



TRUEDEM

Trust in European Democracies

TRUEDEM: Trust in European Democracies (2023-2025)
Theoretical and Methodological Framework

(D11.3, V1.0)



**Funded by
the European Union**

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TRUEDEM Project in a Nutshell



Project Director
Prof. Christian Haerpfer
(Institute for Comparative
Survey Research, Austria)

I am delighted to present today our new EU Research Project conducted within the Framework of the Horizon Research Programme of the European Union. The title of this new research project is 'Trust in European Democracies' and the acronym is 'TRUEDEM'. This European flagship project started in January 2023 and will be implemented until December 2025 over a period of 3 years. The project has top-level partners in Austria, Czechia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia,

Slovenia, Sweden, and Ukraine. The TRUEDEM Consortium consists of leading 12 European Universities and Research Institutes.

This ambitious international research project is directed and coordinated by the Austrian Institute for Comparative Survey Research (ICSR), which is also hosting the International Secretariat of the World Values Survey Association (WVSA) on the one hand and Eurasia Barometer (EAB) on the other. The Principal Investigator and Project Coordinator is Professor Christian W. Haerpfer from the University of Vienna (Austria), the Co-Principal Investigator is Professor Pippa Norris from Harvard University (USA). The Project Manager is Dr Kseniya Kizilova. TRUEDEM is an international and interdisciplinary research project with top scholars from the academic disciplines of Political Science, Sociology, Political Sociology, Economic Sociology, Public Policy, Law, Science of Mass Communication and Media, and Psychology.

The TRUEDEM project represents a concerted effort to examine and fortify trust within European democracies. Political trust has long been regarded as an important element of regime support and factor of regime stability; it is widely associated with a number of positive outcomes in representative democracies. Political trust drives citizens' interest and engagement in politics, increases voting turnout and makes law-abiding behaviour more common. Political trust is frequently equated to diffuse regime support and thus linked to the effective functioning and stability of the political system. The proposed research effort will monitor the structural (long-term) drivers of political trust but also emphasize the strategies which can be employed by diverse actors and agencies to strengthen accurate and informed judgments of the agency trustworthiness. Key research questions of the project are summarised below.

The objective of this ambitious project is twofold. First, we aim to design and implement a complex research effort to collect comprehensive evidence on the judgments of trustworthiness in a range of European states. Second, the project will develop a comprehensive and transparent toolbox of short-term and long-term policy interventions including recommendations, and methodologies for enhancing the trust in political institutions, boosting transparency, and inclusiveness of representative systems in Europe. While there is a growing concern about the crisis of democracy and democratic backsliding, this research effort will provide an innovative theoretical perspective on the sources of regime support and strategies for trust building in the public domain.

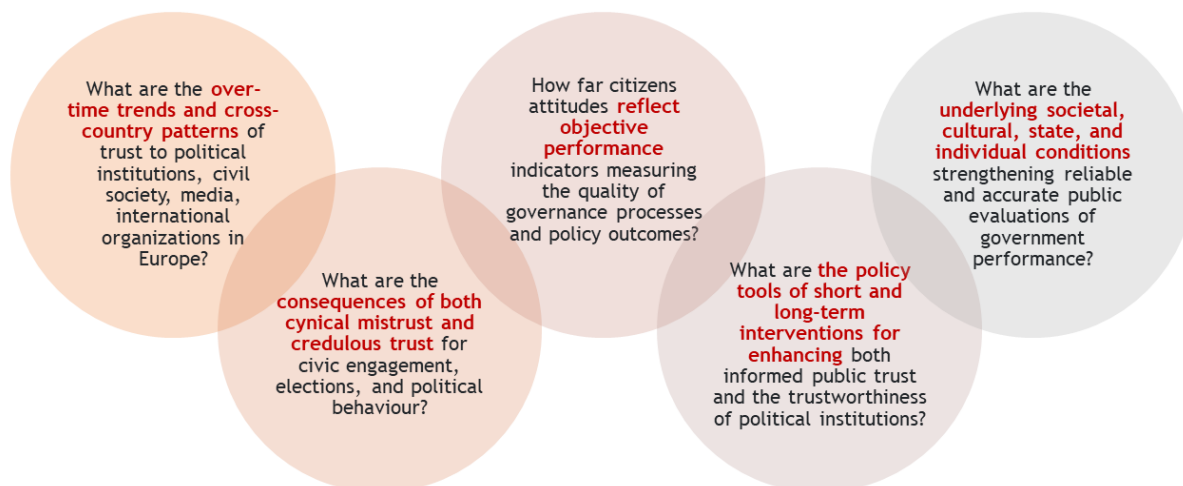
The project looks at the different drivers of 'positive high trust in democracy' and 'negative high trust in autocracy'. The project will facilitate the development of a new paradigm of political trust and trust-building and will inspire the emergence of new insights on the multi-facet origins of political trust and multi-factor nature of trustworthiness.

Structured into 12 distinct work packages, encompassing research (8), policy analysis (2), dissemination (1), and project management (1), TRUEDEM navigates a methodical path towards its objectives. Project outputs shall be summarized in 44 deliverables, including quantitative and qualitative databases, research reports, policy papers, educational materials, and administrative documents.

True to its ethos of inclusivity and collaboration, TRUEDEM endeavours to engage a wide array of stakeholders. Policymakers at the regional, national and European levels, politicians, civil servants, civil society organizations, scholars, media representatives, educators, and citizens are all key targets for interaction and dialogue.

As TRUEDEM progresses, it seeks not only to advance the scholarly understanding but also to catalyse tangible improvements in democratic governance. By fostering dialogue, disseminating knowledge, and informing policy, TRUEDEM endeavours to contribute to the cultivation of trust and legitimacy within European democracies, thereby promoting their resilience and efficacy for years to come.

In my capacity as the Director of this new exciting and important project, I invite you to get engaged with the Project team in any suitable way of your choosing: follow us on social media, join us for conferences and webinars or reach out to plan with us joint publications. The TRUEDEM Consortium is very much looking forward to establishing new partnerships and joining efforts with other scholars in this field to advance the Political Sciences research on public trust.



TRUEDEM Consortium



LADISLAV CABADA (CZECHIA)

Professor of Political Science at Metropolitan University Prague. His research interests include comparative politics of East-Central and South-Eastern Europe, party systems and political actors, policies, regional studies.



CHRISTIAN WELZEL (GERMANY)

Chair in Political Culture Research at the Center for the Study of Democracy, Leuphana University Lüneburg, Fellow of the German Academy of Sciences. His research interests include values, political culture, and democratization.



DOMENICO MADDALONI (ITALY)

professor of Sociology at the Department of Political and Communication Sciences, University of Salerno. His recent research work has focused mainly on social and political change, globalization, and international migration.



CLAUDIU TUFIS (ROMANIA)

Associate Professor at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest. His research focuses on political culture, electoral behavior, civil society, social movements, political parties, and democratization.



ALENKA KRASOVEC (SLOVENIA)

Professor of Political Science at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. Her research interests include political institutions and actors, as well as political processes: elections, policy-making, democratization, Europeanisation.



FREDERIC GONTHIER (FRANCE)

Professor of Political Science at the University Grenoble Alpes, Sciences Po Grenoble. His work focuses on welfare attitudes and on the linkage between value systems and party systems in a comparative perspective.



SOKRATIS KONIORDOS (GREECE)

Full Professor of Sociology at the Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Peloponnese. His main research interests include economic sociology, work, migration, modernity, civil society, and values.



AGNIESZKA TURSKA-KAWA (POLAND)

Director of the Institute of Political Science at the University of Silesia. Her scientific interests include the psychology of politics, cognitive aspects of political choices, and broadly understood pathologies of democracy.



ANETA VILAGI (SLOVAKIA)

Assistant Professor of Political Science at Comenius University in Bratislava. Her research interests include Slovak politics, European integration, Euroscepticism, and anti-democratic politics, as well as social experiments and research methodology.



IRINA KUZINA (UKRAINE)

Associate Professor of Sociology at the Department of Methods of Sociological Research, V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University. Academic interests include political trust and support for the political system, law enforcement system, migration, methods of sociological research.



BI PURANEN (SWEDEN)

Associate Professor of Economics, Founding Director of Bikupan Research Institute. Her research interests include social and political values and beliefs, migration, and security.

Organizational Structure of the Project

WP1. Quantitative indicators and long-term trends of political trust

Leader: Claudiu Tufis (ROMANIA)

- Comprehensive database of quantitative indicators for 1980-2022
- Methodology for harmonizing the trust data
- Analysis of long-term dynamics and regional trends
- Set of educational materials on trust in political institutions
- European Observatory of Political Trust

WP2. Voting and electoral behaviour: new challenges for inclusiveness and representativity in democratic systems

Leader: Domenico Maddaloni (ITALY)

- Database on voter turnout in Europe in 1980-2022
- Electoral volatility and decreased voting turnout trends
- Emergence of new parties
- Challenges for inclusiveness and representativity in democracies

WP3. Role of socioeconomic transformations in reshaping European democracies

Leader: Sokratis Koniordos (GREECE)

- Mid-term and long-term impacts of socioeconomic transformations associated with the corona-pandemic; migration and refugees; digitalization of work
- Implications of socioeconomic transformations for democratic attitudes, political participation and trust

WP4. Democratic systems and national cultures: transition and interplay of values

Leader: Christian Welzel (GERMANY)

- Democratic values and value change
- Human empowerment and self-expression values
- Inequality and value shift: challenges to democracy

WP5. New identities and emerging cleavages: implications for political polarization

Leader: Ladislav Cabada (CZECHIA)

- Database on long-term trends of political polarization in 1990-2022
- Erosion of old and emergence of new political cleavages
- Erosion of old identities and party alignments
- Radicalisation of political attitudes and increased polarization

WP6. Social media and political trust: democracy backing or democracy destabilization

Leader: Aneta Vilagi (SLOVAKIA)

- Social experiment
- Citizens' participation through social media
- Empowered by social media? - implications for political trust

WP7. Information environment, media use, trust

Leader: Pippa Norris (AUSTRIA/USA)

- Studying trust with split-sample experiments
- Role of media environment in forming trust in the European Union member-states
- Country-specific predictors of trust in Europe

WP8. Empirical data collection (quantitative and qualitative studies)

Leader: Kseniya Kizilova (AUSTRIA)

- Expert interviews with policymakers (N=155)
- Consultations with CSO leaders (N=155)
- FGDs with citizens (N=16)
- Online survey of citizens in 6 countries (N=9000)

WP9. Democratic innovations and policy toolkit: knowledge-based policy actions catalogue

Leader: Frederic Gonthier (FRANCE)

- Framework and action plan for a system of democratic innovations
- Catalogue of knowledge-based policy actions to enhance political trust and support for democracy
- Audience-targeted recommendations on promoting democratic innovations

WP10. Multi-level policy interventions for trust-building at local, national, regional, and EU levels

Leader: Alenka Krasovec (SLOVENIA)

- Multi-level policy action plan: local, national, regional and EU levels
- Policy actions by effect: short-term (12 months); mid-term (3-5 years); long-term (7-10 years)

WP11. Dissemination, communication, and exploitation

Leader: Christian Haerpfer (AUSTRIA)

- Consultations with NGOs & public
- Thematic dissemination events for academia, policy-makers, NGOs & general public
- Workshops & final conference

WP12. Consortium Management

Leader: Christian Haerpfer (AUSTRIA)

- Executive, scientific, and communications management
- Project coordination and administration

Setting Up the Methodological Frame¹



Co-Principal Investigator
Prof. Pippa Norris
(Harvard University, USA)

There is widespread concern among many scholars, media commentators, and policymakers that public trust in political leaders and democratic institutions has eroded over time, within Europe and elsewhere, due to public disaffection with how leaders and institutions perform, generating political instability and polarization, constituting a deep-seated legitimacy crisis for representative democracies. All states require a reservoir of political trust from citizens for

voluntary acquiescence with authority, but in Europe such trust is thought as being vital to prevent democratic backsliding.

Despite extensive concerns, a considerable scientific debate remains about these common claims, including 1) whether systematic evidence from public opinion trends supports a systematic decline in political trust across European societies; 2) whether any erosion, which is demonstrated to have occurred in specific societies, can be attributed to shortfalls in the policies or procedural performance of governing authorities; 3) whether the consequences of any decline in public trust have indeed triggered greater political instability and polarization; and, finally, 4) on this basis, whether claims of a widespread legitimacy crisis are valid or exaggerated.

To address these important issues, TRUEDEM conducts a systematic examination of the patterns, mechanisms, and determinants of political trust within Europe, especially the trustworthiness of political actors and institutions as the key driver for trust attitudes. The project's primary objectives are to develop a rigorously reevaluated theory of political trust and to formulate a comprehensive policy toolkit comprising short- and long-term interventions. These goals are designed to bolster both understanding the informed trust judgements of the public and strengthening the overall trustworthiness of political institutions.

The contemporary literature about the causes of trust has generated an extensive body of theoretical and empirical research by social scientists in diverse disciplines. Diagnosing the underlying causes and the consequences is critical to identifying effective remedies. In the early psychological literature trust was conceptualized as an inherent, enduring trait rooted in individuals' personalities, believed to be largely independent of adult experiences. According to this view, individuals were classified as either "trustees" or "cynics," with their predispositions influencing how they perceive and interact with others. Contemporary psychologists have extended this understanding by exploring the relationship between trust and the 'Big Five' personality traits, particularly Agreeableness. The classic psychological approach to understanding trust has been influential but faces challenges in explaining fluctuations in trust levels observed at individual and societal levels. Moreover, the deterministic nature of the psychological approach makes it challenging to identify effective social interventions or political reforms to enhance trust.

Sociological theories, by contrast, focus upon the macro-level, emphasizing that societies stamp enduring cultural values and social norms upon those growing up within each local community, nation-state, and world region, generating enduring geographic contrasts in trust evident across

societies. These accounts intersect with psychological theories, which also emphasize the role of early socialization in forming trust attitudes. However, sociological theories place greater emphasis on collective cultural transmission processes, including societal development, education, religious teachings, media influence, and community participation. Cultural theories suggest several predictions open to testing against survey data gathered by the TRUEDEM project. According to this theory, observed patterns of social, political and international trust should reflect common values and norms and past societal experiences, and not respond to contemporary changes in social conditions, like sudden upticks or downturns in levels of unemployment and growth, the shock of Brexit, shifts in the quality of European governance, the rise to power of authoritarian populist parties in Hungary and Poland.

The final perspective explored in this project draws upon political economy literature, focusing on performance theories to understand trust. One approach to performance theories suggests that citizens' confidence in state institutions is influenced by subjective perceptions or objective indicators of government competence, integrity, and impartiality. This perspective posits that trust in government is influenced by factors such as the government's track record in delivering on promises, especially in managing the effective delivery of public goods and services. Short-term fluctuations in economic performance, like those resulting from crises or policy changes, are expected to correlate with shifts in public confidence in government institutions.

However, evaluating government performance poses challenges. It's unclear what criteria citizens use to assess government performance, whether it's based on campaign promises, past performance, or comparative benchmarks with neighbouring states. Additionally, studies often narrowly focus on economic indicators, overlooking other salient issues like health, education, environmental protection, or foreign policy. Moreover, establishing a causal relationship between trust and government performance is complex. Factors like partisan bias, prior beliefs, and reciprocal relationships between trust and performance can confound interpretations. The TRUEDEM project aims to utilize econometric techniques to examine these relationships across various agents and agencies beyond central government.

Utilizing a mixed-method approach is crucial due to the multifaceted nature of trust and the diverse research questions it entails. By integrating various methods such as experimental designs, qualitative interviews, and field observations, researchers can achieve a comprehensive understanding of trust from different perspectives. The TRUEDEM project will monitor European trends but also combine this data with performance indices across multiple agencies and agents, to be able to expand and deepen our understanding of cross-national medium and short-term volatility in public trust. The use of representative survey experiments and some qualitative focus groups in selected countries will also provide further insights into how far randomized exposure to varied types of informational messages about the competency, honesty and impartiality of agency performance influence subsequent public views about their trustworthiness - and how far the impact of the informational cues varies among different social sectors. The mixed methods combining both descriptive observational and survey experimental data is designed to overcome the limitations in each separate approach, breaking new scientific ground in our understanding of the causes of trust and trustworthiness.

¹ Norris, P. (2023). Literature Review and Research Paper on Measuring Trust. *Working paper No1.1*. TRUEDEM: Trust in European Democracies Project (www.trueDEM.eu).

Research Framework and Thematic Studies

To address the multi-facet nature of trust, TRUEDEM distinguishes between trust as a quality of the individual and trustworthiness as a feature of dyadic relationships². In the context of political system, trustworthiness can be described as a function of the institutions' ability to provide citizens with a political and economic environment that guarantees political rights, ensures economic prosperity, equality, and wellbeing for substantial parts of the society and is guided by ethical, just, fair, and transparent standards.

Operationalized through a repeating cycle of trustworthiness assessment, trust-building can be described as a complex process of matching new evidence on agency performance (such as new laws adopted by the parliament, new policies introduced by the government, changes in the rates of inflation or unemployment) against a set of good governance criteria, mediated by a system of individual-level characteristics and factors of social, political, and cultural environment. Decisions that agencies are trustworthy, in this conceptualization, involves estimating the risks and benefits of delegating authority to others.

TRUEDEM aims to unpack mediating conditions which can help to understand the intervening steps and the causal chain within the 'black box' of trustworthiness assessment. Key questions that emerge in this context are which information citizens use to evaluate the performance of governments and other political institutions, on one hand, and which individual- and country-level factors intervene fostering more or less accurate assessments and decisions about trust. Perceptual bias in judgments of trustworthiness includes both overestimating the performance of institutions resulting in credulous trust widespread in authoritarian environments, as well as underscoring governmental efficacy leading to cynical mistrust, common for many European societies.

The TRUEDEM research framework comprises a set of thematic studies each dedicated to the investigation of a specific domain influencing trustworthiness assessment and transition to a positive or negative decision about trust. For instance, voting behaviour (WP2) shapes trust by indicating faith in the system through participation, ensuring representation aligns with voter interests, holding officials accountable, fostering civic engagement, and reflecting

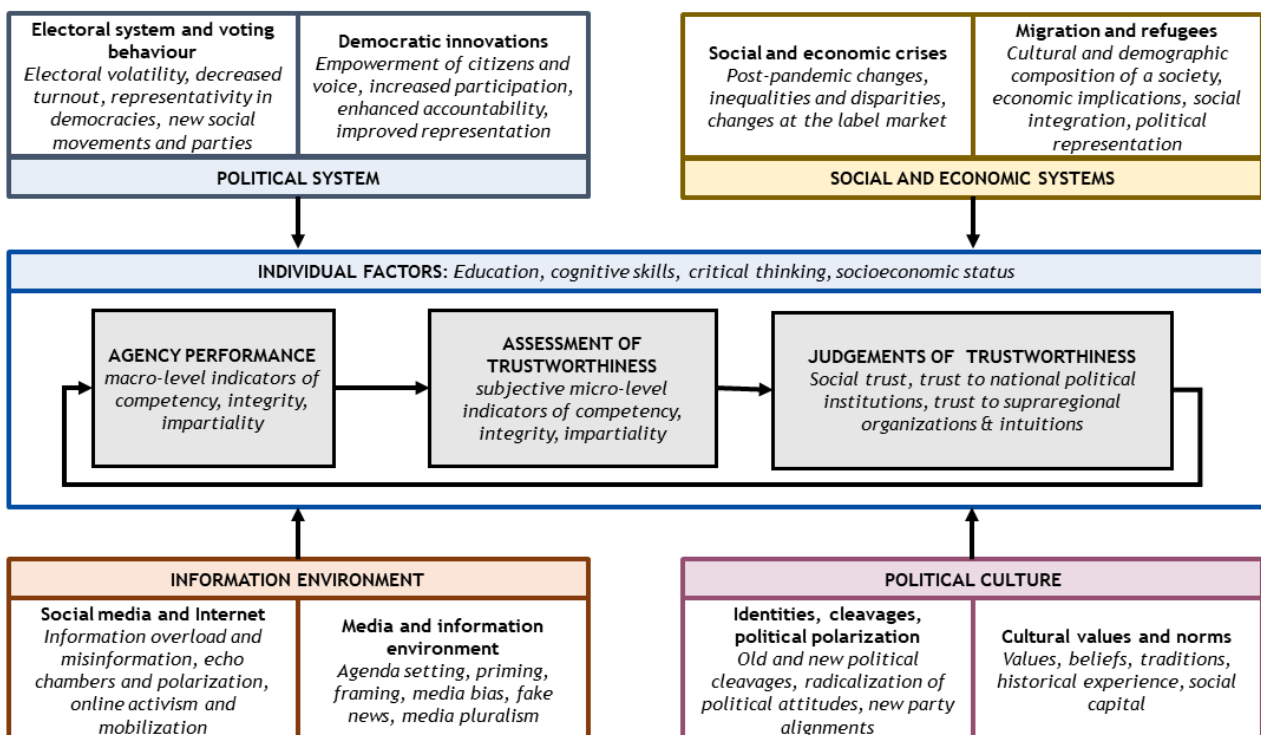
disillusionment when perceived corruption or disconnect occurs. Democratic innovations (WP9) empower individuals and communities by providing opportunities for citizens to directly engage in decision-making processes, and thus can affect perceptions of trustworthiness.

Cultural norms and values (WP4) shape the foundation of trust within societies. Societies that prioritize transparency, accountability, and fairness tend to have higher levels of political trust. On the other hand, political polarization and cleavages (WP5) breed distrust by fostering divisive rhetoric, eroding common ground, and promoting confirmation bias, ultimately undermining faith in institutions and social cohesion. Socioeconomic transformations (WP3) pose another challenge to political trust. Economic crises can reduce political trust by eroding confidence in government's ability to manage the economy and address inequality. Migration can also impact trust through cultural shifts and perceptions of identity, with policies and integration efforts playing a crucial role in shaping trust levels.

The media and information environment (WP7) play a crucial role in shaping political trust by influencing public perceptions, framing political narratives, and providing the context through which people interpret political events. On the other hand, social media's influence on political trust (WP6) is dual edged: it enhances transparency and citizen engagement but also fosters echo chambers, spreads misinformation, and may inadvertently deepen polarization. TRUEDEM analyses the multi-level system of factors and their interplay to generate new knowledge on the underlying societal, cultural, state, and individual conditions strengthening reliable and accurate public evaluations of government performance.



Project Manager
Dr. Kseniya Kizilova
(Institute for Comparative
Survey Research, Austria)



² Norris, P. (2022). In Praise of Skepticism: Trust but Verify. New York: Oxford University Press.

Trust Measurement and Trust Data Harmonization



WP Leader
Prof. Claudiu Tufis
(University of Bucharest,
Romania)

The aim of this study is to build a robust and comprehensive knowledge base on the long-term developments for trust in political institutions of representative democracy (political parties, executives, parliaments, judiciary) and trust in supra-national institutions that play an increasingly important role with respect to democracy at the national and international levels (the European Union, the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization etc.). Within this study, available secondary

data was collected, harmonized, documented through the addition of metadata, and integrated into a dataset that serves as input data for other studies in the project and that was distributed to the public.

The first part of the study deals with the secondary analysis of the political trust measures and harmonization of the trust data. Political trust surveys are conducted across different countries, regions, and time periods by various organizations and researchers. Harmonization ensures that data collected from these diverse sources can be compared meaningfully³.

The measurement of trust using public opinion surveys has a long history. The earliest case of a survey question measuring social trust, identified using the Roper Center's iPoll archive, was in a survey conducted in March 1942 in the United States by the Office of Public Opinion Research. The Civic Culture study of 1959 is the first survey in the Roper Center's iPoll archive that uses a different question to measure social trust - the Trusted-Careful version - the same version that has been discussed by Rosenberg (1956), and the same version that is still in use in many public opinion survey projects in the 2020s.

In this study, the TRUEDEM project team conducted a detailed analysis of the existing measures of trust. It included an overview of the most important debatable issues in the measurement of trust and quantitative review of the trust literature. For the quantitative review of the trust literature, traditional approach was combined with a new approach that took advantage of the availability of LLM models. The traditional quantitative data analysis has been duplicated and supplemented using Chat GPT as a tool to code the information included in the abstracts of the articles that have been included in the quantitative review. Abstracts of 19 265 unique academic publications listed in Scopus and Web of Sciences from a period of 1965 to 2023 were analysed and coded.

Fields such as abstracts, keywords, number of authors, publishers etc. were analysed. The results suggest that cooperation in the field of trust research has intensified over time, with the number of publications co-authored by 3-5 colleagues growing from 30% in 2000s to a half in the 2020s.

The conducted analysis suggests that the analysed pool of articles was published in 5000 journals; 12% of all articles were published in top 25 journals by top 10 publishers (Elsevier, Routledge, Sage, Wiley, Springer among the others). Articles published in the main journals in Social Sciences have a higher average number of pages (Social Indicators Research - 22 pages; Journal of Trust Research - 22 pages; Political Studies - 21 pages; Political Behaviour - 23 pages) while journals from other disciplines publish shorter articles (Social Sciences and Medicine - 10 pages; Journal of Business Research - 10 pages; Computers in Human Behaviour - 11 pages; Personality and Individual Differences - 7 pages).

The analysis identified 6 main thematic clusters in trust research literature: institutional trust (political science); consumer trust (marketing); social capital and trust (sociology); technology, AI and trust (IT sphere); trust in healthcare and medical domain (health sciences); intra-organizational trust (management). In publications that rely on population survey data in social sciences, the most widely used datasets are European Values Study/ World

Values Survey (27%); European Social Survey (22%); General Social Survey (15%). The most analysed geographical regions are China (13%); USA (12%); world as a whole (12%); Europe (8%).

Based on the literature review, the study also developed an exhaustive catalogue of trust measures, which have been used in survey research over the past decades. The catalogue is structured in 5 sections and includes measures of interpersonal trust; trust in other groups / countries; trust in specific contexts; trust with a gender perspective; and institutional trust. European and international cross-country survey research projects have been examined as a source of these measures.

Five different questions are used to measure interpersonal trust, with the most commonly used being the "Trusted-Careful" question. The scale used to measure responses has undergone multiple modifications, resulting in seven different versions of the scale. Measures of institutional trust are represented by indications of confidence in national institutions and supranational and international organizations. The scales used to measure trust in institutions exhibit variability, ranging from 2-point to 11-point scales. Measures of trust with a gender perspective were briefly used in the Eurobarometer during the 1970s and 1980s. These questions asked respondents whether they trusted more a man or a woman to perform specific actions. However, they primarily captured biases in gender attitudes rather than trust itself and have not been used since the end of the 1980s. Measures of trust in specific contexts have been explored more extensively, particularly by the Eurobarometer. These measures involve asking about trust in institutions or entities within specific contexts of interest, such as trust in institutions to inform about radioactivity levels after the Chernobyl disaster or trust in sources of information about health. These contextualized trust measures offer potential for deeper insights and may be considered for future surveys conducted by the TRUEDEM project.



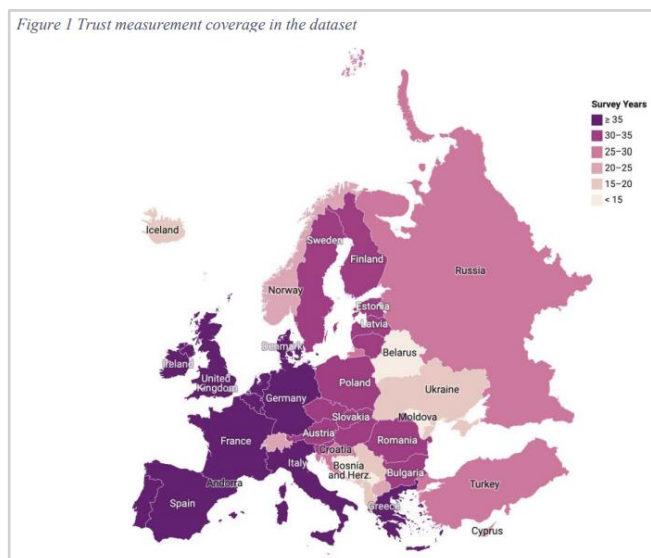
³ Tufis, C. (2023). Methodological paper on trust data harmonization. Working paper no.1.2. TRUEDEM: Trust in European Democracies Project (www.truedem.eu).

Long-term Trends of Political Trust: Quantitative Secondary Database

Political trust is an important concept in understanding citizen attitudes towards political institutions, leaders, and the government as a whole. Measures of political trust are commonly included in many surveys, particularly those focused on public opinion, political behaviour, and social research. A harmonized quantitative database of trust indicators becomes crucial considering the plethora of survey sources available.

TRUEDEM project outputs produced to date include a database on social and political trust⁴. The database comprises secondary survey data for 44 European countries for a period of 1980-2023. Data sources include Eurobarometer (EB), European Social Survey (ESS), European Values Study (EVS), World Values Survey (WVS), International Social Survey Program (ISSP), New Democracies Barometer (NDB) / New Europe Barometer (NEB), Central and Eastern European Barometer (CEEB), Applicant and Candidate Countries Eurobarometer (CCEB). The database comprises 91 indicators which are grouped into nine clusters, including interpersonal trust (10 indicators); institutional trust to non-political institutions (8); trust to media (5); trust to civil society (6); trust to economic institutions (3); trust to international organizations (7); trust to EU institutions (12); trust to nationalities (32).

Figure 1 Trust measurement coverage in the dataset



The TRUEDEM project ensures the accessibility and usability of its dataset by providing data in multiple formats. Researchers can download the data in SPSS, Stata, SAS, or CSV formats, catering to different analytical preferences and software compatibility. Moreover, the inclusion of original data by scale type and harmonized 2- and 3-point trust scales enhances the dataset's versatility and comparability across different studies and analyses.

In addition to downloadable data and documentation, the TRUEDEM project provides an online data analysis tool⁵. This tool offers a user-friendly interface for exploring and analysing the dataset interactively. Users can generate frequency distributions over time for specific countries or regions, visualize trends through graphs, and export tables for further analysis or presentation purposes. The online tool enhances the accessibility of the dataset, allowing researchers to conduct preliminary analyses and gain insights without the need for specialized software or expertise.

This cross-country time-series secondary database of quantitative indicators of social and political trust has several major goals. Foremost, the database was designed to track trends in social and political trust over time across different countries. This involves identifying patterns of trust development, decline, or stability. The database facilitates comparative analysis between countries to identify similarities and differences in factors affecting social and political trust. This includes examining how cultural, economic, political, and historical factors influence trust levels. The database helps raise public awareness about the importance of social and political trust and its implications for democratic governance, social cohesion, and economic development. The database allows developing predictive models to forecast future trends in social and political trust based on historical data, which could be valuable for policymakers, researchers, and organizations seeking to anticipate societal dynamics.

Trust Data
Trust in Non - Political Institutions - Churches - Scale 2 points [CCEB,EB]

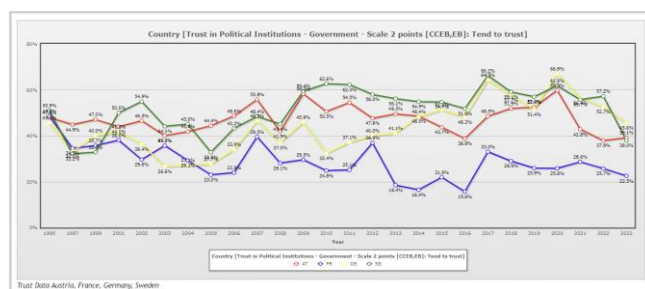
Indicator 41/352

[EB]: I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it. The Church [CCEB]: I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it. The Church

Country	Year	1997	1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2010
France	Tend not to trust	53.0%	50.2%	53.6%	57.1%	52.4%	52.1%	50.7%	50.5%	42.1%	51.7%
	Tend to trust	34.5%	35.9%	36.0%	33.4%	35.2%	34.9%	36.7%	36.1%	42.8%	32.2%
Great Britain	Tend not to trust	27.9%	26.2%	33.4%	39.9%	43.9%	42.5%	43.8%	43.2%	43.0%	51.6%
	Tend to trust	57.4%	60.5%	53.5%	45.8%	40.1%	44.0%	42.8%	41.3%	43.9%	37.4%
Germany	Tend not to trust	38.5%	46.5%	48.7%	51.9%	49.6%	46.3%	40.7%	42.1%	42.7%	50.7%
	Tend to trust	44.0%	36.9%	35.8%	32.7%	31.9%	40.6%	54.0%	48.8%	47.6%	38.5%
Greece	Tend not to trust	21.3%	16.1%	27.4%	34.5%	35.3%	37.6%	47.5%	41.7%	41.2%	58.5%
	Tend to trust	76.6%	81.2%	70.2%	62.1%	61.5%	59.1%	51.9%	57.9%	58.4%	39.0%

Trust Data All samples

Researchers often duplicate efforts by conducting similar surveys on trust indicators. A harmonized database reduces redundancy by providing a centralized repository of trust data, saving time and resources for researchers. The database also contributes to methodological advancements in the measurement and analysis of social and political trust. This includes refining measurement instruments, enhancing data collection techniques, and developing innovative analytical approaches.



Subsequent updates of the database will include trust data from national and regional surveys, macro indicators and data on the political, social, and economic contexts as well as the performance of political institutions. This will enable identifying correlates and determinants of social and political trust, such as income inequality, media freedom, corruption levels, democratic governance, social cohesion, and institutional trust contributing to the analysis of the multifaceted nature of trust dynamics. Overall, the database becomes a valuable resource for advancing knowledge, informing policy, and promoting societal well-being by enhancing our understanding of social and political trust dynamics across countries and over time.

⁴ Tufiş, C., Ghica, L., Radu, B. (2023). Long-Term Trends of Political Trust Dynamics (1980-2023): Dataset and Codebook. Working paper no. 1.3. TRUEDEM: Trust in European Democracies Project (www.truedem.eu).

⁵ Accessible at: <https://www.truedemdata.eu/odajds/oda.jsp>

The Covid-19 Pandemic Challenge to Political Trust



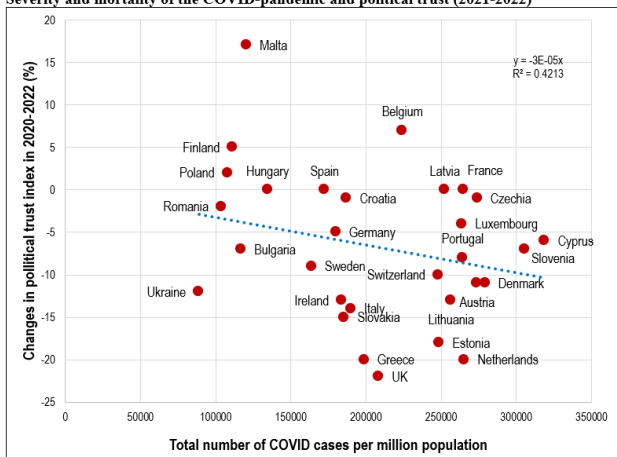
WP Leader
Prof. Sokratis Koniordos
(University of
Peloponnese, Greece)

National governments, European Union bodies, and both national and international medical authorities and agencies have united in their efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the collective mobilization, the implementation of stringent measures has sparked concerns among governments and opposition circles alike. While the primary goal remains the containment of the disease, ensuring the preservation of democratic principles and the rights of citizens has not always been given precedence. Predictably, the enforcement of these measures has faced resistance from diverse quarters, each expressing varying levels of dissent grounded in different rationales.

Analysis⁶ stemming from literature reviews and secondary data analysis illuminates several recurring thematic threads regarding the impact of COVID-19 on social and political trust, as well as satisfaction with democracy across various European countries. Trust emerges as a central focus, wielding significant influence on compliance with pandemic-related measures and vaccination campaigns. Research conducted in Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, France, Moldova, and Slovakia underscores the crucial role of trust in governmental institutions, particularly during the pandemic's initial phases. However, a decline in trust over time, fuelled by factors such as perceived governmental shortcomings and preexisting socioeconomic disparities, has resulted in diminished compliance and scepticism toward pandemic management strategies.

Protests against institutional policies have emerged as another thematic concern. Moreover, discussions regarding political liberties and democracy have gained prominence, with critiques of governmental encroachments on democratic rights prompting debates about the delicate balance between public safety and civil liberties. Instances of democratic backsliding and apprehensions about the erosion of democratic norms have spurred calls for political actions in response to the crisis and legal investigations into the intricate relationship between democracy and constitutional frameworks.

Severity and mortality of the COVID-pandemic and political trust (2021-2022)



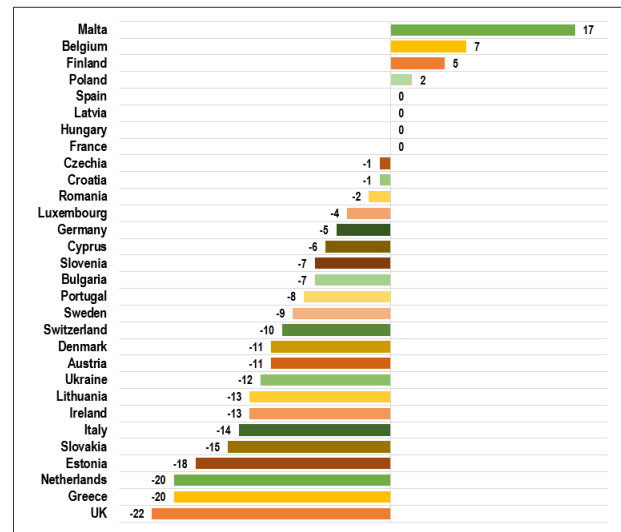
Source: TRUEDEM calculations based on European Social Survey and Eurobarometer (2020, 2022); COVID-19 dashboard of the World Health Organization

The identified significant connections between psychological factors and vaccine acceptance underscore the influence of individual differences in shaping attitudes towards vaccination. Socio-demographic variables like age and

socioeconomic status play a crucial role in determining compliance with pandemic measures, with older individuals and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds showing higher levels of adherence. Additionally, higher levels of education typically correlate with greater compliance, whereas lower educational attainment may result in the adoption of non-scientific perspectives.

Other thematic areas addressed in the literature encompass the proliferation of non-scientific and conspiratorial narratives, the influential role of media in shaping public perceptions, and the ongoing digitalization of government services. Furthermore, suspicion regarding China's involvement in the pandemic and discussions surrounding the revitalization of the welfare state have been prominent topics of inquiry. Theoretical analyses have endeavoured to conceptualize the pandemic through diverse lenses, incorporating considerations of individual autonomy and ideological perspectives.

Changes in the political trust index (2022 vs 2020) (difference in percent points)



Source: TRUEDEM calculations based on European Social Survey and Eurobarometer (2020, 2022)

Analysis of existing public opinion research data revealed a complex tapestry of trust fluctuations, both temporally and geographically. While some nations experienced peaks in trust during certain years, others grappled with declines. Throughout this period, a consistent pattern emerges: the police consistently emerged as the most trusted institution, followed by the legal system and parliament. In contrast, politicians and political parties tended to elicit lower levels of trust, indicative of a broader scepticism towards political elites. Through cross-national comparisons, several key insights emerged. Affluent EU countries demonstrated resilience in political trust during the initial years of the economic crisis, potentially due to their relative economic stability. Despite initial declines, many countries gradually recovered trust levels over subsequent years. However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on political trust varied widely. Contrary to expectations, a universal "rally around the flag" effect was not observed in all countries, challenging assumptions about crisis-induced trust dynamics.

These findings underscore the intricate interplay between economic events, public health crises, and trust in political institutions. Fluctuations in political trust are intricately linked to broader socio-political dynamics, encompassing economic conditions, institutional factors, and societal attitudes. Ultimately, this narrative provides valuable insights into the diverse trajectories of political trust across Europe, shedding light on the complex relationship between crisis events and public perceptions of governance.

⁶ Demertzis, N., Yfanti, A., Koniordos, S. (2023). Literature Review on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Democratic Attitudes and Trust. Working paper No 3.1. TRUEDEM: Trust in European Democracies Project (www.TRUEDEM.eu).

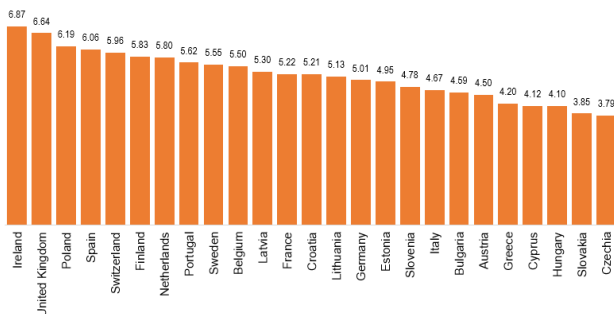
Exploring the Nexus of Migration Dynamics and Political Trust in Europe

The influx of migrants and refugees has sparked various reactions among European citizens, leading to shifts in their trust in democratic institutions and political leaders. Perceptions of immigration as a threat can lead to judgments on the effectiveness of political institutions in managing migration. Perceived failures in this regard erode trust in institutions and elected officials, potentially leading to broader distrust in the democratic political community. Furthermore, the handling of migration issues by political leaders can impact public trust. Instances of perceived mismanagement, inadequate responses, or politicization of immigration can contribute to a decline in trust in political leaders and parties. Moreover, the rise of anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies in some European countries has polarized public opinion and contributed to a climate of mistrust. This can further deepen divisions within society and erode trust in the democratic process itself.

Migration plays a significant role in shaping political trust in Europe, with its effects being felt across various dimensions of democratic governance and societal cohesion. The substantial increase in migration flows to EU member-states occurred during two recent periods: notably, in 2015, when approximately 1.2 million individuals, primarily from Syria and other Middle Eastern countries, sought refuge in the EU, and in 2022, when over 6 million citizens of Ukraine fled their country due to Russia's military actions. Such large-scale population movements within short time frames undoubtedly exert profound effects on the political, social, and economic fabric of receiving countries, notably influencing public trust toward key political institutions. Existing literature tends to indicate a decline in public trust in national governments and political leaders, alongside growing dissatisfaction with their management of immigration issues and increased support for anti-immigration political parties.

The theoretical logic connecting immigration, political trust, and democracy is multifaceted. One perspective posits that immigration plays a central role in the domestic politics of European democracies, with migration policies being used to reaffirm state sovereignty at the expense of democracy. This view highlights the marginalization of migrants and refugees, leading to the erosion of trust and the corrosion of liberal democratic foundations. Another theoretical argument links immigration with political trust, claiming that the former negatively impacts the latter. It maintains that large-scale external and economic challenges to European democracies, have brought a series of social and economic effects that, in turn, have provoked political effects, including the rise of populism and the transition to "authoritarian democracy", reflected in restrictive migration policies.

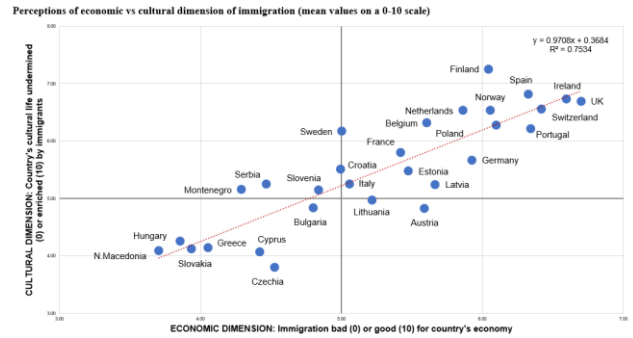
Mean value: immigrants make the country a worse [0] or better [10] place to live



Data source: European Social Survey, 2020

The theoretical framework employed by the TRUEDEM project⁷ centers on the interconnectedness of immigration and political trust, particularly focusing on the trends and predictors of public trust in political leaders and institutions. The project posits that perceptions of trustworthiness regarding politicians and institutions are influenced by specific

policy decisions and overall performance. In this context, the erosion of citizens' support for specific democratic institutions and the broader liberal democratic regime is explored concerning the success or failure of governing elites in managing the immigration crisis.



Data source: European Social Survey, 2020

Available empirical evidence originating from the European Social Survey⁸ is used to test the established hypothesis. Immigrants are perceived as making the country better in Ireland, the UK, Poland, and Spain, while they are seen as making it worse in Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Cyprus, and Greece. Public perceptions of immigration's impact on the economy and cultural life feature high correlation, indicating that immigration is often seen as a complex phenomenon affecting various aspects of society. Overall, cultural aspects of immigration tend to be evaluated more positively, with higher correlation with the overall assessment of immigration's impact.

While higher levels of political trust generally align with more positive attitudes towards immigration, there are variations across countries, and the relationship may be influenced by various contextual factors specific to each country. Countries like Sweden, Germany, and Finland exhibit relatively strong positive correlations between political trust and positive opinions towards immigration. In contrast, countries like Hungary and Croatia show weaker correlations, indicating that the relationship between political trust and opinions towards immigration may be less pronounced or consistent. Respondents who had no trust at all in the country's parliament tended to hold more negative views towards immigration, believing it to be bad for the economy, undermining cultural life, and making the country a worse place to live.

The EU has implemented various policy measures to address immigration and asylum seeking, with significant developments occurring between 2005 and 2022. Milestones include initiatives such as the European Commission's Green Paper on managing economic migration, the Stockholm Programme, and the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. These interventions aim to strike a balance between security concerns and respect for human rights, establish common rules for legal migration, and respond to crisis situations, such as the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean.

While EU interventions and the involvement of independent authorities have raised awareness and addressed some aspects of immigration challenges, there are still areas for improvement. Challenges include the need for more effective democratic consultation processes, greater citizen engagement, and the realization of the full potential of independent authorities in safeguarding human rights and accountability. Opportunities lie in further developing mechanisms for democratic participation, enhancing transparency and accountability in policymaking, and promoting dialogue between EU institutions, citizens, and stakeholders.

⁷ Sotiropoulos, D. A., Kanellopoulos, K. & Yfanti, A. (2023). Literature review on the impact of the migration and refugees' waves on democratic attitudes and trust. Working Paper no.3.2. TRUEDEM: Trust in European Democracies Project (www.TRUEDEM.eu).

⁸ European Social Survey: <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>

Democratic Systems and National Cultures: Transition and Interplay of Values



WP Leader

Prof. Christian Welzel
(Leuphana University,
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The objective of this study is to investigate the mechanisms and analyse the patterns of interplay between the support for democracy and political trust on one hand, and the social, political, cultural, religious, and other values that are integral to the national cultures of European societies on the other. This study is primarily concerned with the identification of those social and cultural values, attitudes and beliefs which are congruent with the support for democracy and reinforce sceptical political trust. This study also explores the interplay of political systems and national cultures in the EU area to examine the elements of value systems that align with credulous trust and cynical mistrust.

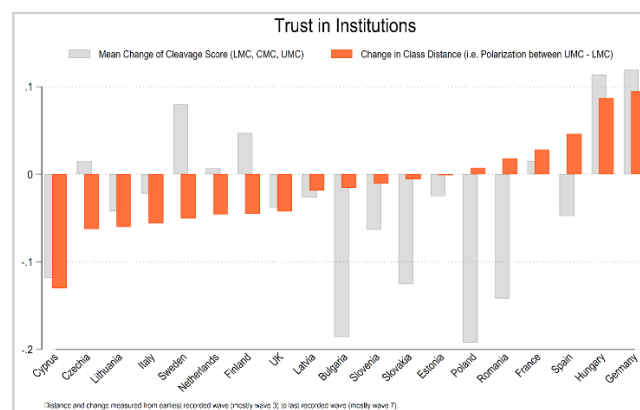
The first part of the study focused on exploring the role of social and economic inequalities as the driving forces of values polarization and associated with it decline of political trust. Phenomena described as “democratic backsliding” refers to the reactionary ideological shifts in large population segments often presented as the key reason for the rise of Right-Wing Populism (RWP). Against the backdrop of risen economic inequalities and insecurities, the alleged authoritarian reaction among “modernization losers” is presumed to increase ideological group polarization over key dimensions of political conflict. Following widening ideological polarization, economically deprived and culturally marginalized population segments become increasingly alienated from the existing system and its representatives, visible in crumbling institutional trust. These shifts not only fuel citizens’ distrust in democratic institutions, but also increase readiness to support RWP in its efforts to cut back on democracy’s liberal principles.

To test which ideological dimensions precipitate class-based polarization, the European Values Study/ World Values Survey cross-country time-series data-set⁹ is used to identify the key cleavage domains: (1) the market cleavage over the deregulation versus regulation of the economy; (2) the migration cleavage over the exclusion versus inclusion of immigrants; (3) the diversity cleavage over the intolerance versus tolerance of ethno-linguistic pluralism; (4) the sexuality cleavage over the restriction versus widening of reproductive freedoms; (5) the sustainability cleavage over job creation versus environmental protection as policy priorities. To avoid mixing the long-term trend with futile momentary fluctuations, the analysis focuses on changes over a considerably long-time span, that is, from the mid-1990s (way before any of the recent financial, migration, pandemic, war crises) till 2018-2020 (EVS/WVS wave 7). Analysis focuses on the four largest national populations from the EU’s Western core, Nordic region, Mediterranean South, and post-communist East as exemplifications. Polarization is measured by the distance between the upper (UMC) and lower middle classes (LMC)’ scores.

Obtained results¹⁰ demonstrate that evidence of increased middle-class polarization over ideological cleavages, as suspected by the “democracy eroding narrative,” is modest at most and inconsistent across European regions. On no domain of ideological conflict did the distance between the lower and upper middle class increase by more than .09 scale points over 1990s-2020s. In fact, in most instances, ideological class distances decreased, thus indicating diminished ideological class polarization. Polarization over the alienation-vs-confidence institutional trust cleavage has

moderately increased for around a third of the European countries. While institutional trust has decreased in the Mediterranean South and in the Post-communist East, it has increased in some of the West European Core and the Nordic region. When this increase is not evenly distributed across lower to upper middle-class segments, increasing polarization was diagnosed.

There is a decreasing polarization on the right-vs-left cleavage over economic deregulation versus state intervention, with the exceptions of Italy, Cyprus, Hungary, and Romania. On the EU-level, emancipative values grew considerably across all observed countries. However, this growth is not evenly distributed across the middle-class spectrum and leads to increasing polarization on the diversity and sexuality cleavages in a slight majority of countries. On the sustainability cleavage, the Mediterranean South and Post-communist East turned less pro-environmentalist and instead became more materialistic in favour of job creation, whereas the West European core and the Nordic region turned strikingly more progressive in favour of environmental protection.



The detected regional disparities allow uniting the West European Core and the Nordic Region as one (Protestant), and the Mediterranean South and Post-Communist East as another (Catholic) group. The Protestant group displays increasing trust in institutions and progressive attitudes towards sustainability, while the Catholic group shows declining trust and a conservative shift regarding environmental protection. These shifts correspond to the differing performance levels of the two groups’ institutions, with the Protestant regions generally exhibiting better functioning institutions, less corruption and more efficient economic policies compared to the Catholic group. This division reflects enduring long-lasting mutual path dependencies in mentalities and governance, reminiscent of Max Weber’s analysis of Protestant and Catholic influences.

Supporters of RWP show strikingly alienated positions on the political trust scale where and when RWP-parties are in the opposition and strongly confident positions where and when they are in power. This group takes reactionary ideological positions on each cleavage, but most notably on the migration/diversity and sustainability cleavages manifested in a deep-seated opposition against the non-RWP parties’ liberal consent on immigration policy and the resulting institutional distrust for not having a voice among the parties of the pre-RWP era. The problems accounting for RWP’s success, therefore, reside in accrued representation deficits with respect to grown non-voter camps whose immigration scepticism found no credible voice in the party systems of the pre-RWP era.

⁹ European Values Study/ World Values Survey cross-country time-series dataset: <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSEVStrend.jsp>

¹⁰ Brunkert L. J., Puranen B., Turska-Kawa A., Welzel C. (2023). Cultural Background of European Democracies: Examining the Distribution of Values and Norms. Working paper no.4.1. TRUEDEM: Trust in European Democracies Project (www.truedem.eu).

New Identities and Emerging Cleavages: Implications for Political Polarization¹¹

The discourse within the Social Sciences recognizes identity as a pivotal determinant that shapes both individuals and social groups, exerting significant influence over their behaviour across cultural, economic, social, and political spheres. Identities, cultivated through educational and socialization processes, serve as linchpins for comprehending polarization, with historical and contemporary shifts and adaptations under keen observation. The theory of cleavages, rooted in the Enlightenment's emphasis on individual liberty and equality, secularization, and the evolution of modern political institutions, underscores the foundational aspects of the identities within Western democracies. These cleavages, spanning diverse dimensions such as class, state-church relations, rural-urban disparities, and centre-periphery dynamics, have historically framed political conflicts and party systems, thereby contributing to stability and effective governance.

However, the stability of these cleavages has faced challenges since the 1960s, resulting in heightened polarization and alterations in party competition. These transformations encompass a spectrum of trends, including the erosion of traditional cleavages and the emergence of new ones, a shift towards axiological cleavages, the radicalization of political sentiments leading to increased polarization, the reinforcement of 'bad civil society', the attenuation of old identities and party allegiances, the rise of new social movements and political factions, as well as a decline in party membership coupled with the individualization of citizen attitudes.

Increased polarization within society refers to the growing ideological distance and hostility between different political factions or groups. This polarization can manifest in various forms, including differences in policy preferences, values, and worldviews, as well as heightened animosity and distrust toward those with opposing political beliefs. One consequence of political polarization is the erosion of trust in political institutions.

Additionally, affective polarization, a phenomenon prevalent in contemporary Western democracies, refers to the intense dislike, bias, and animosity between supporters of two opposing political parties or camps. This polarization is not solely based on ideological differences but also on strong emotional attachments to one's own group (in-group) and distrust towards the opposing group (out-group). Studies suggest that affective polarization is most pronounced when extreme views gain political legitimacy and public expression, leading to ideological divergence from the political centre and general centrifugal trends. Such forms of polarization extend beyond political institutions to other societal sectors such as science, education, media, and law. Partisan divides influence confidence in these institutions, with individuals often placing more trust in institutions controlled by their preferred party. Factors contributing to growing polarization include issues such as abortion, gun rights, immigration, and cultural values, amplified by media channels, including both traditional media and the internet.

Central to democratic systems, political parties play a vital role in bridging citizens' preferences with the political decision-making process. Entrusted with representing citizens' interests and translating them into policies, political parties have undergone significant transformations in recent decades, raising concerns about their future viability and trustworthiness.

Increasingly perceived as elite-driven and unrepresentative, political parties witness a weakening of partisan identifications and connections between parties and the public. The emergence of niche parties, diverging from traditional class-based politics, focusing on specific issues or policies, disrupted the previously established consensus among mainstream parties and, in some instances, deepened polarization between societal groups.

In contemporary European democracies, where national governments and legislatures are predominantly composed of political parties, public evaluations of party performance significantly impact trust in government and legislature. Public dissatisfaction with the political establishment creates fertile ground for populist, challenger and anti-establishment parties. These parties capitalize on distrust towards traditional political actors and institutions, appealing to dissatisfied voters by criticizing the status quo. Monitoring public trust in political parties, thus, becomes essential for understanding broader trends in political trust and democratic stability.

This TRUEDEM study delves into understanding the mechanisms behind and analysing the patterns of interaction between deepening political polarization and the emergence of new forms of polarization, juxtaposed against the trust placed in political parties and institutions. The main question is whether the key polarizing impulse is the fact that protest parties gain popularity on the basis of the poor performance of the incumbent parties and the loss of trust in these parties, or whether, on the contrary, the key polarizing impulse is the fact that the protest party or parties take over the government, whereupon they profile themselves as untrustworthy.

This research aims to uncover how these dynamics intersect and influence one another within the political landscape. By examining these relationships, the study seeks to shed light on the complexities of contemporary political polarization and its implications for trust in established political entities and structures.



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¹¹ Cabada, L., Charvat, J. (2023). Methodological framework paper on identities and polarization *Working paper no.5.1*. TRUEDEM: Trust in European Democracies Project (www.truedem.eu).

Voting and Electoral Behaviour: New Challenges for Inclusiveness and Representativity in Democratic Systems¹²



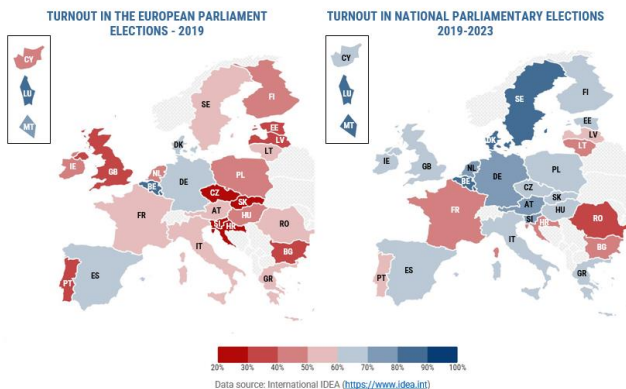
WP Leader
Prof. Domenico Maddaloni
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Turnout, or the percentage of eligible voters who participate in an election, is crucial for maintaining political trust. High turnout ensures that the elected officials represent the will of the people more accurately. When a significant portion of the population doesn't vote, there's a risk that the elected officials won't accurately reflect the diverse opinions and needs of the electorate. High turnout increases the accountability of elected officials. Politicians are more likely to respond to the

needs and concerns of voters when they know that a large portion of the electorate is actively engaged and paying attention to the political process. Voter turnout is closely linked to trust in democratic institutions. When citizens perceive that their participation can make a difference and that the electoral process is transparent and fair, they are more likely to trust democratic institutions and have confidence in the political system as a whole. Conversely, low turnout may erode trust in democratic processes and institutions, leading to feelings of apathy, disillusionment, and even political cynicism.

Between 1991 and 2023, the average level of electoral participation in national parliamentary elections in European Union member states (including the United Kingdom) was 69.2%¹³. The highest turnout is observed in Malta (93.5%), Belgium (90.5%) and Luxembourg (89.3%). The lowest turnout is in Switzerland (45.9%), Poland (52.0%) and Romania (53.4%).

WHICH ELECTION HAD A HIGHER TURNOUT IN RECENT YEARS?

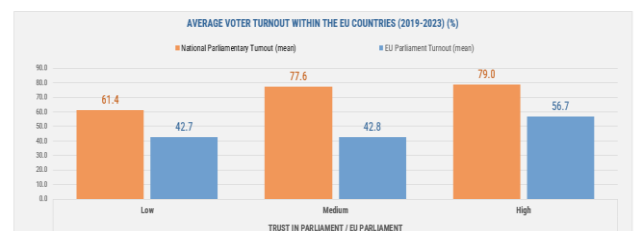


The survey of literature on electoral turnout reveals diverse factors associated with it, that can be categorized into institutional, political, and socio-economic domains. Analysis in this study delves into the pivotal role of trust, particularly political and social trust, in influencing voter turnout. While prior literature has often overlooked the significance of trust, recent scholarship has illuminated its profound impact on electoral participation. Notably, political trust is found to correlate positively with heightened political engagement, while conversely, diminished political trust can engender political disillusionment and suppress voter mobilization, particularly in contexts marked by perceived corruption. In parallel, social trust, denoting general trust within society,

is posited to indirectly influence voter turnout through its association with social capital and civic engagement.

The theoretical model employed by the TRUEDEM project delineates between macro, meso, and micro-level factors influencing voter turnout. At the macro level, two primary dimensions are examined: culture and modernization. Culture encompasses general social trust, a public good fostering trust in unknown others, distinct from particularized trust limited to familiar groups. Modernization, encompassing economic, educational, and urbanization factors, constitutes the social foundation of democracy and mass political participation. While socio-economic development correlates with the spread of democracy, modernization's diverse impacts on civic engagement vary, influenced by factors such as inequality and shifting cultural values.

DOES TRUST IN PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTIONS AFFECT TURNOUT?



The orange bars show the average voter turnout in parliamentary elections (2019-2023) in European countries with different rate of trust in national parliament (data for the same years): 'Low' (40% or less): BE, BG, CY, CZ, EE, ES, FR, GB, GR, HR, HU, IT, LT, LV, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK. 'Medium' (50-60%): AT, DE, IE, LU, MT. 'High' (61% or more): DK, FI, SE. The blue bars show the average voter turnout in European Parliament elections in 2019 in European countries with different level of trust in the EU parliament (data for the same year): 'Low' (40% or less): CZ, ES, FR, GB, GR, IT, SI, SK. 'Medium' (50-60%): AT, BG, EE, HR, LV, MT, PL, PT. 'High' (61% or more): BE, CY, DE, DK, FI, HU, IE, LT, LU, NL, RO, SE. Source: International IDEA (<https://www.idea.int>), Eurobarometer (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurobarometer/>)

At the meso level, institutional arrangements and electoral systems shape electoral convenience, influencing individual cost-benefit calculations in voting choice. Factors such as electoral laws, registration efficiency, and media pluralism directly impact turnout. Institutional differences within countries of similar modernization levels can lead to varying turnout trends. Interpersonal trust, while not a direct antecedent of political trust, is linked via effective government, following Putnam's argument. Social trust fosters cooperative social relations crucial for effective political institutions, which, in turn, cultivate political trust and voter turnout. This conceptualization aligns with the literature on social capital, where high social capital fosters virtuous circles of cooperation, trust, and civic engagement, conducive to democratic governance.

The regression analyses unveil pertinent insights into the multifaceted determinants of electoral participation. Economic disparities and levels of generalised trust emerge as influential factors impacting turnout in national elections, with the age of democracy displaying nuanced effects. The imposition of compulsory voting in national elections correlates positively with turnout, contrasting with the adverse impact of special voting arrangements. In European elections, the significant deterrent of vote buying underscores the intricate challenges of electoral integrity. Furthermore, trust in European Union institutions emerges as a pivotal determinant of turnout in European elections, highlighting the distinctive role of supranational governance in shaping electoral engagement. Regional disparities also surface, with Western countries exhibiting higher turnout rates compared to their Eastern counterparts, indicative of broader geopolitical dynamics at play. These findings elucidate the intricate interplay of socio-political factors shaping electoral participation dynamics across diverse electoral contexts within Europe.

¹² Addeo, F., Ammirato, L., Delli Paoli, A., Fruncillo, D., Maddaloni, D. (2024). Voter turnout: Overtime and regional trends in Europe. Working paper no. 2.3. TRUEDEM: Trust in European Democracies Project (www.trueDEM.eu).

¹³ Fruncillo D., Addeo F., Ammirato M., Delli Paoli A., Maddaloni D. (2023). Longitudinal cross-country database on voter turn-out in European countries. TRUEDEM: Trust in European Democracies Project (www.trueDEM.eu).

Social Media and Political Trust: Democracy Backing or Democracy Destabilization

The active engagement of citizens in political affairs benefits both the individuals and the institutions of governance by fostering a sense of empowerment and inclusion among citizens and enabling responsive action from political entities. The emergence of digital platforms has expanded the scope of civic engagement beyond traditional electoral processes, with social media serving as a prominent avenue for transparency, communication, and participation. Political stakeholders can harness the collaborative potential of social media to promote transparency and foster engagement, thereby bolstering political trust. However, the proliferation of digital disinformation, fake news, and the prevalence of "post-truth" politics pose challenges to building political trust through social media. The use of social media to propagate anti-establishment and anti-political narratives risks undermining public perceptions of the political system and democracy by alleging institutional and media bias and unresponsiveness.

The objective of this study is to elucidate the interconnections between social media usage and attitudes regarding representative democracy, while also assessing the impact of social media engagement on political trust and perceptions of trustworthiness of politicians and institutions. Through this analysis, insights are garnered to devise strategies for leveraging social media as a mean to address citizens' demands and preferences expressed through non-electoral forms of political engagement, thereby fostering active participation and inclusivity, and consequently bolstering responsive decision-making and governance across Europe.

The relationship between social media and political behaviour is a topic of diverse scholarly exploration. While the literature lacks consensus on the impact of social media on democracy, it predominantly examines its effects on political behaviour and attitudes. One significant area of study is the relationship between social media usage and political trust. Empirical evidence suggests that social media use correlates with a decline in political trust, which is crucial for the legitimacy and stability of democratic systems. However, the impact of social media on trust varies depending on the political context, with authoritarian regimes potentially benefiting from reduced trust in non-democratic institutions.

Conversely, in consolidated democracies, such influence is perceived as detrimental. Social media also contributes to political polarization, fostering extremist viewpoints and hindering democratic decision-making. Populist rhetoric, often associated with far-right politics, thrives on social media platforms, exacerbating societal divisions. While some studies suggest a positive correlation between social media use and polarization, the impact varies across platforms and contexts.

Social media plays a significant role in shaping political knowledge and exposure to news, which are crucial elements in democratic systems. Media, including social media, are vital for citizen information dissemination, informed decision-making, and democratic accountability. The impact of media on political attitudes can be examined from the perspective of several theories, including the Theory of Media Malaise, linking media consumption to political distrust, and the Theory of Virtuous Circle or Media Mobilization, which suggests that attention to campaign communication and political trust reinforce each other.

The current discussions about the role of social media on democracy and democratic attitudes are characterized by a

higher level of complexity. Social media, as innovative online platforms allowing users to construct public or semi-public profiles, establish connections, and explore connections made by others, present a new realm of internet-based communication. Advocates of social media's democratizing potential emphasize its ability to facilitate horizontal communication, collaboration, and diverse viewpoints, enabling easy connections and independent opinion formation outside established institutions.



WP Leader
Prof. Aneta Vilagi
(Comenius University,
Slovakia)

Conversely, scholars contend that the potential for digital democracy is exaggerated or that its democratic potential is conditional and subject to content restrictions influenced by governments. Empirical evidence often highlights the negative impact of social media on democratic processes, failing to meet optimistic expectations of democracy's beneficial transformation. Concerns arise from issues associated with social network communication, such as fake news, filter bubbles, echo chambers, hate speech, the rapid spread of false information, and the promotion of authoritarianism. These phenomena contribute to declining trust, increased polarization, and the rise of populist and authoritarian figures.

Our empirical investigation¹⁴ into social media's impact on satisfaction with democracy yield mixed findings. News exposure was found to have a significant effect on support for democracy but not on satisfaction with democracy. Offline political participation was found to have a negative effect on support for democracy but a positive effect on satisfaction with democracy. Online political participation, on the other hand, was positively correlated with support for democracy but negatively correlated with satisfaction with democracy. When examining support for specific liberal democratic principles, distinct effects of participation and news exposure emerged. Online participation had the most significant impact on the perception of media rights, indicating that individuals who engage in online political activities are more likely to value the freedom of the media to criticize the government. Overall, these findings highlight the complex and nuanced relationship between news exposure, political participation, and democratic attitudes, underscoring the importance of detailed analysis to understand citizens' endorsements or rejections of specific liberal democratic principles across different contexts.

Drawing upon the contemporary academic discourse, we articulate the following research inquiries for further empirical scrutiny:

- What are the patterns and modalities of social media utilization for political interactions, involving both users and political actors?
- How do users perceive political activities conducted on social media platforms?
- In what ways can social media function as platforms for fostering or increase of trustworthiness and pro-democratic attitudes?

¹⁴ Baboš, P., Dolný, B., Világi, A. (2024). Social media participation and political attitudes towards democracy. *Working paper no. 6.1*. TRUEDEM: Trust in European Democracies Project (www.truedem.eu).

Information Environment, Media Use, and Trust¹⁵



WP Leader
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Few citizens have the capacity to make informed judgments directly about the political process and the societal impact of government policies, especially concerning complex technical issues where they lack first-hand experience and background knowledge. As such, political coverage in the primary channels of mediated mass communications - newspapers, radio and television, and the internet - can be expected to

play a crucial intermediary role connecting citizens and the state.

This information environment is thought to shape perceptions of the performance of political authorities, including how ordinary people evaluate both the decision-making process and also policy outputs and outcomes, and hence judgments of government trustworthiness. The information environment is theorized to impact audience evaluations principally through processes of agenda-setting (framing salient problems), priming (suggesting the standards used for performance evaluation), and framing (suggesting how specific events resonate with underlying pre-existing schemas among their audience). As such, media coverage of politics is widely believed to shape public judgments about the trustworthiness of specific authorities and leadership elites, core state institutions such as parliaments and government, and more abstract support for democratic and authoritarian values.

Debate continues, however, about the direction of this impact; popular media malaise theories suggest that political communications through media channels, especially the focus on negative news, fosters adverse views about politics and misinformation among its audience. This process is claimed to heighten unwarranted cynicism towards the policymaking process and mistrust of the authorities, as well as strengthening political disengagement and, ultimately, contributing towards civic malaise.

Alternatively, however, the ‘virtuous circle’ thesis suggests a self-reinforcing process whereby those most attentive to the news media are usually likely to become more informed about current affairs, as well as more civically engaged. Greater political knowledge is expected to help citizens make accurate and informed evaluations of the performance of the authorities and institutions - and thus whether or not they should be regarded as trustworthy. The media environment is also important in this regard, with those exposed to alternative perspectives - or two-sided forms of information - more likely to have the reasoning capacity to form accurate judgments than those exposed to only a single perspective, or one-sided forms of information.

The virtuous circle thesis was originally summarized two decades ago: “The most politically knowledgeable, trusting, and participatory are most likely to tune-in to public affairs coverage. And those most attentive to public affairs become more engaged in civic life” (Norris 2000). By contrast, those apathetic sectors of the public least interested and active in politics are less likely pay much attention to political news, or indeed to trust media messages. Empirical support for the thesis was originally derived from analysis of

Eurobarometer surveys in the mid-1990s, where those Europeans most attentive to news from TV and radio news, newspapers and the Internet were found to be significantly more likely to express support for democratic principles, and to have greater confidence and trust in European and national political institutions, although there was no association with support for specific political leaders.

The earlier study focused on trust not trustworthiness, however. Establishing the direction of causality in this iterative reciprocal relationship was also difficult to establish in the original study, in the absence of either panel survey data overtime or experimental data. During the last two decades there have been several subsequent methodological advances examining evidence for the virtuous circle theory, providing further confirmation from studies using panel time-series survey data in specific countries.

At the same time, during the early 21st century the nature of the information environment in European societies has been radically reshaped by major structural developments. There is widespread concern that public trust in democratic principles, and informed judgments of the performance of governing institutions, may have been distorted by the fragmentation of the media landscape, facilitating greater reliance on one-sided sources of information, arising from many factors such as declining exposure to legacy media sources, including the printed press and the share of the audience tuning into public service broadcasting, and the growing prevalence of one-sided forms of information associated with filter bubbles, echo chambers, algorithmic biases, the use of artificial intelligence, and misinformation in social media.

Moreover, democracy and human rights watch organizations have documented processes of democratic backsliding, including the decline of freedom of expression in European societies such as Hungary, with such trends also likely to strengthen state propaganda and to limit rational assessments of political trustworthiness. These developments can be expected to have made it more difficult for ordinary citizens to use the media to make accurate and informed decisions about the trustworthiness of political authorities and institutions.

In the light of these developments, TRUEDEM examines whether among the European public the virtuous circle thesis, observed two decades ago, continues to be observed empirically concerning evaluations of political trustworthiness, or whether there is greater evidence today for the media malaise theory. By analysing the relationship between media consumption patterns, political knowledge, civic engagement, and perceptions of political trustworthiness, TRUEDEM aims to provide insights into how the evolving media landscape influences public attitudes toward governance and democracy in European societies.

¹⁵ See for more information: <https://www.truedem.eu/work-packages/wp7-media>

Tackling Political Trust with Democratic Innovations¹⁶

Political leaders are now aware that reforming the political system has become necessary to rebuild mass political support for democratic regimes, which have lost part of their legitimacy. Even though the ideal of democracy remains strongly entrenched, voter turnout does not necessarily imply consent to being represented, or to being represented through elections.

Democratic innovations are a family of institutional reforms that could help substantiate the objective of reenchanting democracy. These innovations seek to address the challenges and shortcomings of traditional representative democracy by providing avenues for citizens to directly engage in decision-making processes and influence policy outcomes. Contrary to electoral reforms playing on thresholds, degrees of proportionality and division of constituencies, democratic innovations relate to the various institutional mechanisms aiming to build up citizen's involvement in political decision-making. They draw either on direct or deliberative democracy, enabling the whole citizenry or a portion of citizens to be consulted before a decision is made, or even to reach the decision themselves.

Democratic innovations can help strengthen political trust in several ways. By providing opportunities for citizens to directly engage in decision-making processes, democratic innovations empower individuals and communities. Many democratic innovations, such as participatory budgeting and open government initiatives, promote greater transparency and accountability in governance. Democratic innovations like citizen assemblies and deliberative polling ensure that a diverse range of voices and perspectives are taken into account in decision-making processes. This helps to address inequalities in political representation and fosters trust by ensuring that all citizens have a stake in the democratic system.

Democratic innovations are usually meant to be complementary to the representative system, and not to replace it. Scholars have found that even though a large majority of European citizens are open to political innovations to better control elected representatives, they are not that much prone to set aside the symbolic divide between laymen and political experts and engage into a fully direct democratic system. Extant research thus suggests that while willing to enhance people's power of decision-making, ordinary citizens do not necessarily aspire to reforms that go beyond traditional forms of representative democracy. In particular, most citizens seem to call for a governance model where decision-making power is shared by elected representatives, experts and citizens. As a result, the monopoly over representation by politicians turns out to be more challenged than representation or elections in and out themselves.

Yet, it remains to be checked whether those citizens who are the most critical of democracy follow the same pattern. In particular, dissatisfied democrats as well as individuals holding strong populist attitudes can be expected to be more supportive of democratic innovations building on a plebiscitary logic, such as the legislative referendum and the recall procedure. Some have argued that populist citizens are more inclined to participate than stealth democrats or dissatisfied democrats. Therefore, better understanding their views on democratic innovations is key.

Facing the variety of possible democratic innovations, public opinion research appears rather short of adequate survey items to measure preferences of the general population about such mechanisms. A large number of indicators have been formulated and stabilized throughout the years to operationalize political support for the existing representative systems. However, survey items to gauge what citizens think of potential alternative political decision-making procedures remain scarce.

So far, it is almost only by extrapolating disenchantment with the current representative system that studies can suggest an inclination for democratic renewal. Some trade off questions exists, or Osgood scales, which often oppose "representative democracy" to "direct democracy" epitomized by the referendum. Unfortunately, they are not very fit to measure general support for democratic innovations neither to detect preferences in that matter, since this type of question stages representative and direct models of democracy as antagonistic, while the rationale behind democratic innovations is rather to combine them.



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Questions using Likert scales to capture the level of agreement or support for specific features, are more appropriate. Still the list of tested items is often rather short, boiling down to opinions about the referendum. Findings thus suffer from important shortcomings, as respondents may express some support as ways of criticizing the functioning of the current political system, even though referendum is not their preferred solution.

Besides, the range of democratic innovations is large, and referendums are far from summarizing the full spectre of what citizens are likely to support. Previous research established a typology of democratic innovations that one can build on to derive six sub-types of democratic innovations: the legislative referendum, the citizens' initiative, the recall procedure, the implementation of consultative or deliberative mini publics, the increase in devolution to local powers, and the replacement of representatives by ordinary citizens thanks to a selection by lot.

By synthesizing the findings of previous research efforts, TRUEDEM aims to understand how democratic innovations contribute to fostering political trust and reenchanting democracy. This involves examining the role of trust-building in democratic processes and understanding how political trust influences support for democratic institutions. To overcome the limitations of past research, TRUEDEM employs mix-mode approach to the study of democratic innovations combining both quantitative survey and qualitative interviews and focus-groups with citizens. Focus groups and other qualitative methods are valuable tools for studying democratic innovations because they facilitate in-depth exploration, contextual understanding, interaction, exploration of diverse perspectives, hypothesis generation, and informing policy and practice. By complementing quantitative research with qualitative insights, TRUEDEM shall gain a more nuanced understanding of citizen attitudes toward democratic innovations and contribute to the advancement of democratic governance.

The second objective involves translating the scientific knowledge gathered from the quantitative and qualitative studies in TRUEDEM into actionable policy recommendations, methodologies, and tools. This process aims to create a comprehensive catalogue of democratic innovations that can enhance political trust and support for democracy. By making this catalogue freely accessible, the project seeks to provide policymakers, practitioners, and the public with practical tools to improve democratic governance and strengthen trust in political institutions.

¹⁶ See for more information: <https://www.truedem.eu/work-packages/wp9-democratic-innovations>



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