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Report

Political Support and Participation through Public Service Delivery in Europe



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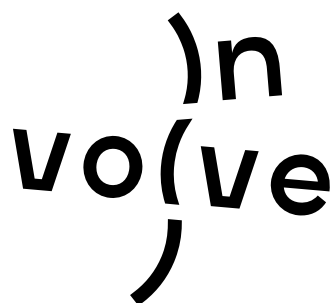
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(Summary

This report examines how public policies and people's experiences with public services shape political support and participation across Europe. Drawing on the capability approach and applying the receiver–doer–judge (RDJ) framework, it conceptualizes public services as potential *conversion factors of democracy*. From this perspective, institutions not only mitigate socio-economic risks (receiver), but can also enable meaningful agency (doer) and recognize citizens' evaluative capacity (judge).

The analysis is based on novel survey data collected within the INVOLVE project in 2024, which captures people's perceptions of public policies and their experiences with public services. Overall, perceptions of public policies are mixed. Respondents express the highest levels of dissatisfaction with access to housing and, in many countries, with healthcare, while evaluations of other policy domains tend to be more neutral. Support for increased public spending and stronger government responsibility is higher for universal policies, such as health and education, and lower for more targeted policies, including unemployment benefits and poverty relief.

The majority of respondents used at least one public service in the previous year, most commonly healthcare services, and a substantial minority encountered barriers to access, including waiting times and opening hours. Around one in five respondents report difficulties when using digitalized public services, with considerable variation across countries. Satisfaction with service outcomes is generally high for widely used services, but notably lower for targeted services such as employment activation, social housing, and immigration services. With regards to procedural aspects, most users report that services were easy to find and access, and that they were treated respectfully. However, far fewer felt they had meaningful choice among providers or influence over how services were delivered. In RDJ terms, public services are generally experienced as providing support (receiver) and acknowledging users' judgement (judge), but much less as empowering users to act (doer).

Linking these patterns to democratic inputs, the report finds a positive association between overall satisfaction with public policies and political trust, satisfaction with democracy, and political efficacy. In contrast, the relationship with political participation is weaker. Satisfaction is only weakly and positively related to institutional and civic participation, but weakly and negatively related to non-institutional participation. Satisfaction with the outcomes of personally used public services is less strongly related to political support and efficacy and shows no clear association with participation. Procedural experiences aligned with the RDJ framework are somewhat more strongly related to political support and political efficacy, suggesting that respectful and fair treatment is associated with a more positive view of democracy. However, neither positive outcomes nor high-quality procedural experiences consistently translate into higher levels of political participation. In some cases, procedural fairness is associated with lower probabilities of non-electoral participation, indicating that more negative experiences may coincide with higher levels of political protest.

To move beyond individual perceptions and experiences, the analysis then turns to a second dataset that captures variation in public policy outcomes at the country level. These multi-level analyses combine individual-level data from the European Social Survey (ESS) (2006-2023) with country-level indicators from Eurostat to examine how differences in policy performance across countries and over time relate to political support and participation.

The multilevel analyses show that stronger policy outcomes in housing, health, education, and employment are independently associated with higher levels of political support, even after accounting for individuals' own evaluations of public policies. Some indicators – notably housing

(affordability and healthy life expectancy – are also associated with higher voter turnout. At the same time, and in line with the participation patterns observed in the INVOLVE survey, weaker policy outcomes – particularly in housing and employment – are linked to higher levels of political participation outside elections, as citizens are more likely to engage in non-institutional activities such as public demonstrations.

Overall, this report concludes that strengthening public policies and improving everyday public service encounters are promising routes to bolstering political support and citizens' sense of efficacy, particularly when services recognize users as receivers, doers and judges. However, improvements should not be expected to raise political participation outside elections.



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(Introduction

European citizens experience the presence of the state most directly through public policies and public services, for example when they receive benefits or make use of public services such as schools or hospitals. Across Europe, welfare states have been developed to cover many of the social risks people encounter over the life course, although the scope and generosity of this protection vary by country and by policy domain. In these interactions, citizens are often positioned as recipients of public action, benefiting from support provided by the state.

In addition to providing adequate material support, however, **public policies can recognize people as valued members of society, who are capable of exercising judgment over their own lives and collective choices**. By doing so, public institutions can create conditions that foster political trust and enable political participation (Bonvin et al., 2018; Bonvin & Laruffa, 2018b, 2024; Sen, 2009, 1999, 2002; Shore, 2019, 2020). For this potential to be realized, citizens' voices must be heard and meaningfully incorporated into processes of policy design and implementation. Ensuring that all voices within society are fairly represented is therefore central to achieving genuine democratic outcomes (Bonvin et al., 2018; Bonvin & Laruffa, 2018a).

In practice, many citizens remain excluded from meaningful involvement in political processes. They often lack the resources, opportunities, or institutional support needed to make their voices heard (Bartels, 2008; Gilens, 2012; Gillissen et al., 2025; Solt, 2008, 2010). Such difficulties in articulating preferences and demands raise broader concerns about democratic legitimacy, as governments receive fewer and more unequal signals from citizens. In the literature, these signals are commonly referred to as democratic inputs, which are captured by two core elements: citizens' political support for political institutions and their political participation through elections and other forms of engagement (Easton, 1965, 1975; Norris, 1999, 2011, 2022). Public policies and public services are therefore increasingly seen as important levers for strengthening democratic inputs, by enabling political participation and fostering trust in political institutions, and in doing so, allowing for the potential of equal citizenship to be realized (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2021).

At the same time, public policy spending across Europe is under pressure. Governments face expanding social risks, including in-work poverty linked to job precariousness and rising demands related to physical and mental health, alongside growing fiscal constraints on public budgets (Abou-Chadi & Immergut, 2019; Ferragina, 2022, 2025; Gingrich & Ansell, 2012; Hemerijck & Matsaganis, 2024). As governments pursue policy reforms under these conditions, it is crucial that changes do not undermine democratic legitimacy. **Understanding how citizens' perceptions of public policies and their experiences with public services relate to political support and political participation is therefore crucial**.

The INVOLVE Horizon Europe project¹ addresses precisely this, by examining how political support and participation are related to public policies and public services. **A central purpose of the project is to investigate how public policies shape the services available to citizens and, in turn, influence what people are able to aspire to and achieve**. Achievements at one point in time shape individuals' capacity to pursue further goals in the future (Sen, 1999, 2002, 2009). Concretely, being unhealthy, undereducated, or homeless, constrains people's ability to develop future perspectives of themselves, be that in terms of their personal goals, professional careers, or collective aspirations.

The results presented in this report show that public policies and public services which enable citizens to be healthy, educated, decently housed, and well employed, allow these citizens to be democratically involved. When countries fail to uphold such a quality of public

¹ <https://involve-democracy.eu/>

policy, it diminishes the capacity of vulnerable social groups to invest and realize their aspirations (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2024; Zimmermann, 2024). This, in turn, weakens the foundations of a genuinely inclusive democracy (Bonvin et al., 2018; Bonvin & Laruffa, 2021).

Democratic legitimacy is commonly understood as being closely tied to democratic inputs (Easton, 1965, 1975; Norris, 1999, 2011, 2022). Broad political support for the political system and widespread expression of political demands are considered essential for maintaining a stable democracy. Political support, when directed toward political institutions and actors, is often captured through citizens' trust in these institutions to produce desired outcomes (Gamson, 1968). At a more abstract level, support for the political system can be reflected in satisfaction with the functioning of democracy (Linde & Ekman, 2003).

Political support alone, however, is not sufficient. For policy makers to design and implement policies that reflect citizens' preferences, citizens must also express their views and demands. This can occur through a wide range of activities, including institutionally supported channels and forms of participation that operate outside formal policy processes (Theocharis & Van Deth, 2018; Van Deth, 2014). Together, political support and participation constitute key democratic inputs needed for political systems to maintain democratic legitimacy.

Yet, across democracies, the ideal of equal democratic citizenship, where there are no or limited disparities between citizens in their political support and participation, has been undermined by inequality (Gillissen, Goubin, & Reidsma, 2025). Against this background, **public policies and services can serve to enhance the conditions for equal democratic citizenship** (Shore, 2019, 2020). In this vein, merely providing resources, via replacement incomes or public services, is insufficient to counteract the consequences of inequality (Zimmermann, 2024). Rather, and following a capability-based model (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2018b), **policy-makers need to understand individuals not only as receivers**, who require support and protection against vulnerability; but also as **doers**, who pursue meaningful activities for society and exercise agency; and as **judges**, who capably evaluate different situations or choices by their own evaluations (Bonvin et al., 2018; Bonvin & Laruffa, 2018b, 2024; Sen, 1999, 2002, 2009). By doing so, as shown in **Figure 1**, a higher quality of public policies can theoretically foster greater political support and participation, in turn improving the quality of democracy.

Figure 1. From the Quality of Public Policies to Democratic Inputs to the Quality of Democracy



Source: Authors' own elaboration



In that regard, this report is guided by the following objectives:

1. To analyze original survey data in order to discern how much citizens are ‘receivers’, ‘doers’ and ‘judges’ in their interaction with public services;
2. To identify pathways to improve political support and boost political participation through improving public services;
3. To investigate the impact of public policies on the levels of democratic legitimacy, in terms of political support and political participation.

In line with these three objectives, we investigate how public policies and public services can contribute to democratic legitimacy as follows.

To meet these objectives, the report follows a three-step analytical approach. First, it draws on novel survey data collected in eight European countries participating in the INVOLVE project to examine how citizens experience public services through the receiver, doer, and judge framework. Second, it analyzes how these experiences are related to political trust, satisfaction with democracy, and political participation. Third, it turns to multilevel analyses that combine individual-level data from the European Social Survey with country-level indicators from Eurostat and the OECD to assess how differences in public policy outcomes across Europe relate to political support and participation.

By combining individual experiences with objective country-level indicators, the report adopts a holistic perspective on the relationship between public policies, public services, and democratic legitimacy. **This approach allows for a comprehensive assessment of how policy quality and service delivery shape democratic inputs and helps identify pathways to strengthen democratic legitimacy.**

The remainder of this report is structured in the following manner. Section 1 reviews the theoretical foundation of the INVOLVE project. Section 2 provides an overview of the data sources and methods used. Section 3 provides the results that examine how the quality of public policy and citizens’ perception of public services are associated with political support and participation. Section 4 summarizes the results and concludes with policy recommendations to strengthen democratic legitimacy.

1. From Public Policies and Services to Political Support and Political Participation

In the following Section, we outline the theoretical foundations of the INVOLVE project and explain how public policies and public services can contribute to the quality of democracy. We then discuss how public services relate to political support and political participation. The Section concludes by clarifying how satisfaction with service outcomes and perceived fairness in service delivery can, in theory, strengthen democracy by increasing political support and participation.

Definition Box 1. Democracy and Democratic Inputs

Within the Eastonian framework (Easton, 1965, 1975; Norris, 1999, 2011, 2022), two input factors are considered as central for understanding democracy: **political support and political demands**. First, democratic systems rely on citizens perceiving governing institutions as legitimate and acting on their behalf, which is reflected in political support (Norris, 1999, 2011, 2022). Second, for governing institutions to respond to citizens' needs and preferences, citizens must be able to articulate political demands, including their priorities and policy preferences (Schlozman, 2012). Together, political support and the expression of political demands constitute central democratic inputs and are essential for the functioning of democracy.

1.1. Public Policies and Citizens' Capabilities: Treating People as Receivers, Doers, and Judges

The INVOLVE project is inspired by Sen's capability approach (1999, 2002, 2009), which holds that **everyone deserves to have a good quality of life and lead a life they have reason to value. To achieve this basic ideal, democracies play both an instrumental and constructive role.** Instrumentally, democracy provides channels such as elections, petitioning, and protesting through which citizens, including disadvantaged groups, can express their interests and influence governance. Constructively, democracy enables collective reflection by fostering open public debate and encouraging the consideration of diverse perspectives.

Policies can be considered as democratic to the extent that they are collectively shaped and reflect the situation-specific viewpoints of citizens. Sen (1993) refers to these viewpoints as positional objectivities, emphasizing that democratic decision-making should incorporate the lived experiences of all citizens rather than privileging a limited set of voices.

However, socio-economic inequalities are undermining democracy (Bartels, 2008; Gilens, 2012; Gillissen et al., 2024; Gillissen, Goubin, & Reidsma, 2025; Hübscher et al., 2023; Offe, 2019; Solt, 2008, 2010). Inequality can generate a self-reinforcing cycle in which disadvantaged groups face greater barriers to expressing political demands, leading to unequal representation, weakened

democratic citizenship, and policies that disproportionately favor more powerful groups. Over time, this process further excludes disadvantaged citizens from political life. Material deprivation, monetary poverty, and social exclusion are therefore not only socio-economic concerns, but also manifestations of unequal democratic citizenship and what has been described as ‘political poverty’ (Bohman, 1997).

To counter this downward spiral of structural injustice and power asymmetries, INVOLVE extends the capability approach to articulate an ambitious vision of democracy. **Central to this vision is the establishment of socio-economic preconditions that allow all citizens to participate on more equal terms.** Only when these preconditions are in place can democracy fully perform its instrumental and constructive functions (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2021; Laruffa, 2020). Public policies and public services play a central role in this regard. To understand how public policies and services contribute to democratic functioning, **INVOLVE examines the extent to which they treat citizens as receivers, doers, and judges** (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2018b, 2022).

The **receiver** dimension is concerned with whether policies and services enable people to meet basic needs, such as being healthy, educated, adequately housed, employed, and supported by care networks. This addresses risks of material deprivation, poverty, and unmet care needs.

Once this essential precondition is met, it can next be questioned whether people are enabled to be **doers** by the state, who do activities that they find meaningful, both personally and professionally. Beyond being ‘activated’ in the labor market by providing employment, which many OECD countries see as a satisfactory policy outcome itself (Martin, 2015; Vooren et al., 2019), seeing people as doers implies examining whether they are enabled to engage in activities they *want* to value, rather than activities they accept out of necessity or obligation.

Closely related is the **judge** dimension, which assesses if citizens are recognized as capable of evaluating their own situations and collective futures. A key concern here is preference adaptation, whereby people adapt their preferences to what *is*, *rather than aspiring to what could be*. This entails nourishing people’s visions of what a better future could be, recognizing everyone as holding valuable views and knowledge, and enabling them to co-develop policies to actualize these visions. Hence, **from INVOLVE’s perspective, public policies which address all dimensions in concert (receiver, doer, judge) become ‘conversion factors of democracy’** (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2021).

1.2. Public Services and Political Support

Citizens do not only form their attitudes towards politics based on their ideological orientations (Dalton, 2004; Hetherington, 2005) and the perceived performance of political institutions (Van der Meer, 2010; Van der Meer & Hakhverdian, 2017), but also through their direct encounters with public services and their experiences with public policies (De Blok et al., 2020; Kumlin, 2004). **Citizens thus evaluate *what the state delivers, how it does this and how it *should* deliver it*** (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Tyler, 2006; Van Ryzin, 2011, 2015), irrespective of whether citizens are formally recognized in this role.

A substantial body of research has shown that perceptions of public service quality, fairness, and accessibility shape the extent to which people view their political system as legitimate and trustworthy (De Blok & Kumlin, 2022; Haugsgjerd & Kumlin, 2020b; Kumlin & Haugsgjerd, 2017). Interactions with public services provide concrete signals about whether citizens feel respected, included, and valued, which in turn influences broader attitudes toward political institutions and political actors. **Political trust and satisfaction with democracy are therefore partly shaped by**

Definition Box 2. Political Support

Political support refers to the confidence citizens have in political institutions to uphold democratic governance without requiring continuous oversight (Easton, 1965, 1975). This implies that citizens hold an expectation that political institutions will autonomously deliver positive outcomes for society.

Political support is commonly measured using two indicators: political trust and satisfaction with democracy. The key distinction between these indicators lies in their level of abstraction. Political trust is more closely oriented toward contemporary political actors and institutions, whereas satisfaction with democracy reflects broader evaluations of the political system as a whole (Easton, 1965, 1975).

Political trust reflects a belief in the benevolence and competence of political actors and institutions (Norris, 2017). Such beliefs may stem from perceived responsiveness, attention to the needs of specific societal groups, or assessments of policy outcomes (Fiske, 2002; Kumlin & Haugsgjerd, 2017). Higher levels of political trust indicate that citizens expect political actors to act effectively and in the public interest (OECD, 2017).

Satisfaction with democracy reflects citizens' satisfaction with the democratic procedures of their country, and their perceptions of their democratic regime's norms and values (Canache et al., 2001; Linde & Ekman, 2003). The specific norms or procedures evaluated can vary across individuals and may include aspects such as democratic representation, institutional fairness, or executive efficiency.

1.3. Public Services and Political Participation

Citizens' ability to express political demands varies systematically by education, income, and civic skills (Bartels, 2008; Gilens, 2012; Gillissen, Goubin, & Reidsma, 2025; Kern et al., 2015; Kern & Hooghe, 2018; Solt, 2008, 2010). Indeed, political participation requires time, skills, a social network and a degree of material stability (Almond & Verba, 1963; Brady et al., 1995; Verba et al., 1995). Public policies and public services therefore matter because they can redistribute resources and reduce the constraints that limit political engagement. By supporting access to stable housing, healthcare, education, and employment, public policies help lower the practical and psychological barriers that prevent many citizens from expressing their views.

Beyond reducing socio-economic disparities, public policies and public services also shape how citizens perceive themselves and their relationship with political institutions (Craig et al., 1990; Shore, 2019). When services are accessible and empowering, they can reinforce the perception that citizens' voices are legitimate and meaningful, rather than conveying the message that the concerns of vulnerable groups carry less weight (Mettler & Soss, 2004; Schlozman, 2012). Such experiences can strengthen citizens' willingness to act on their aspirations, rather than adjusting those aspirations to constrained circumstances. In this way, **public policies and services can strengthen democracy by creating the preconditions of equal democratic citizenship and by supporting the capacity to imagine and pursue alternative collective visions of the future.**

Definition Box 3. Political Participation

Political participation refers to **activities that are voluntary acts or interventions by citizens with the goal of influencing politics** (Van Deth, 2014, 353). Citizens engage in such activities to express certain demands, preferences, and policy priorities, which they wish political actors and institutions would respond to and act upon. Political participation is commonly understood as taking place through two broad modes: institutional participation and non-institutional participation.

Institutional participation refers to activities accepted, recognized, and/or integrated into the political system, such as voting in elections, being a political party member, contacting public officials, and displaying political campaign merchandise. These modes of participation tend to be compliant or supportive of the political system.

The most prevalent form of institutional political participation is **voting in elections**. Traditionally, electoral participation has been understood as an expression of political support (Barnes & Kaase, 1979). At the same time, elections also provide opportunities for citizens to express dissatisfaction with the political status quo. This can occur through support for political parties that advocate substantial changes to the political system, including parties on the radical left, which emphasize economic transformation, the radical right, which focus on cultural change, and populist parties, which promote alternative democratic arrangements. While electoral support for such parties may partly reflect ideological commitments, these parties often mobilize socio-economic grievances and position themselves in opposition to established political actors, whom they portray as responsible for poor governance (Rooduijn et al., 2019; Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017; Sipma et al., 2023).

In addition to elections, institutional participation can take the form of **direct and deliberative democratic processes** (Fishkin, 2009; Smith & Setälä, 2018; Theuwis et al., 2025). These include binding instruments such as referenda and citizens' initiatives, as well as deliberative mechanisms like citizens' assemblies and juries, participatory budgeting processes, and digital participation platforms. These arrangements allow citizens to engage more directly in decision-making, although access to such opportunities remains limited to the broader public (Gillissen et al., 2024).

Non-institutional political participation refers to engagement with activities that occur outside of traditional political structures and are often regarded by political institutions as less legitimate. Examples include participation in demonstrations, signing petitions, boycotting products for political reasons, and sharing political content online. These forms of participation tend to be more confrontational or disruptive in nature. Despite operating outside formal political channels, non-institutional participation is similarly oriented toward influencing political outcomes.

Closely related to, but distinct from, political participation is civic participation. **Civic participation** refers to voluntary engagement with activities directly oriented at improving community well-being without the explicit intention of influencing political decision-making (Theocharis & Van Deth, 2018; Van Deth, 2014). Such activities are hands-on approaches of citizens to improving and realizing a better society directly, rather than relying on political actors to take action for this. A central example of civic participation is volunteering in social organizations, such as NGOs, neighborhood centers, or churches.

1.4. Adequacy of Support Received

Adequate public support, whether through income replacement during unemployment, access to social housing, higher education, or healthcare, **is a foundational condition for broad political support and political participation, and thus for democratic legitimacy**. When public services provide substantial and reliable support, particularly during periods of vulnerability, citizens are more likely to perceive the state as capable and benevolent (Gingrich & Ansell, 2012). Conversely, when citizens are not sufficiently recognized as in need of help, a lack of political support is what follows, particularly among worse-off socio-economic groups for whom public services are essential (Shore, 2019, 2020). More controversially, when citizens are stigmatized for needing help, feeling persecuted is not uncommon, leading some citizens to view the state as actively harmful rather than simply ineffective (Bertsou, 2019; Hardin, 2004; Lenard, 2008). Such experiences reduce both the material resources available for participation and the perceived legitimacy of vulnerable groups' political claims, thereby contributing to unequal democratic input.

The literature on welfare state generosity supports these patterns. Citizens in countries with expansive welfare systems are likely to have higher levels of political support than citizens in countries with systems characterized by means-tested minimal benefits (Gillissen, Goubin, & Ruelens, 2025; Haugsgjerd & Kumlin, 2020a; Kumlin, 2007; Kumlin & Haugsgjerd, 2017). Herein, it is the reliable and non-stigmatizing provision of support that signals institutional responsiveness and fosters a sense of security and belonging (Gingrich & Ansell, 2012; Korpi & Palme, 1998; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Van Ryzin, 2011). In addition, a large body of research shows that economic insecurity undermines political participation, particularly among lower-income groups (Brady et al., 1995; Schlozman, 2012). Citizens' expectations about whether they can rely on government support when needed, therefore should shape both political support and their willingness to engage politically.

These mechanisms establish the socio-economic preconditions for equal democratic citizenship. Importantly, **the provision of adequate material support alone does not make public policies and public services conversion factors of democracy** (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2021). When citizens are treated solely as passive recipients of support, their experiential knowledge and evaluative capacities remain unrecognized (Sen, 1993). Accordingly, alleviating material deprivation does not necessarily reduce political exclusion if citizens lack opportunities to act on a more equal democratic footing. Beyond service outcomes, citizens must also be recognized as capable of actively shaping public policies and public services through voice and participation (Bonvin et al., 2018; Bonvin & Laruffa, 2018b, 2018a, 2024).

1.5. Quality of Doer and Judge Empowerment

In the literature on public administration and institutional trust, the extent to which citizens are treated as capable doers and judges has typically been captured under the umbrella of procedural fairness (Tyler, 2006; Van Ryzin, 2015). Herein, services that are delivered through clear, consistent, and respectful processes are more likely to elicit trust and cultivate a sense of recognition and belonging. The capability-informed perspective further unpacks this by questioning the extent to which people are truly empowered to conceive of a personal and collective life they have reason to value (judge) and are provided with the means to develop their capabilities and act upon their aspirations (doer) (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2018b, 2022).

(Citizens routinely reflect on the rules, norms and values embedded in public services (Kumlin & Stadelmann-Steffen, 2014; Mettler & Soss, 2004). These reflections consider whether institutions function in ways that value their political objectivities (Sen, 1993), by respecting and nourishing their knowledge, values, and aspirations. Fair processes should accordingly acknowledge individuals' capacity to co-define the content and goals of public policies and service outcomes (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2024; Zimmermann, 2024). **When services fail to accommodate such form of voice**, they undermine the judge dimension and, with it, **deny opportunities for institutions to show that they value input from their citizens**.

Closely related, citizens assess to what extent public policies and services are empowering them to lead lives they find meaningful. This focuses on the extent to which policies support diverse forms of agency as opposed to narrow pathways into, e.g., employment, care services, educational programs, and housing projects (Bonvin et al., 2018; Bonvin & Laruffa, 2021). For employment policies, for example, this shifts the focus from activation-to-any-job approach to capability-oriented support that builds pathways aligned with individuals' skills and aspirations. Key procedural concerns here relate to the degree of choice and recognized human autonomy when interacting with public services (Zimmermann, 2024). Where service processes are rigid or technocratic, they risk treating people as interchangeable units rather than individuals. The fairness of delivery then hinges on **whether individuals are enabled by services to act as (co-)authors of their own and the collective democratic projects**.

Procedural fairness, therefore, involves more than transparency and respectful treatment. It also concerns **whether public services empower citizens to evaluate options and act upon their aspirations**. When service delivery prioritizes top-down, expert-driven, or efficiency-oriented reforms at the expense of citizens' perspectives, public policies may reduce material inequality without functioning as genuine conversion factors of democracy.

2. Data and Methods

Having outlined the theoretical foundations of the INVOLVE project and the ways in which public policies and public services can strengthen democracy by enhancing political support and political participation, this Section turns to the empirical approach used in the report.

For this, we primarily focus our analyses on subjective indicators that capture individual experiences with, and perceptions of, public services. To gain a proper understanding of public service interactions, we rely on original survey data - the INVOLVE survey (2024) - that was collected for this project. While many international survey projects rely on questions that capture broad perceptions of how public services function, often without reference to personal experiences, this report uses state-of-the-art measures from welfare state research that focus explicitly on individuals' direct experiences with public services. To date, such experience-based questions have typically been included only in country-specific surveys (e.g., Kumlin et al., 2017).

To complement this detailed examination of individual-level experiences, the report also analyzes objective public policy outcomes in the areas of education, employment, health, and housing. These analyses draw on indicators from the Eurostat database that capture yearly country-level variation in policy outcomes and combine them with individual-level data from the European Social Survey. The European Social Survey provides harmonized information on socio-demographic characteristics, socio-economic conditions, and levels of political support and participation across countries. Together, these data sources allow the report to assess how differences in public policy outcomes across Europe are associated with democratic inputs (for earlier analyses of long-term trends in public policies and economic inequality, see Gillissen et al., 2024).

2.1. INVOLVE Survey (2024)

As part of the INVOLVE project, an original survey was conducted to collect data on political attitudes and behaviors, experiences with public services, and general perceptions of public policies. The survey was designed by the Institute for Work and Society (HIVA) at KU Leuven, while data collection was carried out by Bilendi, a company specialized in online survey administration. Respondents were recruited from Bilendi's online panels. Proportionate stratified samples were drawn in each participating country: Belgium (Flanders), France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Switzerland. Each national sample consisted of around 1,500 respondents aged 18 years and older and was designed to be representative with respect to age, gender, education, and region of residence.

2.1.1. Indicators of Democratic Input: Political Support and Participation

To capture democratic inputs, this report focuses on two core dimensions: political support and political demands. **Political support** is measured using survey questions on **citizens' trust in political actors and institutions**, which is a well-established approach to operationalizing political trust. Respondents were asked: "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means 'not at all' and 10 means 'completely,' how much do you personally trust each of the following institutions?"

Levels of political trust are calculated based on trust in four political institutions: the national government, the national parliament, political parties, and politicians. These items show high internal consistency and reliably capture the underlying concept of political trust (Cronbach's alpha greater than 0.9). For descriptive purposes, the analysis also includes trust in civic services and in local governing authorities, which allows for comparisons between political and non-political institutions. In the empirical analyses linking political support to public service experiences, the mean trust score across the four political institutions is used for each respondent.

To assess the robustness of the findings, political support is also measured using **satisfaction with democracy**, which reflects a more diffuse form of political support than political trust (Norris, 2017). Satisfaction with democracy is measured using the question: "On the whole, how satisfied are you with the current state of democracy in [country]?" Responses range from 1, indicating extremely dissatisfied, to 5, indicating extremely satisfied.

Political demands are operationalized through political participation. The analysis focuses on three retrospective modes of political participation: **institutional participation, non-institutional participation, and civic participation**. To measure these modes, respondents were asked to indicate which activities they had engaged in during the previous 12 months from a list of 14 political activities.

For each mode of political participation, respondents were coded as 1 if they reported having participated in at least one of the activities associated with that mode and as 0 if they reported no participation. Box 4 provides an overview of the activities included under each mode of participation.

Box 4. Activities of political participation

Institutional participation	Non-institutional participation	Civic participation
<i>Activities occur within existing institutional structures or are directly related to them</i>	<i>Activities are mostly initiated outside political institutions</i>	<i>Activities located in the civil society, rather than targeted at democratic political institutions</i>
-Contacted a politician, government, or local government official -Attended a meeting of a trade union, political party, or political action group -Worn or displayed merchandise of a political party, such as a badge or sticker -Being a member of a political association or party -Provided input or feedback on government policy, law, or document -Gave money to a political party, activist, or lobby group	-Signed a petition -Participated in a public demonstration or protest -Bought or refused to consume certain products or services for political reasons -Posted or shared anything about politics online, for example on blogs, via email or on social media such as Facebook or Instagram	-Being a trade union member -Volunteered for a not-for-profit or charitable organization

To complement these participation measures, the analysis also examines **political efficacy**. Internal political efficacy is measured using respondents' agreement with the statement, "I have confidence in my own ability to participate in politics." External political efficacy is measured using

agreement with the statement, “The political system allows people like me to have an influence on politics.” Responses to both items are recorded on a five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Finally, the analysis turns to citizens’ **willingness to engage with democratic innovations**. Drawing on research on direct and deliberative democracy (Gherghina & Geissel, 2017, 2020; Pilet et al., 2023), we asked how likely it would be that these innovations would be taken up by respondents should their countries implement them. Because these questions refer to hypothetical future engagement rather than actual participation, these questions should also be understood as attitudes. Previous research shows that expressed willingness to engage in democratic innovations does not automatically translate into actual participation (Gherghina & Geissel, 2017). Support for such instruments can be relatively high even among citizens who are otherwise politically disengaged (Pilet et al., 2023).

For descriptive purposes, the four democratic innovations are examined separately to capture differences in support across instruments. In addition, a combined mean score is constructed to assess how overall openness to democratic innovations relates to other individual-level indicators of democratic input.

Box 5. Democratic Innovations

To assess openness toward democratic innovations, respondents were asked how likely they would be to participate in different forms of citizen involvement if these were implemented in their country. Responses were given on a 0-10 scale, ranging from 0 ‘certain not to participate’ to 10 ‘certain to participate’, with an additional option ‘prefer not to answer’. The following democratic innovations were included. Additional information was provided to explain how each participatory form should be understood by the respondents.

Participate in a Citizen forum: A citizen forum is an assembly composed of around 30 to 50 citizens, selected at random, who meet and discuss a certain topic in order to formulate a recommendation that is then transmitted to the parliament, municipal council, etc.

Share thoughts and policy proposals via a digital government platform

Vote in binding referenda about important national issues: The parliament receives the voters’ opinion and is obliged to follow the decision.

Participate in participatory budgeting: Participative budgeting consists of citizens deciding on a portion of the state’s budget. The citizens involved meet and discuss the way in which they wish to spend that amount in order to support different specific projects.

2.1.2. Indicators of Public Policy Performance: General Perceptions of Public Policies and Services

To assess how citizens experience their interactions with public services and how they perceive public policies more generally, the analysis draws on a range of indicators.

First, respondents were asked to evaluate **overall satisfaction with key public policy domains** using the question: “On the whole, how satisfied are you with the current state of each of the following in [country]?” The domains covered were **education, healthcare, the economy, employment services, access to housing, and public services** in general. Responses were recorded on a five-point scale ranging from extremely dissatisfied (1) to extremely satisfied (5). Empirical analyses indicate that responses across these domains reflect a single underlying

construct and can be combined into an overall measure of general satisfaction with public services. For each respondent, both the mean satisfaction score across policy domains and the corresponding latent factor score were calculated. These measures capture citizens' overall assessments of public policy performance and service provision.

This general indicator is complemented by **measures of policy preferences**. Respondents were asked whether they would like to see **more or less government spending in different areas**, with the prompt explicitly noting that higher spending could require tax increases. The policy areas included healthcare, access to housing, unemployment benefits, education, and social benefits for people with low incomes. In addition, respondents were asked to assess the **degree of responsibility** they believe the **government** should have in various policy domains using a scale from not at all responsible to completely responsible. These domains included ensuring a reasonable standard of living for unemployed people and for people with physical or mental disabilities, ensuring adequate education for all, providing affordable housing, providing healthcare for the sick, and supporting job seekers through placement and retraining.

Finally, the analysis includes an indicator capturing **perceptions of service digitalization**. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, "I often find it hard to access or use public services because they are online," with responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

2.1.3. Indicators of Public Service Experiences: being Treated as a Receiver, Doer, and Judge

Where general insights are helpful to understanding broader perceptions of public policies and services, they cannot shed light on whether people feel that **services treat them as receivers, doers, and judges** (RDJ). For that, we analyze indicators related to people's *individual* experiences with public services.

First, to gain more insight into which services are most used, we asked respondents "Which of the following public services (fully or partially provided by national, regional and/or local authorities) have you or your closest family used during the past 12 months?"

The list of **services used** included:

1. General practitioner/family doctor
2. Public hospital
3. Long-term care/elderly care
4. Public mental health services, such as a psychologist or psychiatrist
5. Public creche
6. Public school
7. Public university
8. Public social housing
9. Employment/labor market reintegration services
10. Immigration services

While not entirely exhaustive, this list covers the most used services, as well as the services of interest for the INVOLVE research consortium (employment, education, housing, and health).

To assess **satisfaction with the public services** that respondents **used**, the survey asked, for each service accessed, "How satisfied or dissatisfied were you in general with the service

provided?” Responses were recorded on a five-point scale ranging from extremely dissatisfied to extremely satisfied. These responses capture individual service outcome satisfaction, reflecting citizens’ evaluations of the services they personally received. For each respondent, both mean satisfaction scores and factor-based scores were calculated across the services used. These measures reflect respondents’ overall satisfaction with the outcomes of their public service interactions.

In addition, the analysis includes an indicator capturing whether respondents **experienced barriers when accessing public services**. Respondents were presented with a list of potential access difficulties and asked to indicate whether they had encountered any of the following barriers:

1. Geographical distance
2. Lack of information about the service
3. Financial reasons
4. Lack of adequate accommodation
5. Online access barriers
6. Language barriers
7. Scheduling or opening time barriers
8. Waiting time barriers

Responses were recoded into a single binary indicator, coded as 1 if at least one barrier was reported and 0 if no barriers were reported.

To move beyond outcome satisfaction and assess whether citizens **felt fairly treated** during their interactions with public services, the survey also included a set of statements aligned with the **receiver, doer, and judge framework**. These items were asked only to respondents who reported that they or a close family member had used a public service in the previous 12 months. The statements referred to different stages of the service process and required respondents to consider their **overall experience across services**, as responses were not collected separately for each service. Some statements relate similarly to the receiver and doer dimension, with it being contingent on whether the service is intended to provide help for people in need or to empower people to act. Respondents indicated their level of agreement with each statement on a five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The following statements were presented to the respondents:

1. It was easy to find the service (Receiver/Doer)
2. It was easy to access the service (Receiver/Doer)
3. I felt ashamed to use the service (Receiver/Doer/Judge)
4. Employees were helpful and listened to what I had to say (Judge)
5. I could influence the way the service was delivered (Judge)
6. I experienced difficulties in understanding how to use the service (Doer)
7. I could choose between different service providers (Doer)
8. I was treated worse than most others (Judge)
9. I received the service and help I was entitled to (Receiver/Doer)
10. I received the service in a timely and efficient manner (Receiver/Doer)
11. Receiving the service had a positive influence on my personal circumstances (Receiver/Doer)
12. I felt discriminated while in contact with the service (Judge)

(For descriptive analyses, the report presents the raw survey responses, which provide detailed insights into how citizens experience their interactions with public services through the receiver, doer, and judge framework. For the analytical examination of how these experiences relate to political support and participation, responses are summarized into a single indicator capturing the overall experience of being treated as a receiver, doer, and judge. This approach reflects the close interrelationship between the three dimensions and provides a clear and interpretable measure of citizens' overall service experiences.

For each respondent, mean scores were calculated based on the available responses. These measures capture the extent to which citizens experience public services as supportive, empowering, and respectful of their evaluative capacity.

2.2. The European Social Survey (2006-2023) and Eurostat

To complement the detailed analysis of citizens' personal experiences with public services based on the INVOLVE survey, the report also adopts a broader comparative perspective on the relationship between public policy outcomes and democratic inputs. For this purpose, it draws on individual-level data from the European Social Survey and combines these data with country-level indicators from Eurostat. The European Social Survey is a biennial cross-national survey that has collected harmonized data on political attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors across European countries since 2002, making it well suited for analyzing political support and political participation in a comparative context.

Individual-level data from the European Social Survey are combined with harmonized administrative indicators from Eurostat covering key public policy domains, including housing, health, education, and employment. The European Social Survey provides repeated cross-sectional data collected at regular intervals, which allows the analysis to examine how relationships between public policy outcomes and democratic inputs vary across countries and over time. A key limitation of the ESS is that it relies on relatively general questions about public policies and public service use, offering limited insight into citizens' direct service experiences. At the same time, its broad country coverage and long-time span constitute important advantages for comparative and longitudinal analyses. Together with Eurostat indicators, these data are used to proxy objective public policy outcomes.

In total, the data used for this report includes 28 European countries between 2006 to 2023 (193 total country-year combinations) that cover around 350 thousand respondents. Given that the purpose of this report is to examine relationships, we do not examine trends in public policy over countries and time (these are addressed in detail in Gillissen et al., 2024).

2.2.1. Indicators for Democratic Inputs: Individual Level Political Support and Participation (European Social Survey)

To capture citizens' **political support**, the analysis uses indicators of political trust and satisfaction with democracy. **Political trust** is measured using the same question wording and response scale as described in Section 2.1.1, with the same set of political institutions included. The reliability of the political trust items is again high (Cronbach's alpha = 0.90). As in the earlier analyses, mean

trust scores are calculated for each respondent. For robustness, political support is also measured using **satisfaction with democracy**, based on the question, “On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]?” Responses range from 0, indicating extremely dissatisfied, to 10, indicating extremely satisfied. Overall, the measures of political support used in the INVOLVE survey and the European Social Survey are highly comparable.

Political participation is examined across three modes: **electoral participation**, **institutional participation**, and **non-institutional participation**. Civic participation is not included in these analyses, as activities related to civic engagement have not been measured consistently across European Social Survey waves. In addition, although the European Social Survey includes items on political efficacy, these have only been available in more recent waves. Including them would substantially reduce the number of country-year observations. As the focus of the analysis is on the relationship between public policies and democratic inputs, political efficacy is therefore not examined using the European Social Survey data.

The European Social Survey does, however, provide consistent measures of voting behavior in all waves, which allows the analysis to examine voter turnout. Like the INVOLVE survey, respondents in the European Social Survey reported whether they had engaged in a range of political activities during the previous 12 months. For each mode of participation, respondents were coded as 1 if they reported participation in at least one activity and as 0 otherwise.

Institutional participation includes contacting a politician or government official at the national or local level, wearing or displaying political party merchandise such as a badge or sticker, and membership in a political party or political association. **Non-institutional participation** includes signing a petition, participating in a public demonstration or protest, boycotting or deliberately purchasing products for political reasons, and posting or sharing political content online. Although this set of activities is less extensive than the one included in the INVOLVE survey, these items capture common forms of political engagement and are widely used in previous research.

Finally, **electoral participation** is measured using respondents’ self-reported voting behavior in the most recent national election. Voting is captured using the question, “Some people do not vote nowadays for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last [country] national election in [month/year]?” Respondents who reported voting were coded as 1, while those who reported not voting were coded as 0.

2.2.2. Indicators for Public Service Evaluations: Perceptions of Public Policies (European Social Survey)

To gain insight into how people perceive public policies, the analysis includes an indicator capturing general satisfaction with the performance of public services. Similar to the measures described in Section 2.1.2, respondents were asked, “Please say what you think overall about the state of the following services in [country] nowadays,” with separate items for education and health services. Responses were recorded on a scale from 0, indicating extremely bad, to 10, indicating extremely good. For each respondent, the average of the two items was calculated to capture their general evaluation of public policy performance.

2.2.3. Country-level Data on Public Policies (Eurostat)

To complement citizens' subjective perceptions and experiences, this report also examines **objective macro-level indicators of public policy outcomes**. Using harmonized country-level data makes it possible to assess whether differences in policy performance across countries and over time are systematically associated with democratic inputs, independent of individual evaluations and service experiences.

The analysis focuses on policy outcomes in four core domains: employment, education, health, and housing. For **employment policy** outcomes, the analysis uses the in-work at-risk-of-poverty rate for individuals who have been employed for less than one year, based on data from the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (Eurostat, 2025). This indicator serves as a proxy for the quality of employment opportunities available to individuals who have recently entered employment.

For **education policy** outcomes, the analysis includes the employment rate of young adults aged 18 to 34 who graduated from upper secondary education one to three years earlier (ISCED levels 3 and 4), based on data from the EU Labour Force Survey (Eurostat, 2024). This indicator captures the extent to which education systems equip individuals with skills and competencies that facilitate entry into employment.

Health policy outcomes are measured using healthy life years remaining at age 50, based on EU-SILC data (Eurostat, 2025). This indicator reflects the effectiveness of health policies in supporting longer lives free from disabling health conditions.

Finally, **housing policy** outcomes are captured by the share of individuals with incomes below 60 percent of the national median who spend more than 40 percent of their disposable household income on housing costs, also based on EU-SILC data (Eurostat, 2025). This indicator serves as a proxy for the extent to which housing policies ensure that housing costs remain affordable for economically vulnerable groups.

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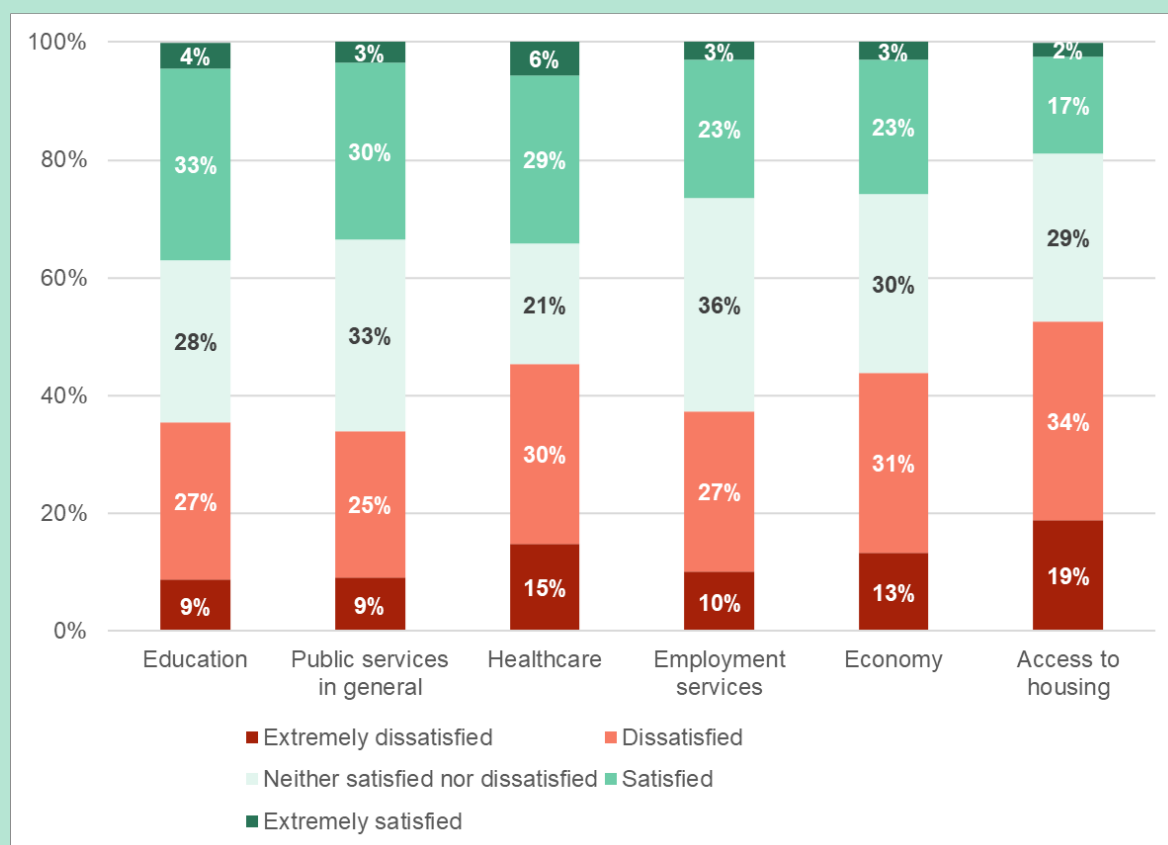
3. Public Services and Their Relation to Political Support and Participation

3.1. Perceptions of Public Policies and Services

3.1.1. General Perceptions of Public Policies

This Section examines citizens' generalized perceptions of public policies and public services using data from the INVOLVE survey. **Figure 2** starts with presenting overall levels of satisfaction with the current state of different public policy domains.

Figure 2. Satisfaction with the State of Various Public Policy Domains



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: Based on responses on a 5-point Likert scale to the question 'On the whole, how satisfied are you with the current state of each of the following in [country]?' with the following shown in the figure, which were presented in a randomized order in the survey.

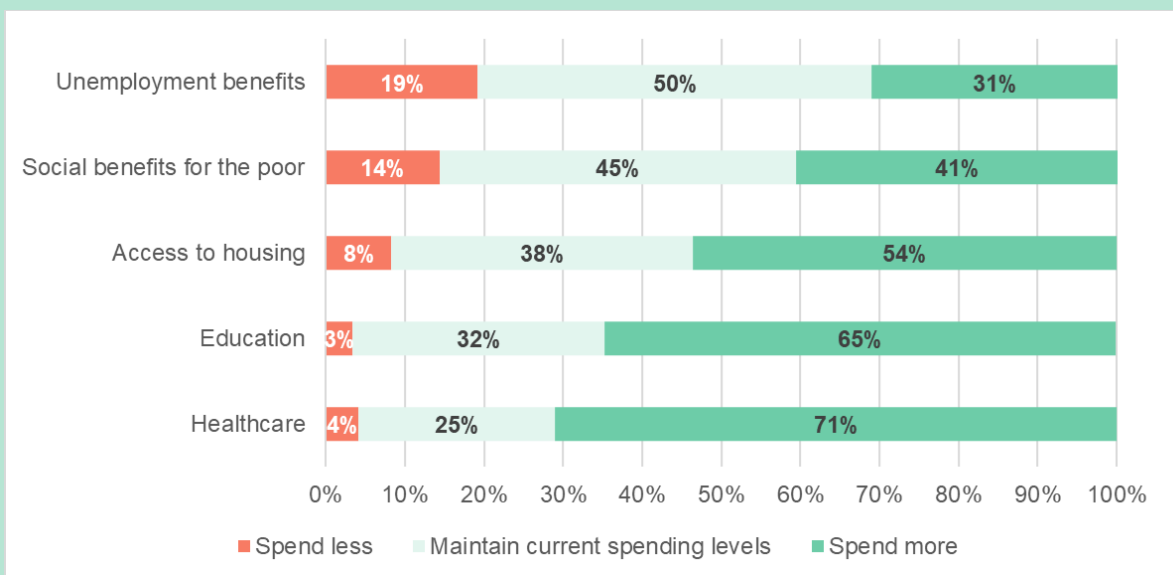
Overall, evaluations are mixed. For most domains, similar shares of respondents report being satisfied and dissatisfied. A clear exception is access to housing, where more than half of respondents report being dissatisfied or extremely dissatisfied. Among current public policy challenges, dissatisfaction with housing stands out as particularly pronounced. In addition, more than 40 percent of respondents indicate dissatisfaction with healthcare services and with the economy.

By contrast, there is no policy domain in which more than 40 percent of respondents report being satisfied. Across policies, only around 5 percent of respondents indicate that they are extremely satisfied, while between 10 and 20 percent report being extremely dissatisfied. **All in all, respondents are more likely to express dissatisfaction than satisfaction with public policies, especially in the areas of housing and healthcare.**

We also looked closely at **differences between countries** (results not displayed) underlying the between-country average of **Figure 2**. Comparing countries, the INVOLVE survey indicates that citizens from Switzerland, and to a lesser extent Ireland, are generally rather satisfied with the current state of public policies, except for healthcare (Ireland) and access to housing (Ireland and Switzerland). Interestingly, while there is a lot of dissatisfaction with the state of healthcare services in most countries, the vast majority of Belgian respondents have a positive opinion about it (66% satisfied or extremely satisfied). The least satisfied citizens can be found in Italy, Portugal and to a lesser extent in France. Dissatisfaction is the most pronounced in the domains of the economy, employment services and public services in general.

As a follow-up to citizens' satisfaction with public policies, **Figure 3** examines **preferences for changes in government spending** across policy domains.

Figure 3. Preference for Government Spending on Various Policy Domains



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: Based on responses on a 11-point scale ranging from 0 ('spend much less') to 10 ('spend much more'), with a clear middle point 5 ('maintain current spending levels'), to the question 'Listed below are various areas of government spending. Please show whether you would like to see more or less government spending in each area. Remember that if you say 'much more', it might require a tax increase to pay for it.' with the areas being listed in the figure, which were presented in a randomized order. For this figure, the original scale has been adjusted to a 3-point scale: a score of 0-3 reflects 'spend less', a score of 4-6 reflects 'maintain current spending levels', and a score of 7-10 reflects 'spend more'.

Figure 3 shows that a **clear majority of respondents support increased spending on healthcare and education**. Specifically, 71 percent favor higher spending on healthcare and 65 percent favor higher spending on education, while only small shares support spending reductions in these areas, at 4 percent and 3 percent respectively.

Support for increased spending is more limited for targeted benefits, such as unemployment benefits and social benefits for people with low incomes. Fewer than half of respondents indicate that spending in these areas should be increased, and a substantial minority prefer spending cuts. Nineteen percent favor lower spending on unemployment benefits, and 14 percent favor lower spending on social benefits for the poor.

These patterns indicate that public support for higher government spending is stronger for broadly used policy areas that benefit a wide share of the population. At the same time, they reflect prevailing public spending narratives in which unemployment benefits are often portrayed as a major budgetary burden, even though these programs typically account for a smaller share of public spending than healthcare, pensions, or education (Gillissen et al., 2024).

Across the eight countries included in the survey, **support for increased government spending on housing varies considerably** (analyses not reported). In four countries, a majority of respondents favor higher housing spending: Ireland at 72 percent, Germany at 69 percent, Portugal at 62 percent, and Poland at 58 percent. This is likely due to the lower home ownership rates or higher rental prices in these countries.

Clear cross-national differences also emerge with respect to unemployment benefits. In Belgium, 42 percent of respondents indicate a preference for substantially lower government spending on unemployment benefits, a share that is markedly higher than in the other countries. A likely explanation for this pattern is Belgium's comparatively generous unemployment benefit system during much of the twenty-first century (Gillissen et al., 2024), though this is likely to change as unemployment benefits will be capped to maximum two years starting from 2026.

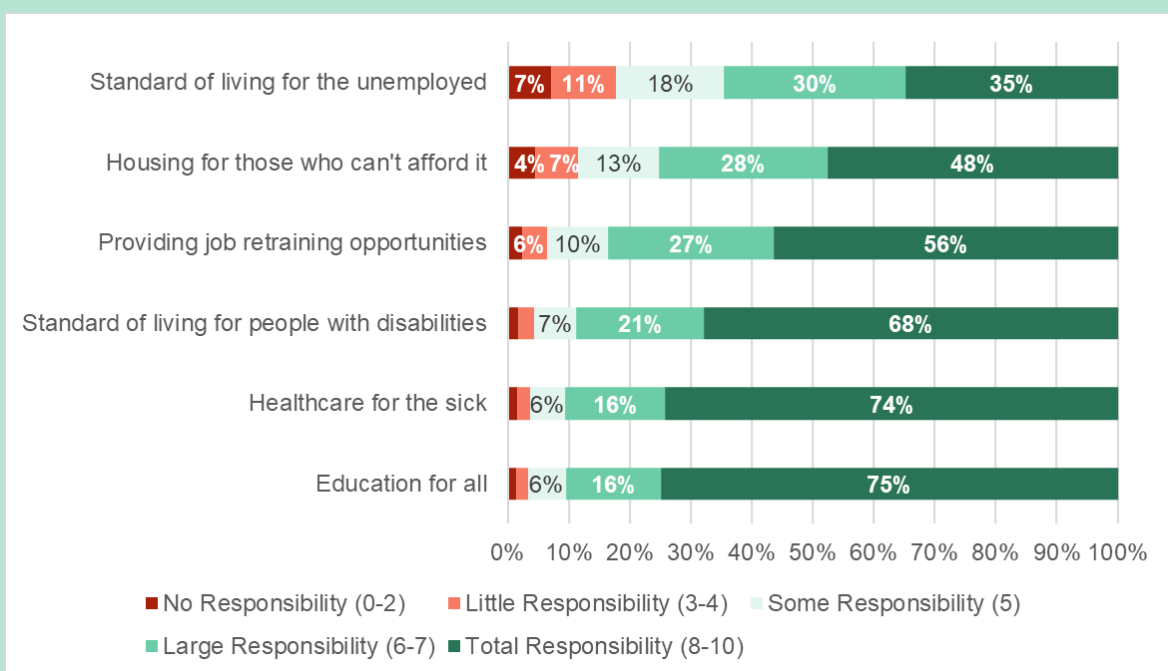
Preferences regarding social benefits for people with low incomes also differ across countries. In Italy and Ireland, a majority of respondents support increased spending, at 59 percent and 52 percent respectively. In contrast, respondents in Belgium and France most commonly prefer maintaining current spending levels, with 56 percent and 52 percent expressing this view. In the remaining countries, differences between preferences for maintaining and increasing spending are smaller, indicating a more divided public opinion on this policy area.

To better understand why respondents are more willing to reduce government spending on poverty-related policies and less willing to reduce spending on education and healthcare, the **analysis also examines perceptions of government responsibility**. **Figure 4** shows that patterns in perceived responsibility closely mirror the spending preferences presented in **Figure 3**.

Specifically, very few respondents believe that the government has little or no responsibility for ensuring adequate education for all or for providing healthcare for the sick. This widespread attribution of responsibility helps explain the strong support for maintaining or increasing public spending in these policy areas. By contrast, there is a sizeable share of people who think that the government has limited responsibility to uphold a reasonable standard of living for the unemployed.

Taken together, the results on perceived government responsibility and spending preferences suggest that Europeans are more supportive of public policies and services with broad and universal coverage, while expressing greater reservation toward more targeted forms of support aimed at vulnerable groups. **This pattern points to a preference for universal service provision over targeted income support in public attitudes toward the role of government.**

Figure 4. Desired Government Responsibility Over Various Policy Domains



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: Based on responses on a 11-point to the question “On a scale from 0 ‘not at all responsible’ to 10 ‘completely responsible’, how much do you agree that it should be the government’s responsibility to...”, with the responsibilities listed in the figure, which were presented in a randomized order.

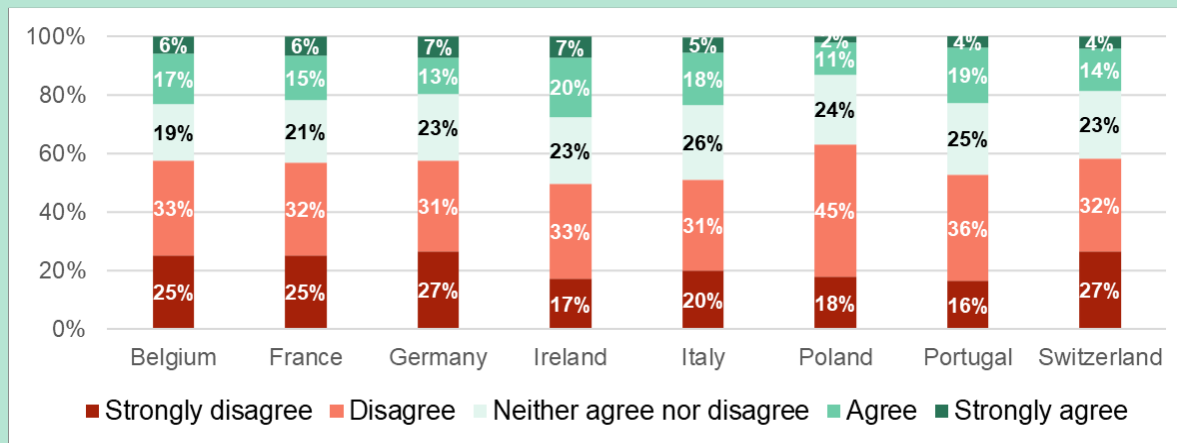
The patterns observed in perceptions of government responsibility in Figure 4 mainly hold when comparing countries. For universal public policies (healthcare and education), more than 90 percent of respondents in most countries believe that the government has either a large or a complete responsibility. This share is particularly high in Belgium, where 95 percent of respondents attribute a large or complete responsibility to the government for both education and health. Similarly high levels are observed in Italy and Germany, with 93 percent for education and 94 percent for health in both countries. Poland constitutes a partial exception, where these shares are lower at 84 percent for education and 82 percent for health. This may reflect differences in historical experiences with state involvement, although further research is needed to assess the underlying drivers of these attitudes.

Stronger cross-national variation can be detected for policies targeted at economically vulnerable groups. The share of respondents who believe that the government has little or no responsibility for ensuring a reasonable standard of living for unemployed people or for providing housing for those who cannot afford it varies substantially across countries. This share is particularly high in Belgium, at 26 percent for unemployment and 13 percent for housing, and in Poland, at 22 percent and 18 percent respectively. By contrast, lower shares are observed in Ireland, at 10 percent for unemployment and 7 percent for housing, and in Portugal, at 11 percent and 9 percent. These differences point to substantial cross-national variation in public expectations regarding the government’s role in supporting economically vulnerable groups.

Last, in order to get a grasp of general perceptions of public policies and services, the INVOLVE survey data also included questions on **the impact of digitalization**. One item asked respondents to what extent they agree with the statement ‘I often find it hard to access or use public services because they are online’. Over half of the respondents did not agree with the statement, while 21% agreed or strongly agreed. Looking at differences between countries in **Figure 5**, the

percentage of Polish respondents disagreeing with the statement stands out (45%). This may reflect differences in digital skills or in the extent to which public services are delivered through online channels, although the available data do not allow for a definitive conclusion.

Figure 5. Difficulty to Access Digital Public Services, per Country



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: Based on responses on a 5-point Likert scale to the question 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?', with the statement being 'I often find it hard to access or use public services because they are online'.

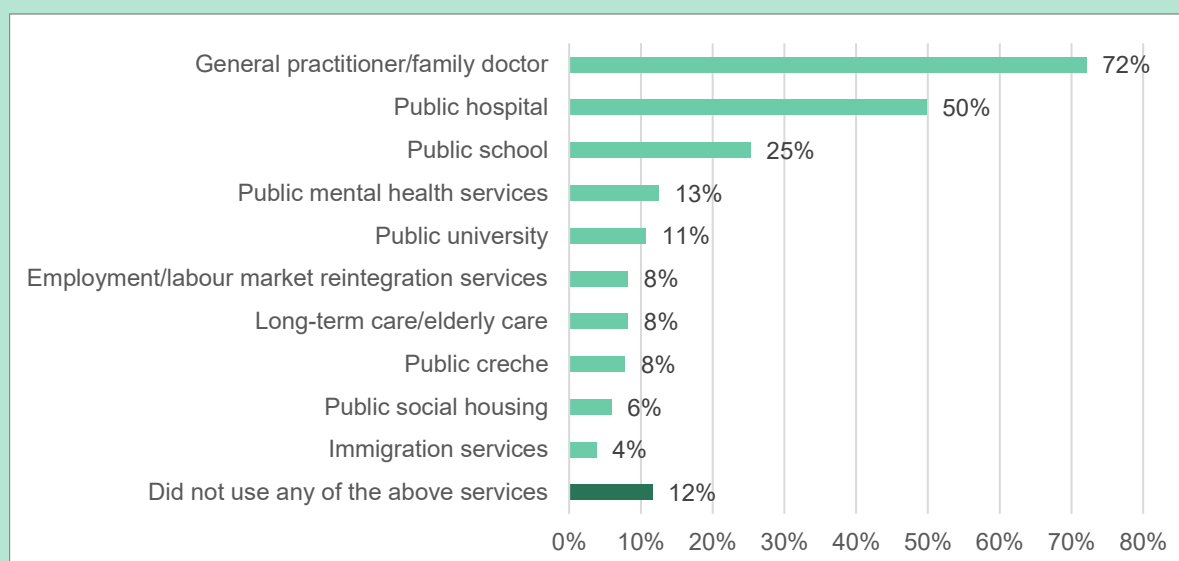
To conclude this Section on general perceptions, the INVOLVE data show broadly mixed evaluations of public policies. There is much dissatisfaction when it comes to general access to housing and healthcare, and less dissatisfaction with education and employment services, though there are important country differences likely resulting from differences in policies. Most citizens are in favor of higher spending on healthcare and education, while cuts in spending on unemployment benefits and social benefits for the poor have more popular support. Importantly, preferences for government spending appear to align more closely with perceptions of government responsibility than with evaluations of current policy performance. This suggests that normative views about the appropriate role of the state play a stronger role in shaping spending preferences than assessments of how well policies are currently functioning.

3.1.2. Personal Experiences with Public Services

This Section examines citizens' personal experiences with public services. It begins with an overview of public services used by respondents. Public service usage refers to services that are fully or partly provided by national, regional, or local authorities and that were used in the past 12 months either by the respondent or by a close family member.

As shown in **Figure 6**, nearly three quarters of respondents report having visited a general practitioner or family doctor, and around half report having used a public hospital. These health services are by far the most used public services. Other services are used by smaller shares of the population, although a sizeable minority reports using other health services, such as public mental health services, as well as education services, including public schools and public universities. These patterns are broadly in line with expectations, reflecting the widespread need for healthcare and education across the life course.

Figure 6. Public Services Used During the Last Year



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: Based on affirmative responses (yes/no) on the multi-option question 'Which of the following public services (fully or partially provided by national, regional and/or local authorities) have you or your closest family used during the past 12 months? Please tick ALL that apply.', with the following being shown in the figure, which were presented in a randomized order.

While the general pattern in public service use shown in **Figure 6** is similar across countries, there are also some noteworthy differences. For the most commonly used service, visiting general practitioners, Belgium reports the highest usage, with more than 80 percent of respondents indicating a visit in the past 12 months, followed by France, Italy, and Poland at around 75 percent. By contrast, reported use is lower in Switzerland and Portugal, at around 65 percent, and lowest in Ireland, where just over half of respondents report visiting a general practitioner.

Patterns differ for the use of public hospitals. Hospital use is the highest in Portugal, at over 60 percent, and in Ireland, at around 55 percent. The lowest levels of hospital use are observed in Germany and Switzerland, where fewer than 40 percent of respondents report using public hospital services. When considering overall use of health services, including general practitioners, public hospitals, and public mental health services, Belgium consistently ranks among the countries with the highest usage across all service types, while Germany ranks among those with the lowest.

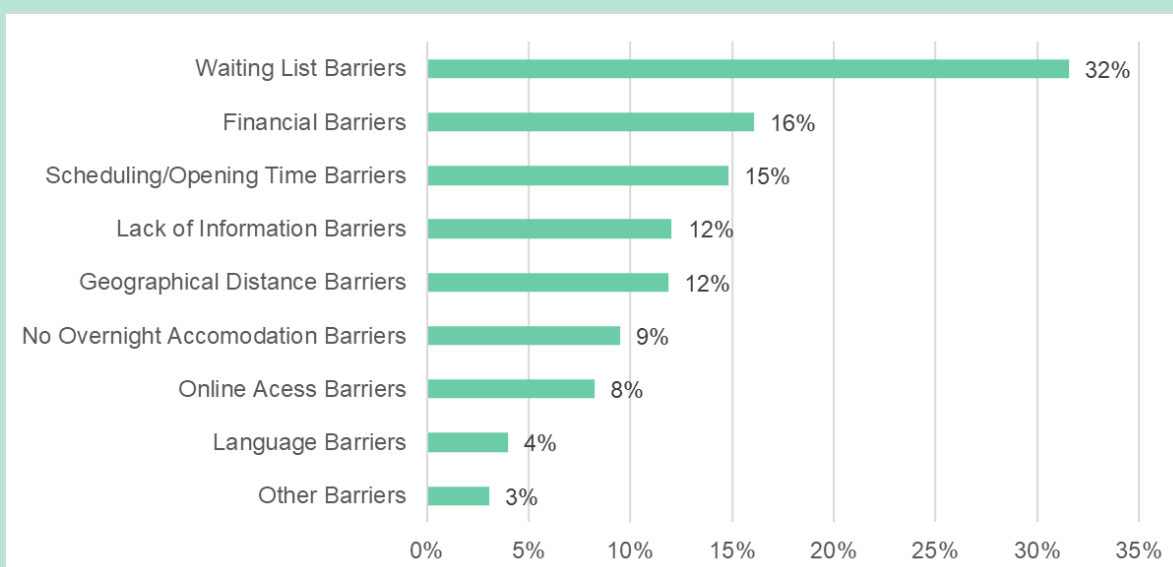
For public services outside the health domain, Ireland and Portugal show comparatively high usage rates for public schools, public universities, elderly care, childcare, and employment services. In contrast, Italy and Switzerland report among the lowest usage rates for elderly care, childcare, employment services, and social housing. While cross-national differences are generally smaller for these less frequently used services, social housing represents an exception. In Ireland, nearly 15 percent of respondents report use of social housing, compared with around 8 percent in France, the country with the second-highest reported usage.

Overall, the dominant pattern across countries is that most respondents use healthcare services, either through general practitioners or public hospitals, while a substantial minority use education services, particularly primary and secondary schooling. Other public services are typically used by around 10 percent or fewer respondents.

Importantly, simply having used a service does not mean it was outright easy to do so. Accordingly, we should **shed light on the challenges that people experienced in accessing public services**. As **Figure 7** shows, a third of respondents that used a public service in the past

12 months faced waiting time barriers (32 percent). Beyond this hurdle in accessing public services, around 15 percent of respondents also indicated that they experienced financial barriers or scheduling/opening time barriers. While these figures might suggest that access barriers are relatively common among service users, a substantial share of respondents report no such difficulties. Approximately 40 percent of respondents indicate that they did not experience any barriers when accessing public services.

Figure 7. Challenges in Accessing Public Services



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: Based on affirmative responses (yes/no) on the multi-option question 'When thinking back to the service(s) you have used, did you experience challenges in access for any of the following reasons? Please tick ALL that apply.', with the following being shown in the figure, which were presented in a randomized order.

Experiences of access barriers vary substantially across countries. For waiting times, which constitute the most frequently reported barrier, higher shares of service users in Belgium and Ireland report difficulties, at around 38 percent in both countries, compared with approximately 32 percent in most other countries. Switzerland stands out at the lower end, where only 17 percent of service users report waiting time barriers.

Cross-national differences are also evident for barriers related to digital access. More than 10 percent of service users in Ireland, Poland, and Portugal report difficulties accessing public services online, compared with around 5 percent in Switzerland and Italy. A similar pattern emerges for geographical distance. Only 6 to 7 percent of service users in Belgium and Switzerland report distance as a barrier, whereas this share exceeds 15 percent in France, Portugal, and Ireland.

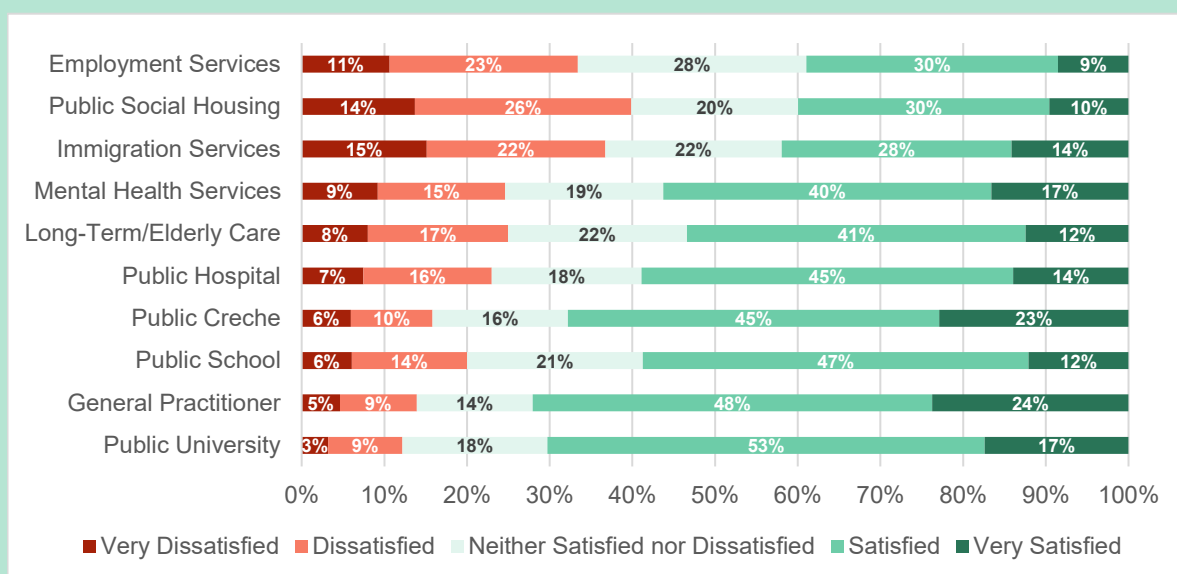
Some access barriers are particularly country specific. In Italy, nearly 30 percent of respondents who used public services report difficulties related to a lack of overnight accommodation, which is roughly double the share observed in the countries with the next highest levels, Ireland and Poland, where around 13 percent report this issue. Overall, Switzerland is among the countries where respondents report the fewest access barriers, although financial barriers are a notable exception, affecting 18 percent of service users.

Finally, it is noteworthy that Portugal and Ireland, the two countries with the highest levels of public service usage, also report relatively high levels of access barriers. This suggests that higher reliance on public services may coincide with greater exposure to access constraints.

Having outlined the various public services that have been used by the respondents in the INVOLVE survey, **the next question is how satisfied people were with the service(s) that they received.** Figure 8 shows the level of satisfaction with the services provided. Overall, people were **more likely to indicate that they evaluated the service as satisfactory than dissatisfactory.** This notably contrasts with the more mixed evaluations of public policies and services at the general level, as shown in Figure 2. When focusing on direct service experiences, respondents report the highest levels of satisfaction with contacts with general practitioners or family doctors, where 72 percent indicate being satisfied or extremely satisfied. High levels of satisfaction are also reported for public universities, at 70 percent, and public childcare services, at 68 percent.

By contrast, several services receive less favorable evaluations. Public social housing is the most negatively evaluated service, with 39 percent of users reporting dissatisfaction or extreme dissatisfaction. This is followed by employment and labor market integration services, at 34 percent dissatisfied, and immigration services, at 31 percent. Overall, **services that are more often used by socio-economically vulnerable groups**, particularly those related to employment support, housing, and immigration, **tend to receive fewer positive evaluations than more universally used services.**

Figure 8. Outcome Satisfaction with Public Services Used



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: Based on responses on a 5-point Likert scale to 'You indicated to have used the following public services. How (dis)satisfied were you in general with the service provided?'.

These findings should be interpreted with caution when examining cross-country differences. If one considers average evaluations of each public service by country on a scale from 0 to 5, respondents in Italy, Portugal, and France consistently provide lower ratings across most services. By contrast, respondents in Belgium tend to evaluate public services more positively than those in other countries, with the notable exception of social housing. Indeed, Belgium is the only country where average satisfaction scores exceed 4, indicating clear satisfaction, for several services, including general practitioners, hospitals, public universities, and childcare services. Switzerland also shows relatively positive evaluations overall, although employment services constitute an exception.

Among the services receiving lower evaluations, employment services are rated particularly poorly in Italy, with an average score of around 2.5. Social housing receives comparatively low

(ratings in Belgium and Poland, with average scores of approximately 2.65, while immigration services are evaluated less favorably in France, Portugal, and Italy, with average scores around 2.75. Even for these services, however, the average evaluations more often reflect ambivalence than outright dissatisfaction.

In summary, these descriptive patterns indicate that respondents are generally satisfied with the public services they use, especially those that are more commonly used. For services primarily targeted at socio-economically vulnerable groups, evaluations tend to be less positive, but they do not indicate widespread dissatisfaction either.

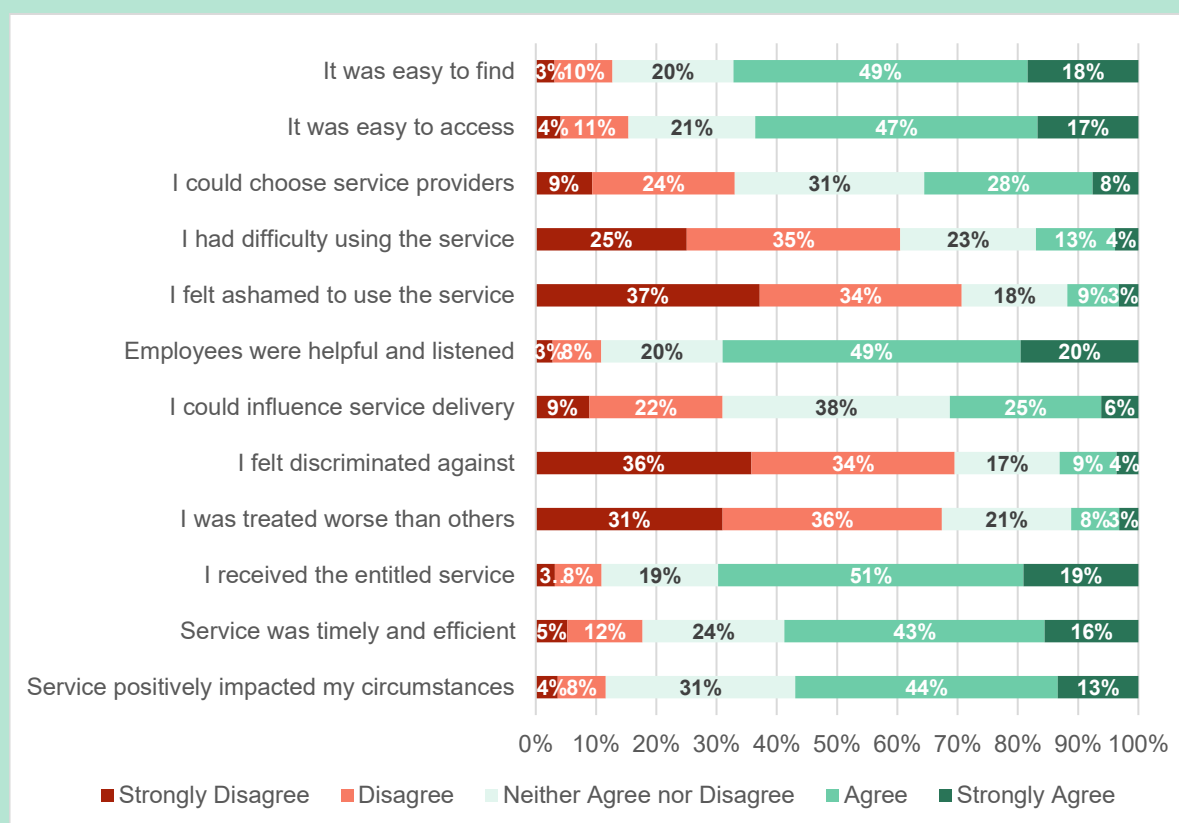
As important as it is to understand how (dis)satisfied people ultimately are with the outcome of public services that they receive, **it is also vital to understand how people felt like they were treated throughout the process of using public services.** It is at this point that public services can theoretically play a role in enabling citizens to expand their capacities and develop their capabilities. To examine how citizens experienced their interactions with public services, respondents were presented with a set of statements capturing different aspects of the service process, inspired by the receiver-doer-judge framework. Levels of agreement with these statements are shown in **Figure 9.**

Figure 9 shows that around two-thirds of respondents indicate that they found it easy to locate and access the public services they used. When asked whether they experienced difficulties in understanding how to use public services or felt ashamed to use them, a clear majority disagreed with these statements. Around 60 percent reported no difficulties with understanding how services worked, and roughly 70 percent indicated that they did not feel ashamed to use public services. Hence, these findings suggest that most respondents experience public services as approachable.

In addition, around 70 percent of respondents report that public service employees listened to them and were helpful. A similarly large share indicates that they did not feel treated worse than others or discriminated against. These results point to generally positive perceptions of procedural fairness and respectful treatment. By contrast, responses are more evenly divided when it comes to influence and choice. Roughly equal shares of respondents agree and disagree with the statement that they were able to influence how services were delivered, at around 31 percent each. A similar pattern is observed for the perceived choice of provider, with approximately 35 percent indicating that they had such a choice. Despite this, a clear majority, around 70 percent, agree that they received the services they were entitled to. Slightly smaller shares also agree that services were delivered in a timely and efficient manner and that they had a positive impact on their personal circumstances. **Overall, respondents tend to report satisfaction with service access and respectful treatment, while perceptions of choice and influence are more mixed.**

These experiences vary considerably across countries (analyses not reported). Respondents in Belgium most frequently report ease of access, with around 75 to 80 percent indicating that they found services easy to locate and use. In contrast, only around 55 percent of respondents in Poland and Italy report similar levels of ease of access. Feelings of confidence and comfort in using public services also differ across countries. In Belgium and Germany, around three quarters of respondents report not feeling ashamed and not experiencing difficulties understanding how services work. In Ireland, Poland, and Italy, this share is closer to half of the respondents.

Figure 9. Procedural Experiences with Public Services Used



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: Based on responses on a 5-point Likert scale to the question 'When thinking back to the service(s) you have used, to what degree would you agree with these statements?', with the statements being shown, with the presented order being randomized.

Perceptions of responsiveness also show notable cross-national variation. In Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, and France, around 75 to 80 percent of respondents indicate that public service employees listened to them and were helpful. In Poland and Italy, this share is substantially lower, at around 55 percent. In Italy, nearly half of the respondents disagree with the statement that they could influence how services were delivered, a higher share than in other countries, where disagreement typically ranges between 25 and 35 percent. Similarly, more than 70 percent of respondents in Belgium, France, Germany, and Switzerland report not feeling treated worse than others or discriminated against, compared with around 60 percent in Ireland, Poland, Italy, and Portugal. Finally, outcome-related perceptions also differ across countries. In Belgium, Switzerland, and Germany, around 70 percent of respondents indicate that receiving the service had a positive impact on their circumstances, that they received what they were entitled to, and that services were delivered in a timely and efficient manner. In Italy, Portugal, and Poland, only around half of respondents report that service use had a positive impact. Overall, respondents of Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, and to a lesser extent France, tend to report more positive, accessible, and respectful service experiences. Italy, Poland, Portugal, and in some respects, Ireland have lower levels of ease of access, weaker perceptions of responsiveness, and less positive assessments of service impact.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that most citizens have direct or indirect experience with public services, most commonly in the health domain, while only a small minority report no service use in the past 12 months. From the perspective of the receiver dimension, public services generally

(succeed in providing support. Most respondents report receiving the services to which they were entitled, and outcome satisfaction is relatively high for widely used services. At the same time, access is not frictionless. While around 40 percent report no access barriers, a substantial share of service users encounter waiting time barriers, as well as financial, scheduling, or information-related difficulties. These barriers are particularly salient for services that are crucial for people in vulnerable situations. Moreover, most respondents experience public service interactions as respectful and fair. A clear majority report that public service staff listened to them, treated them respectfully, and did not discriminate against them. These experiences suggest that public services often acknowledge citizens' capacity to evaluate their own situations and to be treated as legitimate users of public provision. By contrast, the doer and judge dimensions are less strongly reflected in citizens' experiences. Fewer respondents feel that they had meaningful choice over service providers or influence over how services were delivered. While services are generally perceived as supportive and fair, they are less often experienced as enabling citizens to actively shape service provision or exercise agency within the service process.

Taken together, these findings suggest that public services are most strongly experienced as supporting citizens as receivers, while offering more limited opportunities for citizens to act as doers and judges within public service encounters.

3.1.3. Political Support and Political Participation

A central motivation for examining citizens' experiences with public services lies in their theoretical connection to democratic inputs. Before assessing how personal service experiences relate to democratic inputs, however, it is important to establish baseline levels of political support and political participation. This Section therefore describes how citizens evaluate their political system and the extent to which they engage in activities that express political demands.

Specifically, the analysis examines levels of trust in political institutions, satisfaction with the functioning of democracy, engagement with institutional forms of political participation, and participation in non-institutional political activities.

We first start by looking at how much trust people say they have in various political institutions. As shown in Figure 10, more than half of respondents, around 55 percent, report having little or no trust in politicians and political parties, while fewer than 30 percent indicate having much or complete trust in these actors. At the other end of the spectrum, nearly half of respondents, between 45 and 50 percent, report having much or complete trust in civil services and local governing authorities. At the same time, slightly over 30 percent report having little or no trust in these institutions.

Trust in national-level political institutions falls between these two patterns. For national parliaments and national governments, similar shares of respondents report low trust and high trust. Around 40 to 45 percent indicate little or no trust, while approximately 35 to 40 percent report having much or complete trust. These patterns of political support are mirrored in **evaluations of satisfaction with democracy**, where respondents are divided into three similarly sized groups, with the share expressing dissatisfaction being slightly larger than the other groups.

Overall, this shows that people **are more trusting of institutions that are closer to them (local governments and public service employees) and less trusting of more personalized national political actors (political parties and politicians).**

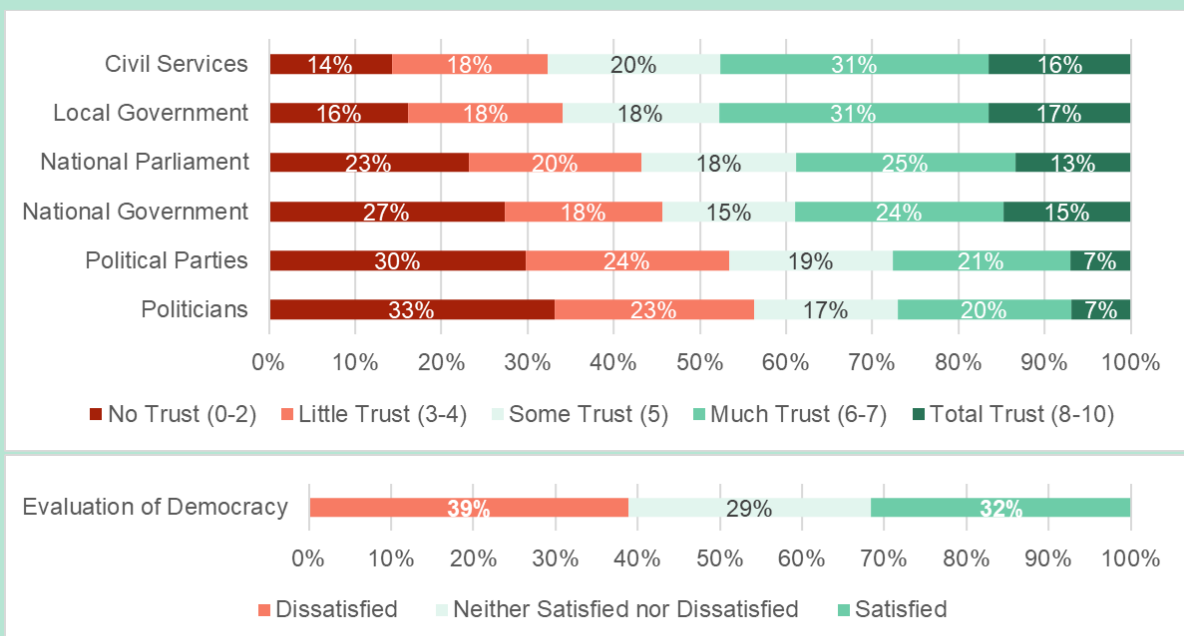
While differences in trust across types of institutions are broadly consistent across countries, there are notable cross-national differences in overall levels of political trust (analyses not reported). For institutions that are closer to citizens' daily lives, namely local authorities and civil services, a clear majority of respondents in Ireland report having much or complete trust, at around 60 percent.

In Belgium, Switzerland, and France, this share is closer to half of respondents, while in Italy, Poland, and Portugal it falls to around 40 percent.

A similar pattern emerges for trust in national political institutions. In Ireland and Switzerland, more than half of the respondents indicate having much or complete trust in their national government and parliament. By contrast, only around 30 percent of respondents in France, Italy, and Poland report similarly high levels of trust in these institutions. Trust in politicians and political parties follows the same cross-national pattern too, being about 10 percentage points lower than trust in other institutions.

When taking a step back and examining the level of trust across institutions per country, a clear contrast can be spotted between high trust countries (Ireland, Switzerland, and to a lesser extent Belgium) and low trust countries (Italy, Poland, and France).

Figure 10. Trust in Various Political Institutions and Levels of Satisfaction with Democracy



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

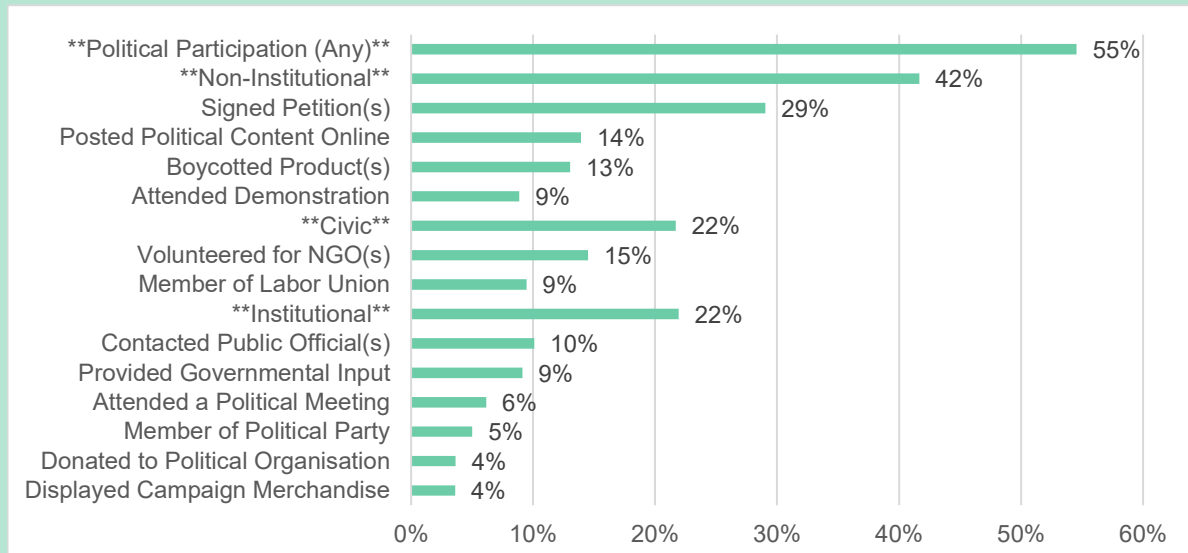
Note: (Top figure) Based on responses on an 11-point scale to the question 'On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'not at all' and 10 is 'completely', how much do you personally trust each of the following institutions?', with the institutions being the one shown in the figure, which were presented in a randomized order. (Bottom figure) Based on the same battery as shown in Figure 2.

While people differ with regards to how much political support they have, both trusters and distrusters can express their preferences and frustrations within a democracy by engaging in an activity that expresses their political demands. This is just as important as political support, as policymakers and democratic actors seek to act on the demands and preferences of citizens, meaning it is vital that citizens express themselves. Hence, to understand democratic inputs, we should also examine political participation.

Figure 11 shows the percentage of people that indicated that they engaged in an activity to express their political demands, with activities grouped by their type. Overall, respondents **most frequently engage in non-institutional forms of participation**. Signing petitions is by far the most common activity, followed by volunteering for non-profit organizations, sharing or posting political content online, and boycotting products for political reasons. By contrast, institutionalized

forms of participation are the least common. These include displaying campaign material, donating to political organizations, and membership in political parties. Attendance at meetings of trade unions, political parties, or action groups is also relatively uncommon.

Figure 11. Political Participation via Various Activities



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: Based on affirmative responses (yes/no) to the question 'There are different ways of getting involved in politics. Over the last 12 months, have you done any of the following activities? Please tick ALL that apply.' with the activities being the ones listed, which were presented in a randomized order. All activities with Non-Inst. in front are non-institutionalized modes of political participation, while Inst. refers to institutionalized activities, and Civ. denoting civic participation.

This pattern holds across countries. In every surveyed country, a larger share of respondents report engaging in non-institutional activities, with around 42% having participated in at least one such activity, compared to 22% who engaged in institutional or civic activities. Signing petitions is the most common activity in every country, with particularly high participation rates in Switzerland and Germany, at around 33 percent. Boycotting products is more prevalent in Switzerland, Germany, France, and Ireland, where between 15 and 18 percent of the respondents report doing so. Posting or sharing political content online is notably more common in Ireland, Poland, and Portugal, with participation rates between 15 and 20 percent.

Institutional participation varies more strongly across countries. Ireland stands out with relatively high levels of institutional participation, at around 33 percent, compared with substantially lower levels in Germany, at around 16 percent, and Italy, at approximately 14 percent. This difference is largely driven by higher rates of contacting public officials in Ireland, reported by around 18 percent of respondents, compared with roughly 10 percent elsewhere.

Civic participation also shows marked cross-national variation. Belgium reports particularly high levels, at around 33 percent, which is closely linked to higher rates of trade union membership. Volunteering for non-profit organizations is also relatively common in Belgium, at around 17 percent, with similarly high levels observed in France and Ireland. By contrast, Poland and Portugal report the lowest levels of civic participation, at around 14 and 15 percent respectively, reflecting comparatively low rates of both union membership and volunteering.

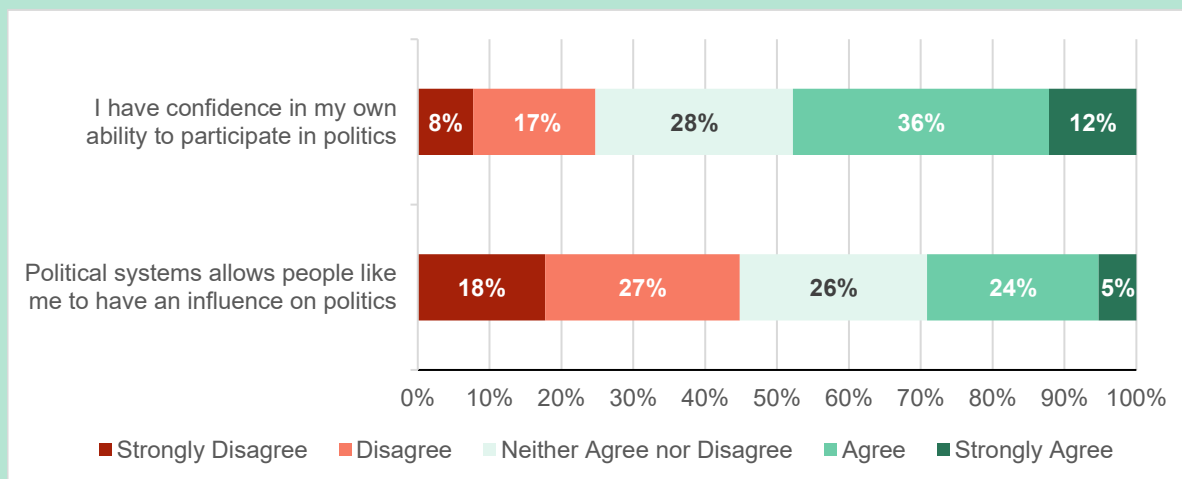
Overall, the share of respondents who report engaging in at least one form of political participation is highest in Ireland and Switzerland, at around 60 percent, and lowest in Italy, at approximately 43 percent.

Auxiliary to political participation is **how much people think that they can and are allowed to politically participate**. Figure 12 shows the percentage of people who believe that they can participate and the percentage of the people that believe that the political system is responsive to their demands when they participate. As the Figure shows, almost half of the respondents indicated that they have confidence in their own ability to politically participate, with around a quarter indicating that they do not have such confidence. A much larger share of people, however, does disagree with the statement that the political system allows them to have an influence. Hence, few people believe that they lack the ability to politically participate, but only a few also believe the system allows them to have a voice.

There are important differences between countries in terms of how much people think they can and are allowed to participate. The highest levels of internal political efficacy are observed in Switzerland, where around 60 percent of respondents report confidence in their own ability to participate in politics. This is followed by Ireland and Portugal, where approximately 52 to 53 percent express similar confidence.

Perceptions of external political efficacy show a somewhat different pattern. Nearly half of respondents in Switzerland, around 50 percent, believe that the political system allows people like them to have influence. This share is also relatively high in Ireland, at around 40 percent, but notably lower in Portugal, at approximately 25 percent. At the other end of the spectrum, only around one third of respondents in Italy report confidence in their own ability to participate, which is substantially lower than in the next lowest country, France, at around 40 percent. In both Italy and France, a sizeable majority, close to 60 percent, disagree with the statement that the political system allows people like them to influence politics.

Figure 12. Perceptions of Internal and External Political Efficacy



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

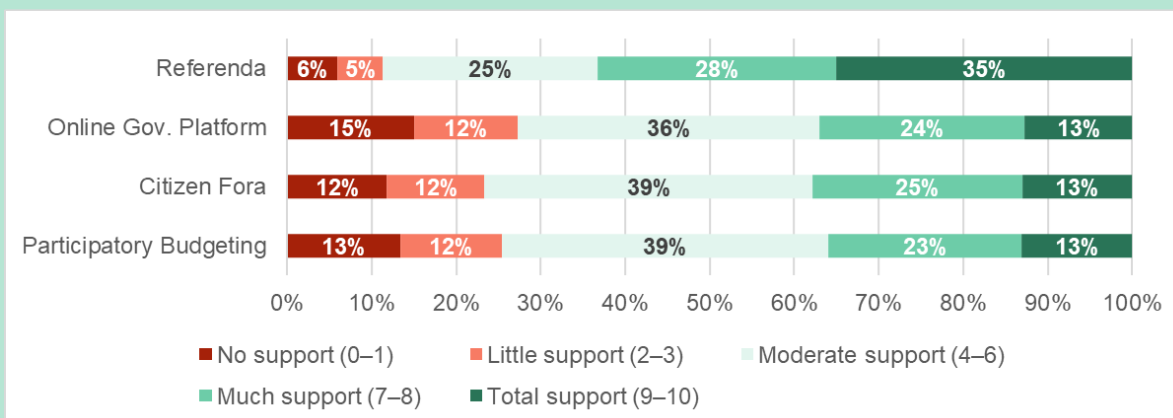
Note: Based on responses on a 5-point Likert scale to the question 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?' (V020), with the statements being shown, with the presented order being randomized.

Importantly, these descriptives relate to existing structures of political systems, with well-established opportunities to express political preferences and demands. **However, democracies are not static** and can adapt to allow for novel ways of political participation. To understand how

likely people are to engage in novel ways to politically participate, **Figure 13** visualizes support for **four potential democratic innovations** that governments can seek to implement. Specifically, these innovations are voting in a binding referendum about important national issues, sharing thoughts and proposals through digital government platforms, participating in a citizen forum of randomly selected citizens to formulate policy recommendations, and participating in participatory budgeting to discuss spending allocations. Respondents could indicate on a scale from 0 to 10 how likely they were to participate via these innovations if they were to be implemented. The responses were recoded to reflect no support (0-1), little support (2-3), moderate support (4-6), much support (7-8), and total support (9-10) for the specified democratic innovation.

Figure 13 indicates that referenda receive substantially more support from citizens than other forms of democratic innovations. In total, 63% of respondents indicate that they would be willing to vote in a binding referendum. This contrasts with support levels of around 35-40% for the other participatory instruments, such as citizens' assemblies or deliberative forums. Notably, referenda are the only innovation for which the largest group of respondents expresses total support, at 35%, whereas responses to the other instruments are more often characterized by moderate or ambivalent support. Nonetheless, despite not enjoying the same level of popularity of referenda, the share of people indicating support for these measures is larger than those who largely would not engage with these innovations. At the same time, expressed willingness to participate should not be equated with actual participation. As shown elsewhere in the report, positive attitudes toward participation do not automatically translate into behavior.

Figure 13. Support for Democratic Innovations



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: Based on responses on a 11-point scale to the question 'Countries are exploring innovations to give citizens more influence in politics. On a scale from 0 'certain not to participate' to 10 'certain to participate', how likely are you to participate in each of the following if implemented?', with the statements being shown with respective information boxes, with the presented order being randomized.

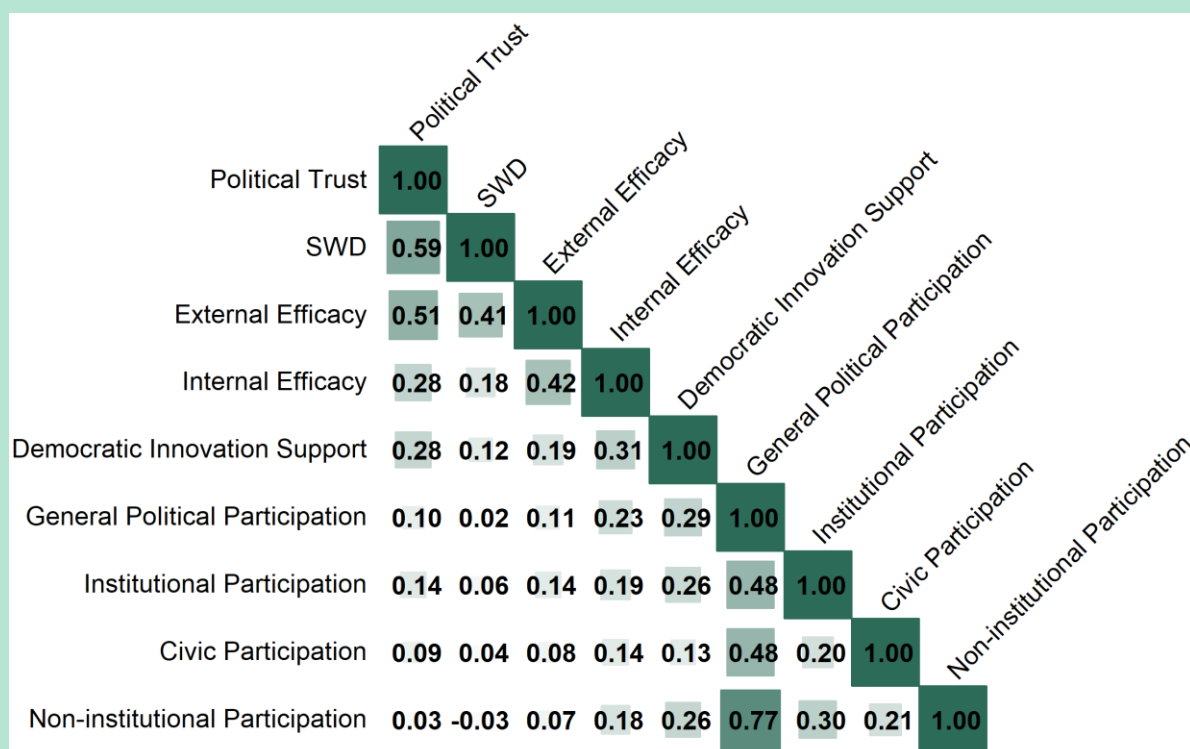
These overall distributions mask meaningful **differences between countries**. Across all forms of democratic innovations, support is consistently the highest in Portugal. 50% or more of the Portuguese respondents express strong or total support for each instrument. Ireland and Poland also show relatively high levels of support, though with different emphases. Ireland follows Portugal most closely in its support for citizens' forums and online government participation platforms, while Poland stands out for its comparatively strong support for participatory budgeting.

The least support for innovations is found in Belgium, where less than 30% of people have much or total support for the innovations which are not referenda. Germany is the only country where support for referenda falls below 55%, while Belgium is the only other case where support

remains below 60%. Switzerland also shows relatively low and consistent support for democratic innovations beyond referenda. France and Italy occupy a middle position, with neither particularly high nor particularly low levels of support across the different forms of democratic innovation.

Lastly, **it is important to understand how these responses**, providing insight into citizens' democratic inputs, **are related to each other**. Figure 14 presents the strength of association between measures of political support, political efficacy, and political participation. These associations indicate how strongly two indicators tend to move together, but they do not imply that one causes the other.

Figure 14. How Political Support, Political Efficacy, and Political Participation are Related



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: Estimates reported are Pearson's correlation coefficients. Political trust is measured using the mean score for trust in the national government, national parliament, political parties, and politicians on a scale from 0 (no trust) to 10 (total trust); SWD (Satisfaction with Democracy) is measured using the single item 'how satisfied are you with the current state for each of the following in [country]?... The state of democracy', on a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) Likert scale; External efficacy is measured using (dis)agreement on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with the single item 'the political system allows people like me to have an influence on politics', and internal efficacy with the item 'I have confidence in my own ability to participate in politics'; Democratic innovation support is measured using the mean score for willingness to use the innovation if implemented in their country on a scale from 0 (certain not to participate) to 10 (certain to participate), with the innovations being citizens fora, a government online platform, referenda, and participatory budgeting, institutional participation, civic participation, and non-institutional participated are measured using an if-then logic, where use of one activity kind (institutional, civic, or non-institutions) counts towards having engaged politically in that manner, where a score of 1 means participation in that manner, and 0 an absence of participation in that manner.

As expected, there is a strong association between the two indicators of political support, namely political trust and satisfaction with democracy. Both of these indicators are also strongly associated with external political efficacy, which captures the extent to which citizens believe that the political

(system allows people like them to have an influence. This suggests that people who view political institutions more positively are also more likely to believe that the system is responsive.

By contrast, the relationship between political support and internal political efficacy, which reflects individuals' confidence in their own ability to participate in politics, is notably weaker. This holds even though internal and external political efficacy are themselves positively related. Associations between political support and political participation are weaker still, and in some cases statistically negligible. The strongest association with participation, although still modest in size, is observed for internal political efficacy. Political trust and external efficacy show only weak associations with institutional participation.

Taken together, these patterns highlight that political support, political efficacy, and political participation are related but distinct components of democratic inputs. Positive evaluations of political institutions and beliefs about system responsiveness do not automatically translate into higher levels of political participation. Similarly, feeling capable of participating does not guarantee that individuals will actually do so.

3.2. Relationship of Democratic Inputs with Perceptions of Public Policies and Experiences with Public Services

The previous Section described levels of political support and political participation, as well as citizens' general perceptions of public policies and their personal experiences with public services based on the INVOLVE survey. Overall, the findings showed that respondents were generally positive about the support they received and the fairness of treatment during service interactions, while views were more mixed regarding the extent to which public services enabled choice and influence.

This Section moves beyond descriptive trends and examines how these perceptions and experiences are related to democratic inputs. Specifically, it analyzes the associations between, on the one hand, general evaluations of public policies and personal experiences with public services, and on the other hand political trust and political participation. The focus is on bivariate relationships, meaning that the analysis considers how pairs of variables are related, without accounting for additional factors that may also shape these relationships. **This is achieved by using LOESS lines (Locally Estimated Scatterplot Smoothing) which visualize the relationship between two variables without imposing a linear line.** This enables an examination of non-linear and gradually shifting patterns, in turn providing richer insights into the nature of relationships.

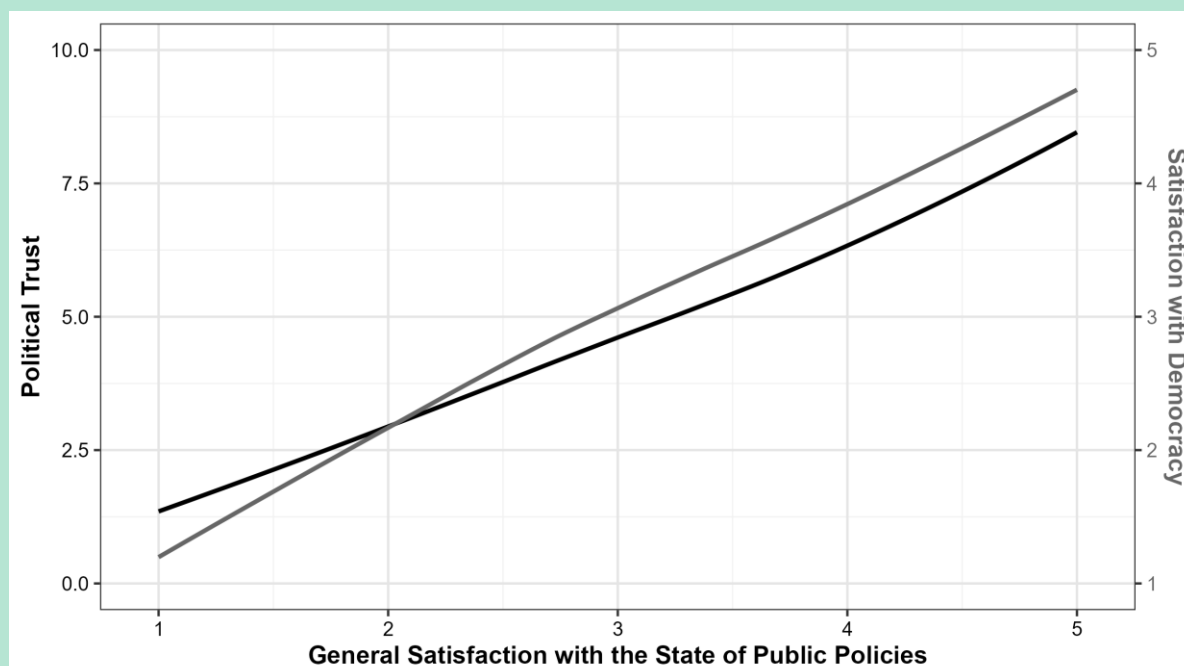
The Section proceeds in two steps. First, it examines how political support and political participation relate to citizens' general perceptions of public policies. Second, it analyzes how these democratic inputs are associated with individuals' experiences of using public services. It is important to note that these two parts rely on different samples. While perceptions of public policies are measured among all respondents and are representative at the country level, analyses of service experiences are limited to respondents who reported having used a public service in the past 12 months.

3.2.1. Democratic Inputs and Perceptions of Public Policies

Figure 15 visualizes the relationship between citizens' general satisfaction with public policies and their level of political support using LOESS lines. General satisfaction with public policies is measured using a composite indicator that summarizes respondents' evaluations of the current state of several policy domains, including education, healthcare, the economy, employment services, access to housing, and public services overall. Responses to these items are recorded on a five-point scale ranging from extremely dissatisfied to extremely satisfied and are combined into a mean score.

Political support is captured using two indicators. The first is political trust, measured as the average level of trust respondents report in political institutions, including the national government, the national parliament, political parties, and politicians, on a scale from 0 to 10. The second indicator is satisfaction with democracy, measured using respondents' overall evaluation of how democracy works in their country, on a 1-to-5-point scale.

Figure 15. How Satisfaction with Public Policies Relates to Political Support



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

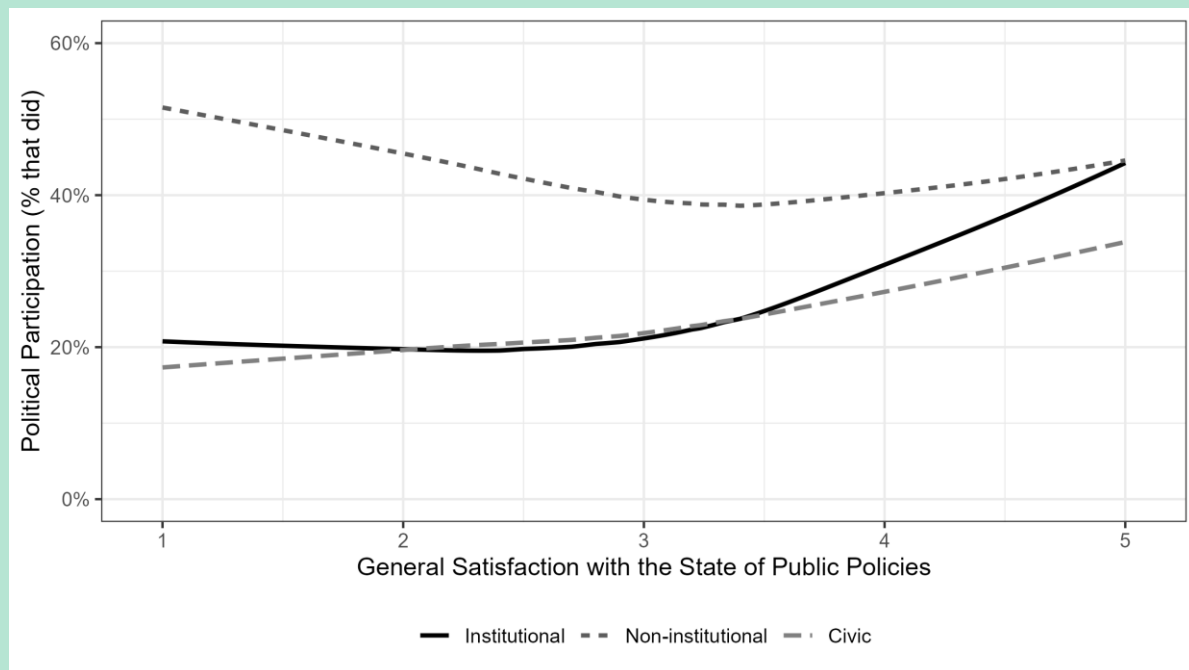
Note: The Pearson correlation coefficient indicates that the association is positive and strong for political trust ($r = 0.56$, $p < .001$, $N = 11,985$) and satisfaction with democracy ($r = 0.62$, $p < .001$, $N = 11,902$). The Figure shows the average level of political trust (left-side axis) and satisfaction with democracy (right-side axis) for levels of general satisfaction with the state of public policy domains (average evaluation across domains shown in Figure 2 per person). The measure of political trust is based on the average of explicitly reported trust in the national government, national parliament, political parties, and politicians (shown in Figure 10).

The Figure shows a clear and largely linear association between general satisfaction with public policies and both indicators of political support. In simple terms, **respondents who express greater satisfaction with the state of public policies also tend to report higher levels of political trust and greater satisfaction with democracy**. Conversely, respondents who are very dissatisfied with public policies report notably low levels of political support. The Figure therefore illustrates how these variables move together across the population. It is important to stress how

this relationship should be interpreted. The Figure presents descriptive associations, not causal effects. This means that it does not show that improvements in public policy satisfaction directly lead to increases in political support. Rather, it shows that people who evaluate public policies more positively also tend to express greater political support. The association is slightly stronger for satisfaction with democracy than for political trust, which likely reflects the fact that respondents' general evaluations of how well their society functions influence both how they judge public policies and how they evaluate democracy more broadly.

Figure 16 moves on to political demands, by showing the relationship between the level of satisfaction with the current state of various public policy domains and political participation using LOESS lines. Political participation is measured retrospectively and grouped into institutional, civic, and non-institutional modes, with respondents coded as having participated if they reported engagement in at least one activity within each mode.

Figure 16. How Satisfaction with Public Policies Relates to Political Participation



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: The Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient indicates that the association is positive but weak for institutional participation ($p = 0.08$, $p < .001$, $N = 12,071$) and civic participation ($p = 0.07$, $p < .001$, $N = 12,071$), but negative though weak for non-institutional participation ($p = -0.06$, $p < .001$, $N = 12,071$). The Figure shows the average level of political participation for levels of general satisfaction with the state of public policy domains (average evaluation across domains shown in Figure 2 per person), capturing non-linear relationships. The measures of political participation are based on the percentage of people who reported having engaged in an institutionalized, non-institutionalized, or civic participation activity (shown in Figure 11).

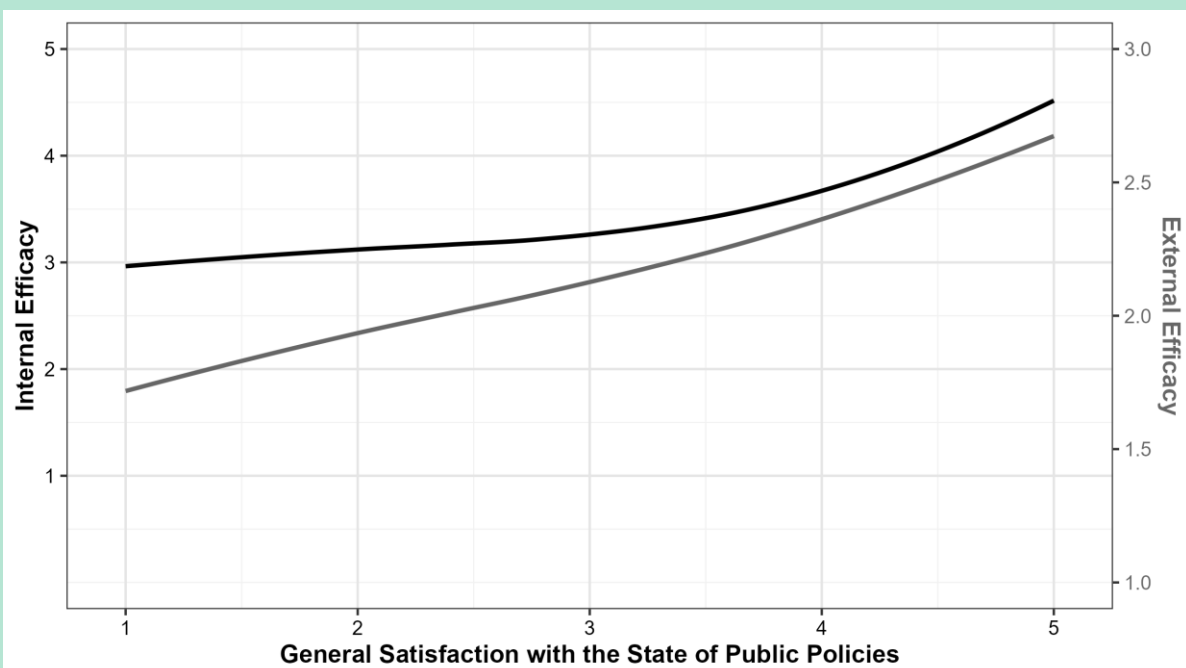
Contrary to political support, **the relationship between policy satisfaction and political participation is less straightforward**. For institutional participation, the Figure shows a small positive association. Respondents who report being very satisfied with public policies are somewhat more likely to engage in institutional activities, such as contacting officials or being active in political organizations. However, among respondents who are dissatisfied or moderately satisfied, levels of institutional participation differ little. For civic participation, a more linear positive relationship is visible, although the increase in participation as satisfaction rises is modest. By contrast, non-

institutional participation displays a non-linear pattern. High levels of engagement are observed both among respondents who are very dissatisfied and among those who are very satisfied, while respondents with moderate satisfaction report lower participation rates. This suggests that non-institutional participation may serve different functions, both as a channel for expressing dissatisfaction and as a form of engagement among politically involved and satisfied citizens.

Overall, these findings indicate that, unlike political support, political participation is only weakly and inconsistently related to general satisfaction with public policies. This underscores that participation does not simply increase as satisfaction rises, and that different forms of participation may reflect distinct motivations, including both endorsement of and dissatisfaction with public policy outcomes.

Figure 17 visualizes the relationship between satisfaction with the current state of public policies and political efficacy using LOESS lines. Satisfaction with public policies is measured using the composite indicator summarizing respondents' evaluations of several policy domains, while political efficacy is captured through two separate indicators. Internal political efficacy reflects respondents' confidence in their own ability to participate in politics, whereas external political efficacy captures their belief that the political system allows people like them to have an influence.

Figure 17. How Satisfaction with Public Policies Relates to Political Efficacy



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: The Pearson correlation coefficient indicates that the association is positive and weak for internal efficacy ($r = 0.18$, $p < .001$, $N = 11,888$) but stronger for external efficacy ($r = 0.37$, $p < .001$, $N = 11,928$). The Figure shows the average level of internal political efficacy (left-side axis) and external political efficacy (right-side axis) for levels of general satisfaction with the state of public policy domains (average evaluation across domains shown in Figure 2 per person). The measures of political efficacy are shown in Figure 12.

The Figure shows a clear positive association between satisfaction with public policies and both forms of political efficacy. Respondents who are more satisfied with the state of public policies tend to have higher confidence in their own ability to participate and stronger beliefs that the political system is responsive. This association is notably stronger for external political efficacy. At low levels of satisfaction with public policies, external efficacy is substantially lower than internal efficacy,

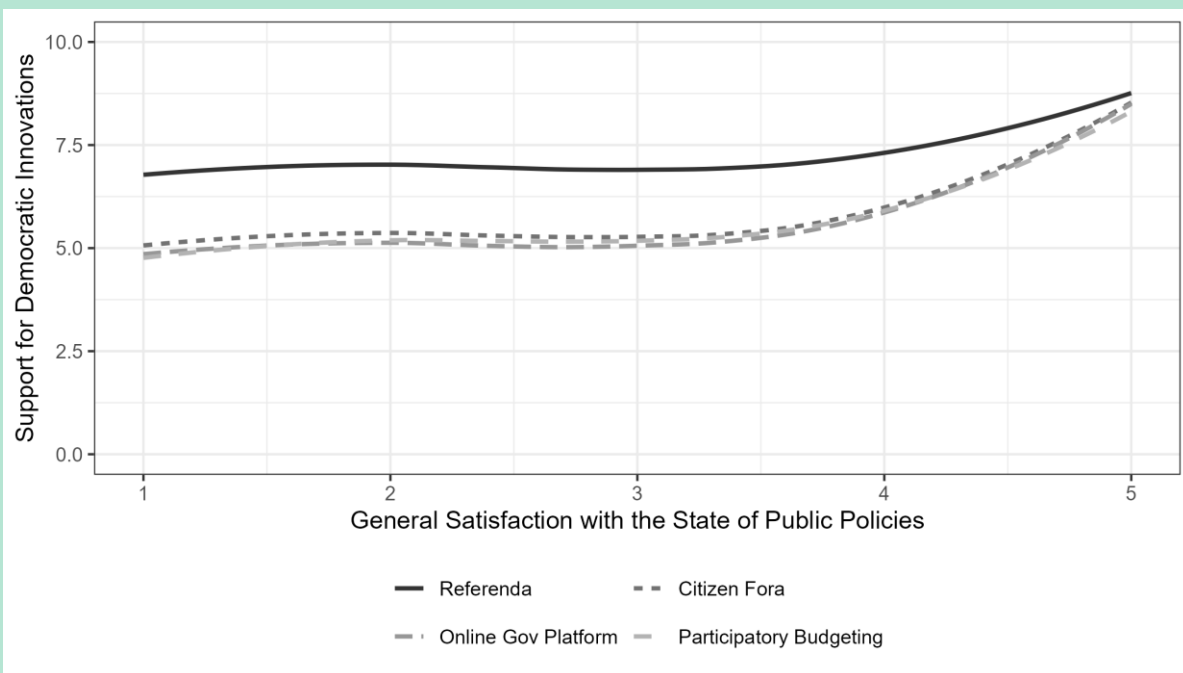
indicating that dissatisfaction is more strongly linked to doubts about system responsiveness than to doubts about one's own abilities.

As with the other figures in this Section, the relationship should be interpreted as descriptive rather than causal. The Figure shows that satisfaction with public policies and political efficacy tend to move together, but it does not indicate whether satisfaction leads to higher efficacy or vice versa.

Figure 18 visualizes the relationship between satisfaction with the current state of public policies and the willingness to engage in democratic innovations, using LOESS lines. Satisfaction with public policies is measured using the composite indicator used in the previous figures. The Figure covers four types of democratic innovation: the likelihood of engaging in binding referenda, citizens' forums, online government participation platforms, and participatory budgeting.

Overall, the same pattern emerges across the four selected innovations, with support for these innovations being higher amongst those who are also more satisfied. The Figure primarily highlights how willingness to engage in democratic innovations is higher when satisfaction with the state of public policies is higher, with the increase in support being greatest for those innovations which are not referenda. Yet, little differences can be discerned between grave dissatisfaction and being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Accordingly, it does not seem that willingness to engage with democratic innovations is greater nor lowest amongst those most dissatisfied. Rather, it is mainly amongst those who are more satisfied that support for innovations is higher.

Figure 18. How Satisfaction with Public Policies Relates to Support for Democratic Innovations



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: The Pearson correlation coefficient indicates that the association is positive but weak for support for participatory budgeting ($r = 0.09$, $p < .001$), online government platform ($r = 0.09$, $p < .001$), citizen fora ($r = 0.08$, $p < .001$), as well as referenda ($r = 0.04$, $p < .001$). The Figure shows the average level of willingness to engage in various democratic innovations should they be implemented for levels of general satisfaction with the state of public policy domains (average evaluation across domains shown in Figure 2 per person). The measure of support for democratic innovations is shown in Figure 13.

Here too, it is important to underscore that these are associations, not causal relationships. We can mainly conclude for which people support is the highest or lowest, but it is very well possible that

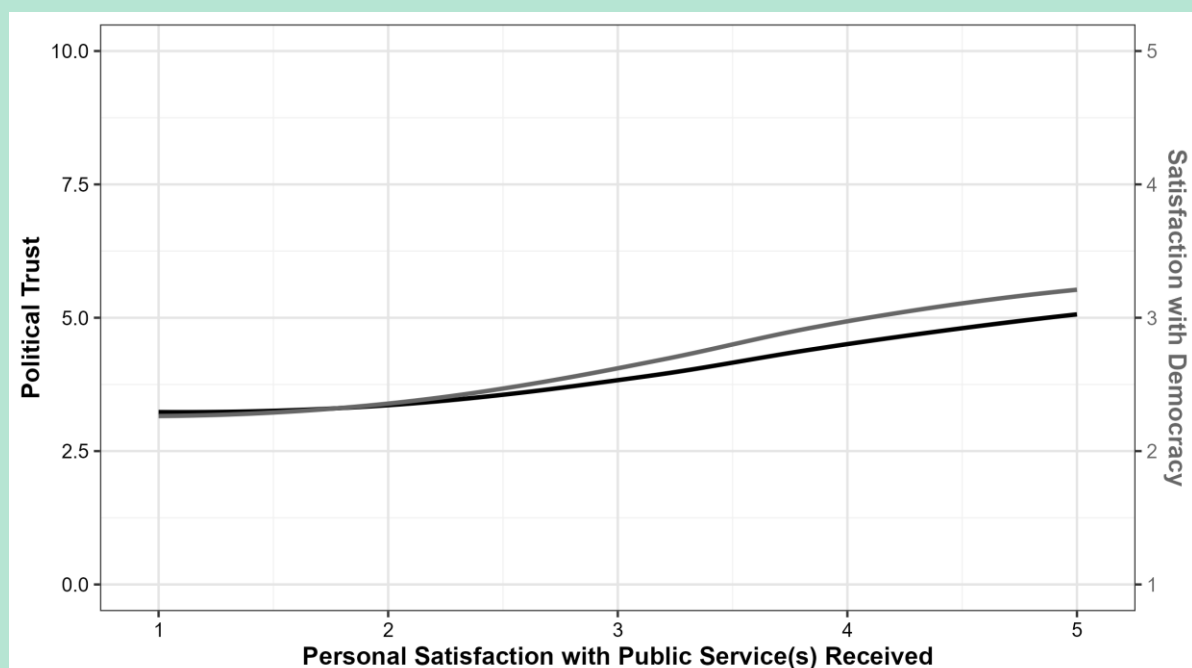
third factors explain the increase in both, such as general satisfaction with life or trust in other people.

3.2.2. Democratic Inputs and Individual Experiences with Public Services

In the previous Section, the analysis focused on how general satisfaction with public policy domains relates to democratic inputs. This Section **shifts attention to citizens' personal experiences with public services**, examining whether and how satisfaction with services is associated with political support and participation.

Figure 19 shows the relationship between **political support**, measured through political trust and satisfaction with democracy, and respondents' satisfaction with the public services they used during the 12 months preceding the survey, using LOESS lines. Satisfaction with public services is operationalized as the average level of satisfaction across all services reported as used by the respondent. This measure captures how positively individuals evaluate the outcomes of their direct encounters with public services, rather than their general views of public policies.

Figure 19. How Satisfaction with Public Services Relates to Political Support



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

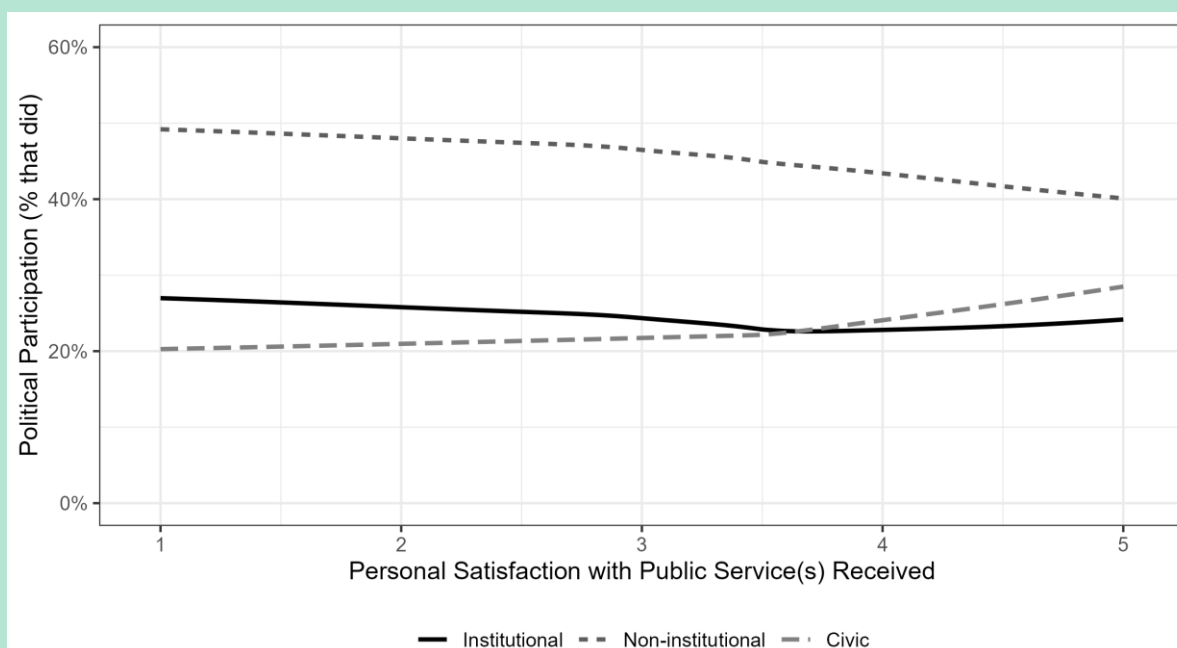
Note: The Pearson correlation coefficient indicates that the association is positive but weak for political trust ($r = 0.22$, $p < .001$, $N = 10,384$) and for satisfaction with democracy ($r = 0.25$, $p < .001$, $N = 10,311$). The Figure shows the average level of political trust (left-side axis) and satisfaction with democracy (right-side axis) for levels of personal satisfaction with public services used (average evaluation across services shown in Figure 8 per person). The measure of political trust is based on the average of explicitly reported trust in the national government, national parliament, political parties, and politicians (shown in Figure 10).

The Figure indicates a positive but moderate association between satisfaction with public services and political support. Respondents who report higher satisfaction with the services they used also tend to express higher levels of political trust and greater satisfaction with democracy.

However, this relationship is noticeably weaker than the association observed for general satisfaction with public policy domains. While personal service experiences matter for political support, broader evaluations of public policies are seemingly more strongly related to how citizens assess the political system as a whole.

Turning to **political participation**, **Figure 20** shows that – contrary to the expectations – there is **no clear relationship between personal satisfaction with public service experiences and political participation**. For institutional participation, respondents who are dissatisfied and those who are very satisfied with the public services reported to participate at similar rates. Overall, no meaningful association can be observed between satisfaction with public services and institutional participation.

Figure 20. How Satisfaction with Public Services Relates to Political Participation



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: The Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient indicates that the association is positive but weak for civic participation ($\rho = 0.08$, $p < .001$, $N = 10,442$), but negative though weak association for non-institutional participation ($\rho = -0.06$, $p < .001$, $N = 10,442$), and an insignificant association with institutional participation ($\rho = -0.01$, $p = .164$, $N = 10,442$). The Figure shows the average level of political participation for levels of personal satisfaction with public services used (average evaluation across services shown in Figure 8 per person), capturing non-linear relationships. The measures of political participation are based on the percentage of people who reported having engaged in an institutionalized, non-institutionalized, or civic participation activity (shown in Figure 11).

For non-institutional participation, a slight downward pattern emerges. Higher satisfaction with public services is associated with a somewhat lower likelihood of engaging in activities such as protests, petitions, or boycotts. However, this negative association is weak, indicating that satisfaction with service experiences explains only a small share of differences in non-institutional participation. Civic participation shows yet another pattern. Participation in civic activities is somewhat higher among respondents who report being satisfied with the services they used, while no clear relationship is observed at lower satisfaction levels.

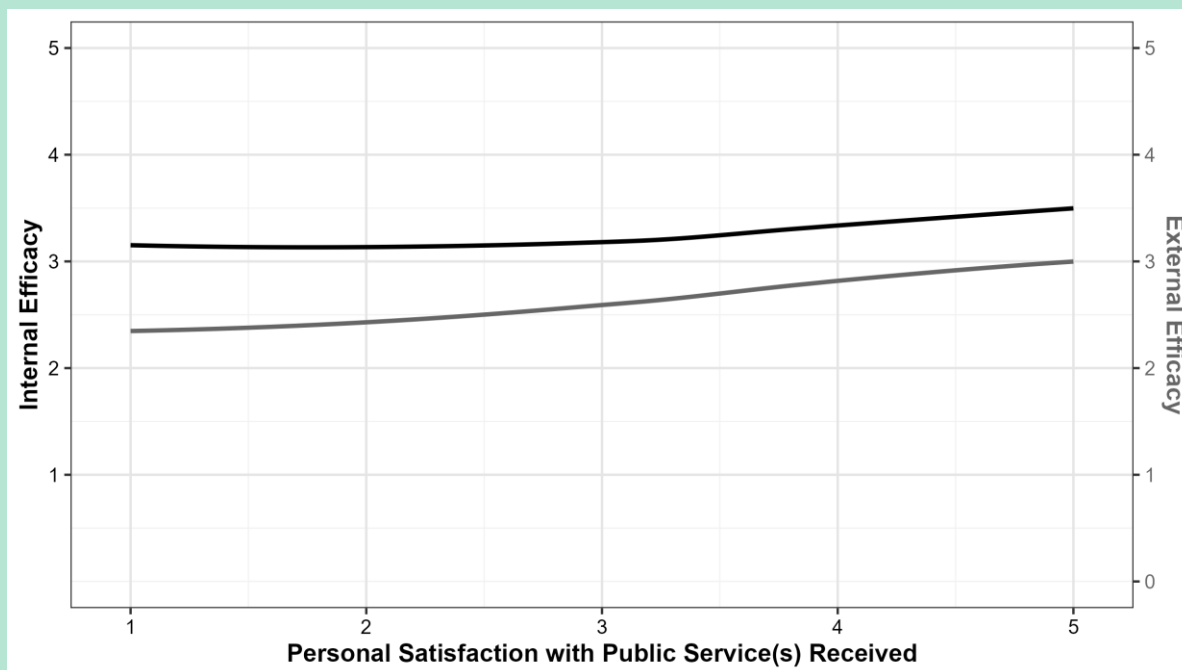
Figure 21 shows the **relationship between political efficacy and personal satisfaction with public services**, illustrating how service experiences relate to citizens' beliefs about their

capacity to participate politically. Overall, the association is positive but modest for both indicators of political efficacy, with the relationship being slightly stronger for external efficacy than for internal efficacy.

For internal political efficacy, which captures how confident people feel in their own ability to participate in politics, differences are small among respondents who are dissatisfied with the services they used. However, levels of internal efficacy increase gradually as satisfaction with public services rises. This indicates that people who are more satisfied with their personal service experiences are somewhat more likely to believe that they themselves can engage in political participation.

For external political efficacy, which reflects whether people believe that the political system allows individuals like them to have an influence, a similar but slightly stronger pattern is observed. Higher satisfaction with public services is associated with greater confidence that the political system is responsive. Hence, positive service experiences are linked to stronger beliefs about political participation, particularly regarding whether the system allows citizens to have a voice, even though the overall relationships remain moderate in size.

Figure 21. How Satisfaction with Public Services Relates to Political Efficacy



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: The Pearson correlation coefficient indicates that the association is positive but weak for internal efficacy ($r = 0.09$, $p < .001$, $N = 10,297$) and for external efficacy ($r = 0.15$, $p < .001$, $N = 10,336$). The Figure shows the average level of internal political efficacy (left-side axis) and external political efficacy (right-side axis) for levels of personal satisfaction with public services used (average evaluation across services shown in Figure 8 per person). The measure of political efficacy is shown in Figure 12.

Figure 22 shows the relationship between willingness to engage in various democratic innovations and personal satisfaction with public services used. Notably, the Figure illustrates the lack of relationship between the two, with the LOESS lines for all four innovations being largely flat across levels of personal satisfaction. Of the four innovations, only referenda reach the standard threshold of significance, with a very weak positive association due to slight incremental increases in the willingness to take part in referenda. Willingness to engage in an online government platform does have an association at a weaker threshold of significance, with the direction of the association being

negative. This can somewhat be observed in the Figure, with the highest levels of willingness to engage in innovations that are not referenda being slightly higher amongst people who are dissatisfied with the services they used. Nonetheless, these are all marginal differences, with there by and large not being a relationship to speak of.

Figure 22. How Satisfaction with Public Services Relates to Support for Democratic Innovations



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

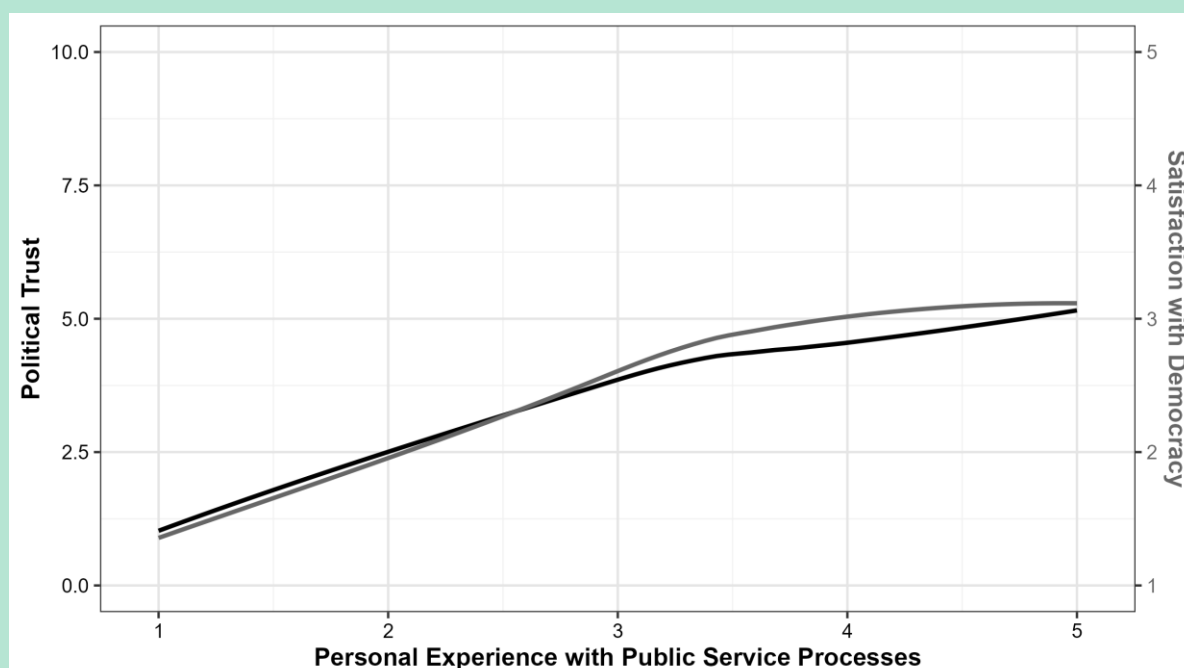
Note: The Pearson correlation coefficient indicates that the association is positive but weak for referenda ($r = 0.04$, $p < .001$), but insignificant for participatory budgeting ($r = -0.00$, $p = 0.815$), and citizen for a ($r = 0.00$, $p = 0.740$), as well as online government platform ($r = -0.02$, $p = 0.054$). The Figure shows the average level of willingness to engage in various democratic innovations should they be implemented for levels of personal satisfaction with public services used (average evaluation across services shown in Figure 8 per person). The measures of support for democratic innovations are shown in Figure 13.

So far, the analyses have focused primarily on the outcomes of public service use, captured through respondents' satisfaction with the services they received. This Section turns **to the process dimension of service delivery**, examining how the quality of treatment experienced while using public services relates to political support.

Figure 23 shows a moderate and positive association between the perceived quality of service processes and both indicators of political support, namely political trust and satisfaction with democracy. In general, respondents who report more positive experiences with how services were delivered, including ease of access, respectful treatment, and opportunities for agency, also tend to express higher levels of political support.

The association is particularly visible at the lower end of the scale. Respondents who report more negative service interactions show noticeably lower levels of political trust and satisfaction with democracy. It should be noted, however, that fewer respondents fall into this category, which results in wider confidence intervals and greater uncertainty around these estimates. This pattern does suggest that negative procedural experiences may be especially damaging for political support.

Figure 23. How Experiences with Public Services Relates to Political Support



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

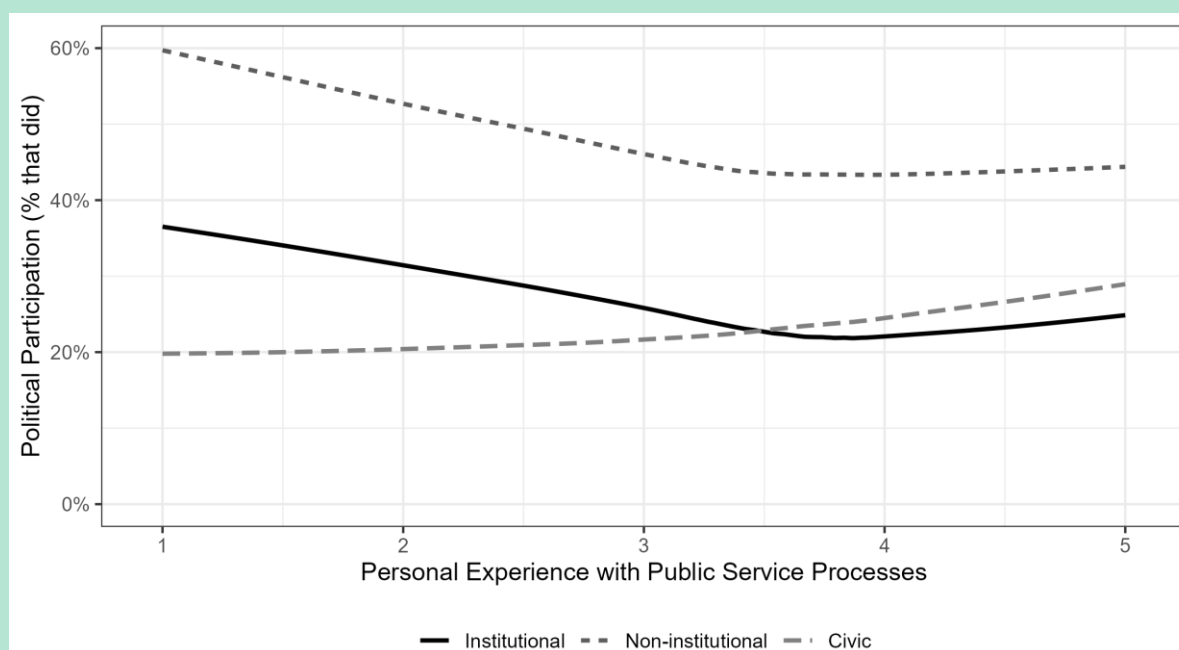
Note: The Pearson correlation coefficient indicates that the association is positive but weak for political trust ($r = 0.21$, $p < .001$, $N = 10,374$) and for satisfaction with democracy ($r = 0.23$, $p < .001$, $N = 10,299$). The Figure shows the average level of political trust (left-side axis) and satisfaction with democracy (right-side axis) for each response level of quality experiences with public services processes (average agreement across statements shown in Figure 9 per person, after reverse items were reversed). The measure of political trust is based on the average of explicitly reported trust in the national government, national parliament, political parties, and politicians (shown in Figure 10).

When turning to political participation, the relationship with experiences of public service processes again appears complex, as shown in **Figure 24**. Like the patterns observed for satisfaction with service outcomes, participation does not increase in a straightforward way as experiences become more positive. **Instead, higher participation rates are observed at both ends of the spectrum.**

Overall, the highest share of respondents who report engaging in political participation is found among those who experienced more negative interactions while using public services. At the same time, participation also rises again among respondents who report the most positive service experiences. This produces a non-linear pattern in which moderate experiences are associated with lower levels of participation than either very negative or very positive ones.

It is important to interpret these patterns with caution. Very few respondents report strongly negative experiences with public service processes, which results in substantial uncertainty at the lower end of the scale. Therefore, estimates for participation among those with the poorest service experiences are less precise, particularly when disaggregated by type of participation.

Figure 24. How Experiences with Public Service Relates to Political Participation



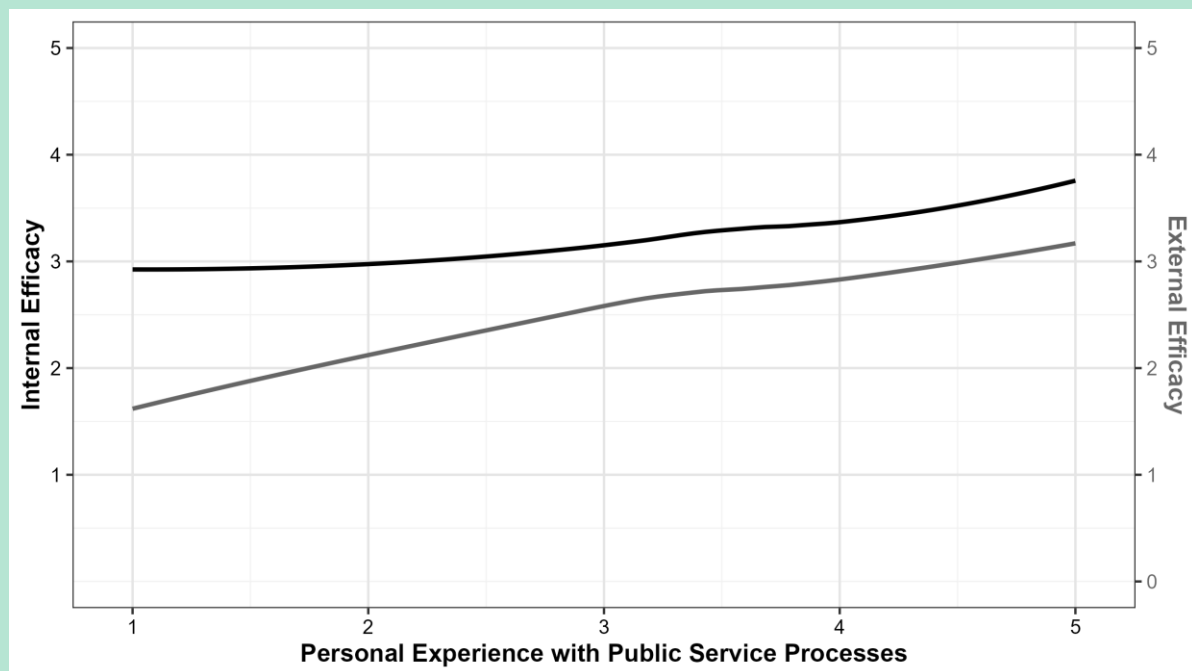
Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: The Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient indicates that the association is positive but weak for civic participation ($\rho = 0.04$, $p < .001$, $N = 10,431$), but negative though weak association for non-institutional participation ($\rho = -0.03$, $p < .01$, $N = 10,431$), and institutional participation ($\rho = -0.04$, $p < .001$, $N = 10,431$). The Figure shows the average level of political participation for each response level of quality experiences with public services processes (average agreement across statements shown in Figure 9 per person, after reverse items were reversed). The measures of political participation are based on the percentage of people who reported having engaged in an institutionalized, non-institutionalized, or civic participation activity (shown in Figure 11).

Figure 25 illustrates how experiences of being treated in line with the receiver-doer-judge framework relate to citizens' beliefs about political participation. **For both internal and external political efficacy, the association is moderately positive.** Compared with the relationship observed for satisfaction with the outcomes of public services, the association is notably stronger, particularly for internal political efficacy.

This pattern indicates that citizens' confidence in their own ability to participate politically is more closely related to how they were treated during the process of using public services than to how satisfied they were with the outcome. In other words, experiences of respectful treatment, accessibility, and opportunities for agency appear to be especially important for fostering a sense of political competence. While the evidence remains correlational, it suggests that public service encounters that recognize citizens as capable actors are associated with stronger beliefs that one can engage in political life.

Figure 25. How Experiences with Public Services Relates to Political Efficacy



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: The Pearson correlation coefficient indicates that the association is positive but weak for internal efficacy ($r = 0.13$, $p < .001$, $N = 10,285$) and for external efficacy ($r = 0.17$, $p < .001$, $N = 10,327$). The Figure shows the average level of internal political efficacy (left-side axis) and external political efficacy (right-side axis) for each response level of quality experiences with public services processes (average agreement across statements shown in Figure 9 per person, after reverse items were reversed). The measures of political efficacy are shown in Figure 12.

Last, **Figure 26** shows how procedural experiences relate to the willingness to engage with democratic innovations. In line with **Figure 22**, there is no clear linear relationship between procedural experiences and willingness to engage in these participatory instruments. The Figure does indicate that there is a non-linear relationship. For referenda, willingness to participate is highest among respondents who report either very positive or very negative experiences with public service processes. By contrast, those who report more moderate or “middle-of-the-road” experiences show the lowest levels of willingness to engage. This suggests that referenda may appeal both to citizens who feel well served by public institutions and to those who feel dissatisfied and seek a more direct say.

This is somewhat flipped for supporting other innovations, such as citizens’ forums or participatory platforms. Here, willingness to engage is highest among respondents with moderately positive service experiences, while it drops sharply among those who report the poorest treatment. Accordingly, it does seem that people’s procedural experiences in engaging with public services are more related to how people seek to politically participate than service outcomes. While positive engagements do not uniformly increase willingness to participate, negative procedural experiences appear to discourage engagement with more deliberative and institutionalized forms of democratic innovations, even as they may coincide with support for more direct instruments such as referenda.

Figure 26. How Experiences with Public Services Relates to Support for Democratic Innovations



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: The Pearson correlation coefficient indicates that the association is positive but weak for referenda ($r = 0.11$, $p < .001$), but insignificant for participatory budgeting ($r = -0.00$, $p = 0.803$), and citizen fora ($r = 0.01$, $p = 0.587$), as well as online government platform ($r = -0.02$, $p = 0.071$). The Figure shows the average level of willingness to engage in various democratic innovations should they be implemented for each response level of quality experiences with public services processes (average agreement across statements shown in Figure 9 per person, after reverse items were reversed). The measure of support for democratic innovations is shown in Figure 13.

Taken together, this section shows that individual experiences with public services are closely related to political support and political efficacy, but less consistently related to political participation. Both satisfaction with service outcomes and the quality of service processes are positively associated with trust in political institutions and satisfaction with democracy. In contrast, political participation often appears higher among those who report dissatisfaction or negative service experiences, particularly outside formal political channels. Overall, these findings indicate that political support and political participation respond differently to how citizens experience public services.

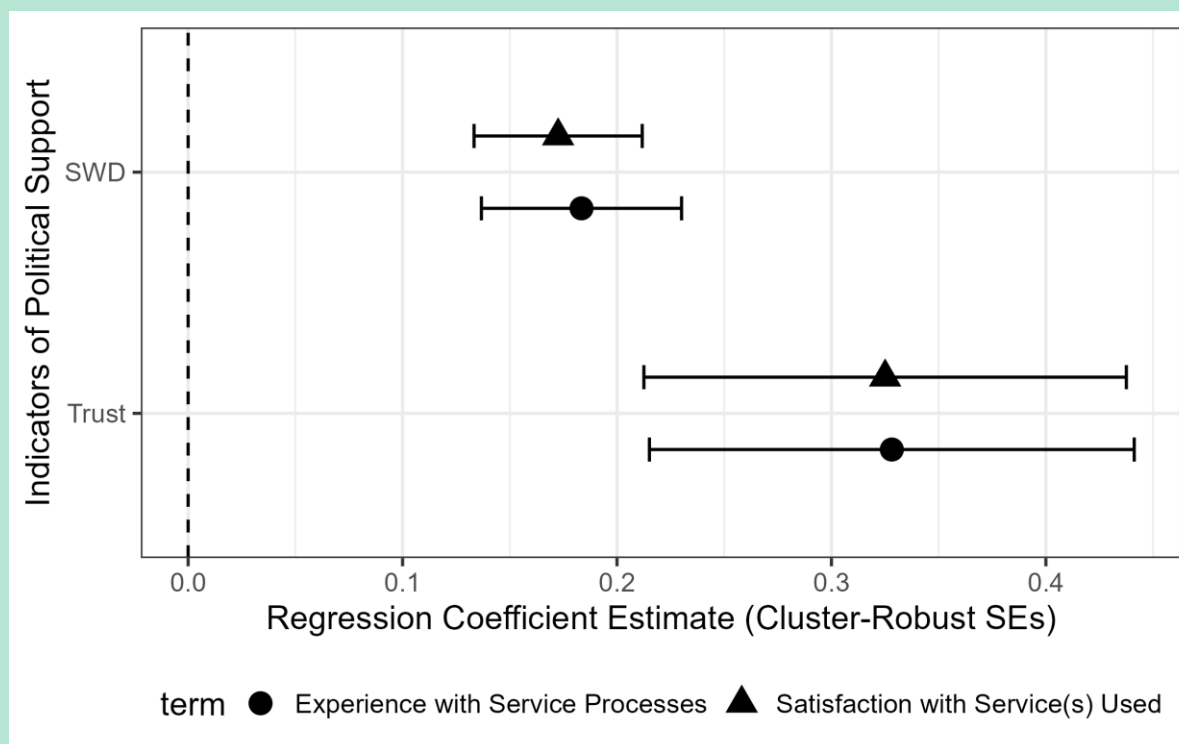
It should be noted that the analyses presented here focus on bivariate relationships and do not account for other factors that may shape democratic inputs, such as socio-demographic characteristics or political attitudes. The next section addresses this by using regression analyses to assess how public service experiences relate to political support, efficacy, and participation when these additional factors are taken into account.

3.3. The Importance of Personal Experiences with Public Services for Democratic Inputs

Having described the bivariate associations between public policy perceptions, public service experiences, and democratic inputs, **this Section turns to regression analyses**. These analyses allow us to **assess whether the observed relationships hold when taking into account other factors that are known to influence political support and participation**. Specifically, the models account for differences in gender, age, region of residence, education, income, employment status, political interest, and left-right ideological self-placement. To ensure that results are not driven by systematic differences between countries, the models also include country indicators and use country-clustered standard errors. The estimates for these control variables are reported in the appendix, while the discussion here focuses on the role of public service experiences. Given the non-linear and, in many cases, non-significant bivariate relationships between evaluations of public services and willingness to engage in democratic innovations, regression analyses using the democratic innovations battery are not reported.

Figure 27 presents the regression results for political support, measured through political trust and satisfaction with democracy, in relation to how respondents experienced their interactions with public services.

Figure 27. Effect of Experiences and Satisfaction with Services on Political Support



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: Displays the estimated unstandardized regression coefficients of linear regression models explaining variation in political trust (bottom) and satisfaction with democracy (top). Figure based on results in Table A2.

The Figure shows that respondents who more strongly agreed with statements indicating that they were treated as receivers, doers, and judges during the service process report significantly higher

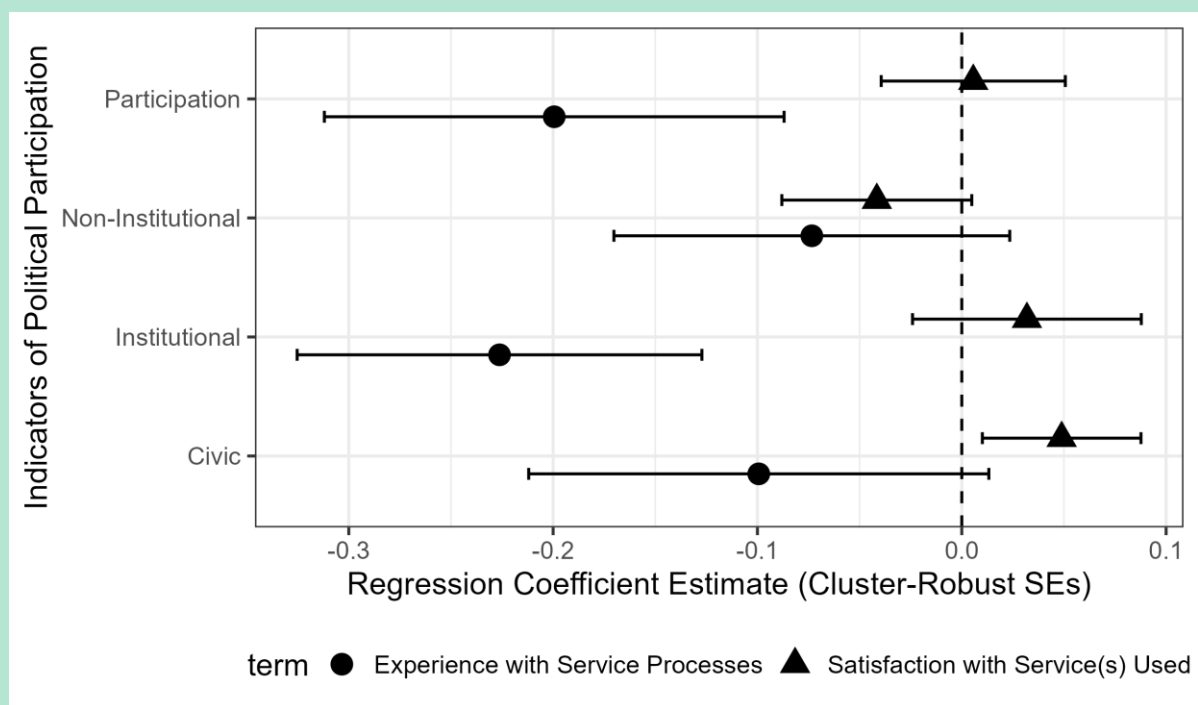
levels of political trust. A similar positive relationship is observed for satisfaction with the outcomes of the public services used. Importantly, the size of the association is comparable for both the quality of treatment during the service process and satisfaction with service outcomes.

The same pattern can be observed when looking at satisfaction with democracy. Although the associations are somewhat smaller than those observed for political trust, both being treated in line with the receiver-doer-judge framework and being satisfied with service outcomes are still positively and significantly related to how satisfied respondents are with the functioning of democracy. The similarity in the size of these estimates suggests that how services are delivered matters at least as much as what they deliver for political support.

Taken together, these results indicate that positive experiences with public services are robustly associated with higher political support, even when accounting for a wide range of individual characteristics. Public services that recognize users as recipients of support, as capable agents, and as evaluators appear to contribute to stronger trust in political institutions and greater satisfaction with democracy.

Figure 28 shows the results of the regression models for political participation, using the same predictors as those used in the previously discussed models. Like Section 3.2, the patterns for political participation notably differ from those for political support and are less straightforward.

Figure 28. Effect of Experiences and Satisfaction with Services on Political Participation



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: Displays the estimated unstandardized log-linear regression coefficients of logit regression models explaining variation in engaging in civic participation activities (bottom), institutionalized participation activities (second from bottom), non-institutionalized participation activities (second from top), and non-electoral participation activities generally (top). Estimates based on results displayed in Table A3.

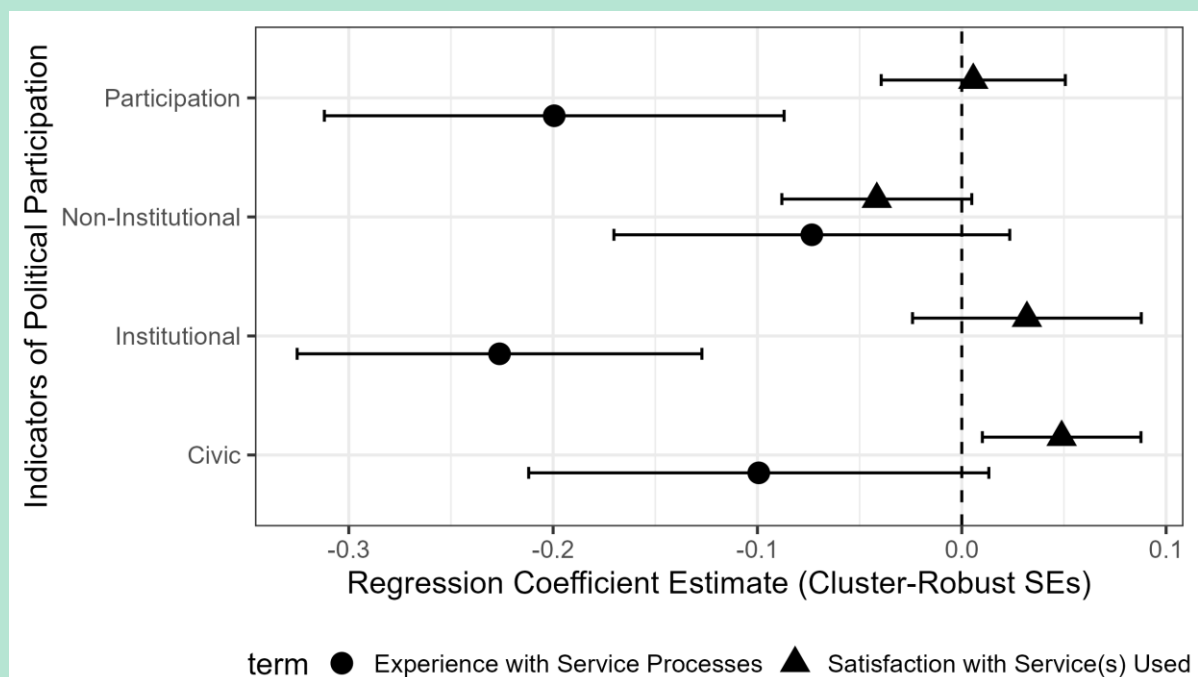
Overall, the results indicate that experiences with public services are either not related to political participation or are associated with lower levels of participation. Satisfaction with the outcomes of public services does not show a significant relationship with non-institutional participation, institutional participation, or participation outside elections more broadly. Similarly, procedural

experiences of using public services, such as being treated fairly, respectfully, and with opportunities for agency, are not positively related to participation. In several cases, more positive procedural experiences are associated with lower levels of institutional participation and lower engagement in non-electoral activities. The only consistently positive association observed is between satisfaction with public service outcomes and civic participation, although this relationship is modest in size.

To further investigate why positive public service experiences do (not) translate into higher levels of political participation, the analyses proceed with an examination of how these experiences relate to political efficacy. Political efficacy captures how much influence people believe they can have in politics, either through their own actions or through the responsiveness of the political system. Unlike participation, efficacy reflects attitudes rather than reported behavior.

Figure 29 shows that different aspects of public service experiences matter for different dimensions of efficacy. Satisfaction with the outcomes of public services is positively related to external efficacy, meaning that people who are more satisfied with the services they received are more likely to believe that the political system allows people like them to have influence. By contrast, this outcome satisfaction is not related to internal efficacy, or confidence in one's own ability to participate.

Figure 29. Effect of Experiences and Satisfaction with Services on Political Efficacy



Source: INVOLVE survey (2024).

Note: Displays the estimated unstandardized linear regression coefficients of linear regression models explaining variation in how much people think the political system allows them to influence politics (top) and think they themselves have the ability to politically participate (bottom). Estimates based on results displayed in Table A4.

Internal efficacy is instead more strongly associated with how people were treated during the service process. Respondents who felt recognized as receivers, doers, and judges report a stronger belief in their own capacity to express political preferences and demands. This indicates that respectful, accessible, and empowering service processes can foster a sense of political empowerment. At the same time, when viewed alongside the earlier results, these findings highlight

(a key disconnect. While positive service experiences can strengthen people's belief that they can participate politically, this increased sense of efficacy does not consistently translate into higher levels of actual participation.

In summary, the findings show that the impact of public service experiences on democracy is more nuanced than initially expected. **When accounting for individual characteristics and broader contextual factors, satisfaction with service outcomes and the quality of treatment during service delivery remain clearly associated with higher political support, but not with higher political participation.** In some cases, more positive service experiences even coincide with lower levels of participation, particularly through institutional channels.

At the same time, public service experiences do matter for how politically capable people feel. Satisfaction with service outcomes is linked to stronger beliefs that the political system allows people to have influence, while respectful and empowering treatment during service delivery strengthens confidence in one's own ability to participate. However, these gains in political efficacy do not consistently translate into greater political action. Overall, positive public service experiences appear to reinforce political support and confidence in the system more than they mobilize citizens to participate actively.

3.4. The Impact of Country-Level Policy Outcomes

The final part of this report examines how objective public policy outcomes are related to democratic inputs at the individual level. Rather than focusing on citizens' personal service experiences, this analysis uses Eurostat indicators of policy performance in four domains: employment, education, health, and housing. These indicators capture differences in policy outcomes across countries and over time.

To conduct this analysis, we rely on data from the European Social Survey. Compared with the INVOLVE survey (8 countries, 1 year), the European Social Survey covers a much larger number of countries and years (28 countries from 2006 to 2023 every two years), which allows for a longitudinal assessment of how policy outcomes relate to political support across Europe. A limitation of this approach is that the European Social Survey does not include detailed measures of individuals' experiences with public services. As a result, this part of the analysis cannot directly assess how people are treated as receivers, doers, or judges, and instead focuses on more general perceptions of public policies alongside objective policy outcomes.

The analysis combines individual-level survey data with country-level policy indicators using regression models that take both levels into account. In practical terms, this means that the models estimate how differences in public policy outcomes across countries and years are related to individuals' political support, while holding constant key individual characteristics. These characteristics include gender, age, education, income, political interest, and left-right ideological self-placement. The models also account for persistent differences between countries and for general changes over time that are unrelated to the specific policy indicators. The discussion of results focuses on the role of individuals' general evaluations of public policies, which is measured via their average satisfaction of education and health policies, as well as country-level outcomes in employment, education, health, and housing.²

Figure 30 presents the estimated relationships between public policy indicators and two measures of political support: political trust and satisfaction with democracy. Political support is measured using survey questions that ask respondents how much they trust key political institutions, as well as how satisfied they are with the way democracy works in their country. Responses are given on 0-to-10 scales, where higher values indicate greater trust and satisfaction. For political trust, the analysis uses the average trust score across questions on politicians, political parties, and the national parliament. Satisfaction with democracy is measured using a single item capturing respondents' overall evaluation of how democracy functions in their country.

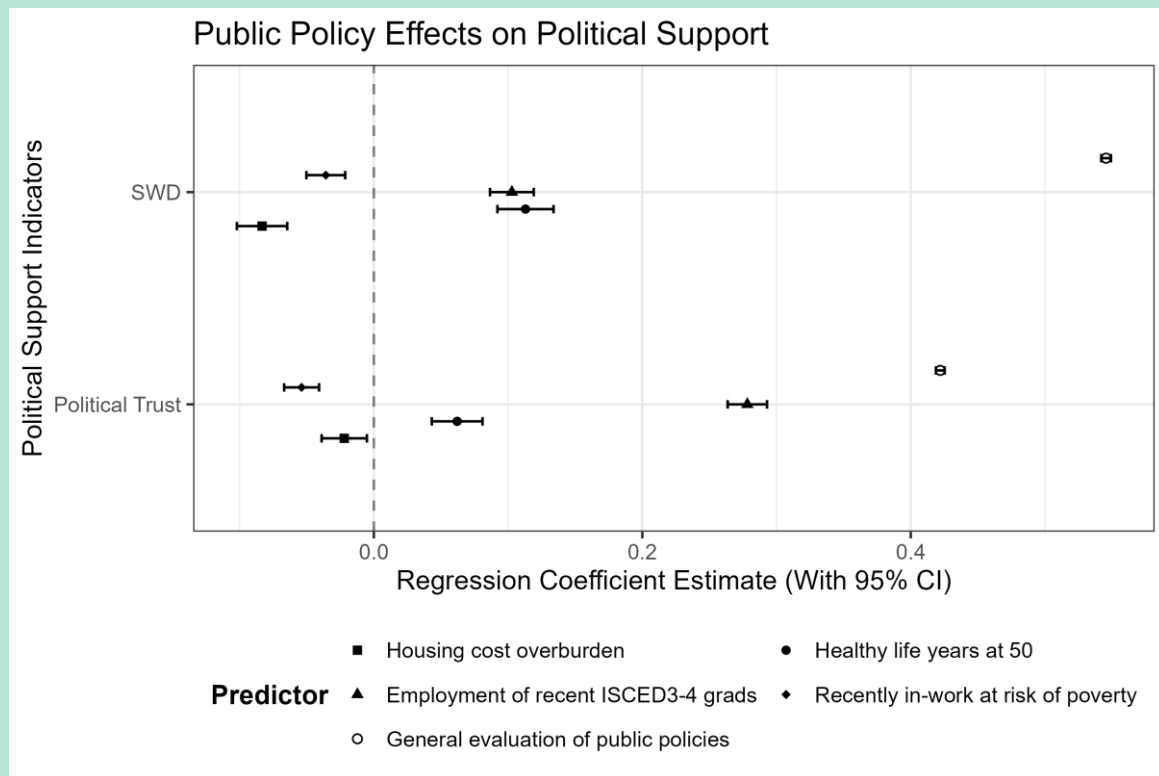
Altogether, the results show a clear and consistent pattern. **Both more positive individual evaluations of public policies and better objective policy outcomes at the country level are associated with higher political support.**

At the individual level, general satisfaction with public policies shows a strong positive association with political trust and satisfaction with democracy, which is in line with the results based on the INVOLVE survey. At the country level, several policy outcomes also display meaningful relationships with political support. Higher housing cost overburden rates are associated with lower political support, indicating that when a larger share of the population struggles with housing affordability, trust in political institutions and satisfaction with democracy tends to be lower. By contrast, higher levels of healthy life expectancy at age 50 are associated with higher political support, suggesting that better health outcomes contribute to greater confidence in political institutions. Similarly, higher employment rates among recent secondary school graduates are

² The European Social Survey does have two waves with more detailed questions on general perceptions of public policies, namely perceived standard of living of pensioners and unemployed persons. Yet, these questions are only available in two years, disabling a proper analysis of country-level public policy outcomes due to a substantial reduction of observations.

linked to higher political support, pointing to the importance of education systems that facilitate labor market entry. Finally, lower in-work poverty among people who have recently entered employment is associated with higher political support, indicating that the quality of employment matters, not only employment itself.

Figure 30. How Policy Outcomes Relate to Political Support



Source: ESS (2006-2023) for individual-level data; Eurostat (2006-2023) for country-level data.

Note: Displays the estimated unstandardized linear regression coefficients of multi-level regression models with a country random intercept that explains variation in how much they are satisfied with the state of their democracy (top) and trust their political institutions (bottom). Estimates based on results displayed in Table A5.

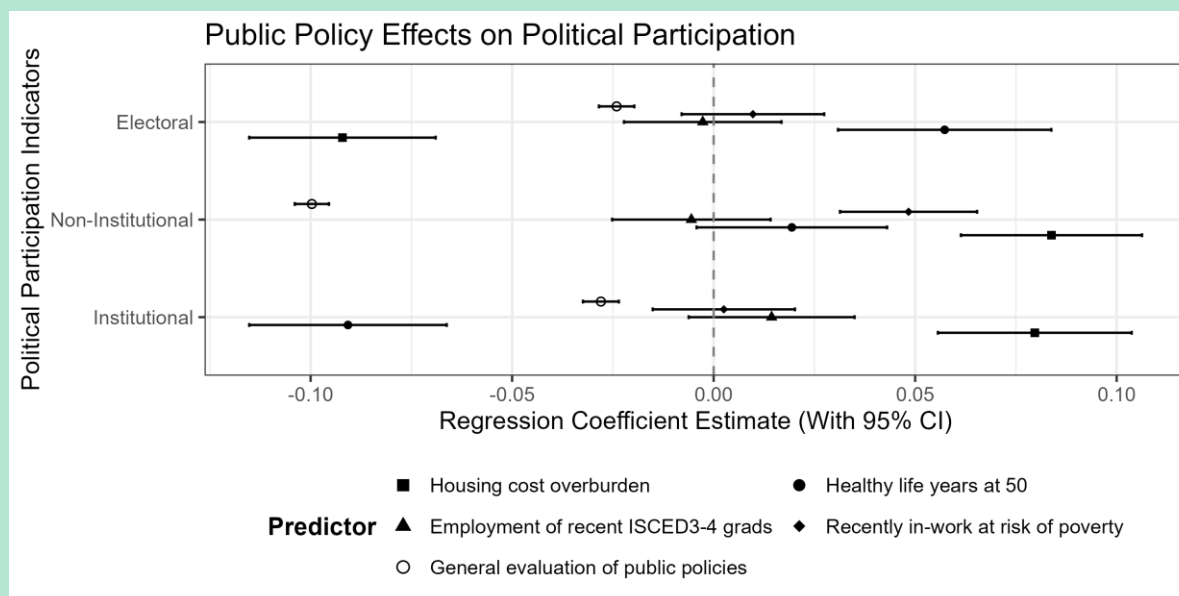
Importantly, these relationships are observed even when individual evaluations of public policies are taken into account. This means that objective policy outcomes appear to be related to political support not only through how people perceive public policies, but also directly. Hence, **the findings do indicate that better housing affordability, stronger health outcomes, smoother transitions from education to employment, and higher-quality jobs for newly employed workers are each independently associated with higher levels of political support.**

Where the previous Figure showed a consistent pattern in which better public policy outcomes are associated with higher political support, **this pattern does not extend to political participation.** Figure 31 shows the estimates for the same predictors from models predicting political participation. The results indicate a negative association between individual evaluations of public policies and political participation. In practical terms, **respondents who are less satisfied with the state of public policies are more likely to report having participated politically.**

This pattern is most pronounced for non-institutional forms of participation, such as demonstrations, petitions, or boycotts. The associations with electoral participation and institutional participation are weaker, though they follow the same general direction. These findings suggest that political participation, particularly outside formal political institutions, is more strongly linked to dissatisfaction with public policies than to satisfaction. In other words, political participation often

appears to function as a channel for expressing discontent rather than as a response to positive policy performance.

Figure 31. How Policy Outcomes Relate to Political Participation



Source: ESS (2006-2023) for individual-level data; Eurostat (2006-2023) for country-level data.

Note: Displays the estimated unstandardized log-linear regression coefficients of multi-level regression models with a country random-intercept that explains the likelihood of participating via institutional means (bottom), non-institutional means (middle), and electoral means (top). Estimates based on results displayed in Table A6.

It is important to note that these findings concern general evaluations of public policies and not satisfaction with specific public services used, which were examined earlier in **Figure 28**. Taken together, the results indicate that improvements in public policies and services are closely related to higher political support, but they do not consistently translate into higher levels of political participation. Participation is driven more by perceived shortcomings than by positive experiences.

The results for **country-level public policy outcomes and political participation further underpin this protest mechanism or show no effects**. First, employment outcomes show limited and uneven associations with participation. The employment rate of recent secondary school graduates is not significantly related to any form of political participation, implying that there is no meaningful association present. By contrast, higher in-work poverty among people who have recently entered employment is associated with greater engagement in non-institutional forms of participation, such as protests or signing petitions, while showing no meaningful relationship with electoral or institutional participation. In practical terms, this suggests that less adequate employment conditions may mobilize people to express dissatisfaction outside formal political channels.

Second, health outcomes show contrasting associations depending on the mode of participation. Healthy life expectancy at age 50 is not related to non-institutional participation and is negatively associated with institutional participation, indicating that poorer health outcomes coincide with higher engagement in activities such as contacting officials or joining political organizations. At the same time, healthier populations show higher turnout in national elections, suggesting that better health supports participation in the most common and least demanding form of political engagement.

(Third, housing outcomes also display divergent patterns. Lower housing cost overburden is associated with higher voter turnout, indicating that more affordable housing coincides with greater electoral participation. However, lower housing cost pressure is also associated with lower levels of institutional and non-institutional participation. Conversely, when housing affordability is worse, participation outside elections tends to be higher. This suggests that housing stress may act as a catalyst for political action outside formal electoral channels.

In general, these findings point to a clear distinction between electoral and non-electoral participation. **Electoral participation tends to be higher in contexts where public policies perform better**, particularly in domains that address basic needs such as housing affordability and health. By contrast, **participation outside elections appears more strongly linked to dissatisfaction and adverse policy outcomes**, especially in areas related to housing and employment insecurity. In this sense, non-electoral participation often functions as a response to perceived policy failure rather than policy success.

Overall, the findings indicate that political support and political participation respond differently to public policy performance. Improvements in public policies, particularly in housing and health, are closely associated with greater political support and higher electoral participation. At the same time, poorer policy outcomes tend to coincide with higher levels of political participation outside elections. This pattern underscores that dissatisfaction, rather than satisfaction, often drives non-electoral political action, while confidence in institutions is more closely tied to positive policy performance.

4. Improving Public Services Increases Trust and Efficacy, but not Participation

Many citizens across Europe remain unable to participate meaningfully in democratic processes due to limited resources, opportunities, or institutional support (Bartels, 2008; Gilens, 2012; Gillissen et al., 2025; Solt, 2008, 2010). This prevents societies' ability to realize the full potential of democratic governance (Bonvin et al., 2018; Bonvin & Laruffa, 2018a). Public policies and public services can, in principle, play an important role in addressing these challenges by enabling political participation and strengthening political support, thereby advancing the ideal of equal democratic citizenship (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2021). At the same time, the capacity of governments to maintain the quality of public policies and services is increasingly under pressure due to expanding social risks and growing fiscal constraints (Abou-Chadi & Immergut, 2019; Ferragina, 2022, 2025; Gingrich & Ansell, 2012; Hemerijck & Matsaganis, 2024). Accordingly, it is crucial to understand how citizens' perceptions of, and experiences with, public policies and services are related to political support and the expression of political demands and preferences.

Understanding these relationships is a central objective of the INVOLVE project. The project emphasizes that citizens' capacity to engage in democratic processes is shaped by the public policies and services available to them, which influence both the resources they can draw on and the aspirations they can realistically pursue. From this perspective, ensuring that people are adequately housed, healthy, educated, and employed is essential for reducing inequalities in democracy. As emphasized by the capability approach, what individuals believe that they can achieve in the future is closely linked to what they have been able to achieve in the past (Sen, 1999, 2002, 2009). When public policies fail to provide these basic conditions, the capacity of vulnerable groups to invest in their futures and articulate their aspirations is weakened, thereby undermining the foundations of a genuine democracy (Bonvin et al., 2018; Bonvin & Laruffa, 2021; Bonvin & Laruffa, 2024; Zimmermann, 2024).

Building on this perspective, this report examined how citizens experience their interactions with public services, how these experiences and outcomes relate to political support and political participation, and how broader public policy outcomes at the country level are associated with democratic inputs. By combining individual-level perceptions and experiences with comparative evidence on policy outcomes across countries, the report provides a comprehensive assessment of the ways in which public policies and public services can support, or constrain, democratic engagement.

In the conclusion of this report, the main findings are articulated with a focus on the responsibility of policymakers and the actions they can take to strengthen the adherence of the citizens to their democracy. Starting with one's personal encounters with public services – how fair, accessible, and respectful they are – they influence how citizens view their political systems by evaluating which services are provided and how by the state, which in turn shapes their political support. Adequate, reliable, and non-stigmatizing support delivered through a fair and respectful process which recognizes autonomy, signals responsiveness to people in contact with services and facilitates a sense of belonging to the political system. In a context where disadvantaged voices are muted and

democratic legitimacy is at risk of eroding, the RDJ framework considers public policies and services as means that enable people to participate while cultivating their efficacy and support.

The INVOLVE project collected novel data on the use of and satisfaction with public services in eight European countries. Specifically, the data collected and discussed in this report cover individual level indicators for democratic inputs (political trust, satisfaction with democracy, institutional participation, non-institutional participation, civic participation and political efficacy), general perceptions of public policies (satisfaction with various public policies, preference for government spending and responsibility for various policies, and digital access to public services), and experiences with public services (services used, satisfaction with used services, barriers to using services, and procedural public service experiences). In doing so, this report provides detailed insights into how public policies and people's experiences with public services across multiple countries impact political support and participation.

A first finding is that general perceptions of public policies are largely mixed. Of the enquired public policies, people are most dissatisfied with access to housing (and to a lesser extent healthcare), with the evaluations of other domains being more neutral or even positive. In addition, preferences for government responsibility and spending lean toward universal domains such as health and education, rather than an expansion of targeted unemployment and poverty-relief benefits.

A second finding is that outcome satisfaction with the service(s) received was generally high for widely used services, but noticeably lower for targeted services for people in greater need (e.g., social housing, immigration). Furthermore, most people reported that the access to the services was easy and that they were treated respectfully (felt listened to and helped by staff, and did not feel treated worse than others or discriminated against), but fewer respondents indicated that they had much choice (could choose between services) or voice (could influence the service delivery). Taken together, citizens largely are satisfied with the support from services (receiver), felt respected in their capacity to evaluate (judge), but fewer felt empowered to act when using public services(doer).

Next, we examined how general perceptions and personal experiences relate to people's political support and political participation. A strong association between the level of satisfaction with the state of public policies in general and political support, internal and external political efficacy, as well as institutional and civic participation was found. No such relationships were detected for personal outcome satisfaction with the use of public service, with a weak relationship to political support and political efficacy, and no clear association to political participation.

While still weak, procedural experiences have an association with political efficacy which is stronger than for outcome satisfaction. And the strength of the latter's relation to political support is comparable to the one between procedural experiences and political support. However, this does not extend to participation, where our findings give stronger support for a negative association in case of non-institutional participation.

Regression analyses that control for socio-demographic factors and between-country differences largely confirm these patterns. Both adequate outcomes and high-quality treatment across service processes are associated with higher political support in terms of political trust and satisfaction with democracy, as well as a greater belief that the political system allows them to have an influence. In contrast, neither outcome satisfaction nor procedural treatments were related to a greater chance of participating politically, with results being either insignificant or indicating lowered chances.

Thus, the results clearly indicate that satisfaction with the adequacy of support received and quality of treatment throughout public services processes enhance political support as well as

(external efficacy, with only the quality of treatment improving internal efficacy to participate. Neither the adequacy of support nor the quality of treatment relate to more political participation.

Lastly, we analysed country-level differences across Europe from 2006 to 2023 in public policy outcomes for housing, health, education, employment and their relation to political support and participation using secondary data from the European Social Survey and Eurostat. The findings indicate that better access to affordable housing, higher quality of healthy living, greater employment adequacy of secondary school graduates, and higher quality employment for recently employed persons each independently relate to elevated levels of political support. While the results do indicate that better public policy outcomes for housing and health also increase voter turnout during national elections, the other results are more indicative of worse policy outcomes being associated with increasing political participation outside elections.

In summary, citizens' views on public policies are mixed, though most users of public services were satisfied with the outcome. Additionally, citizens' experiences with public services were respectful and attentive to their judgements, but fewer people indicated that they had much choice or possibilities to give input. Results show that both elements (general views and personal experiences) can improve political support, while the latter can improve internal efficacy to politically participate, but neither increase political participation through active engagement in activities.

Moreover, the results show that better country-level policy outcomes relate to more political support, and some indicators also to higher voter turnout, but political participation outside elections is likely to be higher when policy performance is worse. While this deviates from our expectations based on the RDJ framework, which suggests that people will actually participate more, it equally suggests people react to, and speak out against, worsening conditions. From the perspective of maximizing genuine democratic outcomes, this is not ideal, as it implies less people participate when conditions are better. Yet, from the perspective of delegated democratic authority, where policymakers act on behalf of citizens while being held responsible to their actions via citizens politically participating, this is more reassuring.

To put it bluntly, adequate public policies can be used as a vehicle to increase political participation and foster a culture of democratic outcomes in order to prepare for a situation when part of the population is unsatisfied with certain policies. It is mainly when public services fail to recognize people as receivers, doers, and judges that they will lose political support and take action.

It is important to underscore the **limitations of this research**. Foremost, the population of study was the general population of a country. Importantly, the RDJ framework is most applicable to public services that exist to uphold a decent standard of living for vulnerable populations, such as the homeless, disabled, uneducated, and unemployed persons. As the results do indicate that people who used services targeted at more vulnerable populations were less satisfied with the service they received, it is plausible that results would deviate if the focus would solely be on this subpopulation. However, the total number of people who used these services is much smaller, as would logically be expected, which disables a proper analysis for only this group. Accordingly, the results speak mainly to whether this theory can be broadly applied to most public service experiences, complementing the work of the partners within the INVOLVE project who conduct research focusing more specifically on these people. Second, the measurement of procedural experiences could not empirically distinguish experiences of being treated as a receiver, doer, or judge, as the responses to the statements were strongly related. This resulted in only being able to use a single measurement for being treated as a receiver-doer-judge, distinguishing outcome satisfaction with services used from how people felt they were treated throughout the process. A potential reason for this could be that people in the sample - reflecting the general population of a country - did not have experiences where they could differentiate between being treated as receiver-doer-judge, resulting in similar agreeing or disagreeing with both statements for the

(separate dimensions. Nonetheless, the relatedness of responses restricted the ability to test for different effects from the elements of the receiver-doer-judge framework. Last, for country-level public policy outcomes, the analyses were limited in their ability to account for multiple outcomes simultaneously. While the European Social Survey and Eurostat make country-level analyses possible, the restricted time coverage (2006–2023) and the exclusive focus on European countries imply that results may change when additional factors are included in the models. Accordingly, although multiple indicators per policy domain would have been preferable, only one indicator per domain was included to avoid unstable estimates caused by strong overlap between policy outcomes.

In closing, this report points to a clear but bounded lesson: **making public policies and services more adequate, affordable, and procedurally empowering can strengthen political support and efficacy. Yet, this does not translate into broader political participation, especially outside elections. The practical implication is twofold.** First, it is important to continue investing in core public policy outcomes, notably for housing and health. Second, public services should institutionalize respectful, choice-sensitive, and co-creative service processes. In doing so, political trust, satisfaction with democracy, voter turnout, and political efficacy will likely increase. However, this will not relate to people being more likely to express their political demands. In one sentence, the RDJ framework applied to the general population would deliver political endorsement but not engagement: improving public services as outlined would raise political support and efficacy, but not non-electoral political participation.

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Table A1. Correlation Matrix Between Country-Level Public Policy Outcome Indicators

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1 Share Home Owner Total	—	0.87***	-0.24***	0.50***	-0.17***	0.36***	-0.44***	-0.66***	-0.36***	-0.28***	-0.33***	-0.44***	-0.46***	0.46***	0.26***	-0.15**	-0.44***	-0.53***	0.25***
2 Share Home Owner Below 60	0.87***	—	-0.20***	0.59***	-0.07	0.47***	-0.54***	-0.75***	-0.53***	-0.41***	-0.44***	-0.53***	-0.57***	0.60***	0.37***	-0.20***	-0.50***	-0.55***	0.29***
3 House Burden Rate Below 60	-0.24***	-0.20***	—	0.12*	0.17***	0.05	0.28***	0.07	0.16***	-0.01	-0.12*	-0.13**	-0.12**	0.02	0.28***	0.03	0.11*	0.10*	0.14**
4 House Crowded Rate Below60	0.50***	0.59***	0.12*	—	0.03	0.46***	-0.49***	-0.73***	-0.53***	-0.46***	-0.36***	-0.44***	-0.46***	0.48***	0.29***	-0.15**	-0.55***	-0.38***	0.30***
5 Area Bad Total	-0.17***	-0.07	0.17***	0.03	—	0.21***	0.11*	-0.12*	0.03	-0.20***	-0.22***	-0.14**	0.02	0.29***	0.10*	-0.10*	-0.06	0.22***	0.13**
6 Unmet Need Med Exam	0.36***	0.47***	0.05	0.46***	0.21***	—	-0.37***	-0.45***	-0.34***	-0.21***	-0.43***	-0.26***	-0.27***	0.49***	0.34***	-0.08	-0.15***	-0.15**	0.23***
7 Share Health Status Good	-0.44***	-0.54***	0.28***	-0.49***	0.11*	-0.37***	—	0.63***	0.71***	0.30***	0.18***	0.06	0.22***	-0.26***	-0.09	0.13**	0.37***	0.30***	-0.08
8 LE at 50	-0.66***	-0.75***	0.07	-0.73***	-0.12*	-0.45***	0.63***	—	0.63***	0.44***	0.21***	0.35***	0.35***	-0.43***	-0.08	0.06	0.55***	0.49***	-0.23***
9 HLY at 50	-0.36***	-0.53***	0.16***	-0.53***	0.03	-0.34***	0.71***	0.63***	—	0.35***	0.24***	0.05	0.18***	-0.36***	-0.20***	0.18***	0.48***	0.27***	-0.06
10 Share Recent Uni Grads	-0.28***	-0.41***	-0.01	-0.46***	-0.20***	-0.21***	0.30***	0.44***	0.35***	—	0.13**	0.31***	0.29***	-0.40***	-0.24***	0.18***	0.24***	0.23***	-0.11*
11 Employ Recent Grads ISCED 34	-0.33***	-0.44***	-0.12*	-0.36***	-0.22***	-0.43***	0.18***	0.21***	0.24***	0.13**	—	0.34***	0.41***	-0.87***	-0.84***	0.54***	0.52***	0.05	-0.26***
12 Total PISA mean	-0.44***	-0.53***	-0.13**	-0.44***	-0.14**	-0.26***	0.06	0.35***	0.05	0.31***	0.34***	—	0.85***	-0.42***	-0.31***	0.21***	0.19***	0.23***	-0.47***
13 PISA Success rate all3	-0.46***	-0.57***	-0.12**	-0.46***	0.02	-0.27***	0.22***	0.35***	0.18***	0.29***	0.41***	0.85***	—	-0.44***	-0.40***	0.15**	0.18***	0.27***	-0.39***
14 NEETs Y15-29	0.46***	0.60***	0.02	0.48***	0.29***	0.49***	-0.26***	-0.43***	-0.36***	-0.40***	-0.87***	-0.42***	-0.44***	—	0.77***	-0.53***	-0.63***	-0.29***	0.23***
15 Youth Long Unemploy	0.26***	0.37***	0.28***	0.29***	0.10*	0.34***	-0.09	-0.08	-0.20***	-0.24***	-0.84***	-0.31***	-0.40***	0.77***	—	-0.50***	-0.46***	-0.15**	0.12**
16 Trans To Employed	-0.15**	-0.20***	0.03	-0.15**	-0.10*	-0.08	0.13**	0.06	0.18***	0.18***	0.54***	0.21***	0.15**	-0.53***	-0.50***	—	0.51***	0.04	0.01
17 Employ Rate Low Skilled	-0.44***	-0.50***	0.11*	-0.55***	-0.06	-0.15***	0.37***	0.55***	0.48***	0.24***	0.52***	0.19***	0.18***	-0.63***	-0.46***	0.51***	—	0.47***	0.06
18 NRR UB (1earner 2ch @100 for 7m)	-0.53***	-0.55***	0.10*	-0.38***	0.22***	-0.15**	0.30***	0.49***	0.27***	0.23***	0.05	0.23***	0.27***	-0.29***	-0.15**	0.04	0.47***	—	0.04
19 Recent In-Work Poverty Risk	0.25***	0.29***	0.14**	0.30***	0.13**	0.23***	-0.08	-0.23***	-0.06	-0.11*	-0.26***	-0.47***	-0.39***	0.23***	0.12**	0.01	0.06	0.04	—

Note: * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$.

Abbreviations	
1 Share Home Owner Total	Share of people in a country (%) that own a home
2 Share Home Owner Below 60	Share of people in a country with an income below 60% the national-median household income (%) that own a home
3 House Burden Rate Below 60	Share of people in a country with an income below 60% the national-median household income (%) who spend more than 40% of their income on housing costs
4 House Crowded Rate Below 60	Share of people in a country with an income below 60% the national-median household income (%) who live in a household that lacks adequacy accommodation space
5 Area Bad Total	Share of people in a country (%) that experienced crime, violence, or vandalism in their neighborhood
6 Unmet Need Med Exam	Share of people in a country (%) that have unmet needs for medical or dental care due to healthcare services being too expensive, too far to travel to, and/or having too long waiting lists
7 Share Health Status Good	Share of people in a country (%) with good or very good perceived health
8 LE at 50	Life expectancy (years) at age 50
9 HLY at 50	Healthy years of life (years) - years of life free of any activity limitation - left at age 50
10 Share Recent Uni Grads	Share of people aged 25-34 in a country (%) that obtained a university-level education (ISCED 5-8)
11 Employ Recent Grads ISCED 34	Share of people aged 18-34 in a country who recently (1-3 years ago) completed their secondary education (ISCED 3-4) (%) that is employed
12 Total PISA mean	The average score (PISA scaling) of students aged 15 in a country on internationally standardized tests for math, reading, and science
13 PISA Success rate all3	Share of students aged 15 in a country (%) that obtained a PISA level 5 or 6 score for the math, reading, and science tests
14 NEETs Y15-29	Share of people aged 15-29 in a country (%) that is not in education, employment, or training
15 Youth Long Unemploy	Share of people aged 20-29 in a country (%) that have not been employed for over 12 months
16 Trans To Employed	Share of people in a country that was unemployed (%) and has transitioned to employment
17 Employ Rate Low Skilled	Share of people aged 20-64 in a country that is low skilled (educational attainments ISCED 0-2) (%) that is employed
18 NRR UB (1earner 2ch @100 for 7m)	Net income replacement rate (%) from unemployment benefits in a country for a household with 1 earner that had an income at 100% of the average income, with 2 children, who has experienced unemployment for 7 months
19 Recent In-Work Poverty Risk	Share of people in a country who recently (<1 year) gained employment (%) and are at risk-of-poverty
Note: Bivariate analysis to indicators from the European Social Survey for individual democratic input (political trust, satisfaction with democracy, institutional participation, non-institutional participation, and electoral participation) can be requested from the authors.	

(As the correlation matrix A1 showcases, public policy outcome indicators are strongly related to each other. When testing such highly correlated estimates within a single regression model, it increases the chances that estimates will have a misspecification due to overfitting.

For example, as estimates for overall life expectancy at age 50 will likely be impacted by the inclusion of home overcrowding rates, it amplifies the chances of misleading estimations. Accordingly, we selected only 1 indicator per policy domain for housing, health, education, and employment. Importantly, most indicators do have a positive association to democratic input indicators. These analyses can be requested.

Table A2. Political Support Regression Results of Figure 25 (cluster-robust SEs)

Predictors	Political Trust	SWD
(Intercept)	2.476 (0.462)**	-1.069 (0.201)**
Country: CH (ref. BE)	0.813 (0.046)***	0.457 (0.017)***
Country: DE (ref. BE)	-0.326 (0.042)***	-0.200 (0.018)***
Country: FR (ref. BE)	-0.392 (0.053)***	-0.485 (0.018)***
Country: IE (ref. BE)	0.954 (0.070)***	0.335 (0.028)***
Country: IT (ref. BE)	-0.425 (0.075)***	-0.104 (0.030)*
Country: PO (ref. BE)	-0.231 (0.078)*	0.126 (0.037)*
Country: PT (ref. BE)	0.275 (0.089)*	-0.017 (0.038)
Age (continuous)	-0.012 (0.003)*	-0.007 (0.002)**
Gender: Woman (ref. Man)	0.049 (0.031)	-0.068 (0.026)*
Living Region: Rural Area (ref. Urban Area)	-0.357 (0.106)*	-0.154 (0.041)**
Living Region: suburbs or outskirts of a city (ref. Urban Area)	-0.200 (0.044)**	-0.089 (0.038).
Education: High [ISCED 5-8] (ref. Low [ISCED 1-2])	0.069 (0.160)	0.092 (0.065)
Education: Medium [ISCED 3-4] (ref. Low [ISCED 1-2])	-0.063 (0.101)	-0.008 (0.024)
Employment: Part-Time or Self-Employed (ref. Full-Time)	0.158 (0.116)	-0.008 (0.037)
Employment: Housework or Student (ref. Full-Time)	-0.051 (0.078)	0.045 (0.021).
Employment: Unemployed or Disabled (ref. Full-Time)	-0.060 (0.100)	-0.069 (0.057)
Employment: Retired (ref. Full-Time)	0.338 (0.095)**	0.103 (0.045)+
Employment: Working Retiree (ref. Full-Time)	0.617 (0.350)	0.105 (0.140)
Employment: Working Student (ref. Full-Time)	-0.189 (0.317)	-0.033 (0.142)
Employment: Working for Job and House (ref. Full-Time)	-0.083 (0.439)	-0.046 (0.201)
Subjective Income (Country Mean-Centered)	0.290 (0.035)***	0.145 (0.012)***
Left-Right Self-Placement (Country Mean-Centered)	0.049 (0.051)	-0.019 (0.024)
Political Interest (Country Mean-Centered)	0.540 (0.033)***	0.088 (0.018)**
Satisfaction with Public Service(s) Used	0.325 (0.057)***	0.173 (0.020)***
Experienced RDJ Quality Public Service Treatment	0.328 (0.058)***	0.183 (0.024)***

Note: . $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$. Results based on INVOLVE survey (2024)

Table A3. Political Participation Regression Results of Figure 26 (cluster-robust SEs)

Predictors	Civic	Institutional	Non-Inst.	Participation
(Intercept)	-0.541 (0.220)*	-0.096 (0.269)	0.057 (0.257)	1.602 (0.267)***
Country: CH (ref. BE)	-0.764 (0.045)***	-0.239 (0.035)*	0.703 (0.023)***	0.057 (0.017)*
Country: DE (ref. BE)	-0.459 (0.039)***	-0.541 (0.118)*	0.698 (0.027)***	0.055 (0.027).
Country: FR (ref. BE)	-0.701 (0.059)***	-0.376 (0.054)**	0.518 (0.037)***	-0.243 (0.026)***
Country: IE (ref. BE)	-0.566 (0.034)***	0.504 (0.067)**	0.495 (0.046)***	0.115 (0.031)*
Country: IT (ref. BE)	-0.891 (0.026)***	-0.630 (0.053)**	0.167 (0.023)***	-0.554 (0.020)***
Country: PO (ref. BE)	-1.267 (0.046)***	0.154 (0.036)*	0.469 (0.059)***	-0.248 (0.042)***
Country: PT (ref. BE)	-1.002 (0.034)***	0.078 (0.065)	0.858 (0.057)***	0.161 (0.071).
Age (continuous)	0.001 (0.003)	-0.013 (0.003)**	-0.012 (0.004)*	-0.014 (0.004)**
Gender: Woman (ref. Man)	-0.053 (0.050)	-0.174 (0.058)*	-0.007 (0.067)	-0.069 (0.085)
Living Region: Rural Area (ref. Urban Area)	0.173 (0.061)*	0.106 (0.055).	-0.070 (0.049)	0.056 (0.075)
Living Region: suburbs or outskirts of a city (ref. Urban Area)	0.095 (0.071)	0.052 (0.053)	0.044 (0.052)	0.106 (0.062)
Education: High [ISCED 5-8] (ref. Low [ISCED 1-2])	0.404 (0.116)*	0.322 (0.038)***	0.328 (0.091)*	0.392 (0.045)***
Education: Medium [ISCED 3-4] (ref. Low [ISCED 1-2])	0.120 (0.096)	0.073 (0.084)	0.217 (0.103).	0.219 (0.073)*
Employment: Part-Time or Self-Employed (ref. Full-Time)	0.012 (0.102)	0.179 (0.100)	0.121 (0.073)	0.101 (0.083)
Employment: Housework or Student (ref. Full-Time)	-0.533 (0.126)**	-0.310 (0.086)**	-0.087 (0.089)	-0.318 (0.092)*
Employment: Unemployed or Disabled (ref. Full-Time)	-0.438 (0.138)*	0.049 (0.124)	0.017 (0.041)	-0.087 (0.063)
Employment: Retired (ref. Full-Time)	-0.195 (0.173)	0.287 (0.056)**	0.050 (0.064)	0.074 (0.097)
Employment: Working Retiree (ref. Full-Time)	0.709 (0.334).	1.006 (0.257)*	0.395 (0.237)	0.978 (0.452).
Employment: Working Student (ref. Full-Time)	-0.254 (0.269)	-0.040 (0.317)	0.203 (0.432)	-0.067 (0.356)
Employment: Working for Job and House (ref. Full-Time)	0.315 (0.220)	0.201 (0.600)	-0.005 (0.344)	-0.041 (0.236)
Subjective Income (Country Mean-Centered)	0.036 (0.026)	0.004 (0.033)	-0.043 (0.022).	-0.007 (0.031)
Left-Right Self-Placement (Country Mean-Centered)	-0.051 (0.023).	0.011 (0.019)	-0.060 (0.021)*	-0.040 (0.022)
Political Interest (Country Mean-Centered)	0.420 (0.044)***	0.921 (0.062)***	0.673 (0.027)***	0.756 (0.033)***
Satisfaction with Public Service(s) Used	0.049 (0.020)*	0.032 (0.029)	-0.042 (0.024)	0.006 (0.023)
Experienced RDJ Quality Public Service Treatment	-0.099 (0.057)	-0.226 (0.051)**	-0.073 (0.049)	-0.199 (0.057)*

Note: . $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$. Results based on INVOLVE survey (2024)

Table A4. Political Efficacy Regression Results of Figure 27 (cluster-robust SEs)

Predictors	Internal Eff.	External Eff.
(Intercept)	-0.219 (0.090)*	-1.163 (0.156)***
Country: CH (ref. BE)	0.201 (0.009)***	0.677 (0.021)***
Country: DE (ref. BE)	0.012 (0.010)	0.348 (0.018)***
Country: FR (ref. BE)	-0.236 (0.016)***	-0.209 (0.026)***
Country: IE (ref. BE)	0.059 (0.019)*	0.545 (0.028)***
Country: IT (ref. BE)	-0.308 (0.012)***	-0.114 (0.026)**
Country: PO (ref. BE)	-0.106 (0.015)***	0.318 (0.028)***
Country: PT (ref. BE)	0.124 (0.021)***	0.144 (0.030)**
Age (continuous)	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.005 (0.001)**
Gender: Woman (ref. Man)	-0.127 (0.021)***	-0.077 (0.020)**
Living Region: Rural Area (ref. Urban Area)	-0.004 (0.029)	-0.053 (0.031)
Living Region: suburbs or outskirts of a city (ref. Urban Area)	-0.013 (0.019)	-0.061 (0.028).
Education: High [ISCED 5-8] (ref. Low [ISCED 1-2])	0.196 (0.060)*	0.111 (0.070)
Education: Medium [ISCED 3-4] (ref. Low [ISCED 1-2])	0.069 (0.040)	0.017 (0.055)
Employment: Part-Time or Self-Employed (ref. Full-Time)	-0.033 (0.027)	0.108 (0.037)*
Employment: Housework or Student (ref. Full-Time)	0.049 (0.037)	0.113 (0.052).
Employment: Unemployed or Disabled (ref. Full-Time)	-0.087 (0.066)	0.036 (0.049)
Employment: Retired (ref. Full-Time)	-0.036 (0.033)	0.106 (0.041)*
Employment: Working Retiree (ref. Full-Time)	-0.115 (0.157)	0.084 (0.305)
Employment: Working Student (ref. Full-Time)	-0.124 (0.116)	0.065 (0.112)
Employment: Working for Job and House (ref. Full-Time)	0.210 (0.117)	0.056 (0.163)
Subjective Income (Country Mean-Centered)	0.032 (0.008)**	0.111 (0.015)***
Left-Right Self-Placement (Country Mean-Centered)	0.001 (0.005)	-0.011 (0.011)
Political Interest (Country Mean-Centered)	0.458 (0.015)***	0.258 (0.019)***
Satisfaction with Public Service(s) Used	0.017 (0.017)	0.103 (0.029)*
Experienced RDJ Quality Public Service Treatment	0.146 (0.019)***	0.150 (0.030)**

Note: . $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$. Results based on INVOLVE survey (2024)

Table A5. Political Support Multi-Level Regression Results of Figure 28

Predictors	Political Trust	SWD
(Intercept)	3.778 *** (0.166)	5.127 *** (0.191)
Year	0.018 *** (0.001)	0.005 *** (0.001)
Gender: Woman (ref. Man)	0.171 *** (0.006)	0.047 *** (0.007)
Age (continuous)	-0.003 *** (0.000)	-0.003 *** (0.000)
Education: High [ISCED 5-8] (ref. Medium [ISCED 3-4])	0.205 *** (0.009)	0.206 *** (0.010)
Education: Low [ISCED 1-2] (ref. Medium [ISCED 3-4])	-0.062 *** (0.008)	-0.121 *** (0.009)
Education: Unclear within ISCED framework (ref. Medium [ISCED 3-4])	0.096 *** (0.015)	0.018 (0.017)
Subjective Income (Country Mean-Centered)	0.201 *** (0.004)	0.282 *** (0.005)
Left-Right Self-Placement (Country Mean-Centered)	0.035 *** (0.002)	0.077 *** (0.002)
Political Interest (Country Mean-Centered)	-0.466 *** (0.004)	-0.215 *** (0.004)
Housing Cost Overburden Rate for People w/ <60% median income	-0.022 * (0.009)	-0.083 *** (0.010)
Healthy Life Years left at age 50	0.062 *** (0.010)	0.113 *** (0.011)
Employment Rate of Recent (<1 year) ISCED 3-4 Graduates	0.278 *** (0.007)	0.103 *** (0.008)
At-Risk-of-Poverty Rate for People Recently (<1 year) employed	-0.054 *** (0.007)	-0.036 *** (0.007)
Evaluations of the State of Health and Education Services	0.422 *** (0.002)	0.546 *** (0.002)
Random Effects		
σ^2	3.34	4.03
T ₀₀	0.77 Country	1.02 Country
ICC	0.19	0.20
N	28 Country	28 Country
Observations	344068	337889
Marginal R ² / Conditional R ²	0.202 / 0.352	0.214 / 0.372

Note: * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$. Results based on European Social Survey (2006-2023) for individual-level data, and Eurostat for country-level data.

Table A6. Political Participation Multi-Level Regression Results of Figure 29

Predictors	Institutional	Non-Inst.	Electoral
(Intercept)	-1.213 *** (0.146)	-0.681 *** (0.166)	1.426 *** (0.105)
Year	-0.024 *** (0.001)	0.041 *** (0.001)	-0.016 *** (0.001)
Gender: Woman (ref. Man)	0.114 *** (0.008)	-0.139 *** (0.008)	-0.096 *** (0.009)
Age (continuous)	-0.002 *** (0.000)	-0.016 *** (0.000)	0.040 *** (0.000)
Education: High [ISCED 5-8] (ref. Medium [ISCED 3-4])	0.312 *** (0.011)	0.359 *** (0.011)	0.383 *** (0.013)
Education: Low [ISCED 1-2] (ref. Medium [ISCED 3-4])	-0.308 *** (0.011)	-0.450 *** (0.010)	-0.588 *** (0.011)
Education: Unclear within ISCED framework (ref. Medium [ISCED 3-4])	-0.038 (0.020)	-0.034 (0.019)	-0.295 *** (0.021)
Subjective Income (Country Mean-Centered)	0.068 *** (0.006)	0.049 *** (0.006)	0.176 *** (0.006)
Left-Right Self-Placement (Country Mean-Centered)	-0.019 *** (0.002)	-0.065 *** (0.002)	0.045 *** (0.002)
Political Interest (Country Mean-Centered)	-0.608 *** (0.005)	-0.600 *** (0.005)	-0.603 *** (0.005)
Housing Cost Overburden Rate for People w/ <60% median income	0.080 *** (0.012)	0.084 *** (0.011)	-0.092 *** (0.012)
Healthy Life Years left at age 50	-0.091 *** (0.012)	0.019 (0.012)	0.057 *** (0.014)
Employment Rate of Recent (<1 year) ISCED 3-4 Graduates	0.014 (0.011)	-0.006 (0.010)	-0.003 (0.010)
At-Risk-of-Poverty Rate for People Recently (<1 year) employed	0.003 (0.009)	0.048 *** (0.009)	0.010 (0.009)
Evaluations of the State of Health and Education Services	-0.028 *** (0.002)	-0.100 *** (0.002)	-0.024 *** (0.002)
Random Effects			
σ^2	3.29	3.29	3.29
T ₀₀	0.61 Country	0.79 Country	0.31 Country
ICC	0.16	0.19	0.09
N	28 Country	28 Country	28 Country
Observations	346106	346106	343213
Marginal R ² / Conditional R ²	0.101 / 0.241	0.135 / 0.302	0.246 / 0.311

Note: * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$. Results based on European Social Survey (2006-2023) for individual-level data, and Eurostat for country-level data.

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