomic background*

The European Social Survey (ESS) data reveal that higher levels of education correlate with increased political participation, aligning with findings from Jeffers & Lillis (2024) and Duggan et al. (2023) that educational attainment is a significant predictor of civic engagement. However, this relationship is not linear across all types of participation. The ESS data in this report reveals notable disparities in political participation based on educational attainment. Contrary to expectations, individuals with lower levels of education display high levels of voting participation, akin to those with secondary or higher education. These finding challenges traditional assumptions that higher education correlates with increased political engagement. Instead, it suggests that other factors, such as socioeconomic background, may play a more significant role in shaping political participation. However, when specifically examining formal political participation (contacting a politician, displaying a campaign badge, and donating to or participating in a political party or lobby group), the data shows a different trend: increased educational attainment is linked to higher levels of participation.

Beyond the socioeconomic explanation, other factors might also play a significant role. These could include a sense of political efficacy (the belief that one's engagement can make a difference), cultural and social capital, access to information, and the influence of social networks and community engagement. Moreover, the manner in which political campaigns are conducted and the platforms they utilize could also affect which demographic groups are more likely to engage. For instance, digital campaigns might resonate more with

younger, more educated populations, while traditional campaigning methods might have greater appeal among older, less-educated demographics. However, in highly polarised societies, the impact of digital campaigns on changing people's opinions on political issues is often less significant than anticipated. One illustrative example comes from the 2018 referendum in Ireland. According to a study conducted by Reidy and Suiter (2023), a significant majority of voters had already firmly decided how they would vote long before the campaign commenced. Although social media remained a pivotal component of the campaign, primarily facilitating information dissemination and engagement, its ability to sway opinions during the referendum was constrained. This discovery challenges assumptions regarding the efficacy of social media in influencing voter behaviour, especially within contexts characterised by deep polarization and extensive media coverage of referendum campaigns.

Focusing specifically on formal political participation and socioeconomic factors, the analysis indicates a decrease in participation with higher income levels. Those facing financial difficulties show a higher participation rate (28%) compared to others (22%) in Ireland. This shows us that individuals from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds demonstrate higher levels of formal and informal political participation compared to their more affluent counterparts. Notably, a substantial disparity exists in formal political participation between individuals identifying with a discriminated group and those who do not.

In Ireland, significant changes in social policies tend to affect those with lower socioeconomic status first, particularly in crucial areas like housing, healthcare, and social welfare. This direct impact encourages them to become more politically active to support policies that better meet their needs and interests.

Existing research supports this notion, emphasising the influence of socioeconomic factors on educational outcomes and participation inequalities. Studies by Jeffers & Lillis (2024) highlight the persistent role of socioeconomic disparities in shaping educational outcomes and perpetuating inequality. Their study (2024) discusses strong negative correlations between measures of disadvantage and educational achievement. This implies that students from disadvantaged backgrounds often face barriers to academic success. Factors such as limited attendance, anti-social behaviour, and low expectations may contribute to these participation inequalities.

Despite efforts such as the DEIS initiative, educational inequalities persist, reflecting broader socioeconomic disparities. While the DEIS program has succeeded in reducing educational inequalities at the school level, it has also highlighted the ongoing challenges associated with individual-level socioeconomic disparities (Duggan et al., 2023). Their study highlights that DEIS schools receive additional supports such as a reduction in class sizes, provision of Home School Community Liaison coordinators, extra grant aid, priority access to teacher professional development, and expanded provision from the National Educational Psychological Service. This suggests that while the DEIS program may address some disparities at the school level, broader socioeconomic inequalities continue to impact participation and outcomes among disadvantaged students. This underscores the importance of targeted interventions to address resource inequalities and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Further analysis is needed to understand the underlying mechanisms driving participation among individuals with lower levels of education. It is possible that factors such as community engagement, social networks, and political mobilisation play a more significant role in shaping participation among disadvantaged groups. Additionally, efforts to address systemic barriers to education and promote inclusive civic education are essential for fostering equitable participation.

## 3.2. Gender disparities

Gender disparities in political and civic participation represent significant challenges to democratic inclusion. Despite legislative efforts to promote gender equality, women continue to be underrepresented in political leadership roles, reflecting broader societal norms and structural barriers that limit women's participation in public life.

The statistical analysis reveals nuanced gender disparities in political participation, with slightly higher participation rates among men compared to women consistent with broader gender disparities observed in political representation (Gender Equality Index2022: Ireland, 2022). In terms of voting, ESS study revealed that men exhibit higher participation rates at 85% compared to women at 82%. However, the gender gap varies across different forms of participation, suggesting that women may face unique barriers and challenges in certain contexts. For example, while women demonstrate comparable levels of voting participation, they may be underrepresented in formal political activities such as contacting politicians or participating in political parties. In terms of informal political participation, it is found out that women demonstrate slightly higher participation rates (29%) compared to men (28%) in Ireland. This discrepancy is underscored by Connolly's study (2016), which highlights how gender stereotypes within parliamentary settings in Ireland impact not just the presence of women in politics, but also the roles they are assigned, the expectations placed upon them, and the focus of legislative efforts on gender issues. These stereotypes serve as barriers by limiting the perceived legitimacy of women's participation in certain political activities and by imposing additional hurdles for women who seek to engage in political leadership or influence policy beyond the narrow confines of gendered expectations.

The Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Equality Defence, and Women's Rights identified five main challenges that hinder women's participation in parliamentary politics, known as the "Five Cs": Cash, Childcare, Candidate Selection, Culture, and Confidence (Gender equality in politics lesson plan: Junior Cycle CSPE). These factors contribute to the underrepresentation of women in politics and need to be addressed comprehensively in Ireland. the National Women's Council of Ireland (2019) has produced a report with recommendations for addressing the challenges and increasing women's representation. These recommendations likely include specific policy changes, support mechanisms, and initiatives aimed at overcoming the barriers women face in politics.

## 3.3. Impact of immigration

The rise in immigration in Ireland has significant implications for political and civic participation, highlighting the importance of recognising and addressing the needs of immigrant communities. They bring different viewpoints and experiences, making discussions and decisions in democracy richer and more varied. This is important because it means a wider range of ideas are considered, leading to better policies that reflect the diverse society of Ireland today. However, immigrant communities may face unique barriers to participation, including language barriers, cultural differences, and legal challenges. Furthermore, as the Strength in Diversity report (2020) by the Immigrant Council of Ireland suggests immigrants may have smaller social networks compared to native-born individuals, which can restrict their access to support systems, campaign resources, and political connections necessary for electoral success.

The ESS data reveals lower participation rates among individuals born outside the country or with foreign-born parents, suggesting potential barriers to integration and engagement. In terms of voting, participation rates are lower among individuals born outside the country or whose parents were born abroad. Native-born

individuals display a high participation rate at 88%, contrasting with a lower rate of 55% among foreign-born individuals. This difference may stem from the fact that many expats without Irish citizenship (passport) lack the right to vote in general elections. However, they do have the right to vote in local elections. The rationale behind this policy is to ensure that those who have a direct stake in the country's long-term future and who are fully subject to its laws and responsibilities are the ones making decisions on its governance at the national level. The inability to vote in general elections, which determine the national government and its policies, may lead to a feeling of disenfranchisement among foreign-born residents and is a plausible factor contributing to their lower participation rate. Since general elections play a crucial role in shaping national policies and governance, foreign-born residents who are unable to participate may feel marginalized or excluded from the political process. This sense of exclusion could lead to a decreased motivation to engage in electoral activities, such as voter registration and turnout, particularly if they perceive that their voices will not be heard or their concerns addressed by the government (Strength in Diversity report, 2020).

When it comes to formal political participation, individuals born outside the country, as well as those with parents born abroad, show lower participation rates in Ireland (19% vs. 24% and 20% vs. 24%, respectively). However, a different trend emerges in informal political participation. The data reveals that individuals with foreign-born parents exhibit higher participation rates (34%) compared to those with native-born parents (27%) in Ireland. Informal political participation in this context includes activities such as signing petitions, boycotting certain products, participating in demonstrations, and posting or sharing political content online. Non-Irish citizens including immigrants without an Irish passport can readily engage in these activities, leading to an increase in informal political participation.

These findings underscore the importance of targeted initiatives to promote immigrant integration and civic engagement, including language and citizenship education programmes, outreach efforts, and policies that address the specific needs of immigrant communities.

## *3.4. Age, political attitudes, and ideals*

The relationship between age and political participation is complex, reflecting broader societal and psychological shifts across life stages. Older individuals may feel a stronger sense of civic duty, stemming from a longer period of socialisation within the political system of their country (House of the Oireachtas, NDa; Connolly, 2016). This is consistent with the observed trend of increasing voter turnout among older demographics in Ireland, as highlighted in Section 2. However, interestingly, our study identifies a unique trend in Ireland, where individuals within the 35-44 age group are least likely to participate. Possible explanations may include life stage considerations such as career and family responsibilities, which could impact their ability to participate actively in political processes.

Additionally, our analysis sheds light on the dynamics of age and formal political activities beyond voting. Unlike the trend in voting participation, which tends to increase with age, formal political involvement is most prominent among those aged 35-64. This indicates that, although older individuals are more consistent voters, those in the middle age range are more engaged in activities such as contacting politicians or participating in political parties. These findings highlight the complex layers of political participation among various age groups, emphasising the need for targeted approaches to foster political engagement across different life stages.

The varying levels of political participation across different age cohorts can also be attributed to differing political attitudes and ideals. Younger individuals, motivated by themes of equality, mental health, and climate

change, may engage more in informal political activities, such as demonstrations and online activism, reflecting a shift towards more expressive forms of political engagement (Comhairle na nÓg, ND). Meanwhile, older demographics, having witnessed significant political and social transformations, may prioritise formal participation mechanisms, such as voting and contacting politicians, viewing them as more effective channels for systemic change.

The analysis also shows the influence of political attitudes and ideals on participation patterns. Individuals aligned with the "High ideals" group exhibit higher levels of participation in voting (87%), reflecting a strong commitment to democratic principles. The turnout in Ireland is higher among those leaning towards the right (88%) compared to the left (86%), Conversely, those leaning towards the center of the political spectrum demonstrate lower levels of participation, highlighting the potential impact of ideological orientation on civic engagement. This observation suggests that ideological orientation plays a role in shaping civic engagement, with right-leaning individuals demonstrating slightly higher levels of participation.

Political attitudes and ideals directly influence the manner and frequency of political participation. Individuals aligned with the "High ideals" group, valuing both liberal aspects of democracy and social rights, are likely to engage more actively in both formal and informal political activities. Conversely, those with "Low ideals" or a narrow view of democracy may participate less, possibly due to scepticism about the impact of their involvement or a narrower interest in political issues. The "Political rights" group, emphasising liberal democracy aspects, shows a particular inclination for active participation, suggesting that a focus on “individual freedoms and rights can be a strong mobiliser” (Olsen and Hooghe, 2018). In essence, the emphasis on these democratic values encourages citizens to actively participate in shaping their political landscape, contributing to the vitality of democratic governance.

## *3.5. Conclusion*

The intertwining of education, socioeconomic status, age, gender, ethnicity, political attitudes, ideals and political participation in Ireland presents a complex picture of civic engagement. While higher levels of education and socioeconomic status generally correlate with increased political engagement, persistent disparities highlight the need for targeted interventions. Gender differences are narrowing, yet women's participation in certain political domains remains lower than men's. Age and social class significantly influence participation patterns, with older individuals and those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds more likely to engage in formal political processes. Conversely, younger demographics and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds show a preference for informal engagement methods. Migrants and ethnic minorities face significant barriers to participation, underscoring the importance of inclusive policies and practices that encourage their involvement in the democratic process.

Addressing the barriers to participation requires a broader approach that includes policy interventions and educational reforms. Ireland's commitment to participatory mechanisms and legal frameworks supporting equality provides a foundation upon which to build. Yet, the journey towards a fully inclusive democracy necessitates ongoing dialogue, policy innovation, and collective action across all sectors of society.

# 4. Recommendations for the education system

Considering the findings and discussions outlined in the preceding sections, this section proposes evidence-based recommendations aimed at enhancing political participation in Ireland through targeted interventions at the policy level, institutional level, and among educators. These recommendations are derived from the analysis of political participation in relation to education inequalities, socioeconomic background, immigration, age, gender, political attitudes.

## *4.1. Policy-level and institutional level interventions*

Current data suggest a direct correlation between educational attainment and political participation, albeit nuanced by various forms of participation and other socioeconomic factors. To address this, comprehensive civic education programmes that are inclusive and reflective of Ireland's diverse demographic should be instituted. However, it is important to incorporate a more explicit focus on socio-economic issues to provide a holistic approach to democratic education. By integrating socio-economic considerations, these programmes can better address the challenges faced by students from different economic backgrounds, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to engage meaningfully in the democratic process. Recognising that groups from less economically privileged backgrounds and those born outside Ireland exhibit higher levels of political participation, it is essential to embed their experiences of inequalities within Education for Democracy (EfD). This can be achieved by tailoring civic education to highlight how socio-economic disparities influence political engagement and by fostering an environment that acknowledges and addresses these inequalities.

The curriculum ought to be comprehensive, covering the breadth of democratic principles, rights, and responsibilities, thereby equipping students with the knowledge and skills necessary to participate actively and meaningfully in the democratic process. Civic education in Ireland encompasses various programmes and initiatives designed to foster an understanding of civic responsibilities, democratic principles, and political engagement among students. CSPE (Civic, Social, and Political Education) is a compulsory subject at the Junior Certificate level in secondary schools. Politics and Society is a subject introduced at the Leaving Certificate level. Additionally, Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn (The Union of Students in Ireland - USI), though not formally integrated into the educational curriculum, plays a role in civic education. Dáil na nÓg, the national youth parliament of Ireland, and The Young Social Innovators (YSI) are also notable examples of civic education initiatives in Ireland. These programmes form the backbone of Ireland's commitment to fostering a well-informed, engaged, and responsible citizens, capable of active participation in democratic processes and societal improvement. In order to ensure that these comprehensive civic education programmes effectively bridge the gaps caused by socio-economic disparities, it is essential to integrate strategies that address the varying levels of knowledge, social, cultural, and financial capital among students from different socio-economic backgrounds. Implementing differentiated instruction techniques, providing additional support through tutoring and mentorship, and providing equitable access to extracurricular resources and digital tools could reduce participation gaps among students.

As societal challenges evolve and the global landscape becomes increasingly complex, there is a pressing need to further develop these initiatives. For instance, The CSPE and Politics and Society curricula could benefit significantly from deeper integration with other academic subjects. Creating interdisciplinary connections, for example, between CSPE and subjects like history, geography, economics, and digital media, can provide students with a richer, more nuanced understanding of civic issues. Student voice and participation should be at the heart of civic education. Initiatives like Dáil na nÓg and YSI empower students to take active roles in

addressing societal issues and influencing policy. Expanding these opportunities, ensuring they are accessible to a diverse range of students, and integrating student-led initiatives into the formal curriculum can enhance the impact of civic education. It is important that student voices are not only heard but also recognised and valued. It is recommended that educators implement strategies to make student voice inclusive by creating structured opportunities for all students to participate, such as rotating leadership roles in group projects and using anonymous feedback tools to ensure quieter students can contribute without fear of judgement. Additionally, building student structures that prevent the reproduction of existing inequalities involves providing equitable access to leadership positions and ensuring that active students do not overshadow their peers. Opportunities should not only be accessible but also inclusive by addressing barriers such as cultural dissonance and lack of representation. This can be achieved by incorporating multicultural perspectives into the curriculum and establishing support systems that encourage participation from all student groups. This way, every student feels included and motivated to engage in the democratic process. It is also helpful to provide professional development and training for teachers so they can effectively teach civic education and encourage discussions on civic engagement and democratic participation.

The integration of immigrants into the Irish educational system and society at large calls for targeted policy initiatives. To address and enhance the integration and participation of immigrants within the civic education framework in Ireland, targeted strategies and initiatives are essential. Given the increasing diversity of Ireland's population due to immigration, it is imperative to adapt and evolve civic education to be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of immigrant communities. Policies should mandate the creation and distribution of educational resources that cater to the linguistic and cultural diversity of Ireland's student population. This includes textbooks, digital resources, and other educational materials that reflect the histories, cultures, and contributions of different immigrant communities to Irish society. Educators should employ specific methods to support migrant students to express their opinions and ideas and develop their political agency. This includes implementing interactive projects that encourage self-expression and critical thinking, providing leadership opportunities within classroom activities and student organisations, establishing peer mentoring programmes that pair migrant students with supportive peers, and facilitating community-based initiatives that allow migrant students to engage with local issues and represent their unique perspectives. By adopting these strategies, teachers can create a supportive and empowering environment that enables migrant students to actively participate and contribute to the democratic process. This ensures their voices are heard and valued both in school and in the wider community.

In terms of political participation, it is important for political parties to promote diversity among their candidates, ensuring that the electoral process reflects the demographic realities of Ireland today. Also, it is recommended to review and adjust legal frameworks to facilitate easier access to voting for non-native Irish citizens, where possible. This could include considerations around residency requirements for voting in local elections or exploring mechanisms to allow long-term residents greater participation in the political process.

When it comes to gender equality remains a pivotal area of concern. Policy efforts must focus on eliminating gender stereotypes in education and promoting equal participation in fields historically dominated by one gender, particularly in STEM and leadership roles. In education, implement policies that mandate the integration of gender-sensitive materials and perspectives into the civic education curriculum. This should include the history and importance of gender equality movements, the analysis of gender disparities in political participation, and the promotion of female role models in politics.

## 4.2. Recommendations for educators

Educators are at the forefront of shaping the next generation's political engagement. Professional development opportunities focused on civic education and inclusive teaching practices can equip educators with the necessary tools to engage students effectively in political discourse.

Educators should create a classroom culture that encourages participation, debate, and decision-making which empower students to take active roles in their communities and the broader political landscape. Activities such as student-led panels and debates help students practice public speaking and critical thinking, while collaborative projects encourage them to address real-world issues and connect classroom lessons with local concerns. Using personal reflection tools like journals and creative approaches such as structured storytelling circles, students can share their perspectives and build empathy, which fosters a culture of openness and respect. Additionally, activities that simulate democratic processes, such as mock decision-making boards, or that encourage individual growth, like workshop days focused on personal strengths, allow students to take on various roles within the classroom, building confidence and respect for others. Together, these approaches support a dynamic and inclusive learning environment where students develop the skills and mindset necessary for meaningful civic participation.

Additionally, organising events that encourage dialogue between students of varying ages and elders can bridge generational gaps, allowing the exchange of diverse viewpoints, experiences, and insights on political involvement. Lastly, integrating gender and intercultural studies into the curriculum at all educational levels is essential for cultivating a more inclusive, empathetic, and just society. This involves examining the roles, experiences, and contributions of different genders historically and in contemporary society, exploring global histories, comparative religious studies, and multicultural literature, and analysing social norms and practices from various cultural perspectives. This approach not only broadens students' perspectives but also challenges and reduces socio-economic and cultural capital disparities by providing equitable access to diverse educational content.

Above all, it is important to appreciate and embrace students' diverse backgrounds, ensuring their voices are heard, recognised, and valued within the educational discourse and beyond. Creating an inclusive classroom environment that fosters active engagement, and civic responsibility requires a whole-school approach that values and respects all students' diverse backgrounds and experiences. This commitment means ensuring that every student, including those from migrant backgrounds, students with disabilities, members of the Traveller community, and others with unique identities, feels seen, heard, and valued within both the classroom and broader school community. Recognising and addressing potential barriers, such as cultural dissonance, underrepresentation, or accessibility issues, is essential to creating an environment where every student can participate meaningfully. To promote this inclusivity, schools should implement a multicultural and diverse curriculum that reflects the histories, contributions, and experiences of all student groups. By integrating content that represents diverse backgrounds, including the Traveller community's cultural heritage and the perspectives of students with disabilities, schools can create a curriculum where all students feel represented and valued. A whole-school approach requires collaboration among teachers, administrators, and community members to embed inclusive policies and practices throughout the school environment. By actively supporting diverse needs, whether through accessible resources, adaptive teaching methods, or celebrating cultural diversity, schools can ensure that all students feel connected and empowered. This approach not only strengthens the educational experience but also prepares students for active and inclusive participation in society. It instills values of respect, empathy, and community engagement that extend beyond school walls.

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# Poland

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# Abbreviations

CBOS: Centre for Public Opinion Research (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej)

ESS: European Social Survey

EU: European Union

EVS: European Values Study

ICCS: International Comparative Citizenship Study

NGO: non-governmental organization

PGSW: Polish General Electoral Study (Polskie Generalne Studium Wyborcze)

PiS: Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość)

PO: Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska)

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

# Executive Summary

The Polish national report on education inequalities and political participation is one of the six national reports included in Deliverable 3.1. It presents the results of analysis of data from international surveys and national literature to discuss how political participation is influenced by social inequalities and political values and attitudes.

The report is structured following the common guidelines for all national reports. The first part of the report provides an overview of the Polish context that affects political and civic participation. It focuses on the dynamics of the political system in Poland since 1989, the development of civil society and social movements as well as examines the changes in the social and ethnic structure as well as trends in social inequalities. To better understand the role of education in enhancing political participation, the relationship between education and democracy is also discussed. The second chapter presents the main results of the statistical analysis of the European Social Survey (ESS). It starts with a description of the evolution of political participation between 2012 and 2020, offering the general results in Poland analysed in comparison with the EU average. It reveals that the engagement in all forms of political participation – voting, formal and informal participation – had risen over the years, albeit at different pace. The second section more detailly describes different forms of political participation in 2020 and their correlates. The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of participation dynamics in Poland, with socio-demographic factors (mainly the level of education and sex) and attitudes towards governance significantly shaping individuals' engagement in both voting, formal and informal political participation. The third chapter discusses the significance of the results from the ESS in the light of the outcomes of Polish research on political participation and democratic attitudes, as well as selected official data on voting turnout and other political participation. It also addresses the implications for the education for democracy based on the results of the International Comparative Citizenship Study (ICCS) for Poland. The analysis demonstrates deficits in the political participation of Poles and relate them to their insufficient knowledge about politics, political apathy and disillusionment with the way democracy operates in their country. It also confirms the persistence of social inequalities in political participation, with women, less educated and younger individuals as well as rural residents underrepresented in certain political arenas.

Based on the analysis in chapter 2 and chapter 3, the fourth chapter of the report provides recommendations for the education system in Poland on how to better support the development of active democratic citizenry.

# Table of Contents

# 1. The Polish context for political and civic participation

This section provides an overview of the Polish context that affects political and civic participation. It focuses on the political system in Poland introduced after the transition from real socialism to liberal democracy in 1989 as well as the development of civil society and, more recently, social movements. This is followed by an examination of social structure and social inequalities, in particular related to social class and gender, as well as the attitude towards immigration. Finally, the relationship between education and democracy is discussed.

## *1.1. Political system*

Poland started the transition from real socialism to liberal democracy and market economy in 1989 after the roundtable negotiations between the representatives of the communist ruling party (Polish United Workers' Party) and the democratic opposition grouped around the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity". The agreement signed by both sides of the negotiations aimed at a gradual change of the political system and provided for the legalisation of independent trade unions, media plurality, restoration of the position of the president and the bicameral legislature (with 460 seats in the lower chamber – *Sejm* and 100 seats in the upper chamber - *Senat*). The Round Table agreement also specified that 65% of seats in Sejm should be granted to candidates from the ruling party and its allies, the remaining 35% of the seats were open to opposition in freely contested race. The elections to the Senate were to be completely free.

The election on 4 June 1989, although not yet fully democratic, proved victorious for the democratic opposition, thus bringing 40 years of communist rule in Poland to an end. It triggered a transformation of both economic and political system regulated first by the "Small Constitution" of 1992 and then by the Constitution of the Republic of Poland accepted in a national referendum of May 1997.

As far the current Polish political system is concerned, it is classified as a cabinet-parliamentary system with the main executive competences focused with the government. The president's competences are mostly limited to being the formal head of the armed forces and representing the country in international relations. Being a unitary state, Poland is relatively decentralised with three levels of the territorial self-government. These are communes (municipal, rural and mixed) with direct elections of village mayors, town mayors and city presidents, poviats/counties and 16 regions/voivodship (Madej, 2019).

For the first years of political transformation, the Polish party system was highly fragmented, with many unstable and fluid parties, thus "rendering recognition of the economic (…) interests served by any particular party inaccessible to popular perception" (Wesołowski, 1997, p. 228). It took the form of a bipolar rivalry between the post-communist, consolidated left and the fragmented, post-Solidarity right and centre-right. The postcommunist divide not only operated at the level of political parties and their elites but also at the level of voting behaviour and social beliefs on the most fundamental questions of democracy, the model of social order, the way the country was governed, morality, religion, and attitudes towards the Catholic Church (Grabowska, 2004).

In 2005 the fundamental axis of political competition in the elections shifted from a division between the post-communist left and the post-Solidarity right to a confrontation between two right-wing, post-Solidarity parties. The political disputes centred around the assessment of the achievements of the Polish democracy, its further transformation, and socio-economic issues. It took the form of a rivalry between the conservative, populist and anti-EU rhetoric of Law and Justice (PiS) and the liberal vision of Civic Platform (PO) (Sieklucki, 2010). After being the frontrunner of successful democratic and economic transformation for years, Poland became during

the PiS government (2015-2023) one of the leading cases of European democratic backsliding with a series of illiberal measures including weakening institutional checks and balances through changes to the judicial system and *exerted control over the media landscape*. The illiberal turn also included the rise of anti-immigration rhetoric in the public debate as well as strengthening the campaigns against "LGBT ideology" led by ultra-conservative organisations with the support of the ruling party, the president, selected local governments (introducing "LGBT-free zones") and the Catholic Church. It also involved tightening the abortion law by removing one of three grounds on which an abortion could be obtained and targeting people for alleged abortion-related activities. These changes resulted in mass anti-government protests and eventually sparked electoral mobilization that allowed PiS to be removed from power in 2023 after two terms in office. The new government was formed by the Civic Coalition (an alliance formed around PO) together with three other political parties: the Polish People's Party, Poland 2050 (forming together an alliance of The Third Way) and the New Left. Ideologically ranging from centre-left to centre-right, the parties forming the coalition government share pro-democratic and pro-European attitudes.

One of the specificities of the Polish political life is the prominent role of the Catholic Church in the public debate. The significance of the Catholic Church has its roots in centuries-long national tradition (as Catholicism had been an indication of national identity while Poland was under foreign occupation between late 18$^{th}$ and the beginning of 20$^{th}$ century), and in the role which it played in the support of opposition under the communist regime. Church representatives were the mediators and guarantors of the roundtable agreement in 1989 and legitimized Solidarity elites in the subsequent parliamentary elections (Wesołowski, 1997; Kowalczyk, 2012). With various direct and indirect measures – from vocal support of individual electoral candidates to engagement in public debate on policy making, the Catholic Church has subsequently aimed to ensure that its positions on such issues as religious education, abortion and birth control and the definition of marriage were firmly entrenched in the Polish legal system and social practices. However, recent open support for the right-wing government's policies and rhetoric, especially concerning sexual minorities and women's reproductive rights, as well as paedophile scandals within the Church, visibly strengthened the ongoing secularization process in Poland, especially among young people and the youngest electoral cohort (Skóra, 2023).

## *1.2. Civil society*

The collapse of communist regime opened up the space for the reconstitution of civil society with the rapid emergence of a wide spectrum of NGOs, foundations, charities, religious and ethnic minority organizations, employer and business associations (Ekiert et al., 2017). Currently several thousand new associations and foundations are registered every year (see Figure 1). In 2022, there were 103,400 non-profit organizations in Poland, bringing together 8.3 million members (GUS 2023b). At the same time, the study "Gender Equality and Quality of Life" shows a low level of participation in civic actions (Krzaklewska et al., 2016, p. 21). Fewer than 10% of respondents engaged in charity organizations, local initiatives and organizations, church and religious communities or hobby and sport teams (Krzaklewska et al., 2016, p. 21). Similarly, it is surprising that in a country where the democratic order was won by the trade unions, the unionisation rate is very low and amounts just to a few percent: current membership fluctuates between 5 and 7% (CBOS, 2021a).

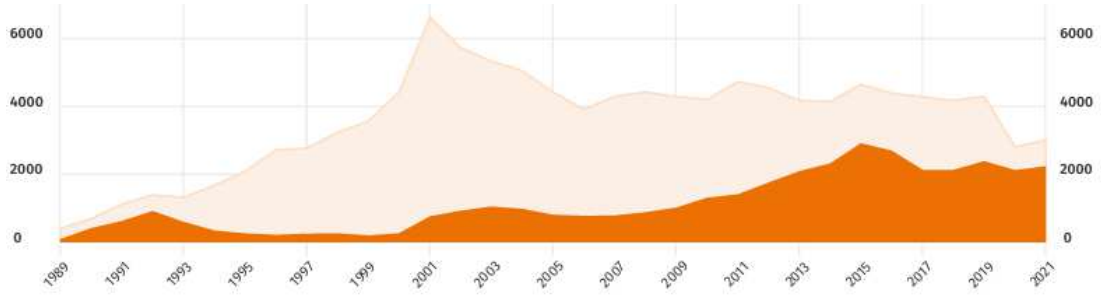



*Figure 1. Newly registered associations (pale) and foundations (orange)*
*Source: Klon/Jawor 2021*

## 1.3. Social movements

One of the most significant manifestations of civic activity are social movements. While the development of citizen opposition and their mobilization is not a new phenomenon in Poland and it can be traced back to the communist period, Law and Justice's policies since 2015 have led to the intensification of protests and public manifestations among right-wing populists and the anti-government opposition (between 2015-2024). This polarisation of society is embedded in social, cultural, economic, and political factors. While the populist movement has emerged mostly in response to the economic and social inequalities growing out of the sense of fear and frustration, reinforced by the financial and immigration crises, the anti-government opposition contested attempts to shift the existing democratic order into an authoritarian regime. The changes proposed by the governing party – Law and Justice – were seen as undemocratic and met with street and online protests, contesting legal and court system reforms, the amendment law on public gathering, restrictions on media freedom, discrimination of minorities, changes in the educational curriculum by forcing "patriotic" values or limiting women's reproductive rights (Korolczuk, 2016; Majewska, 2018). The latter are seen as exceptional as the massive protest in 2016 and 2020 against the bill proposing a complete ban on legal abortion in Poland resonated deeply within society, mobilizing citizens of diverse gender, age, social class, sexuality living not only in big cities, but also in small towns and rural areas. As the estimated data shows, the protests in 2020 were one of the largest demonstrations in Poland since 1989, engaging at their peak approximately 430,000 people across 410 demonstrations all over the country (quotes in Marczewski, 2024, p. 22). The protests in 2016 and 2020 were given considerable visibility in public sphere, providing a space for participants to voice their own rights and needs in a wide spectrum of forms. According to Beata Kowalska, Radosław Nawojski, and Magdalena Pluta (2018), the protests in 2016 – known as the Black Protests – could be seen as new forms of citizens' practices in terms of the variety of forms of manifestation (e.g. taking part in protests or activities in social media, wearing black clothes and/or badges, taking a day off at work). Jenny Gunnarsson Payne (2019) argues that the Black Protests should be seen as a gendered version of "left populism". Through the protests, the citizens gained their agency as well as a sense of community and belonging, expressing their active citizenship to protect individual freedoms, rights and ultimately – democratic order (Ostaszewska, 2018; Nawojski, Kowalska, 2022). The protests to protects women's rights can be seen as a turning point in the exercising of citizen's rights, regaining autonomy and opening a new spaces for citizens' engagement in public sphere. As Marta Przeszło (2017: 20) argues: "One can remember crowds of women who took to the streets to make their presence seen and to show problems".

## 1.4. Social structure and social inequalities

While the transformation brought democratization and market economy, the transition was not a smooth process and came with considerable costs. On a macro level, the Polish economy is seen as providing stable growth, even after the global crisis in 2008. Yet, this picture must be completed by critical voices highlighting the negative effects of neoliberal model of transformation over the last 35 years (Kowalik, 2009; Hardy, 2010; Chancel et al., 2022). The market economy was introduced with the shock therapy approach introduced in 1990 by the then minister of finance Leszek Balcerowicz, and was based on the Washington Consensus, a set of radical policy prescriptions for economic reforms in the countries of Latin America. The reforms checked the hyperinflation, disciplined the budget, and imposed some order on the flow of money (Wesołowski, 1997), but also brought the downfall of many enterprises, and the pauperisation of many social groups. They resulted in huge structural unemployment, wide social inequalities, and increasing poverty. Although the unemployment rate fluctuated, with periods of reversed tendencies, it remained high even at the beginning of the 21st century, leading to the long-lasting development of a "culture of unemployment", affecting young people in particular (despite them being well-educated) and showing the inability of the successive governments to combat unemployment and their acceptance of the situation. Unemployment was also one of the reasons for growing poverty, with the number of people living in absolute poverty increasing. There have been growing differences between rural and urban areas and the lack of communal houses and increasing unemployment has left people with no support. These changes stirred up widespread discontent which was expressed in several waves of social protests, including strikes, demonstrations, marches, and pickets. Especially frustrated and disappointed were employees of state-owned enterprises, farmers and public sector employees (Ekiert, Kubik, 1998). The application of 'shock theory' and the later continuation of neoliberal reforms brought significant income disparity, which to this day translates into a conflicting social structure and feeds support for populist political parties (Tyrała, 2015).

Social inequalities have been increasing since the 1990's. A recent study (Chancel et al., 2022) provides clear evidence of growing social and economic inequalities. While the bottom 50% of the population earned 28% of national income in 1990, in 2021 their income decreased to 20%. The situation is reversed in case of the top 10% whose situation improved over the last 30 years and their share of national income has nearly doubled: from 20% to 38% (Chancel et al., 2022, p. 213). The differences in terms of wealth are even more visible for average household wealth, revealing that the bottom 50% of population in Poland has more debt than assets as their average wealth equals -1% of the total household wealth (Chancel et al., 2022, p. 214). The analysis shows that the society is split into two parts, illustrating the most elitist division of income: a minority with huge fortunes and the majority being poor.

The polarization of society and the inequalities are also reflected in the social structure. Since the transformation, there has also been a shrinkage of the working class and peasantry, emergence and growth of the middle class, and entrepreneurs, an increase in the proportion of people with higher education (Domański, 2015; Gdula, Sadura, 2012). The differences between members of upper, middle and lower social class are embedded in their social, cultural and economic capital, translating, among others, into distinct visions of public policy, education, life styles, employment, and participation in political life (Gdula, Sadura, 2012).

The recent Gender Equality Index also confirms the gender inequalities in Poland. "With 56.6 out of 100 points, Poland ranks 23rd in the EU on the Gender Equality Index. Its score is 11.4 points below the EU's score. Since 2010, Poland's score has increased by only 1.1 points, and its ranking has dropped by nine places. Since 2018, Poland's score has increased by 0.8 points, due to slight improvements in the domains of power and money.

Its ranking remains the same as in 2018" (Gender Inequality Index 2021: Poland, 2021). While Poland has the best score (when compared to other countries) in the domain of knowledge (57.6 points, 15th place among all Member States), the worst one are related to the domain of power (31.5 points, 22nd place among all Member States, 5 places lower compared to 2010). Interestingly, Poland has the highest score in the domains of health (83.3 points) and money (76.7 points, with the biggest improvement since 2010), but has not been able to reach the EU's score in any of the domains (Figure 2).

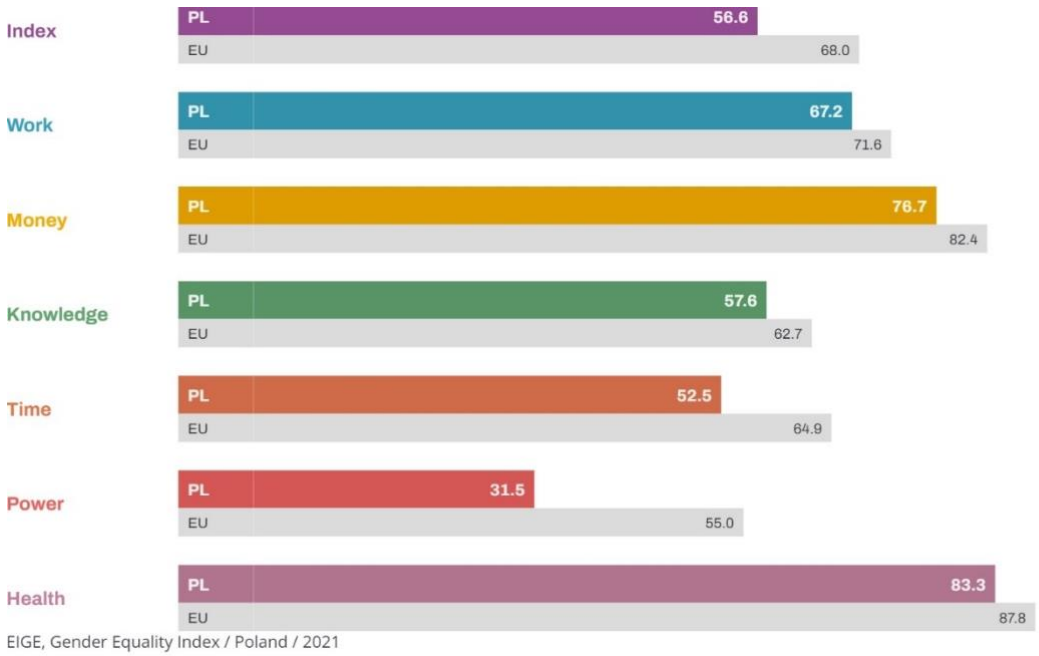



*Figure 2. Gender Equality Index 2021: Poland and EU*
*Source: Gender Equality Index 2021: Poland*

Although there have been improvements in gender equality attitudes and policies, there are still gaps to be addressed in relation to the situation of women and men on the labour market, in the public sphere, and in families (Krzaklewska et al., 2016). Every second women was present the labour market in the fourth quarter of 2023 – the employment rate among women was 50.6% compared to 64% among men (GUS, 2024, p. 2). The expected duration of the working life of women is lower compared to men (respectively 32.2 years and 36.8 years), which is, among others, a result of different retirement age for women (Eurostat, 2023). Although the employment rate among women has increased, their participation in the labour market is strongly related with their family life cycle: the differences are especially visible among younger cohorts (20-24) due to women's educational choices as well as among those aged 25-29 and 30-34 which are related the motherhood employment gap (NSP, 2021). The difference in employment is also observed among men and women aged 55-59, with women being outside the labour market either due to difficulties in entering the labour market or choosing early retirement. Therefore, the changes stem from the demographic trends and cultural factors, but are also an effect of the policies implemented. The inactivity rate is also higher among women who withdraw from the labour market more often than men due to family and care responsibilities but also education and gaining new skills (Rumińska-Zimny, Wejdner, 2023, p. 10). Finally, there is a gender pay gap, although the data shows that the unadjusted gender pay gap is one of the lowest in the EU. Women earn, on average, 7.8% less than men in 2022 (Eurostat, undated), but the differences depend on the position in the company and are larger among top positions, as well as being related to labour market segregation (the feminization of the labour market).

The inequalities in the labour market (especially the gender pay gap) transfer into a care gap. In addition to maternity leave (20 weeks for a single pregnancy), both parents are entitled to parental leave (32 weeks for a single pregnancy) since 2013, and a leave only for fathers was adopted in 2010 (2 weeks). While the latter is used by fathers, the take-up rates for parental leave among men is low – out of 242,200 parents, only 2,000 men (0.8%) used parental leave between January and April 2019 (MRPiPS, 2019). The care gap is less visible among well-educated and middle-class fathers, among whom the uptake of the leave is higher compared to men from the lower class (Suwada, 2021). The long care leaves (maternity and parental leave) taken mostly or entirely by mothers may have a negative impact on their professional development, career progression and earnings, and consequently reinforce their caregiving roles and gender inequalities in care and work. To increase the uptake of parental leave by fathers and reduce the care gap, Poland implemented the work-life directive in 2023. In the light of the new regulation, fathers will be given a right to the entire parental leave regardless of the mother's employment status and the length of parental leave increased to 41 weeks, with 9 non-transferable weeks.

Gender inequalities occur also in political involvement. As already noted, women have been active in social movements, NGOs and local activities. While the importance of civic and political engagement at the local level have already been recognized as important pathways to formal politics (Lister, 2003), this has not been observed in Poland. The engagement in informal politics has not translated into women's participation in formal politics. Since the quota system was introduced in Poland in 2011, the number of women in electoral list has increased, reaching the highest number in the last parliamentary election in 2023. Among all candidates, women constituted 43.8% and one fourth took the first position (Druciarek, Niżyńska, Przybysz, 2023) for the Lower Chamber. In case of the Upper Chamber, the progress is slower and only 19% of all candidates in 2023 were female (Druciarek, Niżyńska, Przybysz, 2023). One of the reasons for a slower progress towards the more equal participation of women in the election for the Upper Chamber is the lack of a quota mechanism, which only applies for the Lower Chamber. This shows that the adaptation of the quota proved to be an efficient tool in addressing gender inequalities: while around 23% of those on the electoral list were women in 2007, the percentage almost doubled after the first parliamentary election using the quota mechanism, reaching 43.5% (Druciarek, Niżyńska, Przybysz, 2023).

## *1.5. Towards a country of immigration*

After long being a country of emigration, in recent years Poland has recorded a positive migration balance, meaning that more people have arrived in the country than have left it. Shortly after 2014, the first stage of the war in the eastern part of Ukraine, Poland became the European leader in terms of newly issued permits for residence, and even the world leader in terms of receiving seasonal labour from abroad. The stock of immigrants at that time went from around 100,000 in 2011 to over 2 million in 2019 (Duszczyk, Kaczmarczyk, 2022). By far the largest group of people coming to Poland are Ukrainians, as well as citizens of a number of former Soviet Union countries (Helak, Szyszkowski, 2022). The Russian aggression in Ukraine in February 2022 resulted in the largest post-World War II migration of war refugees in Europe, estimated by the UNHCR at around 6 million people. As of February 2024, around 1/4 of them applied for asylum, temporary protection, or similar national protection schemes in Poland.[1] It is worth stressing that the recent influx of immigrants to Poland has taken place basically without a coherent and clearly articulated migration policy (Duszczyk, Kaczmarczyk, 2022). While Poland had largely been a homogenous country since the end of World War II, with

[1] Source: UNHCR collation of statistics, https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine

national and ethnic minorities amounting only to 4% (GUS, 2021), recent changes in the migration patterns may significantly change the ethnic structure of its population in the long run.

The attitudes towards immigration and immigrants have recently undergone significant changes in Polish society. While the sense of threat resulting from the presence of immigrants remains stable and lower than in other EU countries, the reluctance to allow immigrants to come and live in the country has been on the rise since 2015 (Brunarska et al., 2022). With the rise of anti-immigrant discourse in public media and among the representatives of the ruling party in the context of the refugee crisis in Europe and the EU relocation policy, approval for accepting refugees in Poland gradually decreased. In August 2015, support for accepting refugees from countries of armed conflict fell to 56% (from 72% in May), while opposition increased to 38% (from 21% in May). After the December 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, opponents of accepting refugees for the first time were in the majority (53% vs. 42% supporters). In October 2017 the percentage of the opponents rose further to 63% (CBOS, 2017).

The Russian aggression towards Ukraine in February 2022 again shifted attitudes towards refugees, at least to those fleeing from Ukraine: 62% of Poles agreed that Poland should accept Ukrainian refugees from conflict areas (CBOS, 2023b).

Despite these shifts, the recent ESS survey demonstrates that attitudes towards immigration were more positive in Poland than in the EU as a whole (Table 1).

| Table 1. Attitudes towards immigration, Poland and EU, 2020 | Poland | EU[(1)] |
|---|---|---|
| Immigration bad or good for country economy (% Good; 6-10) | 53,8% | 48,4% |
| Country cultural life undermined or enriched by immigrants (% Enriched; 6-10) | 56,6% | 51,2% |
| Immigrants make country worse or better place to live (% Better; 6-10) | 51,5% | 38,0% |

*Table 1. Attitudes towards immigration, Poland and EU, 2020*

*Source: ESS 2020*

*Note: EU includes 23 EU27 countries. (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)*

In 2020, more than 50% of respondents declare positive attitudes towards immigration: 54% of people considered that immigration was good for the country's economy, 57% that it enriched cultural life and 51% that it made the country a better place to live. These results were significatively higher than the EU average, where only the enrichment of cultural life is perceived by more than 50% of respondents.

## 1.6. Education and democracy

Changes in the education system in Poland were linked to the social transformations after 1989. Since then, the Polish school has been continuously reformed. After the Round Table talks, schools gained considerable autonomy, and teachers were free to plan and create their own classes. Encouragement was given to the establishment of private, community, and denominational schools (Śliwerski, 1999; Ćwikliński, 2005). In the 1990s, the educational system in Poland required the development of a new vision. The main objective of the reforms was to prepare teachers for working in the new, democratic society (Nowak-Fabrykowski, Tradif, 1999). Another systemic reform was implemented in 1999. The structure of schools changed significantly at that time, with the creation of gymnasiums (junior high schools) and primary school being shortened to 6

years. One of the main goals of the 1999 reform was to equalize educational opportunities for urban and rural youth and the education system shifted from a two-tiered to a three-tiered system. The previous eight-year primary school, in terms of structure, organization, and content, was shortened to six years, the second level of education became a three-year period in gymnasium, and the third level was post-gymnasium schools. After the universal period, students went on to various high schools with different vocational profiles, preparing students for both higher education and entry into the job market (Wiśniewski, Zahorska, 2020). In February 2016, a nationwide debate on education began under the name "Student. Parent. Teacher – good change." The reform came into effect on January 1, 2017. The main goal of the reform was a change in the school structure, with gymnasiums being abolished and primary school extended to 8 years. A high school education in general secondary schools lasted for 4 years, and in technical schools it was extended to 5 years. Vocational schools were phased out, and in their place, vocational schools of I and II degree appeared. The compulsory schooling for 6-year-olds, which had been introduced in 2014, was abolished (Wiśniewski, Zahorska, 2020).

The changes that have taken place over the years in the education system and the curriculum (including the elimination of subjects and the introduction of new ones) are assessed differently. Supporters of the reforms emphasize that they have raised the level of education, equalized students' opportunities, and adjusted the education system to the job market. Opponents, however, argue the opposite. Generally, education reforms are driven either by the goal of improving quality at the expense of accessibility or by the emphasis on increasing the number of students at higher levels, with the cost of reducing selectivity and thus the quality of education. The rationalization of expenditures on education is also a common motive for reforms (Cylkowska-Nowak, 2001; Wiśniewski, Zahorska, 2020)

The education of Polish students strongly emphasizes the values that should be conveyed to the students and this is outlined in the Polish Curriculum. The Polish education system emphasizes democratic principles, including freedom of thought, expression, and inquiry. Schools are expected to promote critical thinking, tolerance, and respect for diversity. However, what resonates strongly is the value of patriotism and conveying it to students as a paramount characteristic in teaching democracy. This is likely due to the historical context as Poland has a rich history of struggle for independence and self-governance. Education played a crucial role in shaping national identity and fostering a sense of solidarity among Poles during periods of foreign rule and occupation. The objectives of educating students for democracy, according to the guidelines of the ministry, are divided into four elements: imparting knowledge to students, teaching information creation and production, self-understanding and problem-solving, as well as communication and collaboration with others (The national curriculum for primary and secondary school - Regulation the Minister of National Education 2017). Teaching democracy in Polish schools is spread between various subjects: history, knowledge about society (a subject only taught in classes of such profile), history and contemporary issues, and Polish language. The documents strongly emphasize that the education system aims to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for active participation in a democratic society. This includes developing an understanding of democratic values, human rights, and the rule of law. In ministerial documentation, civic education is seen as a means to educate responsible and engaged citizens able to contribute to the democratic functioning of society. In the process of general education, schools shape attitudes in students that favour their further individual and social development, such as honesty, credibility, responsibility, perseverance, self-worth, respect for others, intellectual curiosity, creativity, entrepreneurship, personal culture, readiness to participate in culture, initiative, and teamwork (The national curriculum for primary and secondary school - Regulation the Minister of National Education 2017).

Despite well-developed documents, in practice it is observed that, upon leaving the school walls, students limit their participation in democracy only to selected aspects (participation in elections, political engagement). In Poland many schools attempt to develop practical and social skills by ensuring a well-organized system for involved, innovative and cooperating teachers. Yet in the majority of schools, teachers hold traditional lessons focusing mainly on transferring the knowledge they perceive to be is indispensable for achieving good results in exams.

# 2. Analysis of political participation

This chapter summarises the results of the ESS on political participation and its correlates. The first section analyses the evolution of political participation between 2012 and 2020, offering the general results in Poland analysed in comparison with the EU average.

The second section focuses only on the 2020 data and presents the participation rates by the typology of political participation – voting, formal participation, and informal participation – for Poland analysed in comparison with the EU average. It also describes the participation rates in each group defined by the explanatory variables – selected socio-demographics and political attitudes - in comparison with the EU average. Given that the objective is to analyse how certain characteristics, including the level of education attained, influence political participation, the calculations were carried out for the population aged 25 and over.

## 2.1. Evolution of political participation 2012-2020

### 2.1.1. Voting

Participation in national election in Poland increased abruptly between 2012 (70%) and 2020 (88%), which moved it significantly above the EU average (Figure 3). However, it is necessary to stress that these proportions refer to citizens' declarations and the actual voter turnouts in national elections in Poland were much lower (see Section 3. Discussion).

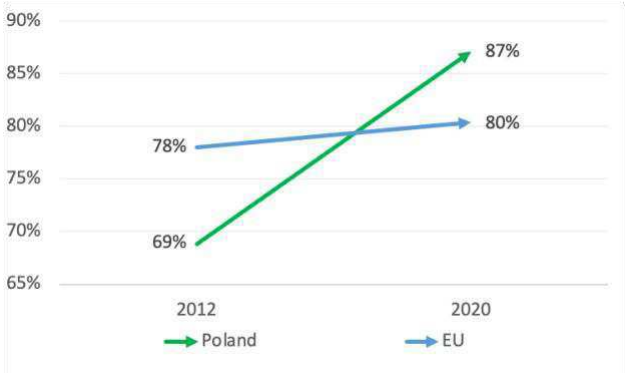



*Figure 3. Evolution of voting*
*Poland and EU, 2012-2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*
*Note: EU includes 19 EU27 countries. (Missing countries: Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)*

### 2.1.2. Formal participation

Contrary to voting, respondents in Poland declared low formal political participation, with an increasing tendency: in 2020, 20% indicated that they were involved in formal politics, which was 9 percentage points higher compared to 2012 and slightly above the EU average (18%). However, when specifically examining each aspect of formal political participation, the data shows slightly different dynamic of change. The analysis reveals that over this period of time, the number of individuals reporting that they contacted politicians had almost remained the same (only 1 percentage point higher in 2020 compared to 2012 and below the EU average), while we observed a considerable increase among respondents who had worn or displayed a campaign badge or sticker (Figure 4 and Figure 5). Interestingly, the latter is more than two times higher than the EU average.

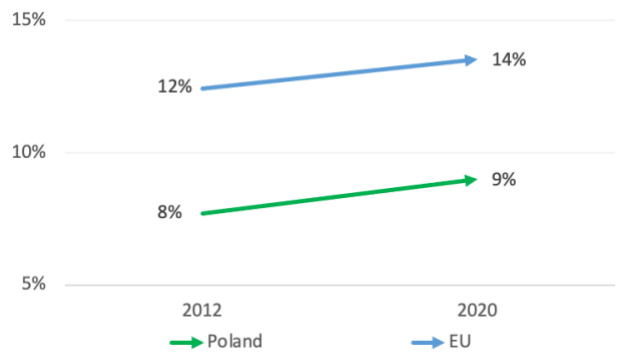



Figure 4. Evolution of the percentage of people who have contacted a politician *a government official, 2012-2020*

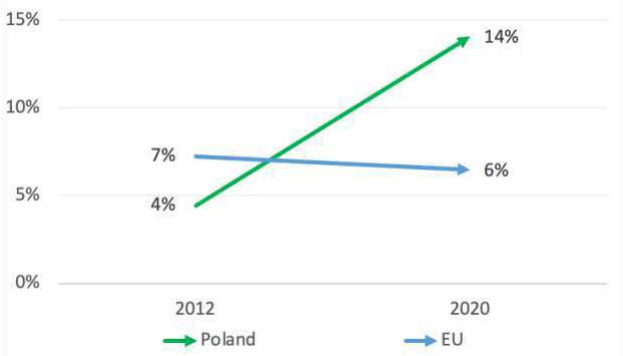



*Figure 5. Evolution of the percentage of people who have worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker, 2012-2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

Note: EU includes 19 EU27 countries. (Missing countries: Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)

### *2.1.3. Informal participation*

Informal participation in Poland increased significantly between 2012 (14%) and 2020 (36%), reaching a level comparable to the EU average (Figure 6). While informal participation in the EU remained at the same level (only 1 percentage point difference in a discussed period), it increased by 22 points in Poland.

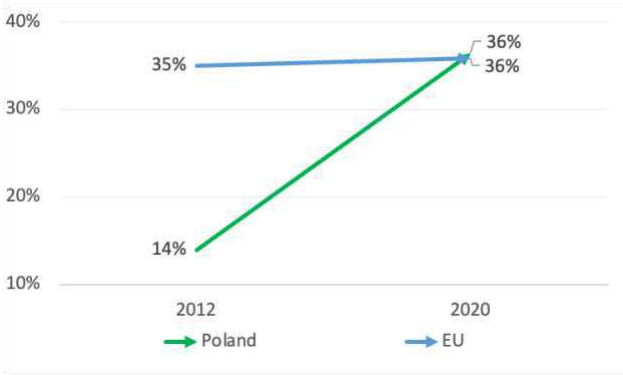



*Figure 6. Evolution of informal participation*
*Poland and EU, 2012-2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*
*Note: EU includes 19 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)*

## 2.2. Political participation in 2020 – an overview

In this section, we analyse the 2020 data comparing Poland with the average for the EU countries based on a broader operationalisation of formal and informal participation and taking the population aged 25 and over as a reference.

Concerning political participation, ESS data show that while both voting and formal participation rates are slightly higher for Poland than the EU average, the levels of informal participation are equal.

| Table 2. Political participation by type, Poland and EU, 2020 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Voting | Formal participation | Informal participation |
| Poland | 88% | 24% | 42% |
| EU | 82% | 20% | 42% |

*Table 2. Political participation by type, Poland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

A closer look on the sub-dimension of formal participation shows that in Poland about 10% of the respondents say that they have contacted politicians or government officials, 14% have worn a badge or a sticker during the last campaign and 9% have donated. In comparison, the EU average is 14%, 6% and 6% respectively.[2]

| Table 3. Formal political participation by type, Poland and EU, 2020 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Contacting politician/government officials | Wearing a badge/sticker during the last campaign | Donation |
| Poland | 10% | 14% | 9% |
| EU | 14% | 6% | 6% |

*Table 3. Formal participation by type, Poland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

In terms of informal participation (Table 4), Polish respondents report similar participation rates to the average of EU countries, with the highest participation rates in the sub-dimensions of 'signing petitions' and 'product boycotts'. 'Expressing political opinion online' is less common, both for Poland and the EU average. 'Participation in political demonstrations' has the lowest rate in both Poland and the EU countries.

2 The general rate of formal participation is calculated on the basis that the person has participated in at least one of the different participation forms. The same applies to informal participation.

| Table 4. Informal political participation by type, Poland and EU, 2020 | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Signing petition | Product boycotts | Participation in political demonstrations | Expressing political opinion online |
| Poland | 24% | 24% | 12% | 16% |
| EU | 22% | 25% | 9% | 17% |

*Table 4. Informal participation by type, Poland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

## 2.3. Political participation in 2020 by socio-demographic characteristics

### 2.3.1. Voting

Regarding the socio-demographic variables and their correlations with declared voting in 2020, Poland resembled the general tendencies observed for the EU, albeit with some unique aspects. Firstly, both in Poland and the EU, the level of voting increased linearly with age (Table 5).

| Table 5. Voting by age, Poland and EU, 2020 | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Poland | EU |
| 25-34 years | 82% | 74% |
| 35-44 years | 84% | 78% |
| 45-54 years | 87% | 83% |
| 55-64 years | 91% | 85% |
| 65 years and older | 93% | 84% |

*Table 5. Voting by age, Poland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Secondly, both in Poland and in the EU, participation in elections increased with the level of education. However, the discrepancy between the least educated (lower secondary education or less) and most educated people (tertiary education) was smaller in Poland (83% vs 93%) than in the case of the EU (75% vs. 89%, Table 6).

| Table 6. Voting by level of education attained, Poland and EU, 2020 | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Poland | EU |
| Lower secondary or less | 83% | 75% |
| Upper secondary | 87% | 81% |
| Tertiary | 93% | 89% |

*Table 6. Voting by level of education attained, Poland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data.*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Thirdly, voting increased in both Poland and the EU with income level, but again the differences between the worst off (having difficulties or considerable difficulties on their present income) and the best off (living comfortably on present income) were smaller than in the EU (86% vs 91% in Poland and 75% vs 89% in the EU, Table 7).

| Table 7. Voting by income, Poland and EU, 2020 | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Poland | EU |
| Difficult or very difficult | 86% | 76% |
| Coping | 89% | 81% |
| Living comfortably | 91% | 87% |

*Table 7. Voting by income, Poland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

In the case of two other socio-demographic characteristics – origin of parents and minority group status – the relations with voting were different for Poland and the EU. While in Poland those with foreign-born parents declared higher participation than those with native-born parents, the pattern for the EU was reversed and more pronounced (66% vs 84%, Figure 7). Unfortunately, due to the low reliability of sample, it is not possible to test the tendency for respondents based on their own place of birth. Additionally, while those in Poland who reported belonging to a discriminated group declared higher participation (91%) than those who did not belong to a discriminated group (87%), in the EU the pattern was reversed (75% vs. 82%, Figure 8).

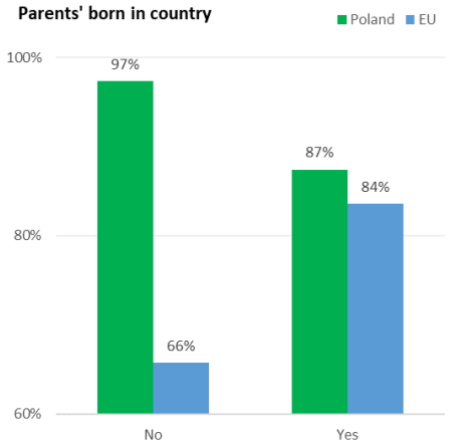



*Figure 7. Voting by parents' place of births, 2020, Poland and the EU*

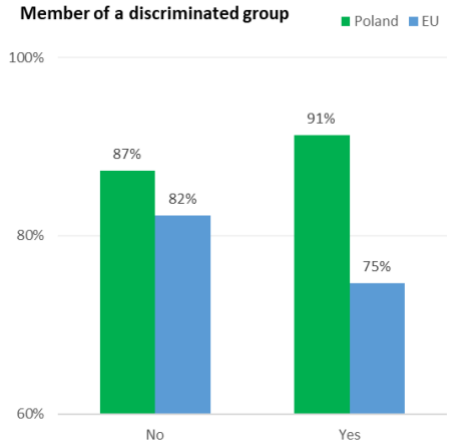



*Figure 8. Voting by belonging to a discriminated group Poland and the EU*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

### 2.1.2. Formal participation

The statistical analysis shows discrepancies in formal political participation based on socio-demographic characteristics. Educational attainments are one of the factors that correlates with formal political participation (Figure 9). In line with the EU average, educated citizens are more involved in formal political

participation: almost 37% of individuals who had graduated from tertiary education answered positively. Among those with a secondary education, only one in five respondents participated in formal politics and the participation level dropped significantly among those with lower secondary and primary education to 12.1%.

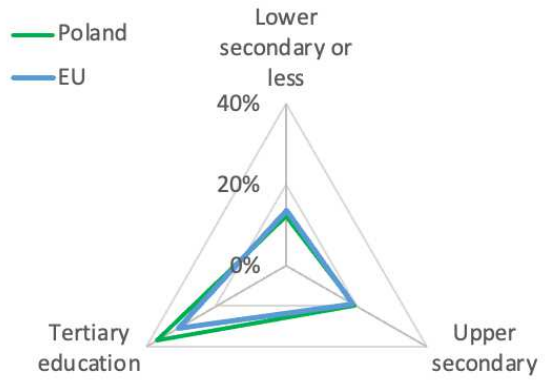



*Figure 9. Formal political participation by level of education attained, 2020, Poland and EU*

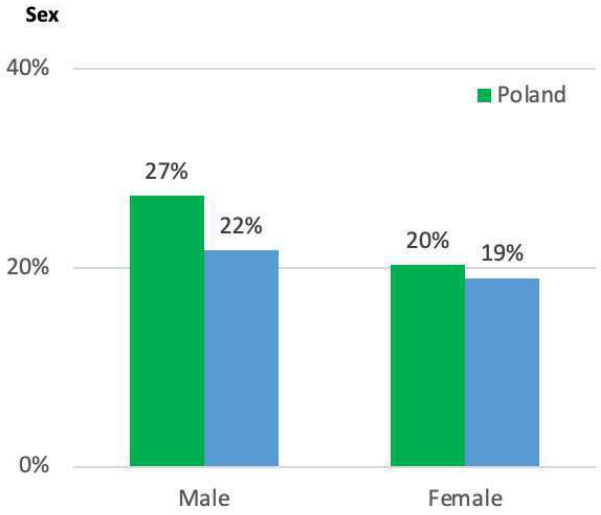



*Figure 10. Formal political participation by sex, 2020, Poland and EU*

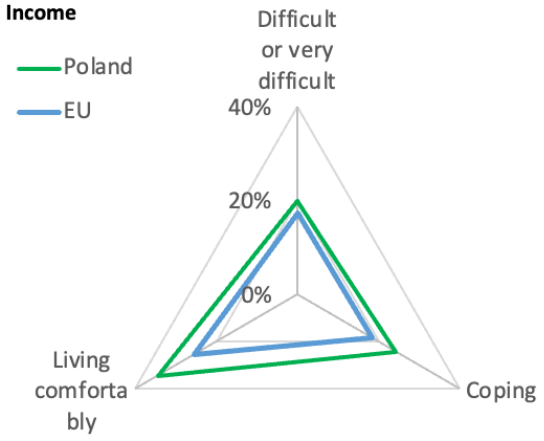



*Figure 11. Formal political participation by income, 2020, Poland and EU*

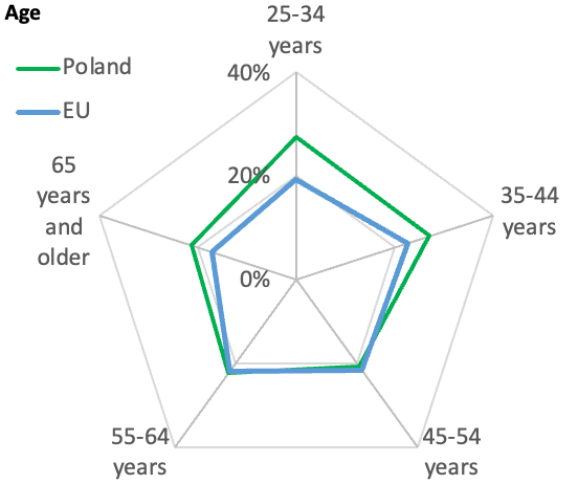



*Figure 12. Formal political participation by age, 2020, Poland and EU*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

The level of political participation is low among both women and men (Figure 10). More than every fourth man but only every fifth woman take part in formal politics (compared to every fifth person regardless of sex in the EU).

Formal political participation increased with income. The most significant and visible difference is between those who declared that they lived comfortably and other groups perceiving their financial situation as less favourable (Figure 11). The most engaged in formal political participations are individuals who declared that

they lived comfortably (34%) – a result higher than the EU average for individuals who lived comfortable (26%). At the same time, there is a similar proportion of individuals who feel that their income allows them to cope or that it is difficult to meet their needs with their income who reported that they participated in formal political activities (respectively 24% and 20%; results higher than the EU average).

Higher formal political participation can also be observed among individuals who perceive themselves as belonging to a discriminated group. Almost every third person from this group (compared to as many as 23% among those who do not report belonging to a discriminated group) reported participation in formal politics. While the former is the same as EU average (30,7%), the latter is slightly higher (19,2%) which can be interpreted that belonging to a discriminated group is less influential a factor in Poland than in the EU.

While in general the formal political participation follows the same patterns as in the EU, there are two socio-demographic characteristics which mark different participation patterns than the EU average: age and place of parents' birth. The former presents a very interesting trends, indicating that the youngest population was more likely to participate. Almost one third of young people (aged 25-34 and 35-44 compared to the EU average 19.3% and 22.7%) are involved in formal politics but this tendency is less prominent among elderly groups (Figure 12).

The varying levels of political participation can be observed based on the place of birth. Individuals whose parents were born outside the country demonstrated higher participation rate in formal politics (26.7%) compared to those whose parents had been born in a different country (23.4%). In both groups, the participation in Poland is not only higher compared to the EU average (18.4% compared to 20.7%), but also the general trend is the reverse. Unfortunately, due to the low reliability of sample, it is not possible to test the tendency for respondents based on their own place of birth.

### 2.1.3. *Informal participation*

Informal participation increases with the level of education. The relationship between education level and participation, as well as the extent of participation at different education levels, align closely with the overall trends seen across the EU. The lower the education, the lower the participation rate (Figure 13).

Participation in Poland decreases with age (from 46% to 36%), with less differences than in the EU (from 51% to 30%). This indicates that as individuals age in both Poland and the EU, their level of informal participation in various activities decreases. However, the decline is more pronounced in the EU. The range of participation rates between younger and older age groups is smaller in Poland compared to the EU (Figure 14).

Informal participation in democracy also matters more to men than to women who are more often involved in these activities (respectively 46% versus 38%). In the EU, the trend is similar, with men showing higher participation (42.8%) compared to women (40.8%) (Figure 15). This pattern aligns with the EU average, where men generally participate more in informal democracy than women. The difference in participation rates between men and women is more pronounced in Poland compared to the EU. In Poland, the gap between men's and women's participation rates is 7.2 points, while in the EU it is 2.

In Poland, participation also increases with income level (from 34% to 62%) and the analyses shows that Poland is not an exceptional case, reflecting the EU average.

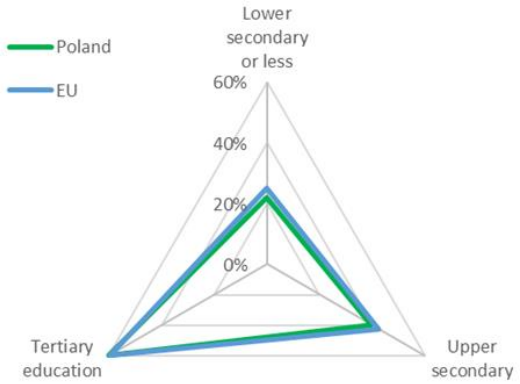



*Figure 13. Informal political participation by level of education attained, 2020, Poland and EU*

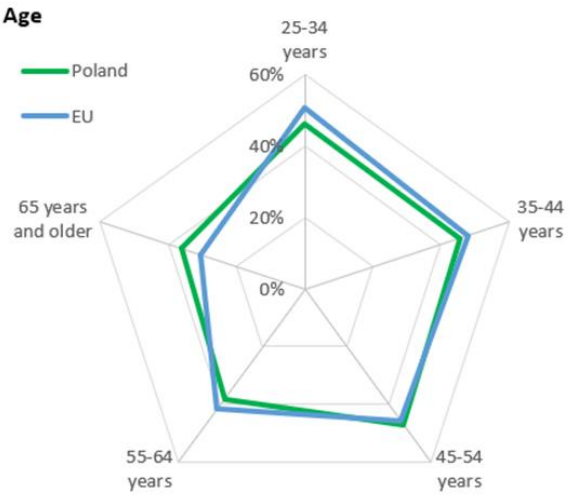



*Figure 14. Informal political participation by age, 2020, Poland and EU*

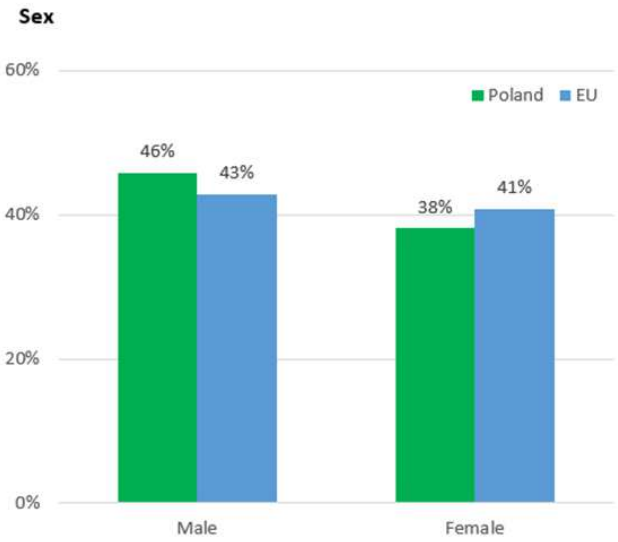



*Figure 15. Informal political participation by sex, 2020, Poland and EU*

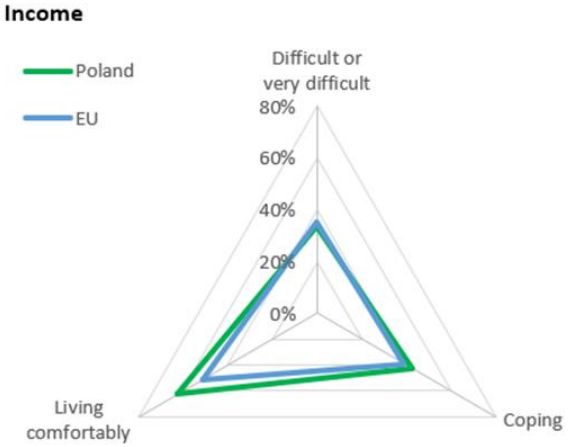



*Figure 16. Informal political participation by income, 2020, Poland and EU*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Participation is much higher among those who reported belonging to a discriminated group (57% vs. 40%) and is 2 percentage points lower than in the EU. A person who reported belonging to a discriminated group has a higher participation rate compared to one who doesn't belong to this group. Despite the higher participation rate among those in the discriminated group, the overall participation rate in the Poland is slightly lower than the EU average (Figure 17).

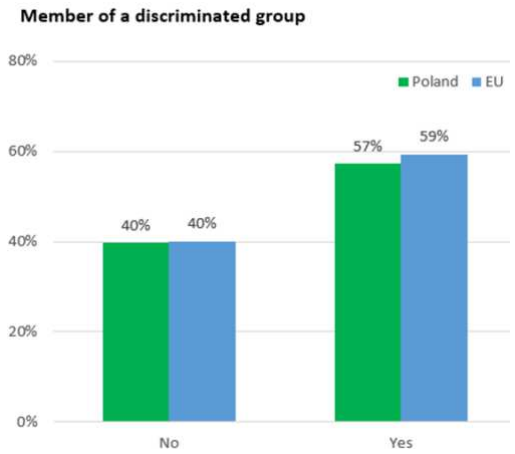



*Figure 17. Informal political participation by being a member of a discriminated group, 2020, Poland and EU*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*
*Note: no data for those born outside the country due to the low reliability of sample*
*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

## 2.4. Participation by democratic ideals and political attitudes

We start this section by comparing political attitudes between Poland and the EU average. As can be seen in Table 8, ESS respondents in Poland appear to have a stronger support for democracy, both in its broadest sense and understood in political terms. While the share of people with low and medium ideals is substantially lower in Poland than in the EU, the support for democracy understood as a set of political rights (33.8%) and in general terms (32.4%) is stronger than in the EU (23.2% and 28.1% respectively). This is also clear if we compare the share of people who consider it extremely important to live in a democracy (70.3% vs 58.5%). At the same time, dissatisfaction with democracy is much higher in Poland than in the EU (60.9% vs 36.4%). While in the EU there is an almost equal distribution of political orientations, people in Poland are more skewed towards the right end of the political spectrum.

| Table 8. Political attitudes, Poland and EU, 2020 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Poland | EU |
| Democratic ideals | Low ideals | 10.4% | 14.3% |
| | Medium ideals | 7.8% | 19.0% |
| | High ideals | 32.4% | 28.1% |
| | Political rights | 33.8% | 23.2% |
| | Social rights | 15.6% | 15.4% |
| Importance of living in a democratically governed country | Not important (0-4) | 3,6% | 3.7% |
| | Important (5-7) | 10.5% | 13.4% |
| | Very important (8-9) | 15.6% | 24.5% |
| | Extremely important (10) | 70.3% | 58.5% |
| Satisfaction with democracy | Dissatisfied (0-4) | 60.9% | 36.4% |
| | Neither satisfied nor satisfied (5) | 13.6% | 15.9% |
| | Satisfied (6-10) | 25.5% | 47.7% |
| Left-right scale | Left (0-4) | 27.6% | 34.7% |
| | Centre (5) | 32.1% | 32.0% |
| | Right (6-10) | 40.2% | 33.4% |

*Table 8. Political attitudes, Poland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

### 2.4.1. Voting

In case of the correlations between political variables and the level of voting in 2020, Poland shared commonalities with the patterns for the EU, however again with some aspects worth highlighting. Firstly, as in the EU, electoral participation in Poland rose with the increase of support for democratic ideals, however the differences between those scoring low (71%), medium (87%) and high democratic ideals (88%) were more pronounced than in the EU (72%, 80% and 84% respectively) (Figure 18).

Both in Poland and the EU those who emphasized "political rights" among democratic ideals declared higher voting participation than those who stressed "social rights", however in Poland these differences were less distinct (93% vs 88% in Poland and 90% vs 79% in the EU).

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

In Poland, as in the EU, people positioning themselves in the centre of the political spectrum were considerably less likely to participate in elections than people identifying with the left and the right (Figure 19). Generally, participation in election increased with the declared importance of living in a democratically governed country

(from “not important” to “extremely important”). However, in Poland – differently than for the EU – this correlation was not fully linear, as people who considered it “important” to live in a democracy declared the lowest level of participation in elections (76%), slightly lower than those who considered it “not important” (78%). Additionally, the differentiating effect of the attachment to life in a democracy was stronger in the EU (spanning from 62% to 87%) than in Poland (76 to 91%, Figure 20).

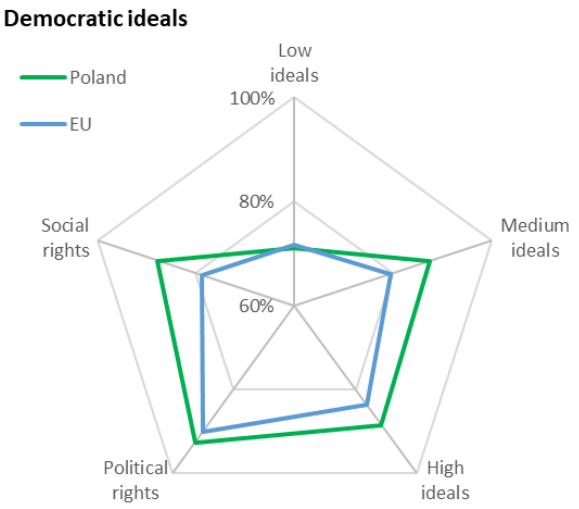



*Figure 18. Voting by political ideals, Poland and EU, 2020*

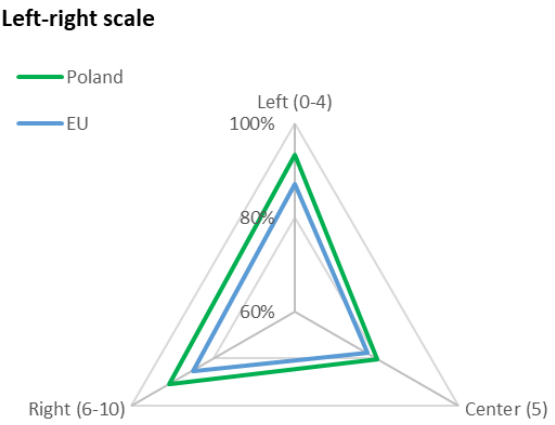



*Figure 19. Voting by left-right scale, Poland and EU, 2020*

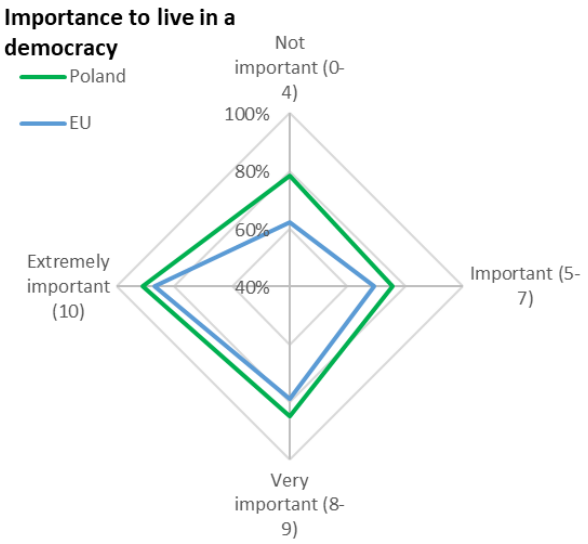



*Figure 20. Voting by importance of living in a democracy, Poland and EU, 2020*

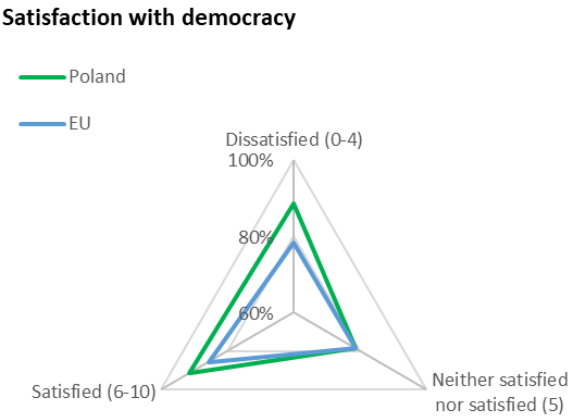



Figure 21. Voting by satisfaction with democracy, Poland and EU, 2020

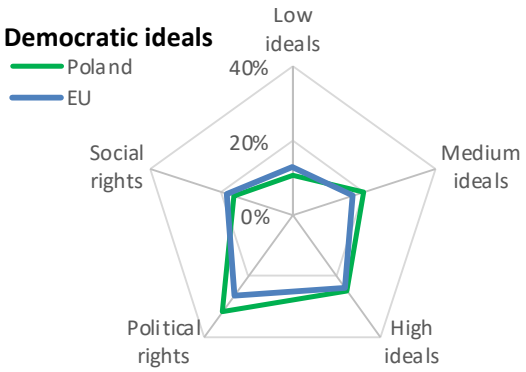
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Finally, in Poland – as in the EU – those that were most satisfied with the functioning of democracy in their country declared the highest levels of electoral participation (92% in Poland, 86% in the EU). However, while in the EU the differences between those who were dissatisfied and those who were neither dissatisfied nor satisfied were negligible (78% versus 79%), in Poland there were bigger discrepancies, and the lowest level of participation was declared by those who were ambivalent in their assessments (Figure 21).

### 2.4.2. Formal political participation

Participation in formal political activities is also shaped by democratic ideals and the perception of democracy as a system. As the democratic order in Poland is considered to be strongly linked to a liberal form of democracy, it is not surprising that the highest formal participation was among those who valued "political rights" (31.6%, higher than EU average – 26%) and who appreciated both – political and social rights ("high ideals" – 25%, almost the same as the EU average – 24%). Interestingly, the lowest – below 20% - proportion of individuals performing formal political activities can be observed among respondents who recognized the importance of social rights and expressed low ideals (Figure 22).



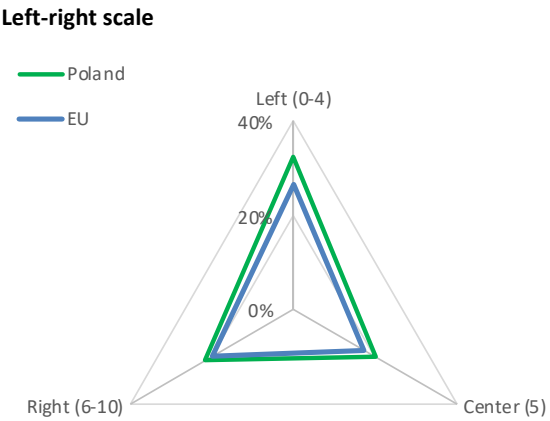




*Figure 22. Formal political participation by democratic ideals, Poland and EU, 2020*

*Figure 23. Formal political participation by left-wing scale, Poland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Those individuals who expressed themselves as having lower satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in their country are the most engaged in formal politics, with a 10 percentage point advantage over those whose satisfaction with democracy is neutral or positive. While the both results are higher compared to the EU average ( respectively 22.3% and 16.4%), indicating that even those who are dissatisfied are engaged in formal politics, the difference between these two groups at the EU level is less marked. At the same time, a higher level of participation is expressed by individuals for whom living in a democracy is extremely important or very important (26.3% and 19.7% respectively) – again higher than for the EU (Table 9).

| Table 9. Formal political participation importance of living in a democracy and by satisfaction with democracy, Poland and EU, 2020 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Poland | EU |
| Importance of living in a democratically governed country | Not important (0-4) | 14.8% | 14.4% |
| | Important (5-7) | 14.9% | 13.4% |
| | Very important (8-9) | 19.7% | 17.1% |
| | Extremely important (10) | 26.3% | 23.8% |
| Satisfaction with democracy | Dissatisfied (0-4) | 27.3% | 22.3% |
| | Neither satisfied nor satisfied (5) | 17.9% | 16.4% |
| | Satisfied (6-10) | 18.5% | 20.5% |

*Table 9. Formal political participation by importance of living in a democracy and satisfaction with democracy, Poland and EU, 2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*
*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Also more active are individuals who identified themselves with a left leaning ideological orientation, with one third declaring that they participated in formal politics. More central and right-wing ideological stances had detrimental effects on participation in formal politics, with every fifth person performing tasks linked to participation in formal politics. The observed tendencies are similar to the EU average, although the reported formal political participation by ideological orientation is higher in Poland.

### 2.4.3. *Informal political participation*

Regarding the political variables, the Polish and EU patterns are also similar in all variables. In terms of democratic ideals, in Poland the “political rights” group has the highest participation (59%) and the “low ideals” group the lowest (20%). The rest of the groups follow a similar pattern to the EU, although the participation of the “social rights” group is comparatively low (27%). This analysis suggests that in Poland, regarding democratic ideals, different segments of the population exhibit varying levels of participation. The 'political rights' group indicates that a significant portion of Polish society actively engages in activities outside the institutional system, such as attending protests, participating in demonstrations, or signing petitions. The 'low ideals' group appears to show less concern or engagement with democratic principles, as evidenced by their lower likelihood of participating in political processes. They may have less interest in democratic ideals or face barriers to participation. The 'social rights' group has a participation rate of 27%. This lower engagement suggests that there may be specific challenges or factors influencing their involvement in activities related to social rights, such as advocating for social welfare programs or equality initiatives (Figure 24).

Overall, while the 'political rights' group demonstrates high engagement, there are disparities in participation among different groups of the population in Poland. These differences reflect varying levels of interest, concern, or barriers related to democratic ideals and participation.

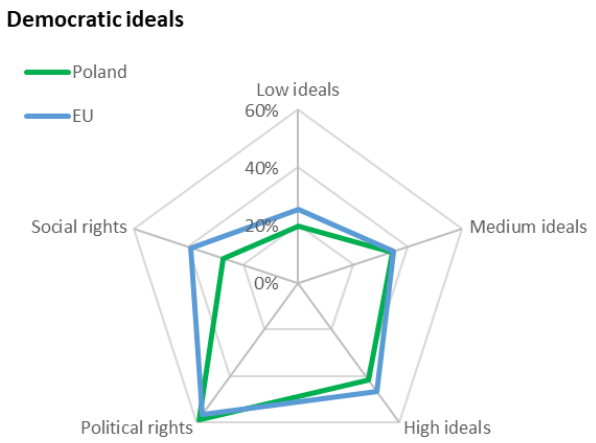



*Figure 24. Informal political participation by democratic ideals, Poland and EU, 2020*

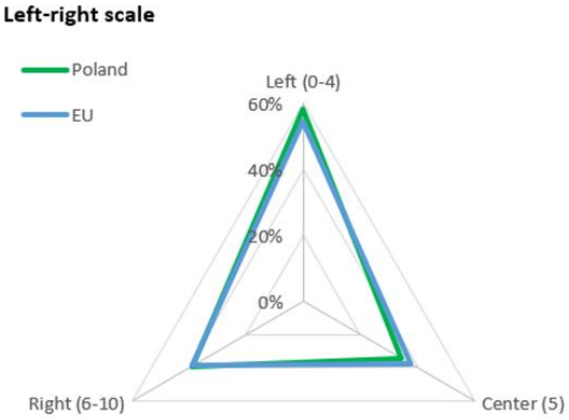



*Figure 25. Informal political participation by left-wing scale, Poland and EU, 2020*

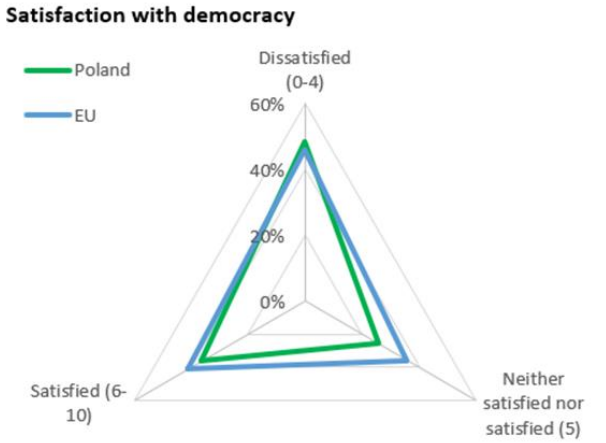



*Figure 26. Informal political participation by satisfaction with democracy,*

*Poland and EU, 2020*

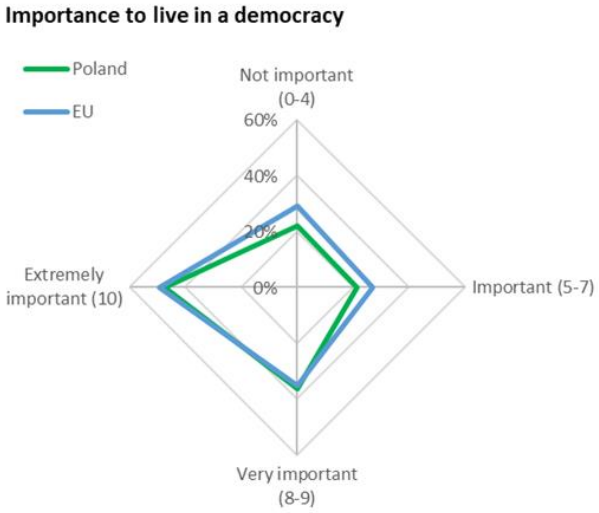



*Figure 27. Informal political participation – importance to live in a democracy,*

*Poland and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

On the left-right axis, participation in Poland is higher among those who are on the left of the political spectrum (58%), followed by a marked difference in those who are on the right (39%) and those who are in the centre (34%). In the EU the pattern is similar, with practically no difference between those who are on the left and those who are in the centre.

In Poland, the highest participation is observed among those who are dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy in the country (48%), followed by those who are satisfied (36%) and by those who are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (26%). Precisely the same pattern is true in the EU, but the differences are less marked. In both Poland and the EU, the group that is dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy shows the

highest level of participation. This indicates that individuals who are unhappy with the way democracy operates in their country are more motivated to engage in political activities, such as voting, protests, or other forms of political engagement. They likely see participation as a means to bring about change or address their grievances within the democratic system. This could suggest that the level of dissatisfaction and its impact on participation might be more pronounced in Poland compared to the broader EU context. These differences could stem from specific political or social factors unique to Poland.

The data indicates both Polish and European respondents highly value living in a democratic country. Participation is lower for those who do not consider it important to live in a democratic country - and this pattern is more marked in Poland than in the EU (Figure 27)

## 2.5. Participation in 2020 - Results from regression models

The data presented in Table 10 offers insights into the situation in Poland. Notably, the results from the three models exhibit significant disparities. However, certain variables consistently exhibit noteworthy effects on voting and participation, both formally and informally. Firstly, in Poland, there is a clear gender disparity in participation, with women being less likely to engage across all three forms of participation compared to men. Additionally, the level of education emerges as a significant factor, positively influencing participation. Those with higher education levels tend to participate more. Effect of upper secondary education is less evident as it does not reach statistical significance in the case of formal participation.

| POLAND | Voting | | | | | | Formal participation[1] | | | | | | Informal participation[2] | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Sociodem. vars. | | | Full model | | | Sociodem. vars. | | | Full model | | | Sociodem. vars. | | | Full model | | |
| | B | Sign. | S.E. | B | Sign. | S.E. | B | Sign. | S.E. | B | Sign. | S.E. | B | Sign. | S.E. | B | Sign. | S.E. |
| Constant | 0.923 | | (1.183) | 0.037 | | (1.271) | -2.121 | *** | (0.455) | -2.046 | ** | (0.625) | -1.611 | *** | (0.406) | -2.294 | *** | (0.577) |
| Age | 0.044 | *** | (0.006) | 0.042 | *** | (0.007) | 0.006 | | (0.004) | 0.005 | | (0.004) | 0.004 | | (0.004) | 0.000 | | (0.004) |
| Sex (ref: male) | -0.450 | ** | (0.168) | -0.441 | * | (0.183) | -0.443 | *** | (0.125) | -0.384 | ** | (0.131) | -0.437 | *** | (0.111) | -0.421 | *** | (0.120) |
| Education (ref: lower secondary or less) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Upper secondary | 0.782 | *** | (0.208) | 0.534 | * | (0.234) | 0.616 | ** | (0.191) | 0.366 | | (0.199) | 0.906 | *** | (0.157) | 0.497 | ** | (0.167) |
| Tertiary education | 1.642 | *** | (0.251) | 1.248 | *** | (0.283) | 1.439 | *** | (0.193) | 1.161 | *** | (0.205) | 1.659 | *** | (0.166) | 1.162 | *** | (0.180) |
| Income feeling (ref: difficult or very difficult) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Coping | 0.215 | | (0.186) | 0.138 | | (0.203) | 0.125 | | (0.156) | 0.095 | | (0.164) | 0.247 | | (0.134) | 0.140 | | (0.145) |
| Living comfortably | 0.284 | | (0.320) | 0.138 | | (0.338) | 0.407 | | (0.216) | 0.310 | | (0.226) | 0.830 | *** | (0.203) | 0.660 | ** | (0.216) |
| Born in country (ref: no) | n/a | | | n/a | | | n/a | | | n/a | | | n/a | | | n/a | | |
| Parent's born in country (ref: no) | -1.896 | | (1.098) | -1.682 | | (1.102) | -0.111 | | (0.293) | 0.015 | | (0.301) | -0.026 | | (0.270) | 0.080 | | (0.277) |
| Member of a discriminated group (ref: no) | 0.528 | | (0.277) | 0.543 | | (0.301) | 0.398 | * | (0.177) | 0.357 | | (0.186) | 0.821 | *** | (0.167) | 0.829 | *** | (0.182) |
| Democratic ideals (ref: medium ideals) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Low ideals | | | | -0.593 | | (0.373) | | | | -0.457 | | (0.356) | | | | -0.429 | | (0.300) |
| High ideals | | | | -0.358 | | (0.353) | | | | 0.215 | | (0.269) | | | | 0.121 | | (0.237) |
| Political rights | | | | 0.336 | | (0.367) | | | | 0.277 | | (0.262) | | | | 0.583 | * | (0.233) |
| Social rights | | | | 0.037 | | (0.388) | | | | -0.091 | | (0.306) | | | | -0.308 | | (0.267) |
| Left-right | | | | -0.017 | | (0.037) | | | | -0.022 | | (0.026) | | | | -0.016 | | (0.024) |
| Satisfaction with democracy | | | | 0.046 | | (0.037) | | | | -0.029 | | (0.026) | | | | -0.050 | * | (0.024) |
| Importance to live in a democracy | | | | 0.125 | ** | (0.042) | | | | 0.020 | | (0.043) | | | | 0.148 | *** | (0.041) |
| Observations | 1,558 | | | 1,446 | | | 1,530 | | | 1,426 | | | 1,536 | | | 1,431 | | |
| Goodness of fit statistics | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Chi-square test (sign.) | 0.000 | | | 0.000 | | | 0.000 | | | 0.000 | | | 0.000 | | | 0.000 | | |
| Cox & Snell R Square | 0.062 | | | 0.083 | | | 0.064 | | | 0.074 | | | 0.117 | | | 0.161 | | |
| Nagelkerke R Square | 0.121 | | | 0.165 | | | 0.095 | | | 0.109 | | | 0.157 | | | 0.216 | | |
| Hosmer and Lemeshow test (sign.) | 0.138 | | | 0.457 | | | 0.443 | | | 0.979 | | | 0.678 | | | 0.883 | | |
| Accuracy (% correctly classified) | 88.3% | | | 88.6% | | | 75.7% | | | 74.5% | | | 65.7% | | | 66.9% | | |

*Table 10. Participation models, Poland, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Signification levels: *** 0,1%; ** 1%; * 5%*

In terms of voting behaviour, age plays a notable role, with older individuals showing higher likelihoods of participation. Moreover, individuals who place greater importance on living in a democratically governed country tend to participate more actively in voting.

Informal participation patterns reveal several key findings. Firstly, individuals in the “Political rights” group demonstrate higher likelihoods of informal participation. Furthermore, those who perceive themselves as financially comfortable, belong to a discriminated group, or express dissatisfaction with the functioning of

democracy in their country are more inclined to participate informally. Additionally, a higher perceived importance of living in a democratically governed country corresponds to increased informal participation.

These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of participation dynamics in Poland, with socio-demographic factors and attitudes towards governance significantly shaping individuals' engagement in both formal and informal spheres.

# 3. Discussion

In the following section we discuss the results of ESS for Poland in the light of the outcomes of Polish research on political participation and democratic attitudes, as well as selected official data on voting turnout and other political participation.

## *3.1. General trends in political participation*

According to the ESS study, participation in elections has risen considerably in Poland between 2012 and 2020, from 70% to 88%. While the actual voter turnouts (in both parliamentary and presidential elections) were much lower at that time, the upward trend is clearly discernible (comp. Table 11) and ranged from 49% in 2011 to 62% in 2019. The voter turnout in presidential elections was slightly higher during this period and reached 64% in 2020. However, it was only in the 2023 parliamentary election that voter turnout was exceptionally high (74%) and exceeded the previous highest of the semi-free election in 1989 (63%).

| Table 11. Voter turnout in parliamentary and presidential elections 2011-2023 | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Election year | 2011 | 2015 | 2015 | 2019 | 2020 | 2023 |
| Type of election | parliamentary | presidential (I round) | parliamentary | parliamentary | presidential (I round) | parliamentary |
| Partici-pation (%) | 48.9 | 49.0 | 50.9 | 61.7 | 64.5 | 74.4 |

*Table 11. Voter turnout in parliamentary and presidential elections 2011 – 2023*

*Source: https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frekwencja_wyborcza*

It is also worth noting that voter turnout in local elections between 1989 and 2024 – gradually rising, albeit slowly – was considerably lower than in parliamentary and presidential elections, with the average of around 45% in the first round (https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frekwencja_wyborcza). As the functioning of local democracy, which is closest to the people, is pivotal in the democratisation of a country, low levels of citizens' participation in its structures should be of concern as well.

Higher levels of the declaration of participation in elections before and/or after the vote compared to the actual turnout is a stable element and discernible at every election in Poland. The tendency to incorrectly declare participation in elections *post facto* may be linked to the widespread belief that participation in voting is the duty of every citizen. In 2011, this opinion was shared by as many as 80% of adult Poles. Perceiving elections as a civic duty coupled with actual absenteeism may result in a reluctance to admit that one did not vote (CBOS, 2015).

The voter turnouts and the results of the Polish studies on voting behaviour, including the analyses of the results of the Polish General Study of Elections (PGSW) demonstrate some regularities and provide some explanations to these tendencies. Firstly, the voter turnout in Poland, as in other transitional democracies of Central and Eastern European countries, has been lower than in many "old" European democracies since the democratic transition. This can be explained as the effect of social dissatisfaction with the realities of democratic politics (Kostelka, 2017) which can be observed on several levels. The disentanglement of the relationship between political participation and political efficacy is reflected in the insufficient feeling of agency and a disbelief that that citizen's voice matters and that citizens can influence what is happening in the country while explaining low level of political participation. The GEQ study illustrates the feeling of

disempowerment among citizens: almost 80% do not feel that they have influence on what is happening in the country, and around 70% - in their local community (Krzaklewska et al., 2016, p. 20). The disappointment of democratic politics is also related to the current performance of political parties in Poland. Almost half of the respondents who have rights to vote claim that they do not have any emotional ties and they do not feel close to any political party (CBOS, 2023a). Moreover, 44% of citizens do not identify with a political party's goals and they do not see them as reflecting their opinions (CBOS, 2023a). Political parties are believed to focus on fighting for power, and therefore lack a social mission and commitment to justice. As a result, politics is seen as distant and abstract, with voting as one of the few tools enabling citizens to voice their opinions.

Secondly, voting behaviour was – at least until 2015 - extremely unstable. This meant that many more citizens changed their behaviour between elections than in other democracies (Cześnik et al., 2016). The picture changed in the 2019 parliamentary elections, when the turnout exceeded 60% for the first time. This was argued to be the effect of decreasing electoral volatility and extensive mobilisation of the non-voters due to growing political polarisation, increasing competitiveness of elections, and growing party identification of voters (Cześnik et al., 2020). The record voter turnout in 2023 parliamentary election was most probably due to the further development of these processes.

Notwithstanding the important role of voting in liberal democracies, democratic legitimacy is threatened by low formal political participation due to insufficient knowledge about politics among citizens – lower compared to more developed democracies but similar to the political knowledge in post-communist countries (e.g. Cześnik, Wenzel, 2018; Raciborski, 2011; Jasiewicz-Betkiewicz et al., 2017). Confronted with the complexities of current political debates and policy challenges, Poles lack the requisite skills, competences, and knowledge of the political system, governance frameworks or functioning of political parties. The proliferation of sources of information leads to the fragmentation of their knowledge, makes them vulnerable to fake news and unable to select accurate information. As a result, they do not feel confident in discussing policy issues or provide evidence-based judgements in policymaking. This low level of political knowledge is dangerous for democracy as it affects attitudes towards democracy, political engagement, and voting preferences. In the context of these studies, politics is seen as neither engaging nor exciting. It does not encourage citizens to engage with policies on a daily basis – mostly because of their insufficient knowledge but also because of the intensity of other, closer areas of their life such as family life or career (Jasiewicz-Betkiewicz et al., 2017).

Public opinion research indicates three dominant attitudes of Poles toward democracy: affirmation of democracy; indifference toward democracy, and non-democratic. The studies indicate that there is a high support for democracy as the best form of governance, although this support has decreased in recent years. In CBOS surveys, starting from the 1990s, Poles consistently declare their approval of democracy, expressing a belief in the superiority of the democratic system over other forms of governance. In 2021, over two-thirds of respondents (68%) agreed with the statement about the superiority of democracy over other systems of governance. The percentage of democracy supporters is currently slightly lower than it was in the years 2018–2020, when support for democracy regularly exceeded 70%, reaching a record level of 76% in May 2018. Other research conducted by the Polish General Electoral Study (PGSW) in 2019, which is a series of studies conducted continuously since 1995, shows that the vast majority of Poles, around 87%, agree that democracy is the best of possible political systems. In the mentioned studies, there are no differences between 2015 and 2019.

The data indicate that the attitude of affirming democracy is correlated with age, education, and place of residence. The typical supporter of democracy is well-educated and resides in urban areas, while only every fourth Pole has an ambivalent attitude toward democracy.

According to CBOS research, Polish society appreciates the achievements of the changes that have taken place since 1989, but it is aware of various dysfunctions, defects, and mistakes. What characterizes Poles is a low level of trust in public institutions, especially those perceived as politicized and partisan (CBOS, 2019; 2021b) observed from the early years of education (ICCS, 2023).

The decline of formal political participation has been linked with the more differentiated views on democracy. While many studies grounded in the quantitative approach emphasize voting and formal politics as the main indicators of democracy, the qualitative approach allows for discovering a slightly different picture. Agnieszka Jasiewicz-Betkiewicz, Mikołaj Cześnik, Michał Kotnarowski, Michał Wenzel, and Marta Żerkowska-Balas's analysis of understanding politics and democracy at the national level reveals that democracy is first and foremost associated with freedom and care for its citizens and further down the list – with voting (Jasiewicz-Betkiewicz et al., 2017). On the one hand, democracy arouses positive associations, but on the other hand it is not devoid of disappointment and dissatisfaction from the way it functions. Such an instrumental way of understanding democracy – as a system caring first and foremost for citizens – may encourage citizens to became involved in other activities, embedded directly in these values, rather than in participation in institutionalised politics. Interestingly, in contrast to the ESS study indicating differences in political participation due to socio-demographic characteristic, the presented conceptualization of democracy is not affected by the level of education or gender (Jasiewicz-Betkiewicz et al., 2017).

One of the most important forms of informal participation are protests. For many people, protests are an expression of opposition to the current reality, often aimed at existing patterns such as the patriarchy, the moral norms of the Church, or legal solutions introduced (Sterczewski, 2021). In recent years, many protests have taken place in Polish cities, with many gathering thousands of dissatisfied individuals. Most often, workers from various professions protested, including miners, nurses, teachers, and farmers, expressing their opposition to social and wage policies as well as the political activities of the authorities. Examples of such protests include demonstrations against changes in the judiciary. K. Podemski (2017) drew attention to the increasing number of protests in Poland, especially in Warsaw, where an average of 559 demonstrations were registered annually between 2004 and 2014, and from October 2015 to June 2017, as many as 4,093 demonstrations took place. Examples of protests with a civic character were the Black Marches and women's strikes, in which women acted not as workers (teachers, nurses) but as citizens defending important values for themselves and demanding recognition of their other rights to choose their own way of life (Korolczuk et al. 2019).

According to a CBOS survey from November 2020, 63% of respondents declared support for protests, while 8% admitted to personal participation in them. Mostly, young people aged 18-24 (28%) and women (11% compared to 6% of men) participated in them more often. City residents, with a higher level of education and better financial situation, as well as those with left-wing views, protested more frequently (CBOS, 2020a). Protesting women stood in opposition to the Church and the state, defending their rights and criticizing existing social values. Protests were not only about abortion issues but also about other human rights, such as LGBT+ rights, as well as generational and identity issues (Sterczewski, 2021). However, despite women actively standing up for their rights, they still constitute a minority compared to men engaging in political participation.

## 3.2. The social image of political citizen

According to the PGSW study (Cześnik et al., 2016), the relationships between voting and socio-demographic variables were significant and quite stable over time in Poland. Electoral participation turned out to be most strongly associated with gender (men), age (older), education (higher) as well as frequency of religious practice (with those who practice regularly voting more often in comparison to those who did not declare religious practices). The influence of income, place of residence and occupational status was smaller, although not insignificant. For example, rural residents voted less frequently than urban residents. The patterns of distribution of voter participation in the social structure recorded in Poland showed a high degree of similarity to the patterns observed in Western European societies (Cześnik et al., 2016). Additionally, rising electoral polarisation in 2019 manifested itself in different embeddedness in the social structure. This meant that the electorates of the two main parties – PiS and PO - "diverged" in terms of their social worldview and ideological characteristics. PiS took root in the countryside and, most generally, in the lower social strata, religious and right-wing circles. PO established itself in the higher social strata, moved towards the lower levels of religiosity and consolidated itself in the centre of the ideological spectrum, reaching out to potential left-wing voters (Cześnik, Grabowska 2017).

In addition to the general characteristics of Polish voters, it is important to highlight several aspects which have an impact on political participation in Poland.

### 3.2.1. Age

Currently, we are witnessing a generational shift in the approach to political participation. Individuals born in the second half of the 1980s and 1990s (now around 35 years old) grew up in a democratic state with economic capitalism. They lack personal comparisons with life under real socialism, which can also influence their views and attitudes (Skarżyńska, 2021).

Differences between generations can be characterized by the results of research conducted by CBOS. "We observe more than average satisfaction with the functioning of Polish democracy among individuals aged 55+ (residents of rural areas, especially farmers, respondents with primary and vocational education, and among those with monthly per capita incomes ranging from 1500 PLN to 1999 PLN). Particularly critical in their assessments are young people up to the age of 24 (residents of large cities and individuals with the highest education and socioeconomic status)" (CBOS, 2020b).

In several studies conducted between 2015 and 2018, concerning the rules of democracy and attitudes toward various manifestations of power, young adults were less likely than older generations of Poles to accept the principles of liberal democracy and more likely than older generations to accept authoritarian manifestations of power, such as the prohibition of public protests and demonstrations, the use of force by the police, and treating parliamentary opposition as an enemy. Young people were significantly more likely than older respondents to agree with the opinion that "One good party would be enough in the country, and others would be unnecessary." These results may reflect the lack of personal experience of young people with the authoritarian exercise of power (most have not experienced police brutality or been detained for 24 hours for participating in a legal demonstration, nor have they observed the consequences of a one-party system) (Skarżyńska, 2018; 2021). According to research by Krystyna Skarżyńska (2020), the young post-transformation generation who have not lived in a system other than a capitalist one, do not perceive the threats to democracy posed by populism and autocracy.

Young adults in the mentioned studies declared a significantly weaker sense of their personal freedom than older participants in the studies. Again, this is likely the result of a different perspective: older individuals compare their current freedom to what they had during the time of real socialism. This result can also be viewed from the perspective of the psychological characteristics of the youngest generation of today's adults, namely their frequent tendency to see things as “all or nothing”. Studies conducted in the United States in the early 21st century (e.g. Alford, 2003) show that many young adults do not feel formally restricted in their rights and freedoms – they live in a democratic state – but they see many limitations (e.g. financial) that significantly hinder the realization of constitutional freedoms. It has been observed (also in Poland) that individuals aged 18–34 value material values (money and power) more highly than freedom compared to older individuals (Skarżyńska, 2018). Young people are unaware that the unrestricted pursuit of their personal needs, without considering the needs and values of others, is unrealistic. Other researchers link the narcissistic expectations of young people to the overly protective way in which millennials were raised by their parents. Organizing every desired activity for them, a reflexive lack of limits, parents' efforts to fulfil all their wishes, have led to the formation of an entitlement attitude in the young generation, placing themselves and their own needs at the centre of the world (Drat-Ruszczak, 2018; Twenge, 2019). It is worth noting that young Poles raised in this way encountered serious systemic barriers to exercising their basic rights and freedoms in their adulthood. The violation of these rights by the rulings of the Constitutional Tribunal, especially the value of autonomy, has activated young adult Poles more strongly than ever in several decades. Therefore, we witnessed such strong levels of resistance and mass protests against laws banning abortion and discrimination against non-heteronormative individuals (Skarżyńska, 2021).

Unlike older generations, young people typically expect significant social support from democracy. In their opinion, Poland should be a caring state and ideologically neutral, which fundamentally distinguishes them from older generations. Meanwhile, older generations strongly emphasize the importance of freedom, systemic subjectivity, and the separation of powers as inherent attributes of the democratic model they fought for (Nowacki, 2020).

Significantly fewer young women than men of a similar age accept the authoritarian exercise of power and more strongly than young men support the principles of liberal democracy. An analysis of data from the latest edition of the European Value Study (EVS) from 2017, conducted by Mirosława Marody and her colleagues, shows that young Polish women are more “progressive” and less “traditional” in their views than young Polish men (Marody, 2021). According to Marody, young women “have redefined their identity”, wanting to be moral subjects, not “brave victims” of the traditional system of social role division.

Currently, the youth generation, i.e., the community born after 1989, is experiencing strong signs of the globalization of their cultural-civilizational life. The model of an individual shaping itself in this reality aims to achieve very high levels of economic success, including socio-economic, and obtaining high incomes in the shortest possible time. The second characteristic noted by researchers is the variability of attitudes, social and political behaviours, the opportunism of ideological choices, prioritizing the idea of efficiency over moral and ethical limitations.

### 3.2.2. Gendered political participation

The analysis of data reveals gender differences in political participation in all three dimensions, which is also confirmed by other studies. There are gender differences in voter turnout, with women only reaching a similar number as men in the recent national election. More women than men feel that their voice does not matter and their opinions have no impact at the national (respectively 80% and 74%) or local levels (66%-72%)

(Krzaklewska et al., 2016, p. 20). They also more involved in various initiatives in civil society. This gender gap in political participation in interpreted in a broader context of values and attitudes towards gender equality as well as policy measures.

Political participation is still influenced by traditional female and male roles. The analysis of EVS data shows that men are thought to be better political leaders than women (29% vs 18%) and better business executives than women (respectively 21% vs 15%). As a result, politics is seen more as a "man's world" and that men possess skills and motivation enabling them to be politically active. These cultural stereotypes do not encourage girls and women to gain knowledge about political activities or become interested in them as they do not provide opportunities for women.

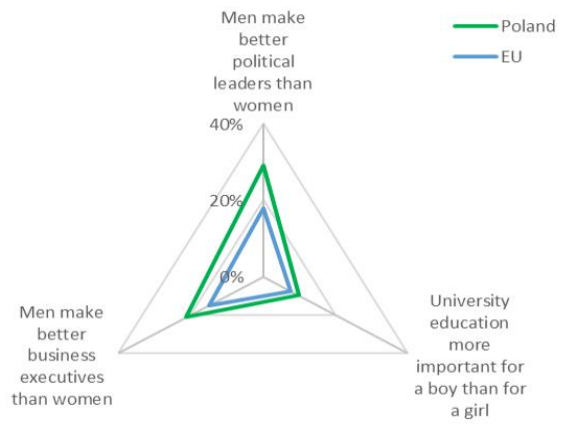



*Figure 28. Gender equality. Education and work. Detailed results,*
*Poland and EU, 2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on EVS data*

On the other hand, a study conducted between 1988 and 2013 focusing on the political knowledge of women and men in Poland, indicates that men and women are equally likely to indicate that they do not know answers to questions on political parties, but men are more likely than women to provide correct answers to these questions (Kunovich, Kunovich, 2016). This study also draws attention to the importance of cable or satellite TV in the case of men and religious attendance in the case of women as factors increasing their political knowledge. This lack of political knowledge may affect the identification with political parties. As already mentioned, every second person does not feel close to a political party, but more men (45%) than women (35%) fully identify with the political party they support (CBOS, 2023a, p. 3). It is even more important in terms of political participation that 49% of women do not identify with any of the political parties compared to 38% of men, which clearly shows that political participation is gendered.

The gender gap in political participation may also be a result of the unequal division of care work. As already presented, care work is unevenly distributed between women and men, with women doing most of it. The belief in traditional gender roles is confirmed by the EVS data: 52% of people believe that children suffer when the mother works (significantly higher than 36% in the EU), up to 61% believe that what women really want is to take care of the home and children (well above the EU average of 42%), 50% believe that family life is negatively affected when women have a full-time job (more similar to the 44% in the EU), and 39% believe that a man's job is to earn money while a woman's is to devote themselves to the home and family (only 25% in the EU). Care responsibilities affect women's political participation. Having the "third shift" related to care is a hindering factor for their involvement in political and civic activities.

The political engagement of women was strengthened when the quota system for the electoral list was introduced in 2011. This change in legislation was transformative not only in terms of the number of women on the electoral list, but also in the Sejm – Lower House of Parliament. According to this regulation, an electoral list of each electoral committee must consist of at least 35% of female and 35% of male candidates in order to be registered. This regulation was applied for the first time during the 2011 parliamentary election, and it applies only to votes according to the proportional representation system, which in case of Poland occur in elections to the European Parliament and the Lower House of parliament, but not to the Upper House of Parliament (the Senate), which is based on first-past-the-post voting. The increased number of women on the electoral list after 2011 can be interpreted as a success: compared to 2005, their number almost doubled on the list for the Lower House of Parliament, while their proportion in the electoral list for the Upper House has not changed significantly. The growing number of women on the electoral list and in the Lower House of Parliament weakens the perception of women as not interested in politics, it also shows that the quota system alone is not sufficient to provide similar opportunities for women and men in politics.

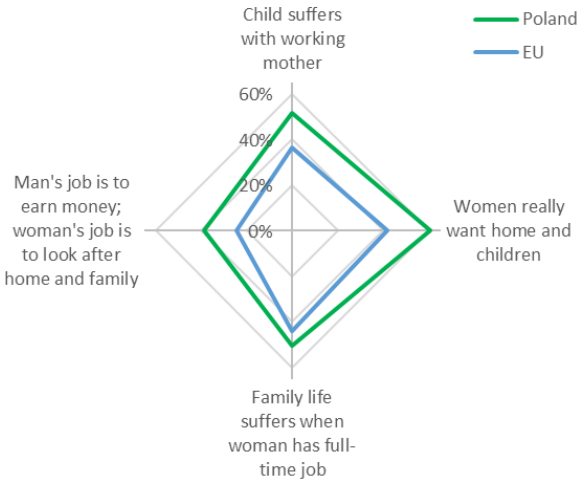



*Figure 29. Gender equality. Family. Detailed results, Poland and EU, 2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on EVS data*

Chart 1. Percentage of women among all candidates and on the top places on electoral lists in the elections to the Sejm in 2005-2019 (data of the PKW [National Electoral Commission])


*Figure 30. Percentage of women among all candidates and on the top places on electoral lists in the elections to the Sejm in 2005-2019 (data of the PKW [National Electoral Commission])*
*Source: Druciarek, Przybysz, Przybysz, 2019, p.7*

To make politics more available to women, the zipper mechanism and placing women at the top of electoral lists should also apply since changes in the political culture and the functioning of political parties are needed (Druciarek, Przybysz, Przybysz, 2019). This lack of supporting mechanisms has reduced the chances for women to be elected, as this is strongly related to their position on the electoral list. While we can observe the increased number of women since 2005, with a rapid change in 2011, it is clear that they are not given the same opportunities as their positions on the electoral list are usually lower compared to men (Figure 30). The number of women in the position 1-5 has increased in 2011, but since then, it has been systematically decreasing. The number of women on the electoral list also differs among political parties, with those related to more leftists and central position being more open and offering more positions for women. This suggests that more women ran for office after introducing quota system but this is not translated into parties' and voters' support for female candidates (Gendźwił, Żółtak, 2020; Kukołowicz, 2013). The studies shows that gender stereotypes concerning candidates knowledge, skills and attitudes as well as the gender of voters have an impact on political preferences and voting patterns. A similar impact of gender stereotypes has also been revealed regarding the perception of female politicians (Turska-Kawa, Olszanecka-Marmola, 2018).

The increase of the number of women on the electoral list translated into an increased number of women in the Lower House of Parliament. However, as shown in Figure 31, the changes are not as significant as in the case of the electoral list. Until now, women had not constituted more than 35% of all members of the Lower House of Parliament.

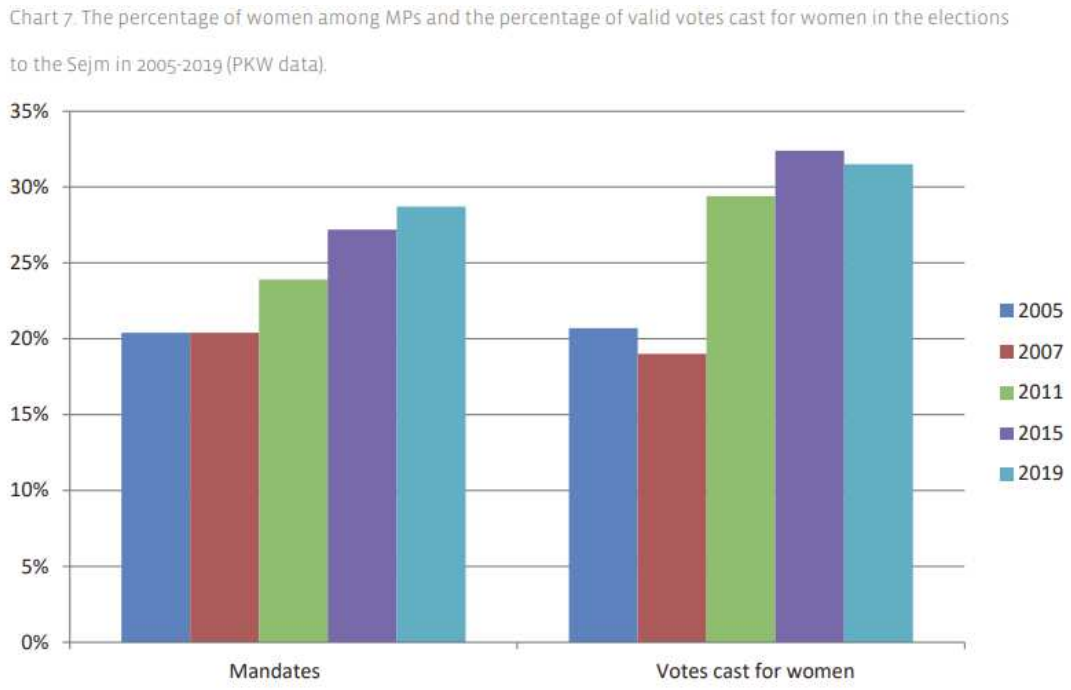



*Figure 31. The percentage of women among MPs and the percentage of valid votes cast for women in the elections to the Sejm in 2005-2019 (PKW data)*

*Source: Druciarek, Przybysz, Przybysz, 2019, p.15*

The opposite situation occurs in case of the election for the Upper House of Parliament, where there are no regulations forcing political parties to promote female candidates. As a result, female candidates have not reached the level of 15% since 2007 and this translates into a low number of women in the Upper House of Parliament – 13 women (out of 100 members) in 2005, 2011 and 2015, 24 in 2019 and 17 in 2023.

There are also gender differences in civic activities (Kowalska, Warat, 2016; Krzaklewska et al., 2016, p. 21). Women reported being more active in charity initiatives as well as parish/church/religious communities while men more frequently indicated their participation in informal groups, hobby clubs, sport teams and trade unions. It is also worth noting that among all activities in civil society, the participation in children's kindergartens and schools stood out. Not only was it indicated by the highest number of respondents, but also revealed that women are much more involved in this sphere. Beata Kowalska and Marta Warat (2016, p. 103) provide three possible explanations of the higher involvement in these activities: "We could interpret these results as indicating the strategy of schools which tries to activate parents and engage them in school's (mandatory) activities. It may be also suggested that creating a particular environment or satisfying expectations formed by a school's or kindergarten's authorities stimulate the civic activity of parents. Or perhaps schools or kindergartens are treated as extensions of the private sphere – our parental responsibilities (especially maternal), and hence greater involvement in this area?"

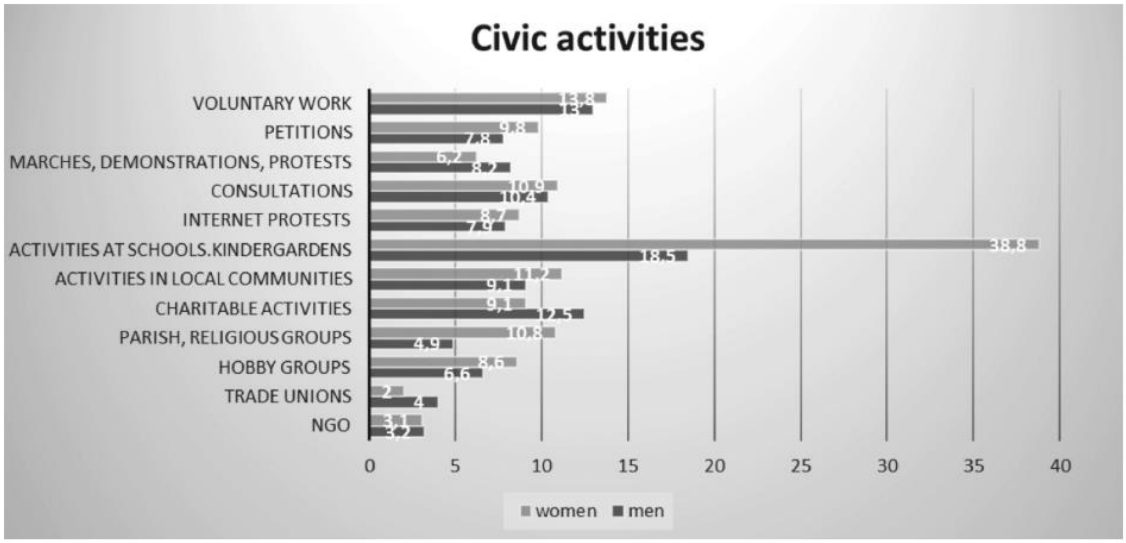



*Figure 32. Civic activities by gender*
*Source: Kowalska, Warat, 2016, p. 102-103*

### 3.2.3. Religiosity

Religiosity remains an important correlate of political participation in Poland. While the results of the World Value Survey suggest that nowadays religiosity often serves as a deterrent rather than mobilising force for political engagement (Omelichevaa, Ahmed, 2018), in Poland people who regularly participate in religious practices are more likely to vote. Moreover, other studies show that they are also more likely than those not practising or practising occasionally, to be active in civic organisations (CBOS, 2022a). It seems that in Poland it is still the case that religious activities, such as churchgoing or involvement in religious groups, build the social capital and civic skills necessary for political participation. It is also argued that direct appeals from clergy to vote in elections, and to vote for certain candidates or political parties have an effect on members' levels of political engagement (Omelichevaa, Ahmed, 2018). However, the impact of religiosity will probably be weakened in the future due to the ongoing secularisation of Polish society, most prominent among the youth and young adults (CBOS, 2022b).

### 3.2.4. Political participation and political attitudes

In reference to Western democracies, it has been suggested that individuals identifying with the right on the political spectrum tend to prefer (orderly) conventional political action, while those on the left would be more likely to engage in contentious politics (Kriesi, 2016). In Poland the picture is different. Both the ESS and the PGSW study (Cześnik et al., 2016) demonstrate that there were no statistically significant differences between voters and non-voters in political identities within the left-right spectrum, when other variables were controlled (see Table 10). Additionally, at least until recently, people with right-wing political self-positioning were more likely to protest than left-wingers in Poland and in some other Central and Eastern European countries (Campos Lima, Martin Article, 2018; Kostelka, Rovný, 2019). These differences suggest that left and right ideologies do not operate invariantly across countries. The meaning and functions of the left-right axis are socially constructed and are bound to specific historical, geographical, and political contexts (Caprara, Vecchione, 2018).

## 3.3. From knowledge to practice: school and political participation. Implications for democracy

This section focuses on the results of ICCS 2023 study which shows the relationship between education for democracy and political participation. Being an active citizen is not a given, it must be taught and practiced. This process happens in many contexts and on different levels: through family, friends, peer's group and school. The latter plays a pivotal role, equipping pupils with knowledge of political and civic issues as well as stimulating their political engagement. Yet, having one of the highest scores in terms of understanding these processes (48% pupils achieved the highest level of skills and 5% are at or below the lowest level) does not translate into practice. There is a clear gap between the cognitive skills of eighth graders and their practices. Firstly, Polish pupils can reproduce the information about democratic processes and democratic system. They also recognise democracy as the best form of governance for Poland and they support values consider important for democratic order: gender equality, equal rights for immigrants and ethnic groups. At the same time, only every third person claims that democracy works well in Poland. The critical perspective towards the functioning of the political system is reflected in their low level of trust in parliament, government, political parties, courts and police and reluctance to join political party or support a candidate's campaign during election in future. This disillusionment in formal political participation does not exclude other forms of political participation: defining oneself as a potential voter (86% of pupils declared that they will vote in the national election when reaching the eligible age) or volunteering in local communities (as reported by 59% of pupils – the highest score among surveyed countries). These findings are not surprising and – as discussed in this report - reflect the tendencies among the entire society.

Secondly, the gap between possessing knowledge and practicing democracy is also clear when it comes to finding political and social viewpoints and debates. For 41% of pupils, the Internet has become their main source of information but only a few use it as a venue to express their political and social opinions. This proves that young people are not actively engaged in online forms of political participation.

Thirdly, while the school develops knowledge about democracy, it has not become a venue for practising democracy. ICCS study (2023) reveals that political participation at school is mostly limited to the elections of representatives to student government bodies (almost all pupils attending 8 grade participate in such elections), with other activities only being practiced by a few pupils. This clearly shows the lack of opportunities to develop the voice of students at school and their sense of involvement in decision-making processes.

Contrary to many studies exploring how education in Poland reproduces social class regardless of its level (e.g. Sadura, 2017), ICCS (2023) reveals the equalizing potential of education for democracy. Its analysis clearly shows that the educational attainments regarding EfD is not influenced by the type of school: regardless of the primary education institutions, pupils were offered similar opportunities for enhancing their democratic knowledge and skills. In this context, school may reduce the impact of social class, especially the social capital of parents. A reverse tendency is observed regarding gender: the analysis of ICCS (2023) indicates that girls scored 24 points higher than boys regarding their knowledge and understanding of civic issues.

# 4. Recommendations for education on democracy

Education plays an essential role in developing democratic attitudes and practices among citizens. Educational attainment universally and considerably affects participation in democratic processes, with individuals with a higher level of education most likely to both vote and take part in conventional and unconventional forms of political activities. Based on our analysis and interpretation, recommendations can involve three main actors: the educational system, teachers, and students.

## *3.4. The education system*

**1) Early stage of the educational process**

The analysed findings suggest that the civic education should be introduced at a very early stage of the educational process (with methods tailored to cognitive abilities of pupils at different age) in order to create equal opportunities for all and to effectively develop individuals' habits to widely participate in democratic procedures, irrespective of their later educational choices.

Civic education should be integrated into school curricula from an early age to instil an understanding of democratic principles such as equality, justice, human rights, and the importance of active citizenship in different social areas, the ability to express one's opinion or respect the opinion of others. Generally, to the average Pole, democratic citizenshipis mainly associated with "voting" and understanding the structures of the state and is not necessarily expanded to other areas of their activity. It is important to raise awareness in the education process, from an early age, that democracy needsa competence that has broad applications in being a citizen, showing various types of activity as civic and democratic actions.

**2) Combining theoretical knowledge (knowledge about democracy) with practical knowledge (democracy in practice). Creating a space to strengthen knowledge and skills**

Implementing inclusive and transparent decision-making at daily class and school life level, as well as at the school governance level, should be one of the methods, alongside civic competences taught both within a separate subject and as transversal topics.

The relatively low level of participation in local elections points to the necessity of strengthening the role of education in fostering personal knowledge, sense of agency and competences concerning the operation and powers of territorial self-government bodies as well as their impact on citizens' everyday life. Hence, there is a need to strengthen both theoretical and practical competences in this area. Education should incorporate participatory learning approaches that actively involve students in decision-making processes within their schools and communities. By experiencing democracy through debates, reasoning, argument, and collaborative projects, students develop the skills and attitudes necessary for active citizenship. Education should encourage community engagement and practical learning initiatives that enable students to address real-world issues and contribute positively to their communities. There are still too few such activities in Polish schools.

**3) Balancing gender themes in teaching content**

While the gender differences in political participation are diminishing, they are still significant in Poland, which suggests examining and changing the gendered curricula and teaching practices which (re)produce gender stereotypes, and unequal gender roles in public and private spheres. As research demonstrates (Chmura-Rutkowska et al. 2019), women are so far underrepresented in Polish textbooks and when they are portrayed,

they are most often represented in their traditional roles of caregivers. Their contribution to politics, science and art is neglected. Similarly, the topics of gender inequalities and the feminist movement are not sufficiently covered.

It is worth understanding that education plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes and social views. If gender stereotypes, biases and inequalities are not challenged in education, there is a risk that they will be perpetuated and passed on to subsequent generations. Introducing changes in teaching programs and pedagogical practices can help break down these stereotypes and promote more equitable gender relations.

## *3.5. Teachers and students*

**1) Creating interactive lessons**

The role of the teacher is crucial in imparting citizenship competences because it is in school that students learn not only academic knowledge but also social skills, critical thinking, and civic engagement. Teachers play an incredibly important role in shaping students' civic attitudes by teaching them democratic values, principles of cooperation, and respect for others. Through appropriate teaching methods, discussions, and involving students in social projects, teachers can support the development of citizenship competences which are crucial for the functioning of a democratic society. It is important for the teacher to promote teaching methods such as simulation games, case studies, and mini-projects in order to engage students in the learning process and develop their civic competences.

**2) Creating space for discussion**

Promoting open discussions on topics related to democracy, equality, human rights, and so forth is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it fosters a deeper understanding of these fundamental concepts among students, allowing them to grasp their significance in society. By encouraging students to express their opinions, teachers create a supportive environment where diverse perspectives are valued, contributing to critical thinking and empathy. Moreover, open discussions provide a platform for students to practice articulating their thoughts and engaging in respectful dialogue, essential skills for active citizenship. When students feel empowered to voice their ideas and concerns, they develop a sense of agency and ownership over their learning process. Additionally, listening to students' ideas cultivates a sense of mutual respect and trust between teachers and learners, fostering a collaborative learning environment. Ultimately, by facilitating open discussions, teachers not only enrich students' understanding of democratic principles but also empower them to become informed, engaged citizens capable of contributing positively to their communities and society as a whole. By consciously utilizing language and examples in the classroom, teachers can contribute to building a more inclusive and equitable educational environment that fosters the development of egalitarian attitudes and social behaviours among students.

This can be done through, for example, Oxford-style debates, where two teams engage in an organized dispute over the truth of the debate's thesis, to which they take predetermined positions. A panel discussion with an invited guest expert can stimulate students' curiosity and familiarize them with public speaking.

**3) Engagement in local communities**

Encouraging students to participate in volunteering or social projects that promote civic engagement is beneficial for several reasons. Firstly, it allows students to actively contribute to their communities and have a positive impact on society. By engaging in activities such as volunteering at local institutions (community centres, nursing homes, hospices, or animal shelters) students develop a sense of responsibility and empathy

towards others. Furthermore, involvement in social activities provides students with opportunities to broaden their horizons and gain valuable experiences outside of the classroom. They have the chance to interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds, learn about different perspectives and develop a greater understanding of the world around them. Generally speaking, encouraging students to participate in social activities has a positive impact on building more engaged communities and promotes active citizenship.

The recommendations address general directions, but they do not exhaust the full range of possibilities or all of the important actors involved in improving democracy education in Polish schools. The family is one of the key actors in shaping civic attitudes in students (children and youth). Cooperation between the school and family can by a highly effective tool in shaping democratic values and civic engagement among pupils.

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# Spain

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# Abbreviations

CCAA: Autonomous Communities (Comunidades Autónomas)

ESS: European Social Survey

ICCS: International Comparative Citizenship Study

PP: Popular Party (Partido Popular)

PSOE: Spanish Socialist Worker Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español)

# Executive Summary

This is the Spanish national report on education inequalities and political participation, one of the six reports included in Deliverable 3.1. Based on a common conceptual and methodological approach (see Introduction), the report takes as a point of departure comparable data from international sources and national literature, with the aim to contextualise and analyse how political participation is influenced by social inequalities and political values and attitudes. Based on this analysis and additional evidence on the education system, the report provides recommendations with a view to strengthen the foundations for equal and democratic participation through education in Spain.

The report is structured following the common guidelines agreed for all national reports. The first chapter provides the context of political and social engagement in Spain, focusing on those aspects which are more relevant for the understanding of political participation patterns and their evolution over time. The second chapter presents the main results of the statistical analysis of the European Social Survey data in 2012 and 2020, paying special attention to patterns of political participation in terms of social inequality and political values and attitudes in 2020. The third chapter discusses the results on the basis of national surveys and studies, and ends by addressing the implications for the education system in general and education for democracy in particular. The final chapter provides policy recommendations to strengthen education for democracy in Spain.

The analysis shows the persistence of unequal political participation patterns related to social inequalities (mainly social class) and the trend towards higher participation levels in different forms. Such increase in political mobilisation is related to the emergence of critical democratic citizens, with strong support for democracy and higher demands of participation, transparency, responsiveness and accountability. However, a spiral of political polarisation has fuelled the emergence of the far right and illiberal values, namely in recent years.

Any consideration of the role of the education has to start by stressing that the education system in Spain tends to reinforce social inequalities. - which is a worrisome trend for the quality and resilience of democracy. The report builds on further evidence about civic education in Spain to argue that enhancing self-perception of individual and collective political efficacy should be the main goal of education for democracy- and this needs to be achieved through practical experience. The pupils need to experience that their political participation or lack of it has an impact on their own living conditions. It also means balancing one's own interests with those of the community. Special focus should be paid to those pupils whose parents show no interest in social and political topics.

This educational approach should be normatively anchored in the fundamental principles of democracy, including the fight against negative attitudes towards gender equality and immigration which are on the rise. Only in this way can democracy be learned and practiced, not as a gift given by the governing class, but as a policy making process based on the ideals of political equality, appropriate representation of societal preferences, and responsiveness of government which requires sustained political participation.

# Table of Contents

# 1. Political and civic engagement: national perspective

Democracy in Spain was established in 1978, after a civil war (1936-1939) and almost 40 years of military dictatorship. Transition to democracy was achieved by a process of negotiation between representatives of the old regime and democratic parties in a relatively peaceful way. 1982 was a turning point, with a failed attempt of a *coup d'etat* and the winning of the general elections by the center-left socialist party (PSOE, *Partido Socialista Obrero Español*), which initiated a long period of socialist governments (1982-1996).

The Spanish political system is characterised by a high degree of decentralisation. The distribution of political competences between the central state and the Autonomous Communities (CCAA) is a key element of the 1978 Constitution. It configured "*a system where shared and concurrent competencies predominate, with few areas of exclusive competence, and with the implementation of central law in the hands of the regional units in most areas*." (Colino, 2020, p. 64).

The parliamentary system is made up of two chambers. The Congress of Deputies (Congreso de los Diputados) represents the Spanish people and elects the government. The second chamber is the Senate (Senado) which consists of 265 senators, 208 of whom are directly elected. The other 57 members are appointed by the CCAA parliaments. Due to the configuration of the constituencies in small districts, the system favours the two large national parties, the centre-left PSOE and the conservative party (PP - *Partido Popular*), but also parties that are strong in some CCAA, namely Catalonia and the Basque Country.

Perceptions of democracy and participation are influenced by the performance of democratic society in terms of social, political, environmental, and economic well-being. Spain's political and civic engagement is marked by some critical topics in its recent history**,** as explained below.

## *1.1. The financial and economic crisis*

The 2008 financial and economic crisis hit Spain harder than many other EU countries after a long period of economic growth above the EU average (1994-2008). As Figure 1 shows, the crisis had a huge impact on the labour market with the unemployment rate rising from 8% in 2007 to 26% in 2013.

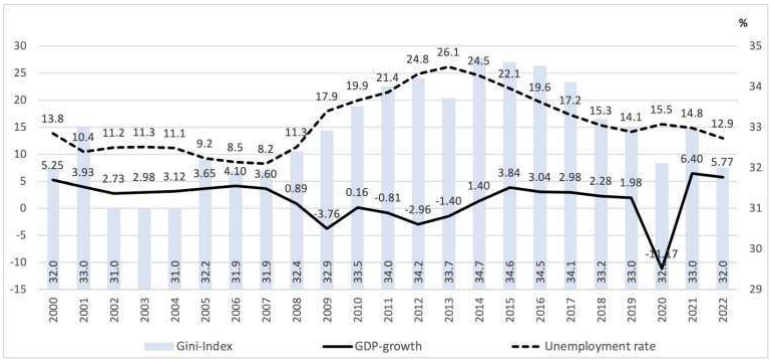


*Figure 1: GDP Growth, unemployment rate and Gini Index*
*Source: World Bank (NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG) and Eurostat ([lfsa_urgan and ilc_di12)*

Income inequality, which was already high with a Gini index around 31-32 raised to 34.7 in 2014. Similarly, the poverty rate rose from 19.8% in 2008 to 22.3% in 2013 and remained stable at this peak until 2016 (EAPN, 2023). Only from 2014 onwards did the Spanish economy show signs of recovery - although it was severely hit by the Covid crisis. Unemployment, income inequality and poverty have also declined, although they remained comparatively high. In 2022, the unemployment rate had fallen to 13%, the Gini index to 32 and the poverty rate to 20.4%, still affecting disproportionately children (0-16), lone parents and migrants (EAPN, 2023).

The reason for the particular severity of the financial and economic crisis lies in the chronic weakness of the Spanish economic model, which can be traced back to the late Francoist period (1959-1973). During these years, an economic structure was developed based on the dependency on tourism, the construction industry and industrial sectors controlled by foreign capital, such as the automotive, chemical and food industries. Knowledge and technology were generally imported from abroad and not developed internally. The model is characterised by few internationally competitive large companies and many micro-enterprises with fewer than 10 employees. There are few Spanish multinationals which are mainly companies that emerged from the privatisation process of state-owned companies (Telefónica, Repsol, Endesa or Naturgy), banks such as Santander or BBVA favoured by several merging processes, or large construction companies such as ACS, FCC or Ferrovial. Most of them are acting in Latinamerica. Only a few companies such as Santander, Telefonica and Iberdrola, but also Inditex (Zara) and Mango from the clothing industry, are oriented towards Europe and other world regions.

The long economic boom from 1994 to 2008 did not fundamentally change this economic model, which was based on the influx of foreign capital and a cheap labour force. The favourable interest rates triggered a credit-financed demand boom. Supported by the legal easing of building land development and tax concessions favouring the acquisition of houses and building, this led to a construction boom in which Spanish families acquired not only primary residences but also second homes. In 2008, 83% of all families owned residential property, with 36% owning more than one home. In addition, there were major public infrastructure projects, such as the high-speed railway lines. However, the success of this boom, in which the unemployment rate fell from 25% in 1993 to 8% in 2007, masked the structural weaknesses of the model, which then became apparent with the financial and economic crisis, when traditional mechanisms such as currency devaluation were no longer available.

The crisis hit first the financial sector, leading to a number of state-financed bank mergers and liquidations, and the construction industry. Furthermore, Spain was one the countries where the resulting housing crisis hit the hardest (Beswick et al., 2016). After years of expansion and easy access to financial credits accompanied by a high-level indebtedness among Spanish families, many families could not afford the increase of mortgages and were obliged to abandon their homes (Górgolas, 2021). The demand for rental increased and rental prices rose disproportionately[1], while the price of houses and flats continued also to increase in the mid-term. These processes are exacerbated by speculation and gentrification and affect especially large cities, as well as tourist areas. Since 2008, housing has become a central issue of political debate and social action (Robles et al., 2020).

The economic crisis hit the Spanish labour market hard, which already suffered structural problems such as chronic underemployment and high unemployment, higher than in most EU member states even during the boom times. Unemployment particularly affects young people, whose unemployment rate is permanently among the highest in the EU. There is also evidence of a dual labour market, with a relatively protected workforce, especially in larger companies and older workers who were not affected by the successive reforms to deregulate the labour market, and a highly deregulated labour market in which precarious and low-skilled employment became the norm. The deregulation of the labour market was driven forward once again with a reform in 2012, when the government introduced a decree with a drastic reduction in labour protection, the

[1] In Madrid, between 2013 and 2020, the rental price for a three-bedroom apartment increased 42%; 41% for a two-bedroom apartment, and 35% for one-bedroom apartment (see Eurostat prc_colc_rents).

far-reaching dissolution of collective bargaining and the precedence of company agreements over inter-company collective agreements.

Köhler (2022) summarises the economic development in the wake of the financial crisis as follows:

- Ongoing deindustrialisation, with dependency on external capital.
- Tertiarisation with tourism as the leading sector, which an increasing part of unqualified jobs in the service sector.
- Increasing precarisation of employment, closely related to the service economy.
- Internal devaluation of labour, that is a drastic reduction of labour costs to regain international economic competitiveness. This is accompanied by a loose of purchasing power and increased income inequality.
- Weakening of the system on industrial bargaining.
- Weakening of the welfare state in all dimensions. The austerity policies include the public investment in education, health, care services and social protection.
- Higher territorial unbalance, concentrating the economic power in the metropolitan area of Madrid and in coastal regions, particularly the Basque Country and Catalonia. The gap with the lagging regions has widened, which is particularly evident in their underdeveloped infrastructure connections.[2]

The financial and economic crisis of 2008 and its serious impact on the living conditions led to pessimism about the economic prospects and distrust in democracy and its institutions. According to CIS[3] surveys, 60% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the Spanish democracy in 2008, but 10 years later this rate had fallen to 43% (Muro, Lugo, 2020). As explained below, the crisis also initiated a cycle of mobilisations against austerity policies and exacerbated political polarisation with the emergence of a new left party (Podemos) and democratic backsliding led by the new radical right party VOX.

Overcoming the financial and economic crisis, as well as the structural problems described above, was hindered by structural political blockades that have accompanied Spain for decades and make overarching solutions difficult. Here five main aspects deserve to be mentioned:

- Political polarisation, which has become entrenched in a camp mentality that makes it difficult to form cross-party agreements.
- The dispute over Spain's territorial configuration, exemplified by the Basque and Catalan aspirations for independence, but also expressed in the formation of regional parties in other CCAAs. The political crisis resulting from the unilateral illegal declaration of independence by the Catalan parliament exacerbated both the polarisation and the territorial dispute.
- The long-lasting political polarisation is also evident in the education sector, with reforms and counter-reforms that have not addressed chronic problems.
- The internal controversial dispute about immigration from non-European countries, which has led to massive internal political debates.
- The debate about feminist politics and gender equality in Spain.

[2] See Del Molino (2016)

[3] CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas) is the public research institute in charge of social and political surveys.

We start by addressing the political scenario of polarisation and the impact of the Catalan independence movement, whilst the next sections deal with education, migration and gender equality.

## 1.2. Political scenario

Participation in the general elections show a declining trend with strong fluctuations related to exceptional situations such as the possibility of a first PSOE government in 1982; the first time that PP appeared as an alternative to the PSOE in 1993; the possibility of a first PP government in 1996; the train bombing in Madrid by Islamic terrorists in 2004, or the PP corruption affair in 2018-2019 (see Figure 2).

Political polarisation has been a constant in Spanish democracy since the transition, due to the relationship between the conservative political parties, Francoism and the Spanish Catholic Church, which belongs to the ultra-conservative wing of Catholicism. Today's conservative PP has never denied its roots in Francoism. Alongside more liberal-minded party factions, the ultra-conservative wing is still strongly present in the party, although part of this wing split off in the mid-2010s to form the ultra-conservative and ultra-nationalist party VOX.

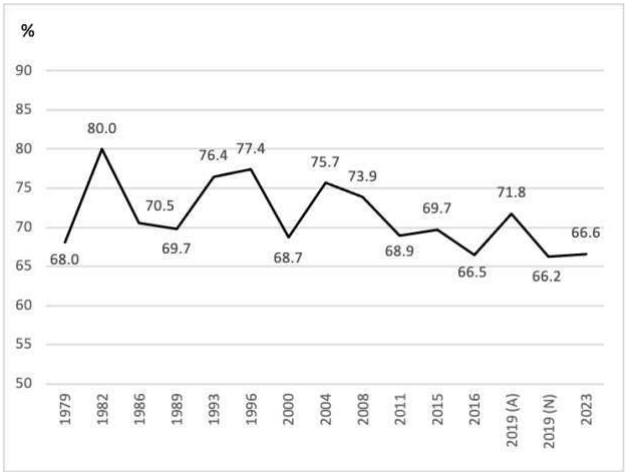


*Figure 2: Participation in general elections (1979 – 2023)*

*Source: Wikipedia (https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elecciones_generales_de_Espa%C3%B1a)*

Polarisation is reflected in the high voter turnout in the 1993 elections, when the PP had a real chance of winning the elections for the first time, and in 1996, when it won the elections and subsequently formed the government. Polarisation then intensified again in the 2004 elections, which took place immediately after the Islamist terrorist attack in the Atocha train station in Madrid. A decisive element in the defeat of the then ruling PP was that the conservative government repeatedly referred to the Basque terrorist organisation ETA as the perpetrator, despite the evidence of Islamist-inspired perpetration. This can also be seen as the moment when deliberately published false news were normalised by both the conservative press and the conservative parties as an element of political debate. It can also be seen as the first moment when the PP labelled the PSOE-led government as illegitimate, as happened with the socialist government after the 2004 elections and is currently happening with the PSOE-led coalition governments.

The polarisation of politics also leads to a politicisation and polarisation of the judiciary. Many of the political conflicts lead to complaints about approved laws and decrees before the Constitutional Court. The polarisation can be seen in the procedures for appointments to the General Council of the Judiciary (Consejo General del Poder Judicial, CGPJ) and the Constitutional Court, whose members are appointed by a qualified majority of the Congress. Since the 2000s, the appointment of new members to these judicial bodies has regularly exceeded the planned deadlines, as the two major parties PSOE and PP have been unable to agree on the

appointments. For example, the mandate of the current General Council expired in 2018 without new appointment in sight[4].

The Spanish political system is characterised by an extensive transfer of powers to the regions (CCAA) in many policy areas. A number of authors such as Caamaño (2014) and Vallès (2016) identified centrifugal tendencies as a defect of constitutional design or lack of a true federal culture. Maihold (2022, p. 16) spoke about destructive patterns between the different levels of governance and a trend towards particularism and blockade politics. On the contrary, Colino (2020:74). considers this more as ongoing dynamic process of institutional adjustment, cooperation, stability, and conflict prevention. However, managing the system of CCAA requires cooperation between the central government and the CCAA governments, which belongs often to other political parties, but is made more difficult by polarisation. The dispute about the territorial configuration and the associated dysfunctionalities is a long-standing debate, which actually has it mayor expression in the Catalan independence movement.

The Catalan independence movement is a product of such dysfunctionalities and of the polarisation of the political system. At the same time, it reinforced the polarisation. As in the Basque Country, there has always been a socio-political movement demanding independence for Catalonia. In contrast to the Basque country, the Catalan movement was mainly non-violent and aimed at achieving a greater degree of autonomy within the democratic system through political negotiation with the central government. The relationships between the state and the CCAA are outlined first in the Constitution and later by Acts on the Legal Status of Autonomy of each CCAA. In the 2000's, the Catalan Parliament approved a new Act, which was substantially modified by the Congress. This revised Act was approved by a referendum among the Catalan population which was again substantially modified by the Constitutional Court. These substantial modifications led to a radicalisation of the Catalan nationalist movement, demanding now independence. It led to several massive demonstrations for the Catalan independence, an illegal referendum, the unilateral declaration of independency of Catalonia approved by the majority of the Catalan Parliament (2017) and the subsequent application of the Art. 155 of the Constitution which suspended the self-government of Catalonia approved by the Congress. Subsequently, many of the political leaders of the independence movement were convicted and imprisoned for several years. Only in 2023 the PSOE started to negotiate an Amnesty Law with the nationalist parties in Catalonia and other parties. This Law has been approved by the Congress of Deputies in 2024 and is currently under discussion in the Senate.

Both the crisis of 2008 and the Catalan independence movement challenged the traditional system of two strong national parties and several strong regional parties in some CCAA. On the left side, Podemos appeared in 2014 at the left of the PSOE as fruit of the 15M movement of 2011, a popular protest movement against the austerity social and economic policies to deal with the financial and economic crisis. In the 2015 general election, Podemos in coalition with other state and regional left parties, obtained 20.7% of the votes and 68 seats in the Congress. Even if it lost support in the 2019 election, it formed with the PSOE the first left-wing coalition government since 1975. In the last election 2023, it was part of the electoral coalition SUMAR, which obtained 12.3% of the votes and 31 seats, and forms with the PSOE another left-wing government. Across these years, the political space at the left of the PSOE has been weakened by internal disagreements - among them, the split between SUMAR and Podemos after the 2023 elections.

[4] The PP is pursuing delaying tactics in the current replacement of the General Council and in previous cases of replacement of both the General Council and the Constitutional Court, as the majority of the members of these bodies are closer to its political positions.

On the right side, the liberal party Ciudadanos (founded in Catalonia in 2006) gained relevance with a political discourse against the Catalan independence movement in the mid 2010s, both in the general elections and the Catalan elections. However, in 2017, the ultra-nationalist and ultra-conservative party VOX achieved for the first time representation in a regional election. Spain was no longer an "exception" as regards the emergence of the radical right parties in Europe and all over the world. While Ciudadanos has almost disappeared from the political scene, VOX is represented in the Congress since 2019 and currently has 33 seats. Furthermore, it participates in coalition governments with the PP in several CCAA where the PP was unable to form government on its own. VOX is based on authoritarian and illiberal values which represent a threat to democracy (e.g. Steven, 2021; Torcal, 2023).

## *1.3. Education system*

The education sector has suffered the political polarisation with a series of reforms and counter-reforms which have not solved its long-standing problems. The Spanish education system is characterised by a high school drop-out rate, which is among the highest of the EU. It affects disproportionately students from low socio-economic and migrant backgrounds (Ortiz et al., 2022). High drop-out leads to education polarisation between low and high levels of education, with a low share of young people with upper secondary education or upper vocational training. Another important feature of the Spanish education system is the combination of public schools, publicly funded private schools and purely public schools. Around two thirds of students in primary and compulsory education attain public schools, whilst almost the other third attends publicly funded private schools. Students from low socio-economic background or migrant origin are concentrated in the public system. Finally, the public education system suffers from chronic underfunding, which was exacerbated by the austerity measures taken during the economic crisis. In contrast, the publicly funded private schools experimented a growth of the public funds (Rodríguez Martinez, 2020).

Like the political system, the education system is characterised by the transfer of part of the political competencies from the central state to the CCAA. This has led to a complex system with high internal heterogeneity (García Ruiz, Martínez Medina, 2018).

State legislation defines the general structure of the system, the knowledge areas and disciplines, and the sequence of their content according to the different degrees. The aim is to ensure a certain degree of cultural and structural homogeneity between the different regional education models. The state establishes the basic structure of the curriculum at all levels of formal education, defining 55% of the basic learning contents for the CCAA with own languages such as Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque Country, and 65% for the others (García Rubio, 2015). This has left room for each CCAA to draw up its own curriculum. All in all, it is a complex multilevel negotiation process between different social actors including schools and teachers (Goodson, 1991) adapted to the cultural and political characteristics of each CCAA (García Ruiz, Martínez Medina, 2018).

The aforementioned political polarisation has also its reflection in the education system. On one hand, there is a dispute about the general orientation of the education system, but more specifically as regards the approach of civic education. Indeed, this polarisation can be traced back to the time before the civil war, when education approaches were developed and implemented to change the traditional education system with its strong orientation to Catholicism. During the democratic transition a strong movement for pedagogical renewal emerged to overcome the Franquist education system. This heterogeneous movement played a significant role in the democratic transition and the modernisation of the education system from 1970 to 1985. Hernández Díaz (2018) described it as a unique educational phenomenon in the Western world, bringing together more than 50,000 professors and teachers in all Spain and at all education levels, who were mobilised

to transform the Franquist educational system by promoting structural and content-related innovations, and defending the quality of education at public schools for all citizens (Hernández Díaz, 2018, p. 258). Teachers from different educational levels and stages dialogued about and shared pedagogical practices in a conflictive political context fighting for the recovering of education as a public right, questioning traditional models and proposing alternatives based on principles of transformative education (Beneyto-Seoane, 2023, p. 5).

In the 1990s, with the approval of a new education act by the socialist government and due to a variety of factors, this movement lost relevance - although it is still alive in numerous associations and platforms (Sánchez, López, 2023): for instance, the Confederation of movement for pedagogical renewal[5], the Catalan teachers association Rosa Sensat[6], as well as new initiatives such as the platform Red Transforma[7], the network Teachers for Future[8], the Association for open education[9] (or social platforms as aulablog[10]. This tension has its main expression in the long-standing debate about the overall orientation of the education system - increasing its functional orientation towards the labour market or adopting transformative educational approaches.

The debate is also present in the consideration of civic education. There is controversy about whether it should be a transversal topic that must be included in all disciplines, a matter of specific education areas such as social sciences, or a topic by itself as civic education or democratic civic education with a strong focus on showing how the political system works formally (Arbués Radigales, Naval Durán, 2020; González Pérez, 2014). These views (which could be combined) are constantly under dispute by the political parties, depending also on the educational orientation of the autonomous governments and the pedagogical project of the schools. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the debate on civic education has been increasingly polarised between catholic conservative and progressive education understandings - and it is reflected in a certain division according to the political orientation of the regional governments. The regions in which the conservative PP is in power for decades, tend to have more functional civic education approaches reducing civic education to the knowledge about the political system, while other regions governed by PSOE are more progressive oriented with a broader understanding.

## *1.4. Migration*

Until the mid-2010s, migration policy stood not at the centre of political debate, although the number of immigrants increased significantly during the economic boom and Spain changed from a country of emigration to a country of immigration (see Figure 3).

The 2008 crisis produced a significant change, as Spain became again a country of emigration, with growing numbers of departures and the return home of immigrants (Martin, 2020; Arango, 2016). With the end of the economic crisis, immigration flow rose again and returned to the level seen before the financial crisis (Kreinbrink, 2022). Ultimately, however, the financial and economic crisis had less of an impact on migration

[5] Confederación de movimientos de renovación pedagógica - https://confederacionmrp.com

[6] https://www.rosasensat.org

[7] https://redtransforma.intered.org

[8] https://teachersforfuturespain.org

[9] https://educacionabierta.org

[10]https://www.aulablog.com

movements than generally assumed (Mahía, 2016, p. 12). According to data from the National Statistics Institute (INE), in 2021 11.4% of the population living in Spain were foreigners, a share similar to that in 2010. The majority of foreigners living in Spain come from other EU countries and the UK. This is followed by Africa (2.5% in 2021) and South America (2.4% in 2021). Irregular migration flows, which mainly come from Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa were drastically reduced as a result of intensive control measures in cooperation with Morocco. In parallel, Spain has become one of the main European countries receiving asylum seekers (López-Sala, Moreno-Amador, 2020).

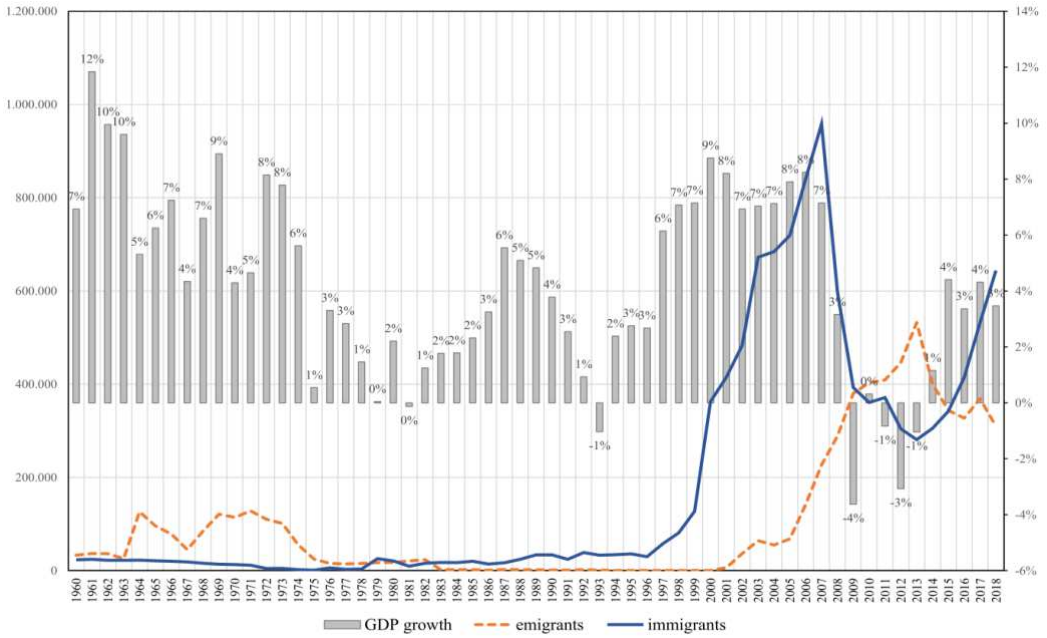


*Figure 3: Emigrants, immigrants and GDP Growth Rate in Spain, 1960-2018*
*Adapted from Spanish National Institute of Statistics (2020)*
*Source: Sobieraj and Mihi-Ramírez, 2020, p. 175*

The salience of migration in the political debate is mainly related to the appearance of the radical right party VOX (López-Sala, Moreno-Amador, 2020). Since then, the anti-immigration discourse has also gained importance within the conservative party (PP). In spite of this, Spanish and international surveys show that positive attitudes towards immigration prevail in the Spanish society (López-Sala, Moreno-Amador, 2020). The most recent data of the European Social Survey (ESS) confirm this aspect, showing that attitudes towards immigration were more positive in Spain than the EU average in 2020[11].

[11] The ESS contains three questions which we use to describe the attitude towards immigration. Each question requires a rating on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being the most negative and 10 being the most positive attitude. The table shows the percentage of positive attitudes (6-10).

| Table 1 - Attitudes towards immigration, Spain and EU, 2020 | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Spain | EU |
| Immigration bad or good for country economy (% Good; 6-10) | 57.0% | 19.2% |
| Country cultural life undermined or enriched by immigrants (% Enriched; 6-10) | 65.6% | 52.1% |
| Immigrants make country worse or better place to live (% Better; 6-10) | 49.4% | 38.7% |

*Table 1. Attitudes towards immigration, Spain and EU, 2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS 2020 data*
*Note: EU includes 23 EU27 countries. (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)*

Table 1 indicates that positive attitudes towards migration prevail in Spain, with a share close or above 50% of positive responses. In Spain, 57% of people consider that immigration is good for the country's economy, 66% that it enriches cultural life and 49% that it makes the country a better place to live. These results are significatively higher than the EU average, where only positive attitudes concerning cultural live are above the 50% threshold.

## 1.5. Gender equality

Gender equality is another issue that has become highly relevant in the political debate. A critical event was the proposal of the conservative PP government to restrict the right to abortion in 2014, which mobilised the feminist movement. Afterwards, sexual violence and femicide became a central theme which has mobilised from 2016 onwards a large part of the Spanish society, also producing a backsliding movement at the right spectrum of the society which was exacerbated by the anti-feminist discourse of VOX (Alonso, Espinosa, 2021). Within the feminist movement, internal debates about the self-registration of sex, prostitution and surrogacy have increased in the last years.

As shown in Table 2 below, data from the European Values Survey (EVS) indicate that the Spanish population has a more positive attitude than the average of the EU countries covered by the survey.[12]

In both Spain and the EU average, attitudes towards gender equality are more negative in the family dimension than in the education and work dimension. The most sensitive items are those related to the impact of women's work on the well-being of children and family life.

In both dimensions, Spain differs significantly from the EU average. Differences are especially marked in the family dimension: 74% disagree that children suffer when the mother works (64% in the EU), 78% disagree that what women really want is to take care of children and home (20 percentual points higher than in the EU), 71% disagree that family life is negatively affected when women have a full-time job (compared to 56% in the EU) and more than 87% disagree that men's job is to earn money while women's job is to devote themselves to the family (75% in the EU).

[12] For the analysis of attitudes towards gender equality, we use four questions for the area of gender equality and family, and three questions for gender equality and work. The survey allows four replies (strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree). The table show positive attitudes towards gender equality (those that strongly disagree or disagree).

| Table 2. Attitudes towards gender equality, Spain and EU, 2017 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| % of those who strongly disagree or disagree | | Spain | EU |
| Family dimension | Child suffers with working mother | 73.7% | 63.8% |
| | Women really want home and children | 78.4% | 58.1% |
| | Family life suffers when woman has full-time job | 70.6% | 55.9% |
| | Man's job is to earn money; woman's job is to look after home and family | 87.1% | 75.3% |
| Education and work dimension | Men make better political leaders than women | 90.6% | 82.1% |
| | University education more important for a boy than for a girl | 95.5% | 92.3% |
| | Men make better business executives than women | 92.9% | 85.0% |

*Table 2. Attitudes towards gender equality, Spain and EU, 2017*

*Source: own elaboration based on EVS data.*

*Note: EU includes 21 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Belgium, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg and Malta)*

Regarding education and work, Spain also performs better than the EU in all indicators, although differences are less prominent. The percentage of people who do not think that men are better political leaders than women (91% vs 82%), who do not think that university is more important for men than for women (96% vs 92%) and who do not believe that men make better business executives than women (93% vs 85%) is higher in Spain as in the average of the EU countries.

Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that these data refer to 2017. Recent surveys and studies on Spain (e.g. CIS, 2023c) show an increase of negative attitudes towards gender equality, namely among young and middle-aged men. In addition, sexual violence and domestic violence against women have increased over the last years - according to official data from the Spanish Observatory Against Women's Violence.

## 1.6. Increasing political mobilisation

The aspects referred above are reflected in the increasing political mobilisation of the Spanish population. Taking only the political demonstrations as a reference, the Disobedient Democracy project[13] data show a high number of protests throughout Spain in the period between 2000 and 2017 (Romanos, Sádab, 2022). As Figure 4 shows, there are three peaks in the number of participants. The first peak occurred in 2003 and 2004, marked by the demonstration against the Spanish government's support for the Iraq-war and the demonstration against the bombing of the Atocha train station in Madrid. In both years, the number of demonstrations was relatively low, but these two demonstrations attracted millions of participants across Spain. The second peak is between 2012 and 2014. Whilst the previous year was marked by the demonstrations of the 15M, it was in 2012-2014 when more people protested against the austerity policies, with a higher number of demonstrations with fewer participants than in 2003 and 2004. From 2016, another upward cycle of demonstrations began, marked by feminist demonstrations and protests for and against the independence of Catalonia. In addition to the demonstrations organised by Spanish nationalist parties against the Catalan independence movement, the conservative part of the society has also organised other mobilisations with a

[13] https://disdem.org

relatively large number of participants such as the protests against the new abortion legislation in the years 2009 and 2010,[14] organised with the support of the Catholic church.

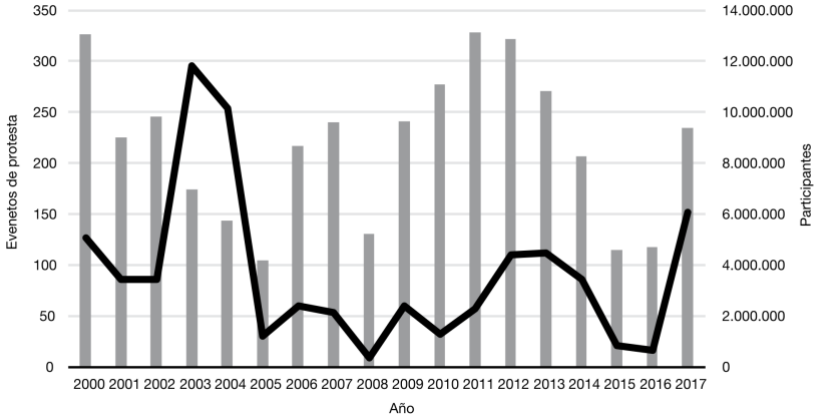


*Figure 4: Number of demonstration and number of participants 2000-2017*
*Source: Romanos and Sádab, 2022*
*Note: number of demonstrations is indicated in the left y-axis; number of participants in the right y-axis*

[14] See article in the newspaper El Pais (07/03/2010) Miles de personas piden en Madrid la derogación de la ley del aborto. https://elpais.com/sociedad/2010/03/07/actualidad/1267916401_850215.html

# 2. Description of political participation

This chapter summarises the results of the statistical analysis of the European Social Survey (ESS). Three different forms of political participation are analysed: voting, formal political participation (which refers to other institutionalised forms of participation, such as participating in a political party) and informal participation (which refers to non-institutionalised participation, such as signing a petition or participating in demonstrations). The first section analyses the evolution of political participation between 2012 and 2020, offering the general results of Spain in comparison with the EU average. The next sections focus only on 2020, showing in detail differences in political participation related to social inequalities and to political values and attitudes, comparing the results with the EU average. Given that the objective is to analyse the aspects that influence participation in addition to the level of education attained, the analysis of the 2020 data is carried out for the population aged 25 and over.

## *2.1. Evolution of political participation 2012-2020*

The ESS data show an increase of all forms of political participation in Spain in the period 2012-2020, more marked than in the average of EU countries. As shown in Figure 5, the Spanish respondents report a significant increase in voting (from 79% to 88%), while this rate increased slightly by 2 percentage points in the EU. Formal participation increased moderately in Spain (from 22% to 26%) as well as informal participation (from 43% to 46%), whilst the EU rates remained stable. In 2020, the ESS data show that participation in Spain was significantly higher than in the EU average in all forms - voting, formal and informal political participation.

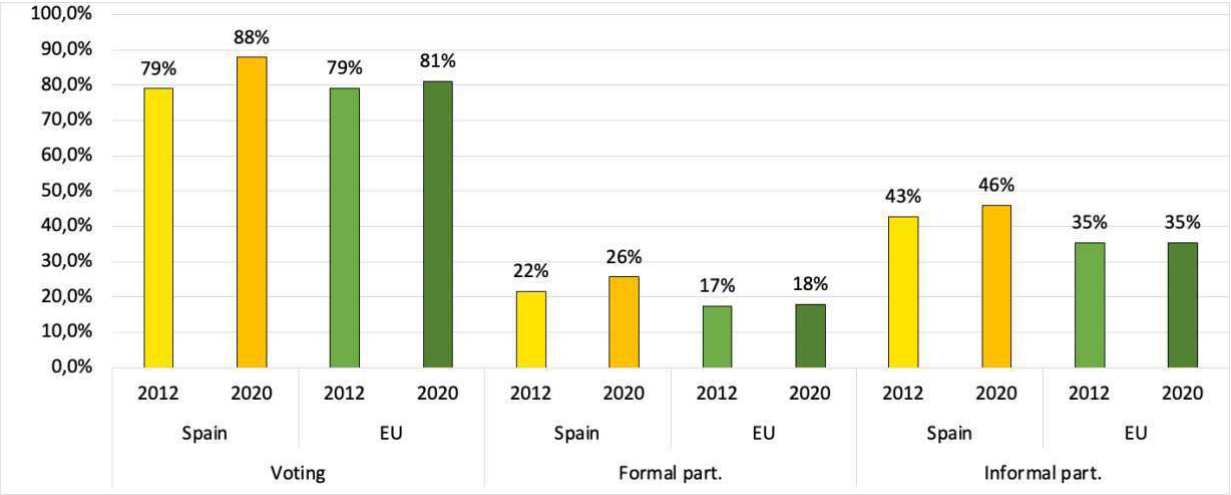


*Figure 5. Evolution of political participation by type in Spain and EU, 2012-2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*
*Note: EU includes 19 EU27 countries (Missing countries: (Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)*

Analysing formal participation[15] in more detail, Figure 6 shows that participation in Spain presents opposite trends in the two items considered. The Spanish respondents report a significant increase in contacting a politician (from 14% in 2012 to 21% in 2020), which is significantly above the EU average in 2020. On the contrary, displaying a badge decreases from 11% to 7%, becoming similar to EU average in 2020.

[15] The general rate of formal participation is calculated on the basis that the person has participate at least in one of the different participation forms. The same is applied to informal participation.

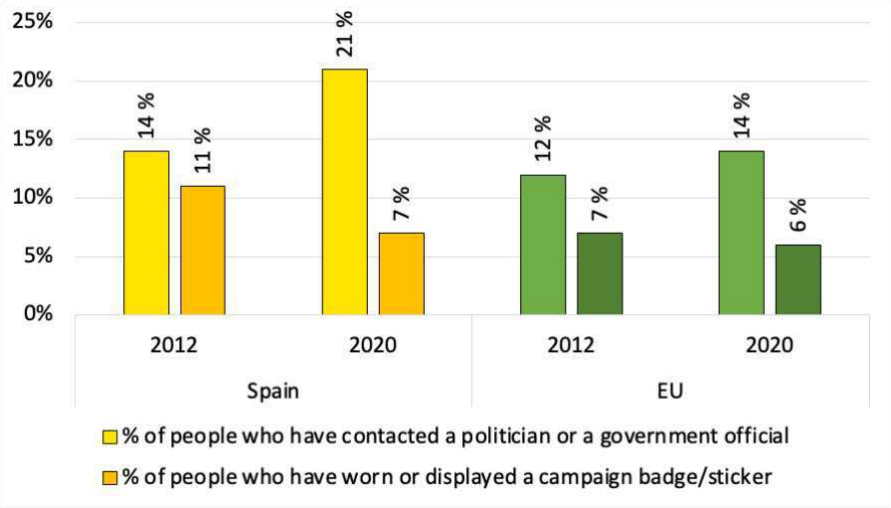


*Figure 6. Evolution of formal participation by type in Spain and EU, 2012-2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data.*
*Note: EU includes 19 EU27 countries (Missing countries: (Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)*

Concerning informal participation (Figure 7), data show a moderate decrease in signing a petition in Spain (from 35% to 32%), similar to trend of the average of the EU countries. On the other hand, boycotting certain products increased in Spain between 2012 and 2020 from 18% to 28%, and in these years the Spanish rate moves from below to above the EU average.

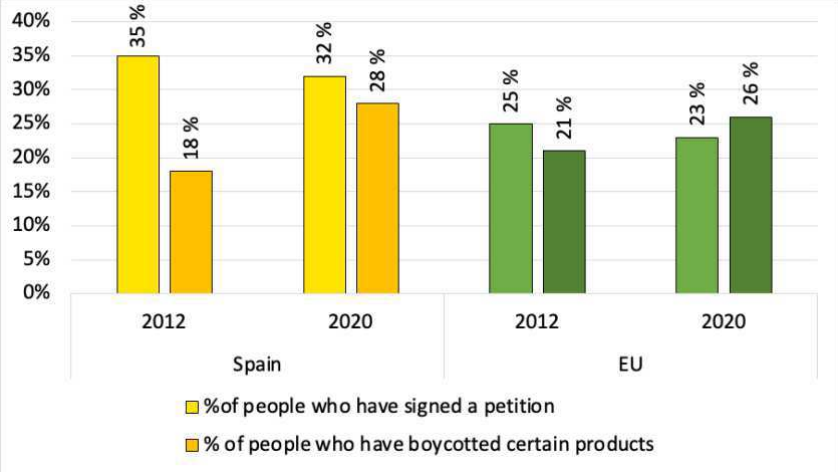


*Figure 7. Evolution of informal participation by type in Spain and EU-average, 2012-2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data.*
*Note: EU includes 19 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania)*

## 2.2. Political participation in 2020 - main aspects

The analysis of 2020 data is based on a broader operationalisation of both formal and informal participation and takes as a reference the population aged 25 years and over. The overall trend is the same as depicted above, with higher participation rates in Spain than the EU average according to ESS respondents (Figure 8).

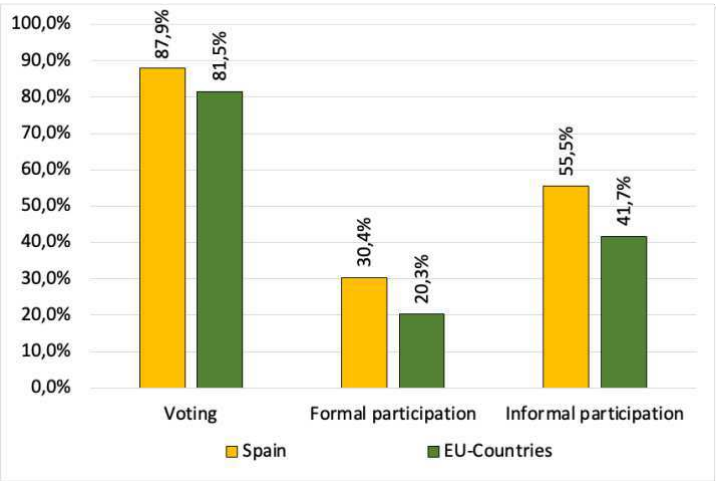


*Figure 8. Political participation by type in Spain and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Note: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

A closer look on formal participation shows that in Spain the highest participation rate (22%) refers to contacting politicians or government officials, which is significantly above the EU average (14%). Participation in Spain is also higher in terms of donating to or participating in a political party (11% vs 6%), while the share of respondents who report having worn a badge or a sticker show is the lowest in Spain and similar to the EU (7% and 6% respectively).

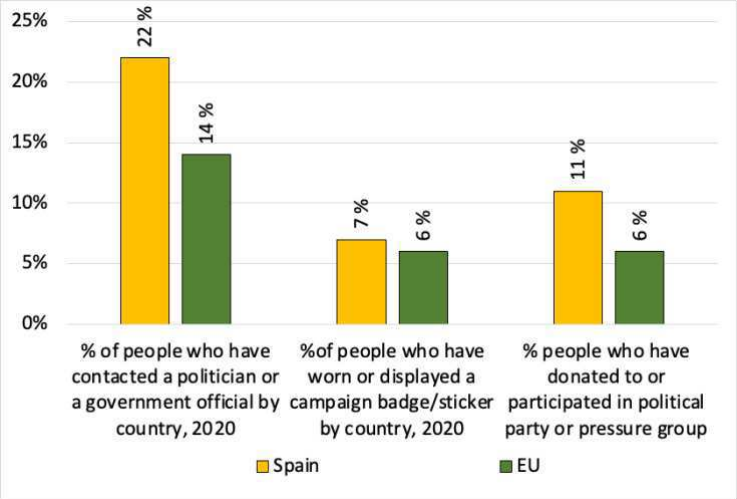


*Figure 5. Formal participation by type in Spain and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data.*

*Note: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

In terms of informal participation (Figure 6), Spanish respondents report again higher participation rates than the average of the EU countries. In Spain as in the EU, participation is highest in signing petitions and boycotting product boycotts. While the boycotting rate is similar to the EU average (28% versus 22%), signing a petition is significantly higher in Spain (33%) than in the EU countries (22%). Expressing political opinion online is less common, but Spanish respondents (26%) are also significantly more active in this field than the respondents from the EU countries (17%). Participating in political demonstrations shows the lowest rate in both Spain and the EU, although the rate in Spain is significantly higher than in the EU (20% vs. 9%).

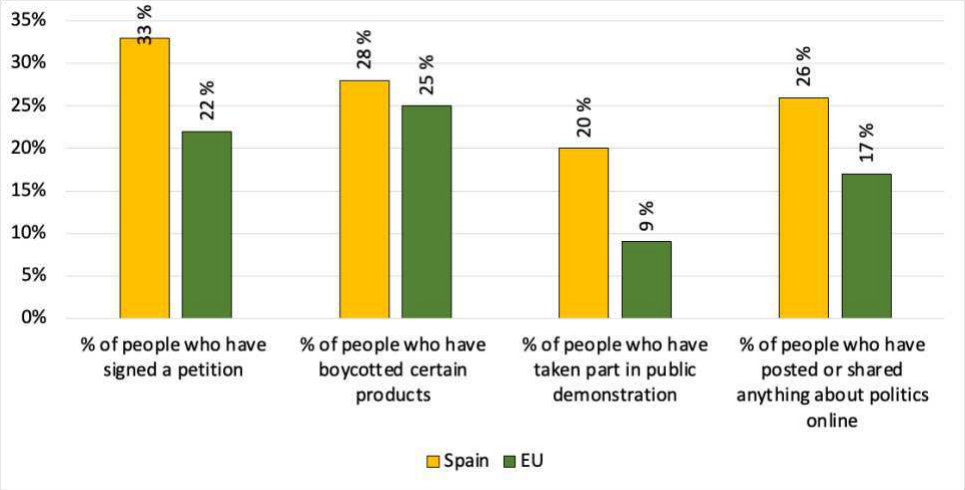


*Figure 6. Informal participation by type in Spain and EU-average, 2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data.*
*Note: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

These results confirms that Spain is a more politicised society compared to the average of EU countries. It can also be interpreted as a reflection of the critical events mentioned in the first chapter, which have increased the level of dissatisfaction with the political system and the state of democracy.

## 2.3. Participation in 2020 by socio-demographic characteristics

### 2.3.1. 2.3.1 Voting

With regard to socio-demographic characteristics (Figure 7) it can be seen that in Spain the declared electoral participation follows a pattern similar to the EU average in most variables, with some aspects to highlight.

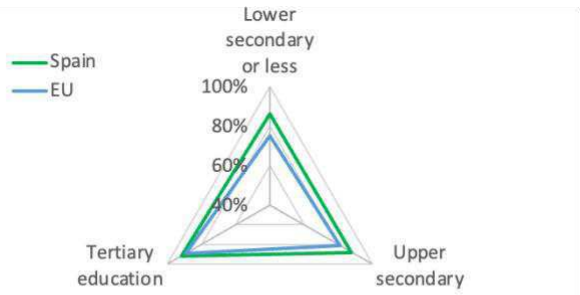


*Figure 7. Voting by level of education Spain and EU, 2020*

First, participation increases with both the level of education and the level of income, but differences in Spain are less marked than in the EU. In Spain, 86% of Spanish respondents with low level of education report to have voted, a rate just 5 percentage points below that of those with tertiary education (in the EU, the difference is 14 percentage points). The same pattern is found concerning income level: in Spain, participation among those who have difficulties on present income (87%) is only 3 percentage points below those who are living comfortably on present income (90%), while in the EU this difference is of 11 percentage points.

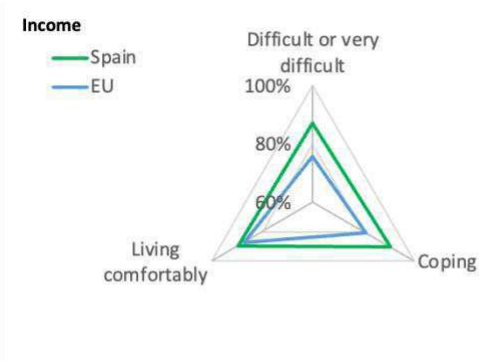


*Figure 8. Voting by level of income*
*Spain and EU, 2020*

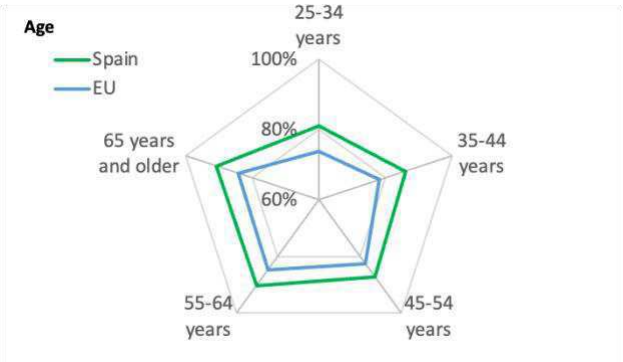


*Figure 9. Voting by age*
*Spain and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

Notes: Figure 7-9 - EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over

Second, participation increases with age, although it should be noted that in Spain the participation among youngest people is comparatively high (81% vs 74% in the EU).

Finally, patterns are also similar in Spain and in the EU concerning migrant background and feeling of discrimination[16]: Participation is lower among those born outside the country and those whose parents were born outside the country; and participation is slightly lower among those who report belonging to a discriminated group and those who do not. The only variable with a different pattern to the EU average is sex, although gender differences are minimal. In Spain, men's participation is slightly lower (87%) than women's (89%), while in the EU the levels are also very similar, although slightly higher for men.

### 2.3.2. Formal political participation

With regard to formal participation (Figure 8), Spain follows a similar pattern than the EU average in most variables, with some aspects to highlight. Again, participation increases with the level of education and the level of income. Concerning education, in Spain the main difference is between the less educated (22%) and the rest (35%-41%), while in the EU, the main divide is between the most educated (31%) and the rest (14-19%). As regards income, in Spain the share of people living comfortably (40%) is comparatively high compared to all other groups (26-29%) while differences in the EU are less marked.

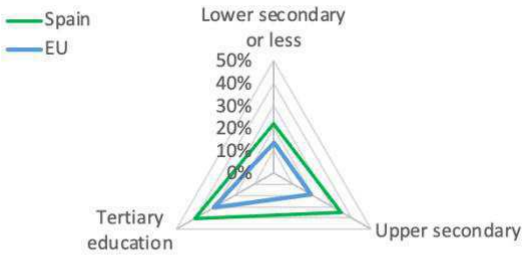


*Figure 10. Formal participation by level of education*
*Spain and EU, 2020*

[16] In these cases, due to the low number of responses, data have to be taken with caution. For this reason, we do not present figures. Concerning migrant background, only people entitled to vote are considered.

Second, participation is higher in the middle age groups (35-64 years) than among the youngest and oldest - and this pattern is more pronounced in Spain than in the EU.

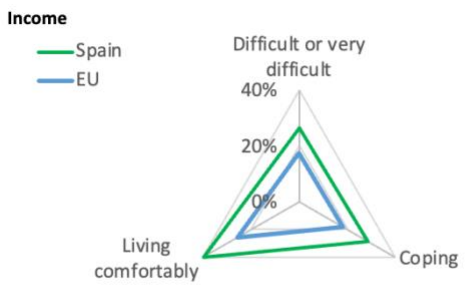


*Figure 11. Formal participation by level of income Spain and EU, 2020*

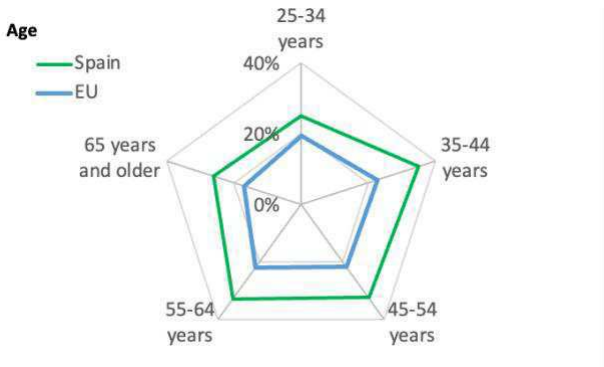


*Figure 12. Formal participation by age Spain and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data.*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Finally, patterns are also similar in Spain and in the EU concerning migrant background and feeling of discrimination[17]: Participation is lower among those born outside the country, those whose parents were born outside the country, and those who report belonging to a discriminated group. In all cases, the differences are more marled in Spain than in the EU.

In contrast, a different pattern is found with regards sex. In Spain women report higher participation (32%) than men (29%), when in the EU the pattern is the reverse.

### 2.3.3. *Informal political participation*

With regard to the socio-demographic variables (Figure 9), informal participation in Spain follows quite a similar pattern than in the EU.

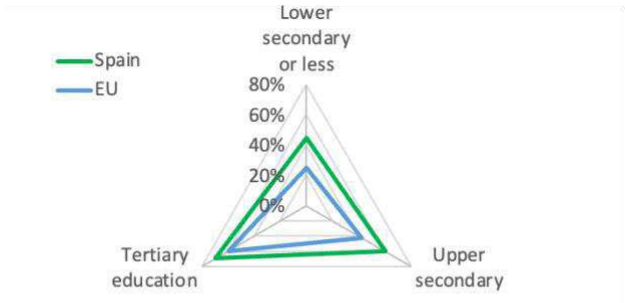


*Figure 13. Informal participation by level of education Spain and EU, 2020*

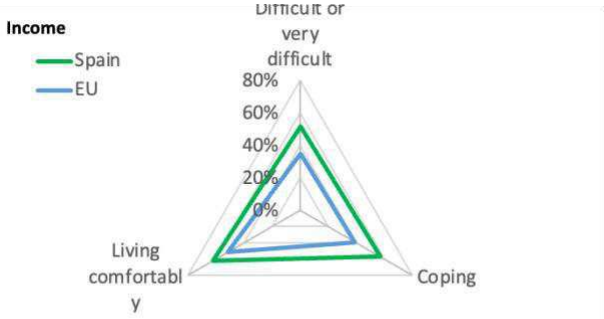


*Figure 14. Informal participation by level of income Spain and EU, 2020*

[17] As explained above, we do not present figures due to the low number of responses.

Again, informal participation increases with the level of education (from 45% to 70%) and with the level of income (from 51% to 62%). Second, it decreases with age (from 64% to 45%). Third, it is higher for men (57%) than for women (54%). Finally, concerning migrant background and feeling of discrimination[18], it is lower among those born outside the country, and much higher among those who report belonging to a discriminated group.The main difference with the EU is regarding the country of birth of parents. While in the EU there is no difference, in Spain the participation of people with at least one parent born outside the country is significantly lower than those with both parents born in the country.

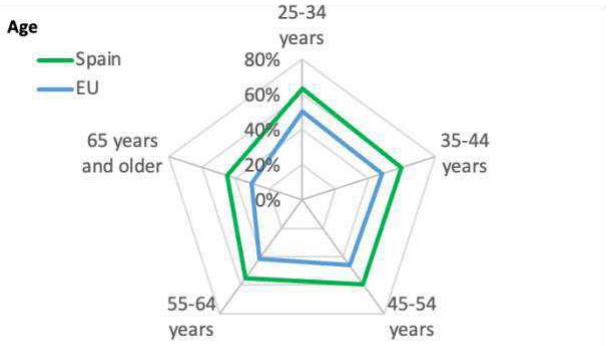


*Figure 13. Informal participation by level of education, level of income and age in Spain and EU, 2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data.*
*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

## 2.4. Participation in 2020 by democratic ideals and political attitudes

We start this section by comparing political attitudes between Spain and the EU average. As can be seen in Table 3, ESS respondents in Spain appear to have a stronger support for democracy in its broadest sense.

| Table 3. Political attitudes, Spain and EU, 2020 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Spain | EU |
| Democratic ideals | Low ideals | 7.9% | 14.3% |
| | Medium ideals | 9.9% | 19.0% |
| | High ideals | 41.0% | 28.1% |
| | Political rights | 23.4% | 23.2% |
| Importance of living in a democratically governed country | Not important (0-4) | 3.4% | 3.7% |
| | Important (5-7) | 10.4% | 13.4% |
| | Very important (8-9) | 18.7% | 24.5% |
| | Extremely important (10) | 67.5% | 58.5% |
| Satisfaction with democracy | Dissatisfied (0-4) | 43.6% | 36.4% |
| | Neither satisfied nor satisfied (5) | 17.0% | 15.9% |
| | Satisfied (6-10) | 39.4% | 47.7% |
| Left-right scale | Left (0-4) | 47.4% | 34.7% |
| | Centre (5) | 28.5% | 32.0% |
| | Right (6-10) | 24.1% | 33.4% |

*Table 3. Political attitudes, Spain and EU 2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*
*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

[18] As explained above, we do not present figures due to the low number of responses.

The share of people with low and medium ideals is substantially lower in Spain than in the EU, while the share of people with high ideals is 41% in Spain and 28% in the EU. This is also clear if we compare the share of people who consider extremely important to live in a democracy (68% vs 59%). It should also be noted that dissatisfaction with democracy is higher than in the EU (44% vs 36%) while people in Spain are more skewed towards the left spectrum than the EU average.

### 2.4.1. Voting

Figure 10 presents declared turnout by democratic ideals and political attitudes in Spain and the EU. As can be seen, patterns in Spain and in the EU are similar in terms of democratic ideals and the left-right axis, with some aspects to highlight. As in the EU, in Spain the "low ideals" group reports the lowest turnout (71%) and the "political rights" group the highest (93%). However, in contrast to the EU, in Spain the turnout among people in the "medium ideals" and “Social rights” groups are comparatively high (87% and 86%). Concerning ideology, people on the left of the political spectrum have the highest level of participation in both Spain and the EU, followed very close by those on the right. However, turnout in Spain is comparatively low for those on the centre of political spectrum and the differences are more marked than in the EU.

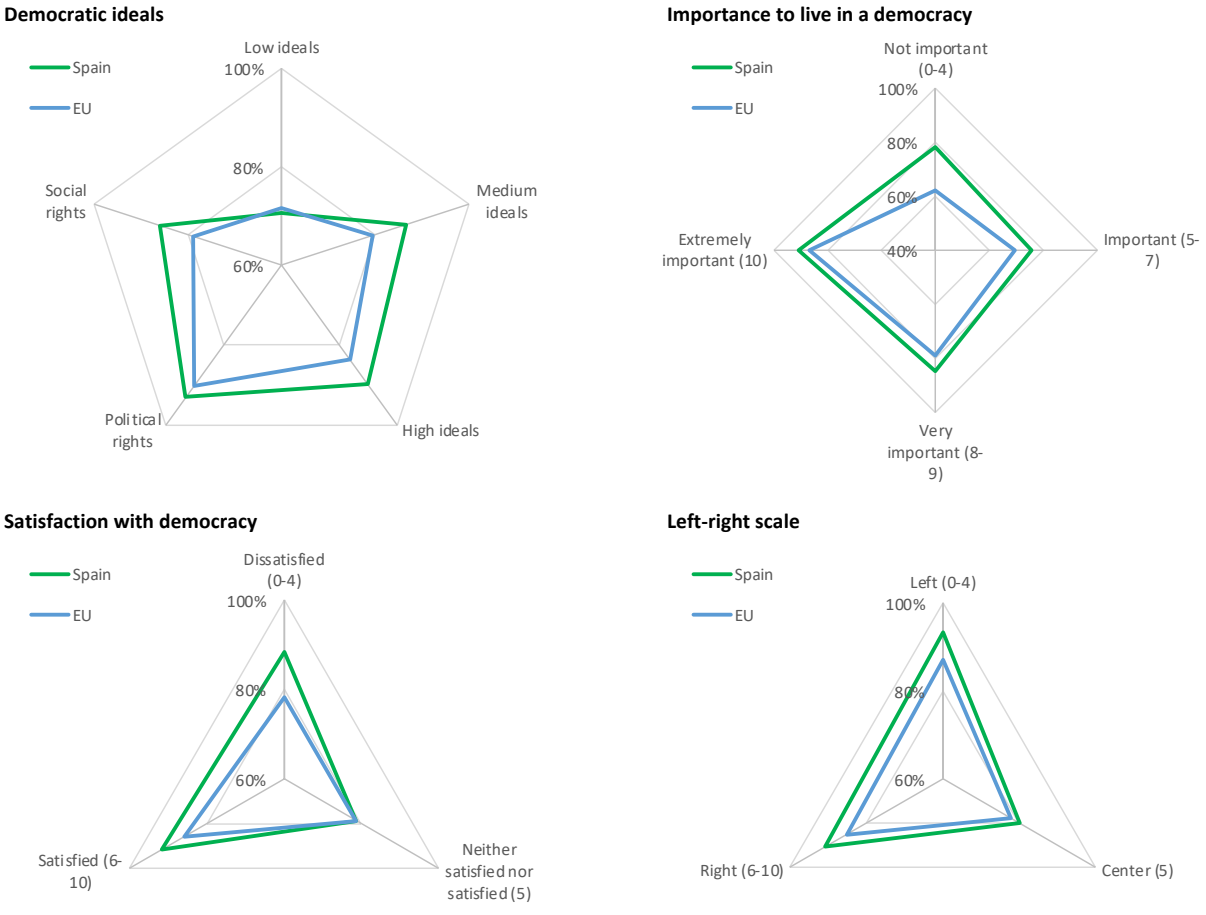


*Figure 10. Voting by democratic ideals and political attitudes in Spain and EU, 2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*
*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

In the other political variables, Spain and EU patterns differ. In the EU, participation increases according to the importance attributed to living in a democratically governed country. In contrast in Spain, participation for those who do not consider it important is higher (78%) than those who consider it only important (76%). Concerning respondents' satisfaction with the functioning of democracy, participation in the EU increases as satisfaction increases. In Spain, the highest rate is also found among those who are satisfied (92%), but those who are dissatisfied have a higher participation (88%) than those who are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (79%).

### 2.4.2. Formal political participation

Figure 11 presents the rates of formal political participation by democratic ideals and political attitudes in Spain and the EU.

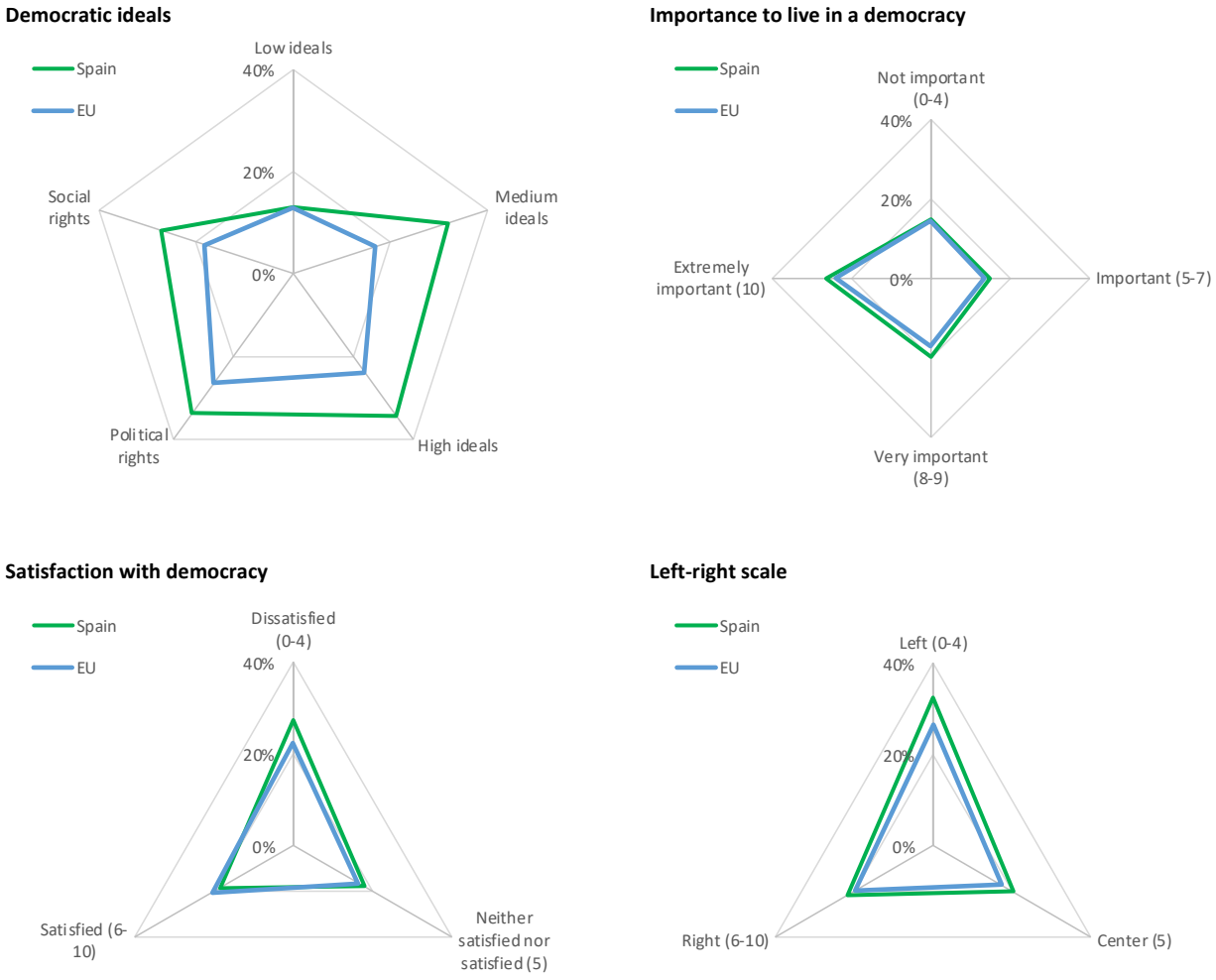


*Figure 11. Formal political participation by democratic ideals and political attitudes in Spain and EU, 2020*

*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*

*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

The Spanish and EU patterns are similar in terms of the importance of living in a democratically governed country: the higher the importance, the higher the participation. Concerning the left-right spectrum, the

pattern is also similar, with higher participation of those on the left of political spectrum, although in Spain the differences are more marked. In contrast, patterns differ concerning democratic ideals and satisfaction with democracy. In Spain, the "high ideals" group has the highest participation (35%), while in the EU it is "political rights" group. Moreover, the participation of the "medium ideals" group in Spain is comparatively very high (32%) and the same applies to the "social rights" group (27%). Concerning satisfaction with democracy, in Spain and in the EU those who are dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy in the country report the highest participation (27%). However, in Spain the participation of the rest is very much lower (18%), when in the EU the differences are less marked.

### 2.4.3. *Informal political participation*

Concerning informal political participation, Figure 11 shows similar patterns in Spain and the EU. The higher the importance of living in a democratic country, the higher the participation; higher participation of those who are on the left of the political spectrum (58%) and similar for those who are on the centre and on the right (34-39%).

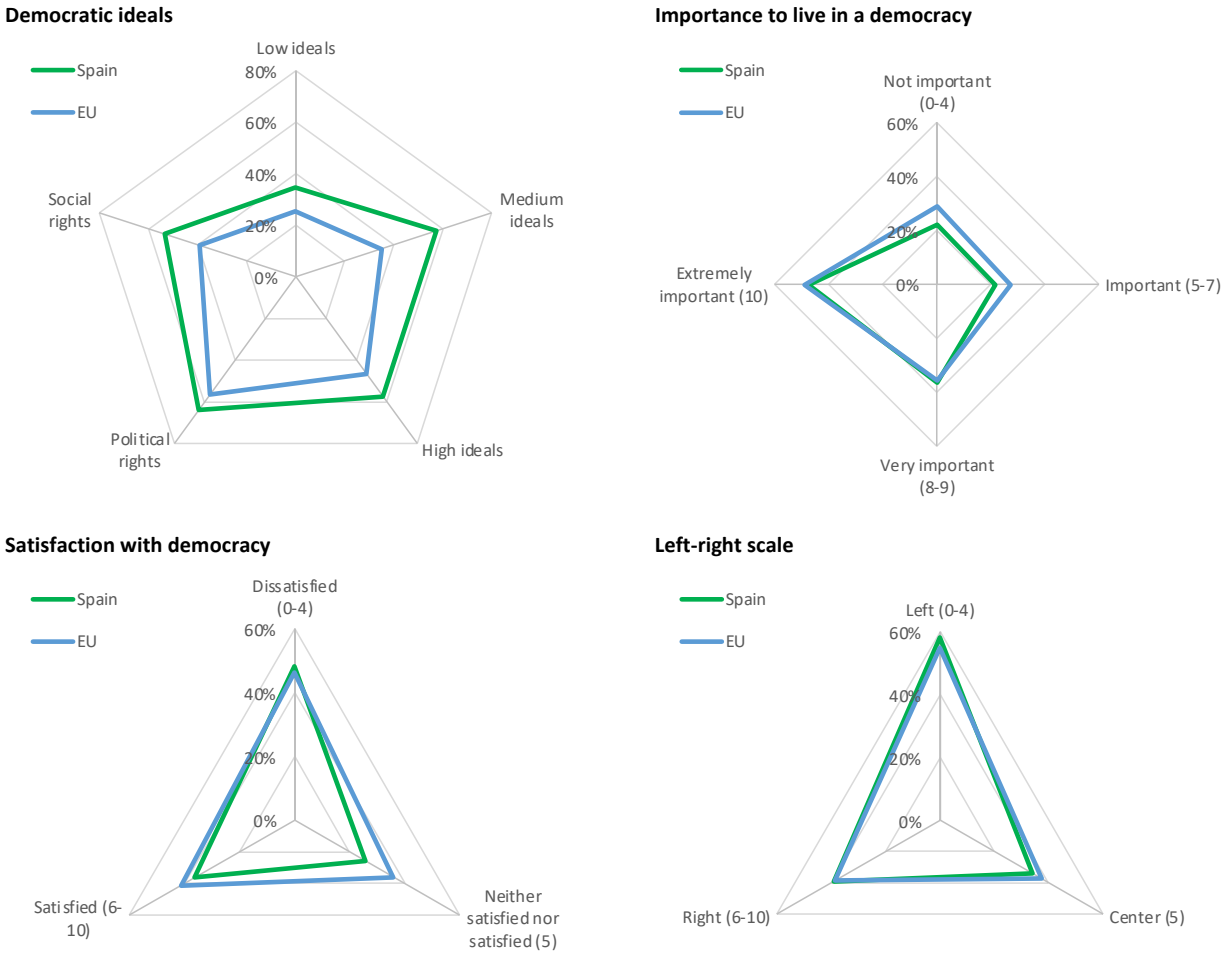


*Figure 12. Informal political participation by democratic ideals and political attitudes in Spain and EU, 2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*
*Notes: EU includes 23 EU27 countries (Missing countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania are missing); population 25 years old and over*

Patterns are also similar regarding democratic ideals and satisfaction with democracy, with some aspects to highlight. The "political rights" group reports the highest participation rate (64%) and the "low ideals" group the lowest (34%), but in Spain the “medium ideals” group has a comparatively high rate (57%), similar to the “high ideals” group, when in the EU the difference between these two groups is more evident. Finally, those who are dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy in Spain report the highest participation (48%) followed by those who are satisfied (36%), while in the EU these differences are less marked.

## 2.5. Participation in 2020 - Results from regression models

In order to better analyse political participation, a logistic regression has been carried out (Table 4). The regression model estimates the probability of participation (for each type of participation) as a function of all explanatory variables (socio-demographic and political variables).

| SPAIN | Voting | | | Formal participation | | | Informal participation | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *B* | *Sign.* | *S.E.* | *B* | *Sign.* | *S.E.* | *B* | *Sign.* | *S.E.* |
| **Constant** | -2.073 | *** | (0.621) | -2.377 | *** | (0.489) | -0.208 | | (0.431) |
| Age | 0.009 | | (0.007) | 0.003 | | (0.004) | -0.014 | *** | (0.004) |
| Sex (ref: male) | 0.158 | | (0.186) | 0.208 | | (0.116) | -0.062 | | (0.111) |
| Education (ref: lower secondary or less) | | | | | | | | | |
| Upper secondary | 0.316 | | (0.254) | 0.493 | ** | (0.159) | 0.360 | * | (0.149) |
| Tertiary education | 0.330 | | (0.241) | 0.707 | *** | (0.150) | 0.713 | *** | (0.144) |
| Income feeling (ref: difficult or very difficult) | | | | | | | | | |
| Coping | 0.109 | | (0.232) | -0.026 | | (0.154) | 0.019 | | (0.142) |
| Living comfortably | -0.281 | | (0.263) | 0.281 | | (0.171) | 0.068 | | (0.165) |
| Born in country (ref: no) | 1.138 | * | (0.521) | 0.542 | | (0.412) | 0.167 | | (0.386) |
| Parent's born in country (ref: no) | 1.118 | * | (0.527) | 0.106 | | (0.414) | 0.471 | | (0.391) |
| Member of a discriminated group (ref: no) | -0.014 | | (0.274) | 0.899 | *** | (0.160) | 0.674 | *** | (0.181) |
| Democratic ideals (ref: medium ideals) | | | | | | | | | |
| Low ideals | -0.564 | | (0.399) | -0.675 | * | (0.338) | -0.615 | * | (0.276) |
| High ideals | 0.001 | | (0.329) | 0.089 | | (0.201) | -0.061 | | (0.196) |
| Political rights | 0.475 | | (0.365) | -0.060 | | (0.213) | 0.031 | | (0.208) |
| Social rights | -0.206 | | (0.358) | -0.228 | | (0.229) | -0.219 | | (0.217) |
| Left-right | -0.039 | | (0.033) | -0.046 | * | (0.021) | -0.062 | ** | (0.019) |
| Satisfaction with democracy | 0.059 | | (0.036) | -0.043 | | (0.022) | -0.107 | *** | (0.022) |
| Importance to live in a democracy | 0.173 | *** | (0.043) | 0.069 | | (0.039) | 0.133 | *** | (0.034) |
| **Observations** | 1,532 | | | 1,590 | | | 1,594 | | |
| **Goodness of fit statistics** | | | | | | | | | |
| Chi-square test (sign.) | 0.000 | | | 0.000 | | | 0.000 | | |
| Accuracy (% correctly classified) | 90.1% | | | 70.1% | | | 66.9% | | |

*Table 4. Participation models, Spain, 2020*
*Source: own elaboration based on ESS data*
*Signification levels: *** 0,1%; ** 1%; * 5%*

As expected, the results of the voting model differ greatly from the models of formal and informal participation. This reflects the descriptive data formerly presented, which show that the reported level of voting is very high in Spain, and differences according to socio-demographic and political variables are in broad terms less marked than in other forms of political participation. Interestingly, the only significant political variable is the importance attached to living in a democratically governed country: the higher the importance, the higher the participation. Concerning socio-demographic variables, only migrant background[19] is significant: people who are not born in Spain or have at least one foreign parent report lower turnout than the rest.

[19] Only people entitled to vote are included in the model.

Concerning formal and informal participation, several variables have a similar significant effect. The level of education has a large positive effect on the likelihood of participation: the higher the level of education, the higher the participation. The feeling of belonging to a discriminated group has also an important effect, with higher participation rates among those who report this feeling. Concerning political variables, the models show clearly that people in the "low ideals" group are less likely to participate, while no differential effects are observed among the other groups. Finally, the further to the left of the political spectrum people are, the more likely they are to participate.

Moreover, for informal participation, three additional variables have also a significant effect. Informal political participation decreases with age: the younger people are, the more likely they are to participate. The importance attached to living in a democratically governed country has a positive effect: the higher the importance, the higher the participation. Finally, the more dissatisfied people are with the functioning of democracy in Spain, the more they participate.

# 3. Discussion

In this chapter we discuss the results of the Spanish ESS data analysis in three steps. First, we compare some selected ESS data with data from Spanish surveys conducted by the CIS, which have a larger sample than the ESS. Second, we refer to studies about social inequalities, political attitudes and political participation in Spain, based either on statistical sources or qualitative methods. The literature review has focused on 2019 onwards and shows that literature is rather scarce. Finally, we refer to additional literature to analyse the implications of the analysis for the education system and

## *3.1. Comparison ESS – CIS*

The CIS conducts a number of social surveys. We have selected the General Spanish Social Survey (ESGE: *Encuesta social general española*), namely the waves 2013, 2016, 2018 and 2023, and the Social Trend Survey (ESTS - *Encuesta sobre tendencias sociales*), which has been conducted in 2021, 2022 and 2023. Our focus in on data on reported voting in general elections (Table 5) according to different surveys and actual turnout (Table 6).

| Table 5. Reported voting in the last general elections. Comparison between different surveys | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ESGE | | | | ESTS | | | ESS | |
| Year | 2013 | 2016 | 2018 | 2023 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2012 | 2020 |
| Participation (%) | 73.4 | 78.8 | 75.8 | 75.7 | 83.5 | 84.8 | 86.9 | 79.0 | 87.9 |

*Table 5. Reported voting in the last general elections. Comparison between different surveys*
*Source: CIS (2013; 2015; 2018; 2021; 2022; 2023a and 2023b) and own elaboration of ESS data*

| Table 6. Voters' turnout in general elections 2011 – 2023 | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Election year | 2011 | 2015 | 2016 | 2019 (April) | 2019 (Nov.) | 2023 |
| Participation (%) | 68.9 | 69.8 | 66.5 | 71.8 | 66.2 | 66.6 |

*Table 6. Voters' turnout in general elections 2011 – 2023*
*Source: https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elecciones_generales_de_España*

It is well-known that actual turnout ratios are lower than declared voting in surveys and pools (e.g., Silver et al., 1986; Milligan et al., (2004); and Siedler (2010) have discussed it in depth for the US, the UK and Germany, United Kingdom and Germany. In general, these studies show two aspects that might explain this result: voting is considered as a civic duty, and for this reason some people declare to have voted, although they did not; furthermore, there is a survey bias towards people with higher participation. It can be supposed that this occurs also in formal and informal participation. In any case, it shows that survey data should be interpreted with caution and consider that they indicate only trends. In this sense, it is also telling to see that there is a great difference between declared voting in the general elections in the two Spanish surveys (e.g. 75.7% vs 84.8% in 2023).

## 3.2. Trends in political participation

The analysis of the ESS data indicates an increase of all forms of political participation from 2012 to 2020. This is in line with several studies that indicate high level of political participation in the 1970s and 1980s, followed by a decline during the economic boom of the 1990s (Justel, 1992; Ribeiro and Borba, 2011) and a recovery of political participation after the 2008 crisis. As observed by Gracia Ortiz and Santos Jaén (2021) there is a contrast between the 1990s and early 2000s, which were considered as democracy of low intensity (Colectivo IOÉ, 2007) and democratic apathy (Oñate, 2013) and the period afterwards. Key political moments as the financial and economic crisis, the political corruption of the Popular Party, misfunctioning of democratic institutions and the Catalan crisis have woken up the Spanish society at the left and right side of the political spectrum.

## 3.3. Political participation and social inequalities

The issue of unequal participation across different social groups has not received great attention in recent years. Statistical analysis in the 1990s or early 2000s, based on CIS surveys, focus on electoral participation.

This literature shows that traditionally, women had lower participation rates than men. However, there has been a consistent trend towards equal participation over the years (Justel, 1994) and differences by sex are not significant anymore (Castellanos et al., 2002). This is related to general trends towards gender equality in society.

Concerning age, different studies show that it has a significant impact on voting, with lower participation of young people and elderly people (Justel, 1994; Boix i Riba, 2000; Pallarés et al., 2007). This pattern is found in many other countries and is mainly explained in terms of life-cycle: transition to adulthood is marked by greater maturity, expertise and social links, which facilitate the ability and willingness to participate in elections.

Finally, the level of education does not show a consistent impact in voting (Justel, 1994; Boix i Riba, 2000). In contrast, participation in voting is related to income level: people with higher income levels show higher participation than those with lower income levels (Castellanos et al., 2002). Analysis of social class and participation trends have focused on the persistent link between social class and party vote rather than abstention (Fraile, Hernández, 2020).

More recent studies have focused on specific socio-demographic aspects and encompass diverse forms of political participation. Hidalgo-Hidalgo and Robles-Zurita (2020) analyse whether the observed correlation between education level and political participation also implies a causal relationship. They use the ESS data from 2002 to 2018 applying the method of pseudo-panel[20]. The analysis distinguishes between conventional participation defined by the participation in electoral process (operationalised by voting, working for political parties and participating actively in the electoral campaign) and unconventional participation, defined as political activities outside the electoral process (operationalised by participation in demonstrations, product boycott and signing petitions). The study confirms the correlation between years of studies and all types of

[20] "The construction of a pseudo-panel ... begins by using the age of each individual at the time of the survey to establish the cohort to which he or she belongs. Such a construction assumes that, if an individual is X years old in the 2002 wave, then he/she will be X+2 in the 2004 wave, and so on. This assumption allows the construction of a panel from cross-sectional surveys, where the age cohorts are the cross-sectional dimensions of the panel" (own translation of Hidalgo-Hidalgo and Robles-Zurita, 2020, p. 2006)

political participation, but it does not find evidence of a causal relationship: this indicates the existence of other variables which affect both the level of education and political participation in the same way (Hidalgo-Hidalgo, Robles-Zurita, 2020, p. 205). Other studies have achieved similar results observing correlation but not causality (see Bommel, Heinck, 2020). Overall, it can be said that this is still an open discussion as empirical research shows mixed results (see Brad, Piopiunik, 2016).

Voces and Caínzos (2022) investigated the impact of over-education in Spain on political participation, departing from the fact that over-education in Spain is comparatively high. Overeducation is defined as having an educational level higher than that required to perform a job. Their study is based on CIS surveys of 2015 and 2016. The analysis shows that over-education implies a tendency to political discontent and the perception that the political system is not responsive to citizen's demands. These aspects lead to higher degree of informal participation, but does not affect electoral participation. However, they also observe that this impact fades with age, it is not great and it depends on other contextual factors.

Alaminos-Fernández et al. (2024) analysed voting in relation to sociodemographic variables and ideology, considering two main aspects as mediating variables: political efficacy and party identity. Their analysis is based on a 2018 CIS survey. External political efficacy refers to the perception that the political system is capable of responding to society's demands and that citizens influence decisions. Internal political efficacy refers to citizens' perception that they are informed, understand politics and can take political action. Party identity refers to a stable and meaningful affective bond between an individual and a party. As expected, they find that political participation is correlated with political efficacy (the greater the degree of perceived internal and external efficacy, the greater the participation levels), and ideological identification with national parties (the greater the degree of identification, the greater the participation levels). The main results are: Age is significant for party identity (the older the individual, the higher the identification with a party) and internal efficacy (the older the individual, the higher the perceived internal efficacy); men show a higher level of perceived internal efficacy than women; Level of education and social class are related to both external and internal political efficacy (the higher the education level or the social class, the higher the political efficacy); finally, the further the individual is placed on the left spectrum, the higher the external political efficacy. This study, however, does not problematise the causal link between political efficacy and political participation (political participation may increase political efficacy) and is limited to show the relationship between these two phenomena.

## 3.4. Attitudes towards democracy

In Spain there are no studies exploring different meanings of democracy or democratic ideals. However, it is a well-known fact that support for democracy was high and stable from mid 1990s to late 2010s, in spite of the economic crisis (Torcal, Christmann, 2020).

One of the questions that is repeated in CIS surveys over the years asks respondents to select one of the following choices:

- Democracy is preferable to any kind of government.
- In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.
- For someone like me, it does not matter what kind of government we have.

In 2018, 85.8% of survey respondents supported democracy as the best kind of government (CIS, 2018). Recent data show that this might be changing. In 2023, support for democracy dropped to 80.7% (CIS, 2023b). This trend is closely related to the increase in the share of respondents that identify as far right (that is, 10 in a

scale from 1-left to 10 right): from 0.8% of respondents in 2018 to 7.3% in 2023. 2023 data show that support for democracy is high and rather stable across the left-right scale, except for people in the far right: only 59.2% consider democracy is preferable to any kind of government. This data reflect increasing polarisation and support for the extreme right (VOX), as explained in the first chapter. .

## 3.5. Satisfaction with democracy and political participation

The relationship between satisfaction with democracy and political participation has been extensively analysed. First, satisfaction with democracy has experienced significant changes. From 1996 to 2008, it was rather stable and close to 80%. With the start of the crisis, it experienced a sharp decline, falling to 20%. After 2015, it showed signs of a modest recovery as the general economic conditions in Spain improved; however, it remained far from the high levels enjoyed during the preceding periods of economic boom (Christmann, Torcal, 2020). These authors analyse the main drivers of these changes in support for democracy based on individual-level panel data for Spain (CIUPANEL) between 2014 and 2016. Their main conclusion is that although the economic crisis had a strong impact, there are also political factors. In particular, worsening perceptions of the political process and government performance (perceptions of corruption, low political responsiveness and poor performance evaluation of the governmental policies).

This is in line with other studies that analyse the link between satisfaction with democracy and political participation (Megias, 2020). Based on CIS surveys (2002-2016), this author shows that satisfaction with democracy is related to both economic and political aspects. The main point is that high levels of dissatisfaction with democracy do not imply political apathy and low political participation. On the contrary, criticism towards the main democratic institutions is related to strong support to democracy as a kind of government and a demand for higher democratic quality, transparency, accountability and political participation. These results are aligned with the outcome of our ESS analysis of 2020 data. However, as indicated above, the increase of the far-right may be disrupting this pattern.

## 3.6. Prospects for democracy

### 3.6.1. Growing polarisation

Although polarisation can be seen as heritage of the Franquist regime, political analysts consider 2004 as a turning point. It was marked by the Islamistic bomb attack in the Railway station of Atocha-Madrid, the disinformation campaign of the conservative PP government (assigning the authorship of the attack to the Basque terrorist organisation ETA) and the loose of the general election by the PP. Polarisation turned more virulent with the motion of censure against the government of the PP in 2018 and its substitution by a coalition government of the PSOE and left-wing parties.

Another driver of polarisation was the financial crisis of 2008 and the following socioeconomic crisis, which the Spanish governments managed with an austerity policy inspired or imposed by the European Union. This was the origin of a strong left social movement (the Indignados or the 15M movement) and the emergence of a new left wing political party (Podemos) - as well as other regional left-wing parties and coalitions.

The emergence of new and radical right-wing parties can be interpreted partially as a reaction to this social movement and the economic crisis, with a strong emphasis on welfare chauvinism (Jiménez Aguilar, Álvarez-Benavides 2022). In turn, the Catalan independence movement fuelled not only liberal-nationalist parties as UpD and Ciudadanos, but also the ultra-conservative and ultra-nationalist party Vox. According to Jiménez

Aguilar and Álvarez-Benavides (2022) the current cycle of political mobilisation cannot be understood without the transformation of the right-wing political spectrum (see also Pleyers, Álvarez-Benavides 2019). The Catalan independence movement reinforced the Spanish nationalist discourse, including the advocacy for de recentralisation of the political competences delegated to the CCAA (see Garrido Rubia et al., 2022). This is combined with arguments against the European Union, and a discourse against feminism and the LGTBI movements, and against immigration and refugees.

Both the emergency of new left-wing and right-wing parties has introduced new forms and strategies of communication, and has taken place with the explosion, diffusion and articulation of post-2011 progressive social movements and the birth of left political parties and social collectives (Jiménez Aguilar, Álvarez-Benavides, 2022).

### 3.6.2. *New forms of political participation*

The new left-wing and right-wing parties are not only a weak expression of new forms of partisan political communication (Simon et al., 2020), but also of new forms of understanding participation which go beyond the electoral, formal, and informal participation as they are operationalised in the social surveys (Garcia, 2019). There has been a long debate about the decline of traditional forms of participation, as membership in political parties and trade unions have decreased in the last decades. Concerning turnout, there is a slight declining trend (considering actual turnover), although with strong fluctuations depending on the political moments. What is mainly discussed is the appearance of new forms of political participation associated to a wide range of diverse social movements at the left and the right of the political spectrum (Gracia Ortiz, 2021).

On the left side, an example is the *Plataform Stop Desahucio* (plataform against evictment) which has emerged as a response to the housing crisis in Spain (Eizaguirre 2019; Garcia 2019), but also other movements active in the urban areas (Islar and Ergil 2018). Such municipal grassroot movement are not a new phenomenon. According to Vila (2014, p. 60) neighbourhood associations in the democratic transition were set up to be a reference for citizen participation and civic demands. Perlmann (1988) pointed out in the late 1980s that civic associations (neighbourhoods associations, housewives' organisations, parent-teachers associations, organisations of pensioners and retired workers, and merchants' associations) were not only relatively more numerous than in other European cities but also, in many cases, more developed in terms of militancy, consciousness, level of organisation, and independence. What is a new trend is the renewal of such movements over the last years.

It is also new the increasing mobilisation on the right side of the political spectrum, such as the ultra-catholic movement against abortion. Finally, without a clear left-right ideological placement, the Catalan independence movement has also developed innovative forms of political participation.

## 3.7. Implications for education

The previous sections have shown the persistence of unequal participation related to social inequalities (mainly social class) and the trend towards higher participation levels in different forms. On the positive side, some studies highlight the emergence of critical democratic citizens which combine strong support for democracy and a critical approach towards how democracy is actually working, with demands of greater transparency, accountability and participation. On the negative side, the far right and illiberal values are on the rise in recent years.

Implications for education in Spain have to depart from the fact that the education system tends to reinforce social inequalities. As indicated in the first chapter, the underfunding of the public education system affects disproportionately students from low socio-economic and migrant backgrounds, who are also those with higher drop-out rates (Ortiz et al., 2022; Rodríguez Martinez, 2020). In other words, education is far away of being an egalitarian force, closing the gap between social inequalities and political participation - and this is worrisome in terms of quality of democracy.

The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ISSC) sheds further insights for education for democracy in Spain. The international report of the 2022 survey (Schultz, 2023a; 2023b) indicates that the national contexts of the countries vary greatly in their educational, political, and economic characteristics, as well as in their position in the Liberal Democracy Index and the Corruption Perceptions Index. There are also differences observed in the degree of autonomy of schools and in the civic education approaches. For this reason, it is difficult to draw general conclusions, although the report does indicate some general trends which are relevant for our study.

First, the study points out that in a large majority of countries, the three most important objectives for civic and citizenship education are the promotion of: students' critical and independent thinking; knowledge of citizens' rights and responsibilities; and, respect for and safeguard of the environment.

Other relevant results can be summarised as follows:

- Civic knowledge increased between 2009 and 2016 and then decreased.
- The perception of having learned about civic issues at school tend to be negatively associated with the extent of students' civic knowledge in many countries.
- There is only a weak association between civic engagement and civic knowledge, and moderate association with political and social interest.
- Girls show higher levels of civic knowledge than boys, but their expected active political participation is slightly lower.
- Students with a higher parental socio-economic status show higher levels of civic knowledge.
- An open classroom climate for discussion and students' experiences of voting at school tend to be positively related to civic learning and prospective participation in society.

These international findings are relevant DEMOCRAT concept of Education for Democracy as they show two main and basic facts: on one hand, the acquisition of civic knowledge does not necessarily lead to positive civic engagement; on the other hand, positive civic engagement is more likely to be promoted by civic experience in the classrooms, schools and out of schools than by the acquisition of knowledge.

The Spanish Ministry of Education has published its interpretation of the results of the 2022 ICCS survey in 2023. The report is focused on statistical analysis rather than on qualitative issues as highlighted above. The ICCS distinguishes four proficiency levels of civic knowledge[21]:

[21] "The proficiency-level descriptions are syntheses of the item descriptors within each level. They describe a hierarchy of civic knowledge in terms of increasing sophistication of content knowledge and cognitive process. Because the scale was derived empirically rather than from a specific model of cognition, increasing levels on the scale represent increasingly complex content and cognitive processes as demonstrated through performance." (Schultz et al 2023b, p. 101). For more information see also Schultz et al. (2023a)

- Level A: 563 score points and above
- Level B: 479 to 562 score points
- Level C: 395 to 478 score points
- Level D: 311 to 394 score points

The Spanish Ministry of Education report (2023) highlights that the average proficiency of the Spanish students (510 score points) is at level B, slightly above the average of the EU-countries covered (508) and of all countries covered (208). The detailed data show that Spain is one of the most equitable countries covered by the survey in terms of civic knowledge. One measure of equity is the dispersion of the score points by quartile of respondents (lower dispersion of proficiency is associated to a more equitable education). Spain is below the EU countries covered (134) and the average of all countries (133). This is confirmed by the analysis of the impact of socio-economic and cultural variables on proficiency, which is among the lowest in Spain (32 points). The same applies to proficiency differences between girls and boys. Finally, the is a proficiency difference between public and private education centres (in favour of the private centres), but in Spain the difference (26 points), is significantly lower than in the other countries covered by the survey (41 points for all countries and 42 for EU countries).

We draw attention to three relevant aspects in terms of education for democracy and political participation. First, 30% of the students of the 2nd year of the compulsory secondary education show some or high interest in political and social issues, which is similar to the average of all the EU and non-EU countries covered. However, this percentage falls drastically to 11% among students with parents or legal guardians showing little interest in political and social issues. The drop is even more drastic in other couuntries as is "*broadly consistent across participating countries*" (ICCS International Report Revised 2022, p. 112)

Second, Spanish data on students' social and political engagement (50 points) is in line with the average of all the EU and non-EU countries covered. Similar to other countries, there is a difference of 2 percentage points in favour of girls, and the same difference of 2 percentage points in favour of the students with a higher socio-economic and cultural background. However, a closer look of the data shows that the most common activity is participating in a sport team (81%), which is considerably higher (7 percentage points) than the average of all countries covered. This is followed by the participation in voluntary groups 36%, which show an increase of 9 percentage points compared to the 2009 survey. Participation in religious groups or organisations (31%) is at the same level as in 2009. Finally, it is very low the affiliation to youth organisations of political parties or trade unions, although it has increased from 5% to 8% from 2009 to 2022.

The third aspect refers to citizenship self- efficacy or political efficacy. The ICCS uses the concept of citizenship self- efficacy as a specific construct that reflects self-confidence in active citizenship behaviour, suggesting that it is a strong indicator of both political participation and citizenship learning. This concept echoes the concept of political efficacy in political science (Eidhof & de Ruter, 2022) and is also used in social psychology, in particular by Bandura (1997), who linked self-efficacy with better learning outcomes.

The ICCS data on self-efficacy[22] indicate that Spain with 51 points is in the middle range of the countries covered by the survey. Comparing the results of 2022 and 2009, ICCS data shows that students' self-efficacy has increased in most countries. Spain (2 points) is the third country with the largest increase.

[22] Citizenship self-efficacy is measured as follows: "ICCS 2022 included seven items reflecting different activities that were relevant for students of this age group: five were unchanged from ICCS 2016, one was modified from ICCS 2016, and one was a new item. Students rated their confidence ("very well," "fairly well," "not very well," or "not at all") to undertake

We have seen above that Alaminos-Fernández et al. (2024) found a relation between political efficacy and political participation. Eidhof and de Ruter (2022) built on the suggestion of Sohl (2011) to distinguish internal self-efficacy from external efficacy, which they prefer to refer as perceived system responsiveness. They also introduced a third concept (collective efficacy) as both civic and democratic action often require collective actions. This is in line with Bandura (2000, p. 57), who points out that human agency depends to a large extent "on the exercise of collective agency through shared beliefs in the power to produce effects by collective action… Perceived collective efficacy fosters groups' motivational commitment". Collective efficacy goes beyond individual self-efficacy, as it requires additional efforts of trust building and the creation of community in a particular domain - be it the classroom, a voluntary association, or a political party.

However, it is not enough to consider individual and collective self-efficacy as a central aspect of the educational efforts. In our deliverable Conceptual Framework and Vision: Responsible Democratic Citizenship and Education for Democracy (Toscano et al., 2023), we argued that civic competences or political competences do not necessarily include democratic competences, as citizenship and political actions are also required in non-democratic states. In this sense, in democratic states, educational efforts on individual and collective self-efficacy should be linked to democratic principles. "*Civic self-efficacy is a morally neutral quality that can accompany social and political convictions that are morally wrong because they are unfair, discriminatory or in other ways undermining democratic society*" (Eidhof,de Ruter 2022, p. 75). It needs to be normatively anchored in the fundamental principles of democracy, not in partisan ideology.

the following activities: "Argue your point of view about a controversial political or social issue" (70% on average across countries reported they could do this fairly or very well); "stand as a candidate in a [school election]" (58%); "organize a group of students in order to achieve changes at school" (61%); "follow a debate about a controversial issue" (64%); "write a letter or email to a newspaper giving your view on a current issue" (59%); "speak in front of your class about a social or political issue" (54%); and "assess the credibility of information about political or social issues" (62%). We used these items to derive a scale called students' citizenship self-efficacy, which was highly reliable with an average reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.87 and was equated to the scale established in ICCS 2009, where the ICCS 2009 average was 50 with a standard deviation of 10 for equally weighted national simples." (Schultz et al 2023a, p. 112)

# 4. Recommendations for education for democracy

Our analysis has highlight four aspects of political participation that are relevant to education for democracy:

- From the perspective of the political system, it should be an essential goal to reduce the share of people with low attachment to liberal and social democratic values, and to increase the share of people who fully support democracy. Education for democracy in primary and secondary education is one mean to achieve this goal.
- Political polarisation is eroding not only the attachment to democracy, but also essential human rights with an increase of negative attitudes towards gender equality and immigration. These aspects are essential for education for democracy.
- Positive political engagement seems to be related to individual and collective political efficacy, that is the individual and collective perception that the participation in political processes has or could have an impact on collective binding decisions which are relevant for the live of individuals. The key objective of education for democracy should be to enhance individual and political efficacy.
- The family context is crucial for the effectiveness of education for democracy. Students' interest in political and social issues falls dramatically when parents are not interested. Therefore, special efforts have to be made to counter-balance this pattern.

Overall, we argue that enhancing self-perception of individual and collective political efficacy should be the main goal of education for democracy- and this needs to be achieved through practical experience. The pupils need to experience that their political participation or lack of it has an impact on their own living conditions. It also means balancing one's own interest with those of the community. Special focus should be paid to those pupils whose parents show no interest in social and political topics.

This practical learning can best be experienced in local environments such as the classroom, the school itself or the community where the school is located or where the pupil lives. Learning should be based on an understanding of democracy not only as a formal political system, but as a social order and process to take collective binding decisions in different environments.[23]

One way to increase political efficacy is to introduce elements of democratic procedures in the classroom, such as consulting pupils about improvements in the classroom or school. However, this step also involves applying principles of accountability in the sense of explaining whether or not a proposed measure can be applied, and if not, what are the reasons.

Approaches such as problem-based learning, usually carried out in groups, provide spaces to introduce democratic procedures based on solidary participation, deliberation and respect of the rights of others in the learning processes. For example, the decisions on how to work together could and should be based on democratic principles. It also shows the constrains of democratic procedures as many social and technical problems cannot be solved by simply majority decisions, if they are not based on trustful information and/or if their effectiveness is not proven. Pupils must not only learn democratic behaviour as outlined in our conceptual framework (see Toscana, 2023) expressed in the competences of solidary participation, deliberation and democratic resilience, but also that such decisions are mostly based on limited information (in uncertain environments) and that the reliability of available information should be checked.

[23] One example is the decision about the rules of football in the school playgrounds, beginning with a fair distribution of space among those who play football and those who play other games, as well as the composition of the different teams.

Another way to implement this approach is to link learning for democracy with concrete issues in the local community such as the extension of spaces for cycling or reducing car traffic in the municipalities. The implementation of measures for sustainability affects the whole community in a positive and negative way and must be negotiated to balance the socio-economic interests of the different social groups.

Last but not least, the fourth aspect mentioned above points to the limitation of education for democracy in schools. If parents do not support democratic behaviour and interests, the efficacy of school-based education for democracy faces serious obstacles. This also suggests that learning for democracy should not be limited to children and young people. A main target group should be adult citizens with low attachment to democracy, showing the risks of living in an 'illiberal democracy' or an authoritarian regime. It should also include adult people coming from countries without democratic culture. It deserves to be stressed that social movements in some African states, such as recently Senegal, show that the population expects democracy to be a mean of achieving a more equal society without corruption. These social movements indicate, as the workers and feminist movements in Europe, that democracy is not a gift given by the governing class, but must be fought for continuously - as social and human rights.

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