

## TRUEDEM: Trust in European Democracies (2023-2025)

### Quarterly Project Newsletter - Issue 5 (March 2024)

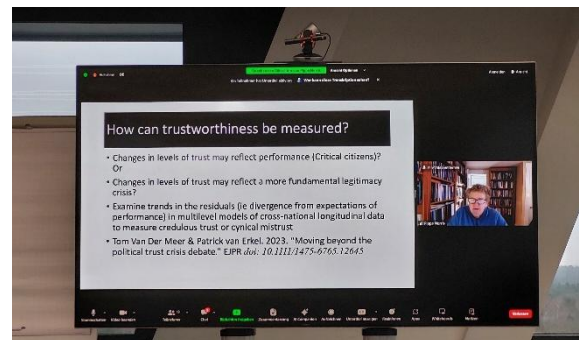
#### General Assembly meeting on February 15-16, 2024, in Lüneburg, Germany



The TRUEDEM General Assembly Meeting took place on February 15-16, 2024, at Leuphana University in Lüneburg, Germany, bringing together consortium members and advisory board representatives. The meeting served as a forum to assess the progress made during the first year of the project, receive feedback from the advisory board, and plan research, dissemination, and publication activities for the second year. The first day of the meeting began with an administrative session focused on reviewing the periodic report for 2023. This included financial reporting, updates on work package progress, impact assessments, and dissemination activities. The session also covered proposed amendments to the Consortium Agreement, including refinements to the core text, budget allocations, and governance structures.

Following the administrative review, the meeting transitioned to a series of presentations and discussions on the findings generated in the first year of the project. The project director provided an overview of TRUEDEM's overarching aims and research goals, emphasizing its focus on understanding political trust and democratic participation in Europe. Theoretical and methodological frameworks were discussed, with particular attention given to how national political cultures influence democratic values. Presentations covered key topics such as long-term trends in political trust, electoral behavior, the role of socioeconomic factors in shaping democracy, and the impact of emerging political identities on polarization. These sessions facilitated a broad discussion on the evolving dynamics of European democracies and set the stage for the next phase of research.

On the second day of the meeting, the agenda shifted to discussions on dissemination, publications, and primary data collection. The dissemination group presented updates on outreach strategies, emphasizing the need to expand engagement beyond the academic community and include policymakers, civil society organizations, and the broader public. Plans for targeted events, including



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thematic workshops and panel discussions at international conferences, were discussed. The upcoming publication plan was also a key topic, with an emphasis on joint journal articles, special issues, and the preparation of a collective volume that would consolidate project findings.

One of the central themes of the meeting was data collection and methodological coordination. The qualitative and quantitative research teams provided updates on the progress of fieldwork, discussing challenges related to ethics approvals, translation of research materials, and logistical constraints in different countries. The project's approach to data anonymization and quality control was also reviewed, with recommendations made to standardize transcription and documentation practices across

research teams.

The meeting also included in-depth discussions on the status of individual work packages, covering topics such as the role of media in shaping trust, the effects of social media on democratic stability, and the development of policy tools for enhancing political trust. Research leads presented updates on their respective areas, detailing progress and identifying potential bottlenecks. One notable discussion revolved around the implications of digitalization on public trust, with several participants highlighting the challenges posed by misinformation and algorithmic biases in shaping political attitudes.



The General Assembly was joined by the advisory board who provided strategic input on the project's research direction and policy relevance. Advisory board members underscored the importance of ensuring that research findings are effectively communicated to policymakers and practitioners. They also recommended closer engagement with EU institutions to align the project's outputs with

ongoing policy debates on democratic governance and political participation.

The dissemination group held a separate meeting to discuss media outreach and engagement strategies. The conversation centered on ways to increase the visibility of project findings through targeted press releases, participation in public debates, and collaboration with media professionals specializing in political communication. The group also explored the feasibility of developing educational materials to promote civic engagement and public understanding of political trust.

As the meeting concluded, consortium members reflected on the next steps for the project, reiterating the importance of maintaining close coordination between research teams, ensuring timely completion of deliverables, and strengthening dissemination efforts. The coming months will focus on finalizing data collection, analyzing emerging trends, and preparing a series of policy recommendations based on the research findings.



## Workshop Trust, Democracy and Voter Turnout in Europe

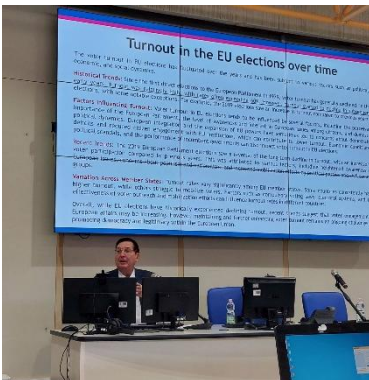


The first quarter of 2024 was an active period for the TRUEDEM project, with significant research activities, academic discussions, and ongoing collaborations shaping the project's work on trust and democracy in Europe. One of the main events of the first quarter of 2024 was the workshop held at the University of Salerno on March 11-12, titled [Trust, Democracy, and Voter Turnout in Europe:](#)

### [First Results of the TRUEDEM Project.](#)

This event brought together researchers, policymakers, and academics to present initial findings from the project and discuss broader issues concerning trust in democratic institutions and voter participation.

The workshop began with a session on March 11, where researchers presented papers examining voter turnout during the 2019 European Parliamentary Elections, the relationship between trust in the European Union and electoral participation, and a multivariate analysis of trust and voter engagement across Europe. The



afternoon roundtable discussion, titled [How Much Does Brussels Matter? Trust in Europe and the Upcoming European Parliament Elections,](#) included perspectives from European Parliament members, journalists, and political scientists who discussed the public perception of European institutions and how trust in the EU might influence voter turnout in the 2024 elections. The second day of the workshop focused on voter turnout trends in Italy and how they compare to broader European patterns, with discussions on historical trends and recent shifts in electoral participation.

## Call for Tenders: TRUEDEM Online Survey

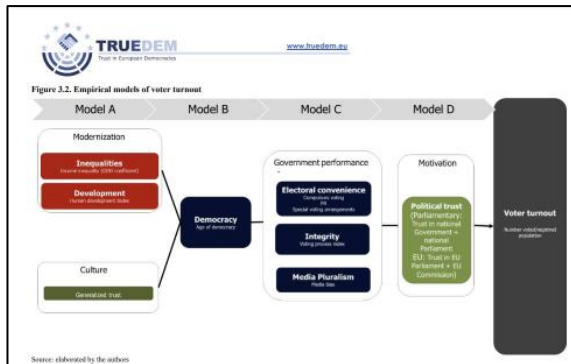


TRUEDEM project is seeking proposals for data collection services for its online survey. The selected vendor will be responsible for conducting data collection for the TRUEDEM online survey in up to 11 European countries: Austria; Czechia; France; Germany; Greece; Italy; Poland; Romania; Slovakia; Slovenia; Sweden. The survey aims to explore political trust attitudes to democratic institutions among

the adult population. The sample size in every country is N=1500 (completed interviews). Target audience: adult population in the age 18+ years, residents of the listed above countries. All samples should be representative of the population structure in terms of gender, age, income, education, urban/rural settlement patterns. The questionnaire comprising of about 180 variables will be provided by the TRUEDEM project team (including the translations into the national languages of the surveyed countries). Period of data collection: April-May 2024. [Learn more here.](#)

## New Project Report: Voter Turnout - Overtime and Regional Trends in Europe

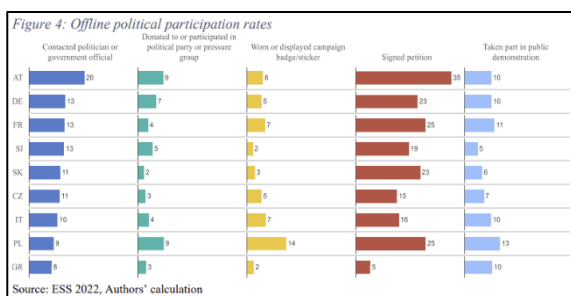
The [report](#) investigates electoral turnout trends over the past three decades across the European Union member states. With a specific focus on European Parliament and national parliamentary elections, it seeks to unravel the intricate relationship between trust—both political and social—and voter participation. Grounded in political science theory, the report acknowledges the centrality of voter turnout as a fundamental indicator of democratic legitimacy. It builds upon established literature, to develop a nuanced understanding of the myriad factors influencing electoral participation.



Highlighting the evolving nature of democratic practices, the report delineates trends in electoral turnout across different periods and country groupings based on EU accession and geographical location. This contextual analysis lays the foundation for examining the interplay between geopolitical dynamics, democratic consolidation, and voter behaviour. Central to the report's inquiry is the theoretical framework articulated by scholars like P. Norris, which

underscores the importance of political trust and social trust in shaping electoral outcomes. Through rigorous multivariate analysis, the report evaluates the relative impact of these trust dimensions alongside other institutional, political, social, and economic factors on voter turnout. The findings reveal intriguing patterns, indicating a significant role for social trust in influencing national election turnout, while institutional trust emerges as a critical factor in European Parliament elections. Moreover, the analysis underscores the pervasive influence of economic inequality on electoral participation, emphasizing the complex interplay between socio-political dynamics and democratic engagement. In examining specific national cases—such as Italy, Germany, and Poland—the report offers valuable insights into the contextual factors driving variations in electoral behaviour. It underscores the need for further scholarly inquiry into the nuanced relationship between trust and voter turnout within European democracies, pointing towards avenues for future research and policy consideration in bolstering democratic participation.

## New Project Report: Social Media Participation and Political Attitudes Towards Democracy



This [report](#) is a part of [work package 6 “Social media and political trust: democracy backing or democracy destabilization”](#), led by Aneta Világi, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia. This research framework paper focuses on political trust, trustworthiness, democracy and the role played by social media. The aim of the paper is to elaborate on existing theories and state of art and prepare groundwork for the subsequent


research in this work package. Performance theories suggest that attitudes formation reflect rational calculations in decision-making processes about trustworthy relationships. The evaluation may result from either one or both dimensions: 1) reflection of the past competency of agents and agencies; 2) reflection of the performance of government decision-making processes (e.g. transparency, good governance etc.).

The “filters” individuals use for reflection of objective agency performance are various, however, academic literature stresses the role played by information provided by media. The communication channels might trigger the processes of informed decision-making and therefore influence the judgements on trustworthiness (Norris 2002). Social media recently have become an important part of online news distribution and consumption (Newman et al., 2021), crucial tool for sharing political information (Bhagat and Kim, 2023) and serve as easily accessible platforms for political dialogue (interactions with agents, agencies and other users). From this perspective, social media offer amply opportunities for studying new channels for transfer of citizen’s demands into the policymaking and for analyzing modern tools for political communication and participation. Therefore, the research focus within the TRUEDEM project (WP6) incorporates also an investigation of the links between political trust, democracy and social media usage.

### Political Trust and Democracy: Open Educational Resources for Schools

In March 2024, the TRUEDEM project published a [set of educational materials](#) designed to enhance civic education among lower secondary school students across twelve European countries, including Austria, Czechia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, and Ukraine. These materials, developed as Open Educational Resources, aim to provide students with a deeper understanding of political trust and its role in national and international democratic institutions. They have been structured to offer a combination of theoretical explanations, historical data, and interactive learning components, making them accessible and engaging for young learners.

**B.3 The Parliament**



The main role of the Parliament in a democratic system is to create and modify laws. This feature is called **legislative power**. The Parliament also has other powers, such as voting the budget of the state and approving the most important international agreements, to which the country intends to be part. The Austrian Parliament is composed of the National Council (Nationalrat) as the Higher Chamber and the Federal Council (Bundesrat) as the Lower Chamber of Parliament. The National Council is formed by representatives directly elected by voters, while the Federal Council groups together delegates of province legislative bodies, according to seats held by parties in these regional legislative bodies. The federal government only responds to the National Council. The National Council consists of 183 seats. The Federal Council has significantly more limited influence (i.e. it can postpone a law, after discussion). The National Council and the Federal Council constitute the Federal Assembly, which has limited scope of action, is convened by the Federal President, and may be called upon to decide over issues of impeachment. Once elected, the members of the Parliament must represent the interests of the entire Austrian population and state, and not only the interests of their constituency, of their electorate, or of their party.

Each national version begins with an introduction to the country’s political system, outlining its main institutions and their functions. The materials provide a definition of political trust, explaining why trust in democratic institutions is essential for maintaining stable governance and civic engagement. The national-level sections explore key institutions such as the presidency, parliament, government, political parties, and the judicial system, while the international component examines the European Union, the

European Parliament, the European Commission, and the United Nations, discussing their impact and relevance to the country’s political landscape.

The materials incorporate a variety of visual aids designed to help students analyze political trust over time. Charts and graphs illustrate trends in trust toward national and international institutions, allowing learners to compare historical data with contemporary figures. Maps provide additional context by showing trust levels across different European countries, enabling students to assess regional similarities and differences. These resources encourage students to reflect on the factors that influence public confidence in institutions, including economic conditions, political scandals, and policy effectiveness.

**B.6 European Union**



The European Union is an international organization, a unique system of governance, as well as an open project of political and economic integration within Europe.

As a project, it was politically launched in the 1950s by six European states (i.e. Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands) through the establishment of initially three distinct international organizations - the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Community of Atomic Energy (Euratom). Their initial role was to facilitate the economic reconstruction and diminish the chances of new military confrontations in the aftermath of World War II, while (re)building trust among the member states. For this purpose, the founders put in practice a very bold idea for those times: instead of the usual attitude of isolating internationally those who lost the war, the project brought former rivals together and created a **supranational governance system** which allowed that the resources and industries that could facilitate the development of weapons were commonly supervised and used primarily for the economic development of all members.

To promote critical thinking and classroom discussion, the materials include an interpretation section with guided questions and interactive exercises. Teachers are provided with structured activities that help students apply their knowledge to real-world examples, facilitating discussions on trust in political institutions and its implications for democratic participation. The discussion prompts encourage students to think about their own perceptions of trust and to consider how political trust is shaped by media, public discourse, and governmental actions.

The primary goal of these educational materials is to foster informed and engaged citizens by helping students understand how trust in political institutions is built, maintained, and sometimes eroded. By offering an interactive and data-driven approach to political education, the TRUEDEM project aims to equip young learners with the analytical skills needed to navigate and critically assess political developments in their own countries and at the European level. Teachers and educators interested in integrating these resources into their curricula can access the materials through the [TRUEDEM website, where they are available for download in multiple languages.](#)

#### C. Classroom activities

This set of exercises can be used in classroom in order to familiarize pupils with the concept of political trust.

##### C.1 How do you build trust? (20 minutes)

The class is split in groups of 4-5 pupils. It is preferable to create groups in such a way that in each group there are pupils that are not necessarily close friends, but rather colleagues. Alternatively, the creation of groups can also be realized randomly. Within each group, students are asked to talk about the notion of trust, as they see it. Questions that may guide their discussions are the following:

- Do you trust the people in your group? If so, why? What makes you trust/distrust them?
- Do you remember how this process started? How did you start to build trust in your colleagues?
- Do you trust your teachers?
- In general, do you trust your school (as an institution)?
- In everyday life, who/what do you trust? Why?

The main goal of this exercise is for each group to create a blueprint of how the “trusting” process unfolds. Basically, each group will present, at the end of the exercise, how they think trust is acquired, and how important reciprocity, predictability, expectations, and common values are. The instructor is in charge of debriefing.

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## TRUEDEM Trust in European Democracies

Cross-country comparative comprehensive investigation of public perceptions of trust and trustworthiness (2023-2025)

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